

DRAFT PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES POLICY

VISION

Information and Communication Technologies for every Pacific Islander

INTRODUCTION

A workshop on Pacific Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) needs assessment and strategy planning was held between 27-31 August 2001 in Noumea, New Caledonia. The workshop was sponsored by the Governments of Australia, France and New Zealand and jointly organised by SOPAC, Forum Secretariat and SPC. It brought together representatives from Pacific Island countries and territories to complete a draft regional ICT policy.

The workshop developed this draft policy statement. The policy sets out a framework of guiding principles and policies to guide future policy development and co-operation by the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs).

The development of the PICTs has traditionally been hampered by their dispersed populations, small size and vast ocean distances separating them. These circumstances impose large costs on service provision in education, economic development, social welfare, health, travel and communication and have limited the growth of important industries such as fisheries, agriculture and tourism.

Improvements in telecommunications services and information technology now provide increasing opportunities for PICTs to overcome these circumstances by:

- reducing barriers of distance,
- improving service delivery across countries and the Pacific Community,
- reducing costs,
- improving the knowledge, skills and general development of their people,
- maximising the economic growth of their countries and the Pacific Community, and
- working more effectively together.

Leadership from governments and partnerships with businesses, non-government organisations (NGOs), religious groups and the community at large are required to facilitate participation in the knowledge society and to make their countries part of the global knowledge economy. They need to work closely to develop a connected population and to use information and communications technology to maximise the potential of the region and its people. Governments will also need to provide special attention to protect the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of the Pacific Community. By committing to individual and collective action partners will increase the use of ICT to benefit the people of the Pacific Community.

Co-operation amongst the PICTs is essential to fully realise the benefits of ICT noted above. Co-operation also provides a voice on the common needs and issues of the Pacific Community, and strengthens national efforts.

The workshop endorsed this draft policy for consideration by national governments, regional organisations and development partners. It has also asked the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) ICT working group to co-ordinate further regional action to have this policy recognised by stakeholders in the development of their national ICT policies. It also asked the CROP ICT working group to further develop the ICT strategic plan, taking into consideration the information papers presented in the workshop and keeping all workshop participants informed.

The workshop also recognised that the policy and strategic plan need regular review, and asked the CROP ICT working group to identify a suitable review process, such as in conjunction with the annual meeting of the working group.

The workshop agreed that the profile of “ICT for every Pacific islander” warranted highlighting and recommended to national governments, regional organisations and development partners that this could be achieved by: (i) a Pacific decade of ICT; (ii) a Pacific year of ICT; (iii) establishing an annual Pacific ICT forum.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: ICT WILL BE USED TO INFORM AND CONNECT PACIFIC ISLAND POPULATIONS AND ENSURE THAT THEY BENEFIT FROM FLEXIBLE AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are characterised by their remoteness, dispersed populations, and limited human resources and institutional capacity. As a result, opportunities for participation in sectoral applications are limited. Improvements in access, awareness, human resources development, and usage are required for populations of PICTs to take their full place in the global knowledge society.

Policy 1.1: Awareness of ICT and computer literacy at all community levels will be promoted and developed while safeguarding existing social and cultural values.

Policy 1.2: PICTs will develop and retain a knowledgeable ICT workforce that will be able to contribute to the maintenance and further development of ICT.

Policy 1.3: ICT strategies will be developed and/or strengthened in a flexible manner to facilitate human resource development, capacity building, and reduce professional isolation of Pacific Islanders at all educational levels and especially in rural and remote communities.

Policy 1.4: Everyone will have equal opportunity access to ICT without barriers, with special regard to women, the disadvantaged, the disabled, under represented minorities, and those in rural and remote communities.

Policy 1.5: Recognising the value of information, Pacific people will have the opportunity to contribute to the global community through the promotion of the rich Pacific cultural identity and diversity.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: APPROPRIATE ICT INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS.

Access to basic telecommunications and the Internet is generally more expensive in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) than in other parts of the world. These higher costs have negative impacts on development of essential services such as education, health, and greater economic opportunities.

Policy 2.1: Regional and national ICT networks and support infrastructure will be reliable, secure, fast, cost effective and adaptive.

Policy 2.2: PICTs will encourage private sector investment in ICT infrastructure and promote competitive markets for ICT service provision, where appropriate.

Policy 2.3: PICTs and regional organisations will co-operate to promote a regional approach to consideration and adoption of global ICT standards.

Policy 2.4: Regional and national institutions will work with service providers toward practical Universal Access to ICT.

Policy 2.5: PICTs and regional organisations will co-operate to improve access and lessen the financial burden that development of ICT imposes on governments, non-government organisations and businesses.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: EASY ACCESS TO INFORMATION THROUGH ICT WILL STRENGTHEN COOPERATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE GOOD GOVERNANCE, TO DEVELOP THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY.

Development of new methods in commerce, education, and public administration in PICTs is inhibited by limited human resources and institutional capacity and the high cost of information management systems. Co-operation between the three spheres of social, economic, and civil activity is essential to overcome these constraints.

Policy 3.1: Governments and regional organisations, the private sector and NGOs including religious groups will expand their use of ICT for interaction with their stakeholders, dissemination of information, and promotion of the principles of good governance and sound business planning.

Policy 3.2: Development of community access to local content will be encouraged for all fields of information.

Policy 3.3: ICT action plans will be actively monitored to identify their impact on national and regional development.

Policy 3.4: Governments and regional organisations, the private sector and NGOs including religious groups will be encouraged to adopt appropriate management information systems for effective decision-making.

Policy 3.5: Governments and regional organisations, the private sector and NGOs including religious groups will actively co-operate to acquire and maintain ICT resources in order to optimise the overall regional development investment.

Policy 3.6: Governments and regional organisations, the private sector and NGOs including religious groups will actively co-operate to ensure that ICT policies are integrated in the development policies of all other relevant sectors.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: ICT POLICIES AND REGULATIONS WILL BE APPROPRIATE TO THE PEOPLE AND CULTURES OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

ICT and related legal and regulatory frameworks in most PICTs are either outdated, insufficient or non-existent to meet the challenges and opportunities made possible by rapidly developing information and communication technologies. Adaptation is needed urgently at the national and regional levels, based on a sound technical understanding and a realistic assessment of fundamental benefits, to ensure that the greatest possible economic and social benefits are gained from new developments while protecting social and cultural values.

Policy 4.1: Regional and national institutions will co-operate in the development of ICT regulations that are consistent with international and national laws, regulations, technical standards, and obligations.

Policy 4.2: Appropriate ICT and related regulatory frameworks will be developed that benefit the specific cultures, customs, and economies of the people of the Pacific.

Policy 4.3: ICT and related regulatory frameworks will be developed, based on legislation, to address socially undesirable activities.

Policy 4.4: ICT and related regulatory frameworks will promote open and non-discriminatory access to publicly accessible networks where appropriate.

Policy 4.5: National ICT and related regulations will balance and protect community and individual interests, including privacy issues.

Policy 4.6: PICTs and regional organisations will take a pro-active approach to representation and advocacy in regional and international fora in order to promote partnerships to resource the development of ICT for all Pacific islanders.