

International Conference

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Crossing the Digital Divide – Options, Pros, and Cons for Affordable Rural and Remote Connectivity

This presentation sets out the problems of inequity that are already becoming apparent as developing education systems invest in ICT both as a vehicle for the teaching and learning of Informatics and Computer Skills and as a tool in teaching and learning across all curriculum subjects. The Domestic Digital Divide, which is essentially the divide between rural and urban societies and between richer and poorer areas in many developing and transitional economies often means that the hardware and software, even when it has been equitably supplied to all schools, is much more difficult to use effectively in rural areas because of widespread problems of power supply, cost and the lack of basic maintenance and teacher/school support facilities.

The presentation points out that most Ministries of Education, by themselves have only limited capacity to influence the equitable provision of power, connectivity and basic services in rural and remote areas unless there is a cooperative approach spanning several Ministries and including at least Education, Finance, Power, Telecommunications etc. Nevertheless, falling costs in this sector mean that there are good examples of NGOs, development partners and even Ministries of Education resolving power supply problems via the development of autonomous power supply systems and the use of a combination of different technologies for connectivity. However, it also point out that while technology initiatives may solve technical problems on a small scale, this so far rarely amounts to national systems and strategies and that cost, after the completion of a donor or NGO project, often means that the power and connectivity issues cannot be sustained.

The presentation also provides a rapid overview of key power and connectivity problems in the region with some potential solutions and provides guidelines for policy making and strategy formation.



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Nick Read studied computer sciences at Trinity College, Dublin. Since then he has worked for the past 12 years in the Irish and UK IT service industry and has worked extensively in the US, Europe and in Asia, taking responsibility for pan-European and global projects involving security and design consultancy on enterprise class IT systems. He has been responsible for the design, implementation and operation of large scale corporate networks. In recent years he has taken an increasing interest in the application of networking and connectivity solutions to institutional and educational problems. Until recently he was the Managing Director of a specialist network services company operating in the UK, Ireland and Europe but has since concentrated on IT related education consultancy work and has a particular interest in the TCO of ICT in education.

