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**A PIONEERING REGIONAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT ON
*PROMOTING ICT FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA 2004: REALISING THE MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT GOALS***

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The twentieth century has witnessed remarkable advances in science and technology. Advances in information and communication brought about by microelectronics and digital technologies have given rise to a debate on the potential of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance human development. The Asian region is particularly well placed to harness and strategically deploy ICTs for enhancing human development as it not only constitutes one of the fastest growing ICT markets, but also one of the fastest growing regions for ICT industries in the world.

UNDP has initiated a pioneering Regional Human Development Report on ***Promoting ICT for Human Development in Asia 2004: Realising in Millennium Development Goals***, which will be released in early 2004. The Report attempts to go beyond the hype surrounding the potential and promise of ICT for developing countries, and systematically examines how ICTs can be harnessed to address the critical concerns of human development such as poverty eradication, healthcare, education, environmental management and economic development.

In order to systematically assess the role and impact of ICTs on human development, the clear targets of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were used as benchmark for human development. The MDGs include:

- eradication of poverty
- universal primary education
- gender equality and empowerment of women
- reduction of child mortality
- improvement of maternal health
- fight against major diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria
- promotion of sustainable environment
- development of a global partnership for development

Within this framework, nine countries across Asia were covered under the research -- China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The countries were chosen on a mix of their Technology Achievement Index, including leaders, potential leaders, dynamic adopters and marginalised countries.

Countries Covered by the RHDR

REGION	COUNTRIES
South Asia	India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka
South East Asia	Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam
East Asia	China and Mongolia

The diversity of the nine countries presented a rich canvas for the research. The complex multi-country research involved two levels. At the first level, nine country studies were commissioned to national experts in the field of ICT and human development, to conduct detailed country-specific assessment of national ICT infrastructure, policies, governance mechanisms, priority areas of ICT use, private initiatives, and institutional frameworks programmes for promoting ICT access and training. The country studies examined applications of ICT for human development MDGs, and clearly documented the successes and limitations.

At the second level, an overall Research Coordinator drew from the nine country studies to systematically explore linkages between ICT and human development. The research findings

- assess the status of ICT use and diffusion in Asia
- document varied case studies and best practices of ICT application
- identify challenges of ICT application, including the issue of digital divide, both between and within Asian countries
- analyse the limitations of ICT in furthering human development,
- draw lessons from multi-country experiences to identify policy directions.

A parallel quantitative study to complement the rich qualitative research was carried out to:

- select ICT indicators relevant for human development
- construct of a composite aggregate Index that ranks the nine countries on their use ICT use for achieving human development goals. This **ICTforHD** Index is a first attempt for Asia which statistically summarises ICT for HD from perspective of the MDGs

The strength of the Report lies in its attempt to combine both qualitative and quantitative linkages between ICT and the eight MDGs, making a significant contribution to the dialogue on the subject. The Report does not promote a simple and technologically deterministic vision of ICTs, however, and recognises the limitations of ICT as a tool for human development, and the relative importance of other inputs like access to food, clean water and sustainable livelihoods.

The varied socio-economic, political, geographic and cultural circumstances in which ICT for human development has been explored in this unique Report will provide useful insights not only for other Asian countries but also, more generally, to the developing world.

The forthcoming Regional Human Development Report has been jointly prepared by UNDP's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Human Development Reports Initiative (APRI), Human Development Resource Centre. This Summary of the forthcoming Report's research findings will be presented at WSIS at a **Preview Event** on **11 December at the ICT4D Platform**.