

Background Note

Title	ITU Internet Training Centre
Theme:	Theme 6: Human Capacity Building
Speaking Duration:	15 Minutes
<p>ICT has been embraced by our Pacific Island Countries (PIC) and has emerged in the past few years as a major priority for the PIC Governments. The Pacific Islands Forum leaders in 2004 recognized ICT as a key component for the PICs to participate in the global economy and an essential enabler for development across all sectors. Nevertheless, the primary and current concern of most Island Nations in the Pacific regarding ICT development are mainly on Infrastructural development; the deployment of desktops, servers and client applications, Internet and Intranet access and common communication services. Most recently, there is an apparent but rather slow increase in the development of electronic services (e-services) such as the use of internet banking in the banking sector and content management systems for e-learning in education.</p> <p>Most ICT policies in the Pacific seem to recognise the need for proper strategies for ICT development but unfortunately most policies lack the fundamental components that are required for effective ICT implementations. This is due arguably to poor human capacities, inappropriate ICT planning and poor development and implementation strategies. Most ICT implementations in the Pacific are on ad-hoc basis, too fragmented, specific requirement driven, lack strategic alignment and no plan for future service integrations.</p> <p>To maximise the real value of ICT in the development of e-services in the Pacific; Governments should take the leading role in enabling the appropriate environment that can allow for strategic and technological development, capacity improvement and quality implementations of ICT. Small economies will find it difficult to rely on the Private sector to drive innovative approaches and development. ICT is one of those areas that require both strategic and technological knowledge to drive innovation and offer appropriate technological solutions. This is lacking in small Island Nations.</p> <p>Why Pacific Island Nations need the ITU Internet Training Centre and the Human Capacity Issue</p> <p>As the Pacific moves to unify people, processes and technology; human capacity development in ICT is the key. Small Island Nations of the Pacific lack professionals in ICT and often rely on external expertise to provide appropriate technological solutions. Some of the solutions have been effective but some have raised certain issues, which are quite difficult to be addressed by many Island Nations due to lack of local expertise and technological support from vendors or consultants.</p> <p>Majority of ICT graduates from Universities and technical institutions after returning to the Islands are finding it hard to cope with the different demand for ICT professionals that are capable of providing relevant and quality ICT solutions. The ICT environment in the Pacific is very small and most of the work processes are still driven by manual operations and inefficient procedures. In such environment, ICT graduates will have difficult times trying to gain enough experiences in dealing with technological development or enhancements. Most Governments in the Pacific also lack the appropriate platform that</p>	

can allow for the development of appropriate human capacities that can enable ICT to fully address most of their economical and social issues.

Most Governments don't realize that ICT is now a diverse field that requires professional and on-going support and development. This is the major reason why Governments in the Pacific fail to implement most of their well developed ICT policies. ICT produces professionals in various areas which may include but not limited to technicians, desktop support, web developer, software developer, trainer, solution provider, business analyst, ICT management, project management, helpdesk operators and many more. Majority of Government scholarships for ICT are not for any specific area. So, when graduates returned home; they are expected to perform all the above areas.

Governments must develop appropriate ICT development structures that provide the platform for addressing their ICT issues which may include ICT support, Infrastructural development, software or online development, etc. Once the structure is in place then human capacity development is a must. Most ICT graduates after returning from higher Institutions will take at least 3 or more years to gain enough experiences in support or developing quality e-services. The fact that the Pacific lacks the environment for ICT professionals to gain appropriate experiences will require some form of professional development. That is why the ITU ITC initiative is important. It provides the appropriate technical training that guides ICT professionals with what they may require to be more effective in addressing some of the technological requirement of the Pacific to effectively participate in the new network economy.

Leaders and experts around the world increasingly recognize human capacity building as one of the most crucial ingredients for development. Both developed and developing countries face an acute shortage of skilled IP networking and IT professionals. In developing countries, the problem is compounded by the difficulties of gaining access to training. Through a unique partnership with key ICT market leaders, ITU works to provide students and telecom/IT professionals in developing countries with access to affordable and relevant training in Internet technology skills in a mentored environment, while fostering a real and sustainable transfer of knowledge.

The overriding objective of ITU's Internet Training Centres Initiative is to ensure that growth in IP networking delivers maximum benefits to the global community. It is part of a global partnership drive with public and private sector organizations which creates a win-win opportunity for all stakeholders". Hamadoun Touré, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT)

This is possible because the international bodies such as ITU work closely with private companies such as Cisco both with different objectives and raison d'etre. So when partnerships are made successfully, it results in effective projects that can make some real difference.

The Impact ITC has in Fiji and now to start in Tonga

The ITC initiative provides affordable opportunities for local students who are seeking employment opportunities in ICT and encourages participation of females in ICT. I was fortunate enough to be part of the team that establishes USP's ITC – Cisco academy which offered Cisco networking courses, Internet development courses and likely in the near future IT essentials. The success of the ITC centre was remarkable; a fortunate move for Fiji's growing ICT professionals. Most organizations in Fiji are now depending on ICT for obvious reasons. Providing effective ICT support for maintaining quality and efficient services for most of these organizations depend on the skills and the commitment of their ICT support personnel. The same that is starting to appear here in Tonga and most other PICs. In the first year of the ITC implementation at USP, majority of USP's ICT support staff enrolled and successfully completed the Cisco networking programme. The quality of USP ICT support improved significantly with fewer service calls and client satisfaction rate increases dramatically.

The demand for quality ICT services require well trained and highly skilled ICT support personnel. Most

technical Institutions are now moving towards integrating their academic diploma and degree programmes with industrial certification programmes that are available at the ITC. Gaining a formal qualification in ICT and an ICT industrial certification at the same time increases a student's chances of securing employment in any organization that uses ICT. Industrial certifications allow students – male and female to easily identify ICT professions that they desire.

In the next few years; there will be a significant demand for experience ICT professional that can assist organizations or agencies with technological implementations which will require high standard and well controlled ICT infrastructure and process automation. A move towards service integrated systems that aims at streamlining of work processes and produces efficient outputs. The new ITC for Tonga is a blessing for Tonga's ICT professional and capacity development. Tonga will benefit from low cost ICT training opportunities that are offered in other countries that rely heavily on local expertise.

Looking into the future of ICT in PICs

In the past few years, many Pacific Island countries have developed strategic policies on ICT focusing on strategic alignment and technological implementations. Some policies cover a wider spectrum of development with emphasis on communication infrastructure, education, community, e-services and many more. But they all share a common challenge; a systematic approach in implementing these policies. Most of the implementations will definitely require external consultants with expertise in ICT development and management. Such skills are lacking in the Pacific especially when there is need for strategic alignment of appropriate technologies to provide optimum results.

ICT in the Pacific is seen by many as a supporting tool that is used mainly for word processing and email. The result; ICT graduates are recruited mainly by agencies to repair desktops, install applications and install networking cables. It is now apparent that the Pacific through global integrations of services and economic developments are starting to see the need for process automation and electronic services such as e-banking, e-learning, etc. As PICs move towards the development of e-services; other ICT areas are required to be improved significantly. Most PICs are currently facing a real capacity issue where there is lack of local expertise that can offer appropriate and sound advices on ICT development issues due to lack of professional experiences and training.

ICT development platform for PICs

The real value of having an effective ICT infrastructure lies in the ability of the organization or Government to maximize the use of ICT to meet its strategic targets by improving the efficiency of its work processes, service deliveries and meeting its obligations to its clients/customers.

Conclusion

Tonga has recently developed a National ICT Policy which highlights the major challenges of the new network-based economy. The Internet Training Centre initiative was established by ITU in partnership with Cisco Systems to provide opportunities for developing nations to be able to facilitate their smooth transition to the information society which require well trained and professional human capacity, proper planning and appropriate strategic alignments.

Tonga recognizes the important role played by ICT in its on-going development and has just presented its ICT policy which was endorsed by cabinet with e-Government as a major component. E-government generally has been evolved from just providing an online presence with electronic transaction capabilities to a more integrated form of electronic collaborations among multiple agencies. This will definitely challenge the traditional and fragmented government processes by introducing well connected e-services that are driven by well developed digital grid.