



Asian Forum on Information and Communication Technology Policies and e-Strategies

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Samoa – Country Report



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ICT DEVELOPMENTS

Samoa is a Pacific Island country with a population of 176,848 (2001 Population Census). Its remote geographical location, small, scattered population and economy size, are typical features of countries and territories in the Pacific region, and are known to impede ICT developments. Considerable effort, however, is being made by the Government of Samoa (GoS) to ensure its citizens enjoy better, and more affordable and accessible information and communication technologies. Consequently, a national ICT policy has been formulated to guide these efforts and to spur innovative developments through working in partnership with the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, such as UNDP, NGOs etc.

Samoa's communications sector (covers telephone (fixed line/mobile), postal, Internet, broadcasting and multi-media services) is undergoing reforms to improve its performance and keep abreast of technological advancements of the more developed countries. The beginning of the reforms saw the corporatisation of the former Posts and Telecommunications Department (PTD) and establishment of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) on 1 July 1999. The latter was recently renamed Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) to reflect the Government's emphasis on ICT development. The corporate body, now called SamoaTel Ltd, is 100% Government-owned and mandated under the Postal and Telecommunications Services Act 1999 to provide the main postal and telecommunications services for Samoa under a monopoly regime, while by the same authority, MCIT administers policy and regulatory functions over the communications sector. Telecom Samoa Cellular Ltd (TSCL), a product of a joint venture between the GoS and Telecom New Zealand Ltd, provides analogue cellular services (AMPS) to the public, under a 10 years exclusive licence, expiring in 2007.

Consistent with the Sector reforms and in pursuit of modern, efficient and affordable ICT services, major infrastructural developments have been taking place over the last few years. The nation's telephone density now stands at 6.6%, and while this may not be an indicator of progress when compared with developed nations, there



has been a steady increase since the telecommunications services were corporatised. A fibre-optic and microwave backbone now exists across Samoa and since installation has resulted in improved traffic flow between its two main islands and urban and rural districts. More recently, a wireless local loop technology was launched by SamoaTel, to enable connectivity for a significant number of families residing in one rural area of Savaii (greater island of Samoa), covering a population of 12, 822 over a land area of 65.64 km. Samoa's cellular services have also improved lately with good coastal coverage around Upolu (mainland) and east coast of Savaii. TSCL has modernised its network by which some digital services are now being offered to the public, such as voice and text messaging (SMS) and prepaid mobile phones. Since the latter service was launched the number of subscribers has increased by 2000, bringing the total subscribers number to 5,500. Internet services have been available to Samoa since 1997 through three (3) Internet Service Providers, albeit SamoaTel Ltd monopolises the international gateway for Internet connection through 256kbps uplink and 2Mbps-downlink accesses. Subscribers of the three (3) ISPs continue to grow, with the most recent count being approximately 3000. A UNESCO study on Internet Infrastructure and e-Governance in the Pacific Islands (March 2002), reported that between 25 and 50% of Samoa's population had access to the internet in offices and telecentres and less than 25% had internet access in the home, schools, libraries and internet cafes. Competition between the 3 ISPS helps to maintain Internet access fees at a minimum (USD\$9.00 for 20 hrs) and good quality service for their customers.

ICT POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Following a Pacific Forum for Communications Ministers in 1999, the region agreed on a Communications Action Plan (CAP) to address the region's participation in the global information infrastructure. One aspect of the CAP was for the region to help facilitate national efforts towards fostering ICT developments. Samoa capitalised on this opportunity and subsequently proceeded with the task of setting up a National ICT Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was to be responsible for developing the country's ICT policy and strategies. January 2002 witnessed the



appointment of 10 members from both public and private sectors, including the chairman (currently held by Chief Executive Officer of MCIT), to take on this role.

The Steering Committee used the regional ICT Policy (developed by the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP)) as a basis for formulating its own. Cabinet approved the National ICT Policy last year. Its Key Guiding Principles cover 4 areas: Human Resources, Appropriate Infrastructure, Cooperation between Stakeholders and Appropriate Policy and Regulation. These principles have been elaborated as policies and emanate from the vision "ICT for every Samoan". (A brochure detailing the policies is attached).

Samoa's ICT policy is currently being distributed amongst stakeholders and the general public at large, as part of the Steering Committee's public awareness campaigns. UNDP has allocated a generous sum as part of its commitment also to ICT development, under Samoa's Country Programme Cycle 2003 - 2007. A number of stakeholder consultation programmes has been scheduled to take place in November/December, prioritising people of grass roots and community based levels first. More focussed stakeholder consultation programmes, aimed at the various sectors, will ensue. Feedback and results from these programmes will inform the ICT policy and provide a platform for developing appropriate strategies.

WTO AND GLOBALISATION

Samoa is in the process of accession to WTO membership. At present, Samoa's communications services are considered as WTO non-compliant, given its market arrangements, which support a monopoly regime.

To help address this issue, a World Bank Project, funding the implementation of a comprehensive postal and telecommunications reform agenda for Samoa over the next 5 years, will be providing technical assistance and advice for the preparation of a schedule of commitments to the WTO in relation to communications services.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Apart from the Internet Act 1997, that enables the establishment of Internet services in Samoa, there is no other legislation for safeguarding Internet users' privacy or security. However, the National ICT Policy, stipulates under its Guiding Principle 4 (Appropriate Policy and Regulation; Policy 4.4) the development of ICT and related regulatory frameworks to balance and protect community and individual interests, including privacy and IPR issues. Essentially, the social, cultural, religious and ethnic values will be paid special attention.

On the other hand, establishing a sound regulatory framework for Samoa's communications services is part of and will be provided through the World Bank Reform Project. Ultimately, MCIT will be equipped with vital tools for ensuring the sector is regulated fairly, impartially and competently. This will culminate by the end of 2006.

CONTENT AND APPLICATION

The promotion of Local Content and knowledge is an area that should be stressed, given the importance of native language and culture to Samoans. Notwithstanding the value of ICT as a tool to social and economic development, the dominance of the English language in the Information Society, means that a significant proportion of the Samoan population will encounter great difficulty in adapting to the ICT oriented society, due to limited knowledge of English.

In recognising this potential barrier to effective ICT utilisation, Samoa is addressing the issue and has included in its ICT policy the following :

"that publication and development of access to local content will be encouraged for all fields of information"



PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The Government has laid out a strategic plan for the overall development of Samoa. This plan is referred to as the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2002-2004 and encapsulates the theme 'Opportunities for All', meaning that everyone Samoan citizen should enjoy the benefits of national development. Contained within this three (3) year national plan is the emphasis on Government to work in partnership with the private sector, so as to achieve and sustain macroeconomic stability.

The ICT policy is advocating the principles of the SDS 2002-2004, through encouraging development of the private sector and improved service delivery. Under Guiding Principle 3 (Cooperation between Stakeholders; Policy 3.1),

"the GoS will act as a role model through national organisations (largely government departments and corporations) in encouraging the private sector and NGOs to expand their use of ICT in interacting with stakeholders, the dissemination of information, promotion of efficient business operations, good governance and sound business planning".

CONCLUSION

The support of the Pacific region, financial aid from international donors, and adequate drive from the Government can only enhance ICT developments further. Samoa will gain full strength in all its sectors with the existence of the ICT policy. Moreover, once the appropriate regulatory framework is in place the e-strategies will be fully operational and help to ensure ICT benefits the culture, customs, and economy of Samoa.