ITC Policy and Practice in the Fiji Islands

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INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of Internet access in the Republic of the Fiji Islands in 1995, Internet policy has been developed in the country in the context of both national and regional development. Fiji has a significant tourism sector—15% of GDP in 2003 (Fiji Tourism Forum, 2003)—and Web-based information is an increasingly important source for potential visitors. The country also aspires to lead digital commerce in the region. In August 2004 the Qarase government affirmed its commitment to the “Bangkok Agenda Action Plan on Broadband and Information, Communication & Technology (ICT) development” (Bangkok Agenda Action Plan, 2004), an agreement calling for government action at a national, sub-regional and regional levels to encourage broadband access and usage. In addition to having one of the largest economies in the South Pacific, Fiji is host nation to a number of regional inter-governmental agencies, and this combination of national and regional interests is driving the rapid elaboration of ICT policy and utilization.

The government established a Department for Information Technology & Computing (ITC) in 1966 and for three decades was principally concerned with the provision of server capacity to government departments and agencies (http://www.itc.gov.fj). Policy development for e-governance was hindered in the late 1990s by the inability of the government’s key computing departments to retain sufficient numbers of qualified staff. This human resource issue was linked to political crises in the country, which resulted in highly qualified citizens emigrating, and to the growth of IT opportunities in the private sector. Training of local staff was supported by JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency) and the Government of Singapore. Key sectors making use of computing services at this time included Customs and Inland Revenue, Education, Treasury, Taxation, the Electoral Commission, and the Criminal Justice System (Information Technology and Computing Services, Department of Finance, Annual Report 1995-96).

Pressures from providing day-to-day services to government, as well as the need to address the “Year 2000” issue prevented any activity on ICT policy during the period 1997-99 (Information Technology and Computing Services, Department of Finance, Annual Report 1997-99).

NATIONAL E-POLICY

By 2000 most government Ministries and departments in the capital, Suva, were connected to the Internet services provided through this Department. The South Cross cable was implemented in 2000, delivering strong connectivity to the rest of the world. In December 2001 the government’s ITC Department commissioned an “e-Government Strategic Plan” to provide a “whole of government” IT plan. This document proposed a 10-year development plan to put in place fundamental ICT policies, procedures and infrastructure, including whole of government policies, a disaster recovery plan and facility, service level agreements, a strategic review process, a fibre ring for government departments, intranet, links to regions, and competitive international linkage (Dataline, 2003, eGovernment Strategic Plan, 2001).

The 10-year plan established as three main themes e-development (establishing Government policy for all IT Development areas in Fiji); e-government (Infrastructure development for the civil service) and e-business (IT development involving the private sector) (Information Technology and Computing Services, 2001 Annual Report, p.10). The Government of Fiji established an ICT Council, which has commenced developing a policy framework. In 2002 the Council reported to the second Prepcom for WSIS that the Vision of the National ICT Strategy Plan was “To Develop Fiji into a Vibrant and Dynamic Pacific ICT Capital with a Thriving Digital Economy and IT Empowered Citizens.” (Manager ITC Services, 2002). That report indicated that the government’s National ICT Strategy Plan had four themes: E-government (as the responsibility of ITC Services, www.itc.gov.fj); E-commerce (Ministry of Commerce); E-personal (Ministry of Education); and ICT Industry (Fiji Trade & Investment Board, www.ftib.org.fj).

At this stage the Council was ready to broaden consultation to include more non-government stakeholders. A workshop on “Facilitating National Information and Communication Technology Development Strategies” held in June 2002 identified six projects worth pursuing immediately: PC recycling, national awareness campaign, rural telecom and telecentre development, policy development, e-government, and reform of the education curriculum. On the basis of such wider consultations and its
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