

Chapter 18

International Satellite Communications to Support and Supplement Web-Based Information Exchange: A Co-Operative Programme

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes international collaborative programs to develop information exchange networks connecting the Pacific Island communities among themselves on the one hand and between them and the Pacific rim countries and the rest of the world on the other. It gives as an example the use of the PEACESAT (Pan-Pacific Education and Communications Experiments by Satellite) satellite network to “talk to” heads of libraries of several Pacific Islands to obtain quick approval of a plan for an Asia-Pacific regional development information network, before submitting the plan document to funding agencies/sponsors.¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

Facilitating international peace and universal respect by promoting collaboration among nations through knowledge sharing, and communication among peoples of the world is an objective of Unesco's programmes. Within this framework the development and support of information networks and institution building, especially in developing countries, were the main objectives of the Networking and Institution Building section of the former General Information Programme (Unesco\PGI) (now Communication and Information). I was heading this section for about four years (1982-1986); Earlier during (1978-1982) I was coordinating a Unesco-UNDP project for establishing a Post-Graduate Training facility / school for information specialists in South-east Asia at the University of the Philippines where I also taught. Selected international and regional networks, regional and national institutions for the development of information professionals, preparation of model national information policy documents, and related programmes and projects I was associated with during this period are briefly recounted in a paper by John Rose (Raghavan and Prasad, eds., 2006). Based on this experience I have assisted in the conceptualization, policy formulation and programme planning for other networks (e.g. IDRC sponsored DEVSIS, Arab League/ALDOC-UNDP sponsored ARISNET, and institution building in Latin America and Caribbean region.

The advent of Internet/WWW has greatly accelerated the process of information flow and exchange by enabling seamless access to information resources and among peoples globally. This, in turn, supports and strengthens the bonds among people in practically all domains of human endeavor, thus pushing societies toward achieving such visions as the global village and knowledge society. While the spread of the Internet and growth in its use have been remarkable over the past decades, yet in terms of the global popula-

tion Internet use is less than 10 percent and is largely confined to the urban population, among scholars, business community, some governments and non-governmental organizations. Low literacy level and limited access to education, paucity of resources, multiplicity of native languages, culture, and other factors affect the spread and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in most developing countries where over three-fourths of the population live and work in rural areas. This has created the so-called digital divide within and among nations. In this context, the successful establishment of a satellite communications facility for the Pacific island communities that are widely separated and spread out is of particular interest.

In this paper I shall briefly describe the plans and international collaborative efforts to develop information exchange networks connecting the Pacific island communities among themselves on the one hand and between them and the Pacific rim countries and the rest of the world on the other. In particular I shall describe briefly the Pan-Pacific Education and Communications Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT), and how this satellite network was used to 'talk to' heads of libraries of several Pacific islands to obtain approval for a plan for an Asia-Pacific regional development information network, before submitting the plan document to funding agencies / sponsors.

2. ISLAND COMMUNITIES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

The indigenous peoples of the islands of the South Pacific live close to nature and have a concern for and unique knowledge of, the natural resources, fauna and flora, and have developed a variegated native cultures, traditions, arts and crafts. Of course, they would like to share this knowledge, experiences and cultures among themselves and with the peoples of the Pacific mainland and globally. They also desire to benefit from the

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