



ICT for Quality of Life - the PacINET Conference in Rarotonga

ICT practitioners and policy-makers from the Pacific and around the world gathered recently in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, for the seventh annual PacINET conference. Opened by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, the Right Honourable Jim Manurai, the conference ran from the first to fifth of September 2008, and was also the Annual General Meeting of the Pacific Islands Chapter of the Internet Society (PICISOC). The ICT Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister was tasked with preparations, and UNDP was one of the funding supporters of the conference through its e-government project in the Cook Islands.

The purpose of the PICISOC conference was to gather together people, with both technical and non-technical backgrounds, from around the Pacific region to share knowledge and information about the work of the internet and ICTs in the Pacific. The theme of the conference was “*ICT for quality of life*”, which is particularly relevant to the Cook Islands as it is the first objective of the National ICT Policy.

The conference also gave people from the Pacific an opportunity to visit the Cook Islands, many for the first time. Visitors from outside of the Pacific participated in the conference, both physically (from Korea, Taiwan, USA, Luxembourg and Japan) and virtually (Mexico, Philippines, Malaysia, USA, India, China and others). This virtual participation was the first time that this type of presentation at a conference had been made in the Pacific.

One of the objectives of the Cook Islands e-Government work plan for 2008 is to raise public awareness about e-Government and the use of the internet, and how government agencies are working towards the enhancement of their delivery of information and services. The conference was an ideal vehicle to promote the Cook Islands National ICT Policy as well as highlight the progress of e-Government in the Cook Islands to interested participants from around the Pacific.

Following the conference and on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, the ICT Unit has identified two young delegates from local Ministries for an e-Government workshop to be held in Korea at the end of October. The Cook Islands is also already starting to gather other benefits from the conference for the workings of Government and its e-Government project.

The opening of the conference involved a formal *turou* (welcome ceremony) to welcome visitors to the *marae* (ceremonial meeting place in village), provided by the Ministry of Cultural Development. The Prime Minister opened the conference, and delegates were welcomed by Ms. Maureen Hilyard, Coordinator of the Conference Committee, and Mr. Franck Martin, President of PICISOC.

Special commendation was made about the Cook Islands’ delegates’ e-Government presentations by Dr. Hyeun-Suk Rhee, Director of the United Nations – Asia Pacific Centre of ICT Training and Development; who requested copies of the videos and

presentations to be used as part of the e-Government training programmes at the UN-APCICT Centre in Seoul.

Dr. Rhee and Mr. Siaosi Sovaleni of SOPAC jointly sponsored and ran the separate workshop “ICT Essentials for Policy Makers” which ran concurrently with the conference. This course was valuable from the perspective of e-Government and e-Governance and contributed to building a stronger knowledge base among Cook Islands participants for the development of e-Government work in the Cook Islands.

The efficient and effective utilisation of ICTs for Development (ICT4D) is one of the main platforms supported by UNDP towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through improved government communication systems and better, more transparent sharing of public information and decision-making. The Cook Islands is one of the countries in the Pacific region at the forefront of bridging the so-called digital divide to bring all its citizens up to speed on modern information and communications technology’s contributions to improving their lifestyles and shrinking the developmental constraints inherent in vast distances as seen in this oceanic region.