Chapter 18
Public Access ICT in Peru

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Peru is located in western South America where it is bordered on the north by Ecuador and Colombia, on the east by Brazil, on the southeast by Bolivia, on the south by Chile, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. With a land area of 1,285,220 sq km and an ethnically diverse population estimated to be more than 28 million, it is the fourth most populous country in South America. The diverse geography includes a central mountain range, dense rainforest, and a narrow coastal plain.

Peru is a presidential representative democratic republic with a multi-party system. The country is divided into 25 regions and the province of Lima. The regions are divided into 195 provinces, and include the province of Lima. The provinces are subdivided into 1,833 districts. Each of these various political divisions has an elected government that serves for a four-year term. Voting is compulsory for all citizens aged 18 to 70. The president is elected by popular vote for five years and may not serve consecutive terms. The unicameral congress seats 120 members who also are elected by direct popular vote for five-year terms. General elections were held in 2006, and Alan García from the Peruvian Aprista Party was elected president with 52.6% of the valid votes.

Since the 1990s, Peru has followed neo-liberal and privatization policies in a political direction moves across the rest of the South American continent. It means that the Peruvian government, in the broadest terms, abandoned planning and concentrated on regulating private investment

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-771-5.ch018

in providing services. The government now has more money to invest, and is using much of it for infrastructure development under the view that better roads, sanitation, school buildings, and telecommunication installations would help the public improve their daily lives, but little has been accomplished with regard to capacity building.

Peru was selected to participate in this study, which was designed to both assess the ability of the public to access information and communication venues, and also to review the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) across the overall economic, political, and regulatory framework. The study assessed how the venues function, how they serve user needs, how they meet operational constraints, and how they realize successes. The study placed an emphasis on the information needs of underserved and remote communities and groups.

The results of the research served to identify the principal venues used by the population to access information and communication, and characterize why, how, and by whom the venues are used. The study results were analyzed to determine how access is affected by inequity variables such as socio-economic status, education level, gender, location, and cultural issues. Through this investigation, the research team identified opportunities to strengthen institutions that offer public access to information and communication, inform policy and decision-makers, examine funding allocations, and review specific topics to consider in implementing policies and programs.

The research was completed in two phases; the first phase being exploratory and involving an extensive bibliographic review and initial fieldwork to identify information needs and the characteristics of public access to information and communication venues in Peru. The second phase involved a more extensive range of fieldwork that included interviews and surveys to characterize each public venue selected.

Findings

Based on the data and information gathered in the course of this study, the researchers were able to note the following points:

- There is little locally relevant content in any of the venues to meet the needs of the underserved population, which is characterized by low educational levels, high rates of illiteracy, and large numbers of people who do not speak, read, or write the Spanish language.
- Public access to the information and communication venues is strongly affected in different ways by the location of the venues, the technological capacity of the potential users, and the accompanying environment, according to the type of venue reviewed. The most relevant variable for access is that the people living in rural areas commonly do not have access to any type of venue.
- The political and economic environment for most of the venues is generally neutral.
- ICTs, and especially the Internet, have become the preferred way to access information, especially among the young people. This preference is particularly true in the urban areas, although it also applies to a lesser degree in rural areas.
- Cybercafés, or cabinas as they are called, are the most widely used information access venues.
- Specific policies and actions related to capacity building and the development of appropriate content are urgently needed to meet the needs of the underserved communities and groups.
- The new and existing information should be reformatted, translated, organized, and disseminated in more appropriate ways.
- The most important success factors affecting capacity building are purpose-oriented