GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008

Focus on *access to infrastructure*

Global Information Society Watch

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UZBEKISTAN

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Introduction

Over the last decade, Uzbekistan has made considerable progress in developing information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. A number of projects are being carried out in different areas, including those involving state institutions and agencies. Substantial work has also been done on legislation. There are currently a number of highly qualified ICT specialists in the country, and there is strong cooperation with international institutions in the field.

However, the country still lacks an adequate ICT policy to guide the development of ICTs. This is having a negative impact on citizens' rights. This report draws a picture of the ICT landscape in Uzbekistan regarding access to technology, and then goes on to suggest several issues that need to be attended to in order to address the gaps in the legislative and policy framework.

Access to technology

It is unfair to compare Uzbekistan with developed countries in terms of ICT development. However, comparisons to developing countries, especially those located in the region, show significant progress in the area. Uzbekistan is extensive (447,400 square kilometres), and has the largest population in Central Asia (about 28 million as of mid-2008). Its communication network is said to cover all of the cities, towns, and regional centres in the country, and 95% of rural settlements. The number of regular internet users exceeds two million.[1]

Uzbek official statistics report the following:

- During January through March this year (2008), ICT services earned USD 210 million (foreign direct investment in this period amounted to USD 41.6 million).

- As of 1 April 2008, the number of base phones equalled 1,818,000 units (7.04 per 100 inhabitants).

- 85% of telephone networks are digitalised.

- The number of internet service providers (ISPs) stood at 797.

- The estimated number of active internet users was about 2.133 million (78.8 per 1,000 inhabitants) compared to 1.7 million in 2007.

- All public offices are connected to the internet.

- Three Digital Signature Registration Centres (DSRC) were operational, one of which is privately owned. The reported number of signatures issued to date is 12,688.

- The general speed of international access was 362 megabits per second (Mbps).[2]

Table 1 illustrates the growth in internet services, in terms of both ISPs and public access points.

Mobile

The mobile sector's growth over the past year is impressive. The number of mobile subscribers as of June 2007 was 3.537 million, while one year later the number had increased to 8.316 million (over 30% of the total population). At the beginning of 1996 there were 3,804 mobile customers, and only one cellular operator in the country. During 1996 five new operators appeared. The growth in the number of operators pushed up the number of customers, which reached 21,555 by the end of 1998. The cost of services was also reduced considerably – from USD 105 per 100 minutes in 1995 to USD 20 by the end of 2000. In 1997 six operators were active on the market. They utilised the two most popular standards – digital advanced mobile phone system (D-AMPS), specifically the IS-136 standard, and the global system for mobile communications (GSM). In September 2001 Perfectum Mobile started its operations using the code division multiple access (CDMA) standard. This year the largest cellular operators were licensed to offer third generation (3G) services. Currently the cost of a one-minute call is on average only USD 0.02.[3]

National backbone

One of the vital questions when approaching the issue of ICT for development is the choice of technology. For developing countries, the problem is made more complicated by

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1   www.infocom.uz

2   www.infocom.uz

3   www.infocom.uz

Table 1: **Number of ISPs and public access points**									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Public access points	-	-	90	125	348	463	350	579	799
ISPs	32	44	135	263	416	539	430	693	797

a lack of capital to invest in the area. A solution to this is twofold. Either a country can subsidise ICT development from a national budget (which is indeed difficult because of the shortage of the money available) or attract foreign investment (which is also not easy, taking into account the unwillingness of the foreign private sector to enter risky markets, as is the case in Uzbekistan).

In Uzbekistan the Programme for Computerisation and Informatisation implements several projects in the area. The programme allocates funds from the state budget, and receives grants mainly from the Japanese and Chinese governments. One of its key tasks is to replace ordinary lines with fibre-optic lines across the entire country (over 3,500 kilometres). By doing this, it is connecting major centres in the country, and increasing capacity significantly. The anticipated length of fibre lines by the year 2010 will be 10,000 kilometres.[4]

Broadband technologies

In March 2005 Sharq Telecom first introduced asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) technology to private customers. The service quickly became available to customers in most of Tashkent's districts. Over the next several months three more ISPs (Sarkor Telecom, Technoprosystem and Buzton Telecom) had joined the ADSL "club". ADSL services are available to customers in the majority of Uzbekistan's regions (at least for large cities). However, they are most popular in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and the Fergana valley. Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) services are also available in major towns.

In 2005 Sharq and Buzton began offering Wi-Fi services (ADSL2+), and a WiMAX pilot project was initiated by Cisco in 2006.

IP-exchange network

In 2004, the first – and so far the only – internet protocol (IP)-exchange network was introduced in the capital Tashkent. It is used by 20 major ISPs in the city, resulting in some 59,422 gigabits per second (Gbps) of traffic in 2007.

Domain names in .uz

The administrator of Uzbekistan's country code top-level domain (ccTLD), .uz, reports the number of domain names as 6,550 as of 22 April 2008.[5] Another source, Voydod,[6] reports 7,400 active domestic domains.

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4 www.infocom.uz

5 www.cctld.uz/stat

6 voydod.uz

E-commerce

In 2006, the first electronic payment system for local services was introduced by PayNet, which initially established 300 points in the capital. Demand for the service was so high that within two years PayNet had extended its services to all major towns in the country, and is now focusing on rural areas. The total number of PayNet points is currently estimated at 10,000.[7]

By the end of 2007, the first online purchasing system was introduced in Uzbekistan by eKarmon, following the passing of legislation on electronic payments in 2005 and 2007. The growth in the number of online transactions is suggested by the growth in demand for digital signature registration.

Policy and legislative framework

The Uzbekistan government approved an ICT development programme for the period 2002-2010 in June 2002 (Government of Uzbekistan, 2003). Under the programme the following goals for internet connectivity have been laid down for 2010:

- Installing more than 45,000 internet access points

- Providing access to international networks of speeds greater than 512 Mbps

- Achieving an internet penetration rate of 11.9 for every 100 citizens

- Connecting 100% of all state institutions and 60% of rural administrations to the internet

- Extending ICT services to all cities and villages in Uzbekistan by 2010.

A national database that will collect laws and regulations, statistics, patent rights, and financial statements of listed companies, amongst other things, is planned. The programme also deals with training specialists in the ICT field.

However, while numerous laws and decrees deal with things like ICTs, e-commerce and media in Uzbekistan, a general policy on ICT development has not yet been developed. As a result, the legislation that does exist is uneven, and has a negative impact on citizens' communication rights (for instance, in the area of a citizen's right to receive information, to prevent the circulation of defamatory information, or to protect intellectual property). Moreover, with the growing impact of ICTs on economic life, the weak legislative framework not only slows down economic development but compels Uzbek users to sign up for services located outside the country.

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7 www.infocom.uz

Table 2: **Number of domains**						
	2003	2004	2005	Jun. 2006	Sep. 2007	Apr. 2008
No. of domains	700	2,800	2,704	2,800	3,940	6,550
Source: **ru.infocom.uz/more.php?id=A2270_0_1_0_M**						

Action steps

Uzbekistan has a number of areas that require attention in order to secure citizen rights in the information society, such as:

- Liberalising state policy dealing with the internet, which includes securing open access to the internet for citizens, and ensuring the right to exchange information online.

- Getting government institutions online, and making state information available. This also refers to public libraries, schools, and other social and cultural entities.

- Defining the legal status of information uploaded onto the internet or circulated online.

- Preventing publicly harmful content from being uploaded or circulated online (in particular, the dissemination of defamatory and obscene material) and creating normative conditions for monitoring online activities in this regard.

- Creating effective copyright protection and protection of other exclusive intellectual property rights for material uploaded onto the internet.

- Protecting private data, including that accumulated by ISPs.

- Regulating e-commerce, including recognising the legal effect of transactions entered into online.

While establishing a legal framework for ICTs in Uzbekistan, it is important to consider similar laws adopted in other countries and the region to ensure legislative uniformity across borders where appropriate. ▪

References

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infoCOM.UZ: www.infocom.uz

Uzbekistan domain name registrar: www.cctld.uz

UZINFOCOM Computerization and IT Developing Center: www.uzinfocom.uz/en

Voydod: www.voydod.uz

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008 is the second in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH or **GISWatch** has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of information and communication technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels

- **Encouraging** critical debate

- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2008** *focuses on access to infrastructure* and includes several thematic reports dealing with key access issues, an analysis of where global institutions stand on the access debate, a report looking at the state of indicators and access, six regional reports and 38 country reports.

GISWatch 2008 is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) and the Third World Institute (ITeM).

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