

IMPLEMENTATION E-MONGOLIA NATIONAL PROJECT

Abstract:

It is 11 years now, since the first Internet service provider started its services in Mongolia. For all these years, the information and communications technology Since the transition of Mongolia from the centrally-planned economy to the market economy and introduction of the Internet in Mongolia in 1996, the wider opportunities opened up for Mongolia, which enabled the country to have access to information and resources available at the World Wide Web as well as to discover new opportunities to share knowledge, experiences and resources within the country and to other countries.

My paper will provide an overview of the ICT development in Mongolia, with the focus on the activities aimed to review of the ICT development in Mongolia; review e-government initiatives, "Low cost PC and Affordable Internet program", which has been implemented and planned to be implemented; assess their impacts to the society. For widely dispersed and rarely populated country like Mongolia, there was a huge need and demand for quality telecommunications services, especially in the outreach to the rural areas.

Introduction:

The development of ICT in Mongolia dates back to the time when the Great Mongol Empire has been established and the horse-riders traveled thousands of kilometers to deliver messages across it. From that time till the late 19th century, when the telegraph facility between Khiagt (town in Russia) – Ikh Khuree (nowadays Ulaanbaatar) – Chuulalt Khaalga (town in China) has been established opening new chapter in history of communication of Mongolia.

The next stage can be defined between late 19th century to mid 20th century, when the telegraph, telephone, postal and radio broadcasting services were introduced in Mongolia.

From 1982, a new era of development of information and communications technology started with establishment of government bodies and research institutions. The telecommunications network has been expanded to all soums of Mongolia, facilitating communications with widely spread communities across country.

With the establishment of the first Internet service provider in 1994 and introducing Internet to Mongolia in 1996, the era of information and communications took off to its next stage. Nowadays, there are 2 mobile operators providing services for over 350,000 subscribers, 8 Internet service providers with over 50,000 users, etc.

The newly established Information and communications technology Authority (ICTA) has initiated and developed "E-Mongolia" program, which was approved by the Government of Mongolia in June, 2005. The vision of E-Mongolia program is to establish "the information society and the foundation for knowledge based society in Mongolia by enhancing extensive application of ICT in all society sectors". It's targeted to make Mongolia in top 10 ICT developed countries in Asia. The "E-Mongolia" program has 4 major components: 1) policy, legal and regulatory framework, 2) telecommunications and information infrastructure, 3) utilization of ICTs and governance and other applications and 4) developing human resources.

We launched Low Cost PC& Affordable Internet programs under the e-Mongolia National Program. The main objective of this program is (i) to give opportunity to buy cheap and qualified computers and its' complements to Mongolian citizens, especially low-income households and (ii) to provide Internet dial-up service by 1 Tugrug.

In 2005, Parliament of Mongolia passed amendment for Laws on custom tax-free for computer and its accessories and VAT exception for software products. These regulations will be support local software industry and supply of computers with affordable prices in Mongolia.

Low Cost PC Program: One result of these regulations, the ICTA concluded a contract with Intel Inc on supply of processors and accessories for domestic market in cost starting from 250 US dollar. Intel Inc has taken a mayor role in successfully spearheading PC ownership Programs of this scale in the Asia-Pacific countries. Computers being sold under the Low Cost PC program are classified A, B, C and D, according to technical and special indicators. For low income families, usually choose A class computer, which has cheap processor, with low energy consumption, able to use ordinary program and connect to the internet, costing US\$250.

PC supply companies have booths at the PC Exhibition, which run since July, 2005 while 6 commercial banks have representation and loan and leasing services.

Affordable Internet program: The Mongolian Internet Service Provider Association (MISPA) introduced Affordable Internet Program or “1 Tugrug Internet campaign” for dial-up connection and the cost of basic Internet had been lowered to night time. Some of major operators such as Mongolia Telecom, Mobicom Corporation and Skytel mobile companies contributed this program for one year. Recently, these companies are planning to introduce high-speed Internet technology in urban areas. Several Wi-Fi hot spots were established in the dense populated districts of Ulaanbaatar city and Internet service is free of charge.

Because of these programs, the service fee for ADSL is decreased by 50 per cent. The price of internet leased line was reduced for 5 times, and the price per flow of 1Mb/s will be approximately 400 USD. Ulaanbaatar Electricity Distribution Company is also providing 20 percent discount electricity service for poor people, especially vulnerable households from April 2005. The following suggestions should be additionally clarified to the Low Cost PC & Affordable Internet Programs:

- Within the framework of “Low cost PC” program, the government agencies are cooperating closely with bank, financial organizations and computer trade companies. However, computerization program is still in the initial stage. This is good opportunity to purchase personal computer for people with low income and to gain additional income and self education by using computer.
- The level of computerization in Mongolia varies social groups, incomes, and regions. The major constraints for the using computer are followings (a) low computer literacy (b) limited Mongolian content in Internet (c) English language barriers and (d) limited business opportunities
- As the Affordable Internet Program is only for 1 year, the further Government coordination of Low cost PC and Affordable Internet Programs is needed. However, the internet cost should be reasonable.

Main Work or Presentation:

My aim is how to reach poorest and marginalized groups with information relevant to their needs. Regarding e-Mongolia national program and government initiatives, people were not fully aware about the benefits of e-Mongolia initiative, not much of understanding was there about the ways how this opportunity can be implemented in countryside level. The rural people have heard that the local governor’s office has been implementing e-Mongolia t project, setting up network of computers and operating paper-less office. But all these concepts were quite distant to them. However, the rural people have some understanding about what can be done within e-Mongolia project. For example, the governor of Bayan-Ovoo soum of Khentii aimag has mentioned that with e-Mongolia initiative it’s possible to “conduct all governor activities electronically, communicate through email, receiving information through website, like in the case of the ministries talking through web. Considering that the postal service comes once a week to countryside, the use of information and communications technology would fasten information getting from central government.

Conclusion:

How mobilizing communities for participation in E-government initiatives for poor and marginalized?

Coming back to the earlier implemented community information and service centers projects, it is apparent that they could serve the basis for further developing them with introduction of development of information and communications technologies. This could be expressed in setting up an information and service access points for citizens who are unemployed, poor but keen to learn some new things. Those information and service access points could provide computer skill development training for people, who can utilize the skills gained to find new employment opportunities and explore new challenges.

There are big challenges for being involved in these activities and benefit from it. Despite gaining computer skills, the people will have an opportunity to learn languages, be able to find necessary information (it can be information about education, health, employment opportunities, etc.) as well as being able to communicate with others.

Along with setting up those Internet and information access points and providing information and services through those centers to citizens, it’s important to develop further and

enhance it more with information, services and applications specific to the needs of those citizens. This should be expanded beyond the taxation authority information and target to individual citizens. This could include opportunity to finding out individual citizen information, such as social security benefits, health insurance, applying for driver's license, opportunities for education and learning from the place where they live (e-learning), opportunities for employment and basis for encouraging citizen's active participation in not only in the decision-making process, but also in the activities of local communities and communities of their interests.

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