Cook Islands

Population: 11,800
Schools: 33, Teachers: 282, 4,385 students
ICT access: Moderate/Good

Background
The Cooks is, by Pacific standards, a highly developed small nation with efficient, effective infrastructure and high socio-economic standards. In terms of ICT in education, the Cooks has benefited from its close association with New Zealand. The NZ curriculum is used in schools, the NZ ministry of education provides support and expertise at the policy level and in terms of teacher development. Cook Island students are, on the whole, likely to be ICT literate – with computers in school and often at home too, particularly in Rarotonga. Internet access in rural islands may be harder to come by, but efforts by the telecom service provider and the ministry of education aim to tackle this problem.

Policy
Overall, the Ministry of Education is not presently making ICT a priority and the new secretary has made it explicit that ICT will take a backseat to other priorities such as bilingualism and the encouragement of the Maori language. The EduNet project, which aims to connect schools to a wide-area intranet through a server containing curriculum-related materials based in the Ministry of Education has been constrained by a number of obstacles: the programme is operated by a team of technical experts rather than eLearning advocates, which has led to a narrower, more reactive mandate than initially hoped for; EduNet does not execute a strategic role, but rather responds to technical queries. The curriculum in the Cooks has been revised in small ways in line with the NZ curriculum to incorporate ICT as a subject area. But changes in leadership and a lack of sustained vision for ICT within government have left the enthusiasm of 2003, and the launch of EduNet, unfulfilled.

Challenges
* Widely distributed, small islands, low population density
* Selection and maintenance of hardware & software; Salt air degrades equipment rapidly
* High telecom prices
* Lack of government vision, beaurocracy in government
* Uncertainty about what to teach, sustainability of school projects
* High emigration
Recommendations
* Further develop the Technology Curriculum
* Encourage schools (esp Rarotonga) to meet, collaborate, share resources/experiences
* Involve ‘champion teachers’ in skills inventory of primary students coming to secondary
* Deploy skills list as educational goal by Form 6.
* EduNET takes more proactive role in installation, maintenance, training in ICT systems
* Run training sessions for technology teachers