

**OPENING ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA, VICE-CHANCELLOR AND
PRESIDENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AT THE 3RD
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
SIDE EVENT TOPIC: ICT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

1.00am-12.30pm, Thursday 4 September 2014
CR 1 Faleata Sports Complex, Apia, Samoa

1. Greetings and Welcome

Honourable Ministers
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Vice-President Dr. Grewal and other colleagues from the USP
Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to our Side Event on “ICT for Sustainable Development”. ICTs are, of course, critical to the sustainable development of SIDS, and the draft outcomes document makes specific reference to the importance of ICTs. The University of the South Pacific represents one of the best examples of using ICTs for education and research in the Pacific. It is also the agency within the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) with lead responsibility for ICTs in the Pacific Islands region. We are therefore delighted to organize this side event with the aim of promoting greater understanding and development of ICTs in our region and in SIDs generally.

2. Crucial Role of ICTs for the Pacific Islands

ICTs are critically important in today’s knowledge dominated, open and competitive world. ICTs are crucial for all societies because ICTs:

- Have a significant direct and indirect impact on GDP growth. For instance, in a recent study, it is pointed out that a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration will increase GDP by 1.5 percent in high income countries and by 1.4 percent in the case of low income countries.
- ICTs generate a lot of jobs. In 2011, about 6 million jobs were created as a result of digitalization (Hughes, 2100).
- ICTs make the other parts of the economy and society more productive. For instance, in the case of EU, it has been estimated that ICT producing sectors contribute 43 percent to labour productivity, while ICT-using sectors contribute a further 34 percent to labour productivity.
- ICTs help countries with the dissemination of important ideas, especially with the widespread use of social media made possible by the availability of cheap mobile devices
- ICTs help in increasing access to government services, commercial services, as well as helping with education and health

- ICTs enable greater accountability by governments and others because of social media

While ICTs are important for all countries, they are CRUCIAL for small, vulnerable, isolated and scattered Pacific islands because they link them, promote social and political cohesion, and enable access to ideas, capital and markets. By opening up world markets for these small countries, ICTs allow them to escape the tyranny of small markets and distance and isolation.

3. Pacific ICT Situation and Challenges

Most people agree that our region lags behind other regions in ICTs, whether it is in relation to levels of internet penetration, use in relation to potential use, or the quality of systems, processes and institutions needed for high quality deployment of ICTs for the sustainable development of Pacific SIDS.

However, there are some pockets of excellence and there have been some interesting and exciting recent developments. The ICT landscape of the Pacific Islands will change dramatically in the next one to three years. Some PICs have connected to high speed marine fibre networks, including RMI, French Territories, Tonga and Vanuatu. Samoa and Solomon Islands are at advanced stage of planning for marine fibre connection. These marine fibre connections give these countries a new revolutionary level of capacity and potential service provided appropriate regulatory systems are put in place to promote competition.

Many countries will be deprived of the truly transformative power of the new ICT capacities of broadband connectivity if they continue with pricing influenced by monopolistic tendencies and companies.

In this connection, I wish to note here that the World Bank has recently approved a grant of US\$4.5m for the next phase of the Pacific Islands ICT Regulatory Resources Centre (PiRRC) that is hosted at the USP. This Project will continue PiRRC's work in encouraging and assisting regulators to work together in order to identify and address telecommunications regulatory issues and challenges due to technological, market dynamics, innovations and developments.

Fiji represents an excellent case study of how the potential of the Southern Cross cable has been realized in recent years after the government ended the telecommunications monopoly, created effective regulatory framework and a Commerce Commission to promote competition, provided a visionary path for ICT development, and worked with a vibrant private sector to transform the ICT landscape.

The second very interesting technological development in ICT revolves around new satellite technologies being adopted, especially the O3B that CI has implemented, and the newly established Kacific systems. Ultimately, a mix of solutions will be needed, but the cost differentials are vastly in favour of marine fibre from the point of end-user.

Finance is a major hurdle to the further development of the kind of ICT infrastructure

that will enable the Pacific Islands to develop appropriately and to have a decent place in the knowledge-dominated world system. It is vital therefore that major financing institutions like the World Bank and the ADB, together with the major development partners be at the same table when we discuss ICTs, especially ICT connectivity.

4. Beyond Capacity: Content

Getting broadband capacity is only the beginning: the Pacific has a lot of work to be done on content, as well as in ensuring adequate cyber security. Ultimately, the greatest value will come from the best and most creative development of applications that can utilize the capacity. The need for education and health applications, e-government and e-commerce, and community cohesion are very significant. These call for significant thinking and additional resources.

5. Beyond the SAMOA Pathway

It is vital to build on the excellent momentum created here at the 3rd UN SIDS conference. The imperative for this is there; the possibilities are there; but the path ahead will be better if there is greater cohesion in our approach to our digital future.

There have been three major events related to SIDS ICTs: the ITU hosted SIDS connectivity; the ICT discussions within the Private Sector discussions; and this USP-organized side event. There is a need to ensure that there is common dialogue, and that the big financial players, public officials responsible for policy, the private sector and technical agencies are all under the same tent. This has not been the case here.

In all the major sectors, the strategies and alliances have been developed through the relevant CROP Working Groups. The CROP Working Group chaired by USP is currently revising the Pacific Digital Strategy. This will be most productive if this strategy is a collective effort bringing together not just the normal members of the Working Group, but the Private Sector and financial institutions. A Pacific Digital Alliance along the Pacific Ocean Alliance may be a good way to go forward.

In addition, most regions in the world have their regional education and research networks. The Caribbean region has the Caribbean Knowledge Network that was developed with EU funding. The Pacific region commissioned a study of a possible research and education network through the ACP, and a meeting to discuss that report supported the idea and gave the responsibility for further developing that to USP (with its expertise with USPNet) and the Pacific Islands Universities' Research Network (PIURN). If this network is to become a reality, now would be the time to seek greater advocacy for it and possible funding from development partners. There is no doubt that the region needs this and that it will significantly help the ambitions of our countries to enhance their participation in higher education, build research capacity, and provide technical and vocational education to the very large number of youths coming out of secondary schools and not able to either access tertiary education or join the labour market.

6. Programme of the Side-Event

My colleagues and other experts will speak today on knowledge management; ICT for education; how small island universities have formed a consortia to deliver a SIDS-contextualized and multi-institutional postgraduate programme in sustainable development; and how ICT can be applied in the region to address pressing regional issues such as climate change, and knowledge management.

Faafetai Lava

Vinaka Vakalevu

Thank you

Professor Rajesh Chandra