

News from the Internet Society

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ISOC@WSIS: ISOC's Capacity Building Programs

Enabling sustainable development of the Internet for over a decade

Geneva, Switzerland - 19th September 2005 - It is widely recognised that developing countries have much to gain from improved access to the Internet. Access that is now taken for granted in many parts of the world is vital to enabling progress in social and economic development.

Developing countries have often been discouraged not only by the high costs associated with building a basic Internet infrastructure, but also by the difficulty of gaining access to appropriate education to develop the skills required to maintain, manage and then grow their infrastructure. Although various recent global initiatives have once again highlighted these 'Digital Divide' issues, most of these issues are not new.

Some of the most effective approaches to supporting developing countries are not new either. The Internet Society, for example, has worked successfully to bring Internet connectivity to many developing countries over the last 12 years. Through capacity-building initiatives that enable specialists to transfer their knowledge to local technicians and policy makers, ISOC has played a pivotal role in bringing sustainable education programs to all parts of the world.

Many of the people who have attended ISOC-supported Network Training workshops have gone on to help build and manage the Internet infrastructure in their countries. Workshop graduates have also used their newly acquired skills to train those responsible for running and maintaining this infrastructure. In the spirit of the Internet Society, some have also worked to bring together those with an interest in developing the potential of the Internet, enabling local users, operators and policy makers to play a more active role in the broader Internet community.

The Internet Society believes that the full involvement of all stakeholders (governments, the private sector, civil society, the Internet community and international organisations) is critical in ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and enabling a stable and secure functioning of the Internet. ISOC's education initiatives help transfer knowledge and develop the understanding that is a basic pre-requisite for effective participation and decision making.

The role of policy makers

The involvement and support of governments, through their policy makers and regulators, is a critical factor in the successful implementation and usage of Internet infrastructure. An environment that stimulates and encourages Internet usage is needed if the benefits of connectivity are to be felt by the local population. These benefits (which can take many

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The Internet Society (www.isoc.org) is a not-for-profit membership organization founded in 1991 to provide leadership in Internet related standards, education, and policy. With offices in Washington, DC, and Geneva, Switzerland, it is dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. ISOC is the organizational home of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Architecture Board (IAB), the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) and other Internet-related bodies who together play a critical role in ensuring that the Internet develops in a stable and open manner.

forms – economic, social and cultural) all depend on broad access to a stable, well-run infrastructure and a respect of standards and current best practices.

ISOC recognises the importance of institutional capacity building. As the organisational home of the Internet standards processes run by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), ISOC is uniquely positioned to help policy makers not only to understand the implications of Internet technologies but also to develop effective and fair Internet coordination policies that can lead to greater self sufficiency in the development of the Internet for the benefit of the people in their countries and regions.

Understanding the impact and role of new technologies

New technologies bring new opportunities and new challenges – not only for technicians, but also for policy makers. For example, voice traffic that was once exclusively handled by the public switched telephone network is increasingly being carried via the Internet. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) can reduce costs and introduce new opportunities for end users, including the public and private sectors. At the same time it can also bypass the traditional telephony network settlements system whereby call termination revenue is generated for countries by incoming calls. Understanding, for example, the opportunities VoIP offers, and not just the challenges, allows decision-makers to have the fullest view of how technologies can contribute to development today and tomorrow.

This is just one example of how advances in Internet technologies are forcing policy makers to look beyond traditional regulatory models. The Internet Society has a growing database of information and real-world experience which can be used by policy makers to assess the ramifications of introducing new technologies such as VoIP, and how the long-term economic benefits of carefully planned implementation can deliver tremendous longer-term gains for their countries.

Building self-sufficiency

Many countries see greater autonomy in the coordination of their Internet resources as being an important step towards broader Internet usage. By taking fuller responsibility for the operation of their ccTLD or by offering the possibility to register domain names in local languages, these countries are building the foundations for future growth. Here too the Internet Society has a long track record of providing support – not only for building up the required technical infrastructure, but also by educating those who will manage it about best practices, tools and procedures.

An example of how ISOC is working to help local operators can be seen in its two year old series of hands-on technical workshops on ccTLD registry operations. Here ISOC is helping ccTLD operators get access to the knowledge and skills that they need to build up high quality infrastructure and services as well as building strong policies in cooperation with their community.

Strength through cooperation and partnership

Thanks to its members in over 80 chapters worldwide as well as its long-standing relationships and cooperation with the many organisations that serve the advancement of the Internet, ISOC is able to tap into a unique wealth of experience, skills and competence that can be united to deliver an invaluable insight into how the Internet works, who makes it work and where it is heading.

Together with organisations such as the Regional Internet Registries or ICANN, ISOC will continue to bring together highly respected specialists from groups such as the IETF or the Network Startup Resource Centre to deliver training courses on the technical and policy implications of new and emerging technologies.

ISOC depends heavily on partner and member organisations for education program sponsorship. A further major source of program funding is the Public Interest Registry (PIR), a not-for-profit organisation that was created by ISOC to manage the .ORG registry function following ISOC's successful bid to ICANN for the .ORG domain.

PIR, building on ISOC's strong technical roots and reputation for responsible Internet citizenship, ensures an exemplary approach to registry operations that focuses on the needs of non-commercial end users in the namespace area. Surpluses generated by PIR's .ORG domain registration revenues are allocated to the sponsorship of ISOC-supported programs in line with the common public interest goals of ISOC and PIR.

Global participation – open to all

Open participation by all stakeholders is encouraged in all ISOC-supported education activities. By enabling the delivery of training courses in forums as diverse as the African Network Operators' group, the South Asian Network Operators' Group, and the Latin American and the Caribbean Workshop on Internet Technology (WALC), or the World Summit on the Information Society, ISOC is working to ensure that the developing countries are not disadvantaged when it comes to education and information. ISOC is also striving to make its education and training materials more widely accessible than ever before through the ISOC Workshop Resource Centre – a web-based portal where materials are available to everyone free of charge.

Looking to the future

The Internet Society looks forward to continued cooperation with the growing community of Internet users worldwide. Our motto is 'The Internet is for Everybody' – and through our education programs and capacity building initiatives we are working hard to make that a reality.

For more information go to <http://www.isoc.org>