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Session 5: Bridging the Digital Divide

Creating an Information Society – Is it a must? Is it achievable?

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CREATING AN INFORMATION SOCIETY—IS IT A MUST? IS IT ACHIEVABLE?

PENGIRAN DR RAHMAH PENGIRAN JADID (PANELIST)

1. Is an inclusive Information Society a prerequisite to K-Economy?

Yes, for the following reasons:

- The market place is global & highly competitive, forcing individuals, firms and entire nations to adapt and improve skills continually in order to compete effectively.
- Knowledge, both basic and applied, is being generated at an unprecedented pace and is growing exponentially.
- The competitive edge belongs to those with the capacity to create new knowledge and those who can apply it.
- Most Bruneians have good access to information (through radio, television, satellite, compact discs, digital video discs, internets and even short message system, etc) but only a small number of Bruneians—the X generation (Verghese, 2005), who are computer literate and internet savvy, and who can use the information in many imaginative ways for their best advantage.
- Having access to information and knowing is not enough.
- The authentic characteristics of members of the information and knowledge society are understanding the information, applying it, transferring it into a new situation, transforming it into knowledge that is usable, and generating from it new information and knowledge.

2. Do we need to fully bridge the gaps to create an inclusive Information Society?

Certainly we need to bridge the gaps to create an inclusive Information Society. Among these gaps include:

- The have and have not—this refers to those who have the ICT technology and use it fully versus those who do not have the ICT technology or if they do have, but do not use it fully to their advantage.
- The computer literate and Internet savvy versus computer illiterate and unable to fully utilize the internet facility.
- The skilled ICT and knowledgeable individuals who can manage information to achieve their goals and develop themselves versus the unskilled ICT and less knowledgeable individuals who are unable to put the potential of knowledge and ICT for their personal growth and development.

3. Is an Inclusive Information Society achievable and when?

Inclusive Information Society can be achieved, if there are:

- The will power to go for it, strong commitment and dedication from all stake holders—the State, the private sector, the civil society and individuals.
- The availability of resources.
- A conducive or enabling environment that supports and sustains the activities to achieve the goals and objectives.
- Well planned and coordinated strategies.
- Well implemented activities carried out by all concerned.
- The capacity building (education and human resource development) to promote literacy in ICT for individual, community and national development and growth.
- The provision for recognition of cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.

- The provision for honouring and upholding the fundamental values and appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive users of ICT.

WHEN requires a consensus a target date either a mandate from the State or a date determines by representatives of various stake holders.

4. What must be done to achieve it?

- Require concerted efforts, will power, commitment and dedication from the States, private enterprises, civil society and every individual.
- Must have a clear vision about k-economy, information, communication and knowledge societies that are translated into easily implemented mission and achievable goals and objectives.
- Must have the financial resources—to build ICT infrastructure that allows easy access to information and connectivity within and among networks throughout the country.
- Require a conducive or enabling environment that supports and sustains the activities to achieve the goals and objectives of the inclusive information Society and k-economy.
- Require a change of the mind set from looking at education that are essentially quantitative and knowledge-based to the need to equip individual to seize learning opportunities throughout life, both to broaden his/her knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to adapt to a changing, complex and interdependent world.
- Require a paradigm shift in philosophy of education (education for life instead to prepare for a career or to get higher qualification), curriculum (focuses on skills to learn for life, to become independent learner and ICT smart) delivery (teaching and learning are not confined to schools and training not only conducted at place of work), assessment (look for authenticity and creativity instead just knowing) and accreditation (not only from educational institutions but other legitimate knowledge providers) and education system (must be flexible to accommodate different types of learners especially pertaining to different age groups, duration of compulsory education, time of delivery, classroom versus virtual, etc).
- Must have capacity building (education and human resource development) that empowers individual to select, apply, transfer, adapt and create knowledge for his/her benefit, growth and development.
- There should be well planned and coordinated strategies; activities that can easily implemented by all concerned.
- There must be a provision for recognition of cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.
- There must be a provision for honouring and upholding the fundamental values such as freedom, personal privacy, religion, equality, solidarity, tolerance, etc., and appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive users of ICT, such as illegal and other acts motivated by hatred, violence, racial discrimination, child abuse including paedophilia and child pornography, exploitation of other individual, etc.
- Require to collaborate with international and regional states and organizations to get assistance in the preparation and implementation of the national action plan.