

Maureen Hilyard



I work in the office of the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands. Apart from the overall management of the ICT Division, I have the added responsibility as the project manager for the e-government project, ensuring that the deliverables in line with its allocated budget from Government and UNDP are carried out accordingly. So attending the IGF in Hyderabad was a perfect complement to both work and study.

The IGF programme was preceded by a group tour of old and new Hyderabad, where together we experienced the rich culture of the people of this particular region of India. We were helped not only to appreciate the culture and history of old Hyderabad but also to understand how India is benefiting from the Internet and its associated activities in the new part of the city.

Ginger Paque's input focused on how digital education can enhance student-teacher interaction which was relevant to me because I have a background in distance learning and my current role in government is to support the development of governance issues relating to the delivery of online learning opportunities for students who live on the outer islands of the Cook Islands.

The Internet has become an enabler for entrepreneurial industries and the Government of India has taken advantage of this growth to invest in the global opportunities that can provide employment for its huge population. Hyderabad has become the central location of this development.

The first morning of the Forum was a baptism of fire with my colleagues volunteering me for a Diplo debate. Even more interesting was that I had to speak FOR the proposition "i-Voting: the Internet is too vulnerable to be trusted" which is in fact the opposite of my views as the e-Government Project Manager in the Cook Islands. But it made me take a serious look at the opposite viewpoint and what's more, Ijeoma Ogbuagu and I won the debate. A great start to the week.

From there I attended a session "Overcoming obstacles of Effective Digital Education" which gave an interesting insight into the issues relating to teacher access to relevant resource material and copyright. Ginger Paque's input focused on how digital education

can enhance student-teacher interaction which was relevant to me because I have a background in distance learning and my current role in government is to support the development of governance issues relating to the delivery of online learning opportunities for students who live on the outer islands of the Cook Islands.

After lunch I attended a session entitled “Can Internet Governance Change Global Futures” which involved a workshop that focused on scenarios to encourage groups to discuss what the Internet might look like and what its governance issues might entail in the year 2025. An interesting exercise in future visioning.

The cocktail event sponsored by ITU was a great wind-down and informal debrief for everyone. I was grateful to be able to personally thank the sponsors from Canada and the Secretary-General of ITU for enabling me to attend the IGF in Hyderabad. It was a fortuitous opportunity for someone like myself from a small Pacific Island nation to be able to attend such a gathering.

If we in the Cook Islands are to establish ourselves appropriately within the global community then it is necessary that we set up good policies from the outset, based on the best practices of other countries who have already trialed what has worked and what hasn't. I am privileged to be playing a major part in this development in my country through my role as the e-Government Project Manager. Further developments from this project will lead towards the development of e-Governance, e-Learning and e-Commerce. This meeting put me in touch with people who are already involved in e-Government and e-Governance in their countries and who are able to help us to achieve successful models in the Cook Islands.

During the session “The Internet and Climate Change: how do we collaborate?”, I found the content of the speakers' presentations of great value to what we need to consider for our small island country with respect to ICTs and how they can impact on our island environment.

OECD's Best Practice Forum on “Internet and the use of Public Sector Information” was information-packed and very interesting. It included Graham Vickery of OECD who explained how ICTs can be used to create better environments, Chris Corban, who spoke about the SPSIplus project and how he is working with countries to assist them to comply with EU Laws, and Rajeev Chawla who explained how the Indian Government has digitized 20 million land records. This has been a real success story for India and will enable poor farmers to access information about available land when they need it. I believe that the Government of India is using the potential of the Internet to encourage equal access for all to knowledge and services which will ultimately change attitudes of



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people across the strata of its currently very structured and diverse society.

“Access to Public Held Information with a Development Perspective” included a talk by Professor Asari, India’s Information Commissioner, on the positive impacts of India’s Right to Information (RTI) Act on civil society and on government. In the Cook Islands we have our Official Information Act, which insists that Ministries and smaller agencies create websites to provide online access to their information and services for the public. As in India, the Cook Islands Government wants the public to be more aware of, and have easier access to,

the services that the government provides for its people.

We attended the prize-giving of the Indian Group of Diplo students receiving their IG certificates before we were all transported to the Forum’s Gala Dinner. It was a great wind-down time and we were able to experience Indian culture at its best with a wide range of food, dance and crafts from different regions. It was an amazing night of dance and music that complimented the smooth operations of the daily Forum programme. I also met up with other Pacific Islanders who were attending the event through their connections with ISOC, PITA and ICANN.

“Getting the Pacific Online – Access Challenges, Issues and Opportunities” addressed the issues of the Pacific region. Richard Misak, CEO Telecom Palau, raised the problems of Internet connectivity experienced by Pacific countries. Through a teleconferencing connection provided by Dimdim, Maui Sanford (CEO PITA) spoke about “Opportunities for Pacific Islands”, from Tahiti. Following the presentations, I was able to explain what developments are taking place with respect to Internet connectivity in the Cook Islands.

The Diplo team gathered to discuss “Internet Governance Capacity Building” which provided an overall summary about the work of the Diplo Foundation and its role in enhancing knowledge about Internet Governance. Because the Internet as a formal communication tool for the Cook Islands Government is in its infancy, the development of its Internet governance is also new. We are in the process of developing a national ICT body made up of representatives from both the public and private sectors which will attend to telecommunications and Internet governance issues. This is all part of our country’s capacity building within this important area.

Our first event of the final day was a Diplo workshop – a negotiation simulation facilitated by Jovan Kurbalija and Kishan Rama, an experienced Diplomat and now Diplo expert. The negotiation scenario was an interesting experience and gave us all a chance to chair a major roundtable meeting of heads of state while at the same time representing these noble personages to negotiate international, regional or national frameworks for key areas of Internet governance. Our group identified some relationship issues between countries and the arguments were so intense that it was difficult at times to believe that we were not in a genuine discussion of some very important issues involving these coun-

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tries. I am sure that everyone came away with some important lessons learned about diplomacy and negotiation skills.

The final get-together was a chance for everyone to relax for a short time and say their farewells before boarding the bus to prepare for their homeward travel. It was certainly not a sad time because we were all aware that the Diplo feeling is strong despite the distances between us and our commitment to the common cause of Internet

Governance will continue to connect us all.

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The IGF was a great opportunity to meet the special people with whom I have worked during the year and to make new friends and contacts. It was the opportunity of a lifetime and I am sure that everyone who attended will have benefited in some way and like myself will have returned with more knowledge, ideas and contact details to help us all improve Internet governance in our home countries. ■



A row of white classical columns with a red 'EXTRACT' sign. The sign is a red-bordered rectangle with the word 'EXTRACT' in red, slanted, uppercase letters. The background is a grayscale image of the columns, with a semi-transparent dark gray area at the bottom containing the main title and subtitle.

EXTRACT

*This extract was originally published as part of the report:
Capacity Development: How the Internet Governance
Forum empowered people from developing countries*

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:

How the Internet Governance Forum
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