

**Minutes of the ICT Stakeholder Meeting – Thursday, 17 August, 2006
FTIB Board Room, 10am**

Present:

Mrs Lailun Khan	-	FTIB (Chairperson)
Mr Andrain Anthony	-	Affiliated Computer Services
Mr Jim Tora	-	Affiliated Computer Services
Mr George Samisoni	-	Fiji International Telecommunications Ltd
Mr Ivan Fong	-	Telecom Fiji
Mr Jito Vanualailai	-	The University of the South Pacific
Mr Kushneel Prasad	-	Australian Trade Commission
Ms Sarita Chand	-	Australian Trade Commission
Mr Ateen Kumar	-	Vodafone Fiji
Mr Apolosi Kaloumaira	-	Information Technology Services (Fiji) Ltd
Mr Omid Saberi	-	Fiji Electricity Authority –
Mr Savanaca Nacanitaba	-	National Council for Small & Medium Enterprises
Ms Brigid Johnson	-	Quest Fiji Ltd
Mr Rakesh Kaushik	-	CAhead Info Technologies
Ms Florence Swamy	-	Fiji Audio Visual Commission
Ms Nanise Young	-	Micronet
Mr Drew Arthur	-	Micronet
Mr Ratu Seci Nawalowalo	-	Fiji Inland Revenue and Customs Authority
Mr Epeli Naua	-	Fiji Inland Revenue and Customs Authority
Mr Jonathan Segal	-	Oceanic Communications
Mr Ravisa Komaisavai	-	ITC Services
Mr Sunia Baikeirewa	-	FTIB
Mr Herbert Powell	-	FTIB
Ms Anshu Mala	-	FTIB

Apologies:

Ms Sharon Smith Johns	-	Connect Internet Services
Mr John Pollock	-	Unwired
Mr Prakash Narayan	-	South Pacific Computer Society
Mr Tevita Rokobaro	-	Ministry of Information, Communication and Media Relations
Mr Barry Kay	-	Hewlett Packard
Mrs Evans Hannah	-	Fiji Times
Lionel Yee	-	ATH

1. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Chairperson welcomed the invited ICT stakeholders to the meeting.

ICT Issues

Mrs Brigid Johnson thanked FTIB for assisting Quest in establishing their call centre at the Kalabo site. She highlighted the need for sustainability of businesses in Fiji in terms of natural disasters and political issues and to her, the continuation and expansion of their business in Fiji is a substantiation that these requirements has satisfactorily been met by Fiji.

Professional Literacy

According to x, the ICT Industry in Fiji should be given more of a *service and customer oriented approach*. It was highlighted that the cost of IT infrastructure in Fiji is high compared to other countries such as India, which has the added advantage to attract a number of IT businesses throughout the world.

Infrastructure in this case was referred to the communication facilities and the local and international carriers. It was pointed out that the internet service payments were very high in Fiji compared to a more developed country like Australia. In addition, it was highlighted that there were inadequacy of business flights to Fiji.

Some of the suggestions made were to lower infrastructure related cost in Fiji to gain its market share in IT industry and provide with better incentives to suit the industry requirements.

Application Training

Mr X, further raised the concern on training needs in Fiji. His special attention was on application training, which needs to be addressed from grassroots level to the upper levels. He supported by giving example that many people do not know how to fill in simple forms and this is something which is becoming a concerning issue of the industry.

Mr Jim Tora from ACS queried on the wage structure provided in the ICT Industry Sector Profile prepared by FTIB. It was highlighted that the wage structure provided is outdated and there was a need to review it.

Oceanic – Jonathan Segal – brining up stuff like tax free Tuesdays because a lot of their materials are imported items.

Ivan Fong – (Telecom) Need to speed up internet – the traffic paths. Most of the bandwidth is not being used. Aging wires, with new networks and the challenge being that there is lack of IT specialists in Fiji to design the new networks.

Don't want all businesses to be done offshore – give tax benefits to locals.

To the FINTEL's network Operations Manager, Mr George Samisoni, the issues brought up by the stakeholders were not new to him as these has been ongoing for a length of time now. He highlighted that currently, FINTEL only customise for Telecom and they hold monopoly for their services in the market. He highlighted that there will be changes in the industry which depends on the current politicians of the country. According to him, the infrastructure needs for the ICT industry in Fiji is all available, however there was a need for market.

A questioned posed by Mr Drew Arthur of Micronet to the participants of this meeting was that "are we pressuring the wrong people?"

What are the economic policies in Fiji?

Residential prices are determined first and whatever is left is given to the business community.

Service providers in Fiji

Mr Anthony Ah Koy of Datec commented that there was an over-supply of service providers in the IT industry in Fiji at all levels. There is a product variation which gives an open market choice to the customers for example, new machines, old machines etc. The speed of service delivery is also not a problem in Fiji.

According to Jim Tora (ACS), that ACS's foreign ownership was taken advantage of by the local suppliers. It was found that there was a jump in the market price of items.

Another issue raised was that there was a need *to update the customs list* on IT related equipment that is imported.

Mr Jonathan Segal brought forward the issue on tax incentives. Currently Fiji offers tax incentives and investment allowance to the IT investors and which can be highly taken advantage of. However, the only issue is that there is no incentives on the operations cost.

Immigration

Mr Jito Vanualailai (USP) showed his concern in processing of the lecturers work permits to Fiji. USP currently has difficulties in designing course and this is one of the ways to overcome this problem is to hire good lecturers at the USP. There have been cases when there is last minute appointment of lecturers (when the semester has already begun), hence the Immigration department is suggested to fully co-operate with the educational institutions in Fiji (knowing the fact that Fiji lacks on experts) and put in place special consideration to such cases.

FAVC – Ms Florence Swamy contributed that FAVC provides a blanket clearance for their clients with the Immigration Department. Those who go through FAVC get their passports endorsed and the immigration fee is waved. One of the reasons for this is the nature of work, that is, production work cannot be held up for a length of time –

there is a need for immediate start. Under the FAVC Act, they are to promote the ICT industry; however shortage in the resources has been a major drawback on their part. Their current target is the film industry but they have included the ICT as part of their next years work plan.

Update on the ICT work with JICA and USP

According to Mr Jito Vanualailai, the \$30m project on the OCT Center funded by JICA has been at halt due to JICA having some conflicts with the Fiji Government on another issue (Lami Jetty). The condition placed was that unless Fiji Government takes action on the Lami Jetty, JICA will not fund the ICT Center project.

Another issue highlighted was the need to involve the industry as part of USP courses. This could be achieved by inviting the industry people as guest lecturers to the lectures.

In addition, internship programmes should be encouraged in educational institutions in Fiji. The students need to be placed in the industry to enhance their theoretical knowledge to the practical level.

ICT Association

Mrs Khan (FTIB) proposed the idea for the formation of an ICT Association in Fiji. This association will act as a lobby to the government on ICT related issues in Fiji faced by the private industry.

Mr Nawalowalo (FIRCA) anticipated the need for a computer group that looks after the interest of the nation as a whole in developing basic computer literacy. This especially includes the SMEs and the school leavers (at local villagers). This basically directs on how we as a nation can get people involved in the ICT in order to develop culture of responsiveness and increase competitiveness as a nation in terms of literacy.

New Product

According to Mr Ah Koy (Datec) one of the ways for the above (concern raised by Mr Nawalowalo) is to introduce a new product – where TFL can install internet kiosks in phone booths with the help of broadband access.

Fund Allocation

Another remedy outlined was to allocate funds for such nation-oriented projects from the industry itself. This will be part of investment in human resources in the country that will later channel its way back to the industry itself.

What Next???

Mrs Khan confirmed all contributions made by the stakeholders will be taken note of. However, there is a need for the industry stakeholders to meet continuously for the following:

- The challenges of the ICT industry has already been identified in this meeting
- Follow – up meetings will help identify:
 - ✚ Strategies for the above identified challenges
 - ✚ Who needs to do what in order to implement the identifies strategies from the follow-up meeting

It is to be noted that the stakeholders agreed that the nature of this exercise should be action oriented. This will give the ICT industry to increase its current level of awareness in Fiji. One of the suggested ways to do that is to organise for a ***Fiji Technology Forum***, which can become an annual event for the industry.

4. Fiji Technology Forum

The Fiji Technology Forum will be treated as a medium of awareness for the ICT industry in Fiji. There will an opportunity to get all the industry and the potential customers under one roof to engage in a business deal face to face.

The current Fiji Computer Society trade show needs to be privatised (given to media for e.g. FM 96) to make it an event and this has to be commercially-driven.

Follow-Up Meeting: Set up a Task Force

Schedule for the Follow-up Meeting: Thursday, 21 September, 2007, FTIB Board Room, 10am.

5. Other Matters