Cautious Approach to Introducing Information Technology into Pacific Island Nations

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ABSTRACT

This poster endeavours to forewarn those who are thinking of or involved in the future in introducing new technologies, information technology (IT) in particular, to small and developing nations of the Pacific. The poster looks at the socio-economic structures of the islands and examines the relationship between average islanders' income level and their basic concept of IT and requirements. It takes Tonga as a case study and presents some facts on the size of the country, population, economy (especially the per capita income) and available commercial resources, ethnic groups, culture and form of government.

Because new technologies are created by the people in the developed countries for themselves and because of socio-political, economic and cultural differences, the new tools are sometimes viewed by people in the developing world as threatening, depriving the elders of their power over their clansmen and women etc. Larmer (1992:139) examines the contemporary attitude of the indigenous people in developing countries towards their culture and states: "It probably goes without saying that to make a success of both business and life in a foreign country one has to be sympathetic and even receptive to local customs and norms".

The poster outlines the author's experience of introducing IT into the Tongan Ministry of Lands, Survey and Natural Resources (see also Latu, 1995; Latu, 1996; Latu, Benwell & Davies, 1996a,b). It indicates how the people in the islands prioritise IT and assesses their level of IT awareness and the consequences for them (in various walks of life, today and in the future) of having or not having IT skills.

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