

Connecting Island Communities: Pacific Telecentre Workshop Brisbane 1-3 December 2004

COMMUNIQUE

Over 60 representatives from 16 countries in the Pacific Region met for three days in Brisbane to report on and foster a vibrant telecentre movement in the Pacific Region. Participants included telecentre operators, librarians, community media specialists, researchers, academics, private sector and policy-makers as well as regional and international agencies from the following countries: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Japan, Malaysia, New Caledonia, Niue, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The workshop was organised by the Foundation for Development Cooperation with support from UNESCO (New Zealand), the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF).

At the conclusion of the Workshop, the delegates agreed to the following actions and recommendations.

Noted that:

1. the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a focus for global priorities in terms of human and society needs;
2. the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan, provides a global focus on ICTs;
3. the new Pacific Plan, endorsed at the Pacific Leaders Forum in 2004, identifies a digital strategy that recognises ICTs as a priority for Pacific Island countries;
4. the Pacific Islands ICT Policy and Strategic Plan (PIIPP) identifies infrastructure development including rural telecentres as a specific priority;
5. Pacific Island countries are all at different stages of development in terms of both ICTs and telecentres; some are well ahead, others are just starting, some are still meeting, others are thinking and some are simply watching;
6. Within each Pacific Island country, especially those with many different isolated islands, the availability of basic power and telecommunications infrastructure varies widely;
7. the term "telecentre" is not widely understood;
8. a telecentre is a community-based facility equipped with information and communications technology (ICT) tools;
9. successful and sustainable telecentres are established to meet needs determined by local communities;

10. even though the services provided by telecentres are varied, they are universally directed towards community building;
11. telecentres can be built on existing infrastructure – schools, libraries, community radio stations, women’s groups, SMEs, youth organisations;
12. telecentres provide an opportunity to deliver government services more efficiently;
13. there are many good examples of existing telecentres and telecentre developments in Pacific Island countries (see below). In particular, the People First Network in the Solomon Islands is an excellent model that other countries are considering emulating. Samoa and Fiji have well developed policy and planning process that can provide models for other countries;
14. ICTs are not cultural or gender neutral.

Agreed that successful telecentres:

1. engage local communities from the beginning;
2. focus on solving community needs and desires;
3. have a strong focus on women and youth;
4. evaluate, on an ongoing basis, including ethnographic action research, community use needs and impacts;
5. deliver both economic and social benefits;
6. have a business plan, clearly identifying ongoing revenues and financial sustainability;
7. may have a commercial component, supporting the needs of local businesses;
8. develop as a partnership between governments, the private sector and local communities;
9. can provide a range of facilities, including email, computer with standard office applications (word processing, spreadsheets, etc), printer, internet connection, training and technical support, multimedia and video production, digital story telling, website production, ICDL training and testing; community radio;
10. can build on successful community activities, providing the opportunity to scale up;
11. can have an export focus, drawing on external revenues from developed countries (where prices can be higher, resulting in larger revenue streams);

12. have established or are developing working relationships with mainstream traditional media.

Recommends that:

Pacific Island Governments

1. ensure a telecommunications regulatory environment that encourages the development of cost effective telecommunications;
2. ensure a regulatory environment that encourages independent and community media;
3. explore opportunities for a regional banking clearing house, providing the ability to process credit and debit cards for online transactions;
4. accept ICTs as a priority, with direct accountability by the Head of State;
5. ensure ICTs are a permanent agenda item at all Pacific Forum meetings;
6. integrate telecentres into national ICT policies and plans;
7. engage and consult with civil society and NGO groups in national ICT planning;
8. support the establishment of an advisory group (or assign responsibility to an existing National ICT Committee, Computer Society, etc) to guide the development of telecentres, including support services and activities, e.g. public ICT awareness, independent evaluation and research, development of appropriate and relevant content and applications, partnership brokering, ensuring gender equality and opportunities for all stakeholders to be represented in decision making;
9. pro-actively seek funding support from donor Governments and international agencies, as well as private sector investors for establishing and upscaling rural telecentre initiatives, and for support services;
10. pursue innovative technology solutions to the limited bandwidth that can currently be derived from a High Frequency (HF) radio link;
11. allocate the 2.4GHz and 5GHz frequency bands as unlicensed spectrum;
12. facilitate access for initiatives such as WINDS (Wideband Internetworking eNginering test Demonstration System), which aims to provide low-cost gigabit capacity satellite connections for Pacific countries in 2007;
13. encourage membership of the Global Knowledge Partnership;
14. encourage ICT specialists in Government to support local communities and villages to establish and develop telecentres;



15. encourage the shared use of telecentres and telecentre infrastructure by government agencies, especially for health and education.

Pacific Island Communities:

16. support a process that engages local communities in identifying telecentre services that meet their needs;
17. develop community ownership (governance) and management processes for telecentres;
18. seek partnerships with local telecommunication organisations and their suppliers;
19. develop a user-friendly brand for telecentres in each Pacific Island county to create greater awareness of ICT developments;
20. encourage local communities to promote products and services online, and explore product distribution issues;
21. leverage on existing groups with email access, e.g. diaspora, government employees, to provide “start-up” markets for community initiatives;
22. encourage Pacific Island communities to take up membership of the Pacific Chapter of the Internet Society;
23. become more vocal in advocating policies for the development and support of telecentres;
24. promote greater awareness of telecentre success stories such as e-Chutney;
25. lobby for greater community representation on national ICT committees with a special focus on gender equity.

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26. take the initiative in establishing a “Pacific Telecentre Online Community” to encourage ongoing collaboration between telecentre initiatives in the Pacific;
27. support the development of indicators to monitor the success of telecentre developments in the Pacific, building on existing best practices, and supporting continuous research on ICT for development, preferably by SPC or GKP;
28. support the development of a database of telecentre best practice models and other telecentre information relevant to the Pacific;
29. assist local communities raise the awareness of their policy-makers about telecentre opportunities;

30. promote better access to information on planned telecommunications infrastructure developments in the Pacific region, and related ICT developments;
31. encourage Government policy-makers to engage with civil society and NGO groups in national ICT planning;
32. continue to consult with Pacific Island communities on the content of future telecentre workshops and conferences.

Telecentre Initiatives in Pacific Countries: Existing and Planned

	Number of Existing Telecentres	Initiative	Status	Ownership
Australia	12	Cape York Digital Network	Existing	Community
	9	Indigenous Knowledge Network	Existing	State Government
Fiji	1	FemLINK	Planned	NGO
	1	Navua Rural Women's Group e-Chutney	Pilot	Community
FSM - Yap	13	E-Mail Network	Existing	Community
New Zealand		Tuhoe Broadband Initiative	Planned	Community
Niue	14	Homework Centres	Existing	Government
Papua New Guinea		HELP Resources, Wewak	Existing	NGO
	3	Community Electronic Network	Existing	Community
Samoa	50	Women's Committees	Existing	Community
	1	Tagilima Handicrafts Group	Existing	Community
	2	Community Telecentres	Planned	Community
Solomon Islands	17	People First Network	Existing	Community
Tokelau	3	TeleTok Internet Centres	Existing	Telecom Operator
Vanuatu		Rural Development and Training	Planned	

