

## **ICT ACT & POLICIES**

India has made great strides in recent time on national ICT policy. India is continually reforming to try to maintain the growth and success India has already achieved. India has taken major steps since 1988 when a World Market Policy was developed. India has continually focused on software development for export, telecommunications policy reform and the privatization of the phone companies. While many of their policies are enlightened and fostering environments that would allow for more ICT investment India still has many other problems with ICT readiness.

India has long been tied down by government regulation. Recent liberalization of key industries has let market forces take action and swift change has proceeded in the ICT landscape of India. Throughout the change there have been published policies on the national level.

The key published policies:

National Telecom Policy 1994

New Telecom Policy 1999

Broadband Policy 2004

The National Telecom Policy (NTP) of 1994 was the starting point in India's governmental focus toward ICT development. The NTP outlined the objectives of that the government of India wished to foster.

The objectives of the New Telecom Policy will be as follows:

- The focus of the Telecom Policy shall be telecommunication for all and telecommunication within the reach of all. This means ensuring the availability of telephone on demand as early as possible.
- Another objective will be to achieve universal service covering all villages as early as possible. What is meant by the expression universal service is the provision of access to all people for certain basic telecom services at affordable and reasonable prices.
- The quality of telecom services should be of world standard. Removal of consumer complaints, dispute resolution and public interface will receive special attention. The objective will also be to provide widest permissible range of services to meet the customer's demand at reasonable prices.
- Taking into account India's size and development, it is necessary to ensure that India emerges as a major manufacturing base and major exporter of telecom equipment.
- The defense and security interests of the country will be protected.

Further in this regard the New Telecom Policy of 1999 was enacted. Due to the inability to fulfill many of the National Telecom Policy objectives and recent changes in the nature of technology the New Telecom Policy was established. This further bolstered the government's mission to foster ICT development.

The objectives of the NTP 1999 are as under:

- Access to telecommunications is of utmost importance for achievement of the country's social and economic goals. Availability of affordable and effective communications for the citizens is at the core of the vision and goal of the telecom policy.

- Strive to provide a balance between the provision of universal service to all uncovered areas, including the rural areas, and the provision of high-level services capable of meeting the needs of the country's economy;
- Encourage development of telecommunication facilities in remote, hilly and tribal areas of the country;
- Create a modern and efficient telecommunications infrastructure taking into account the convergence of IT, media, telecom and consumer electronics and thereby propel India into becoming an IT superpower;
- Convert PCO's, wherever justified, into Public Teleinfo centers having multimedia capability like ISDN services, remote database access, government and community information systems etc.
- Transform in a time bound manner, the telecommunications sector to a greater competitive environment in both urban and rural areas providing equal opportunities and level playing field for all players;
- Strengthen research and development efforts in the country and provide an impetus to build world-class manufacturing capabilities
- Achieve efficiency and transparency in spectrum management
- Protect the defense & security interests of the country
- Enable Indian Telecom Companies to become truly global players.

In line with the above objectives, the specific targets that the NTP 1999 seeks to achieve would be:

- Make available telephone on demand by the year 2002 and sustain it thereafter so as to achieve a teledensity of 7 by the year 2005 and 15 by the year 2010
- Encourage development of telecom in rural areas making it more affordable by suitable tariff structure and making rural communication mandatory for all fixed service providers
- Increase rural teledensity from the current level of 0.4 to 4 by the year 2010 and provide reliable transmission media in all rural areas
- Achieve telecom coverage of all villages in the country and provide reliable media to all exchanges by the year 2002
- Provide Internet access to all district head quarters by the year 2000
- Provide high speed data and multimedia capability using technologies including ISDN to all towns with a population greater than 2 lac by the year 2002

The coming age of the internet changed the ICT landscape again. In order to maintain competencies in the new market India enacted the Broadband Policy of 2004. This policy detailed and structured some of the objectives for internet rollout in India. Unlike previous national policy this new legislation was specific in naming objectives in Optical Fiber Technologies, Digital Subscriber Lines, Cable TV Network, Satellite Media, Terrestrial Wireless, and Future Technologies.

The Broadband Policy of 2004 also specifically defined what constituted broadband connectivity: "An 'always-on' data connection that is able to support interactive services including Internet access and has the capability of the minimum download speed of 256 kilo bits per second (kbps) to an individual subscriber from the Point Of Presence (POP) of the service provider intending to provide Broadband service where multiple such individual Broadband connections are aggregated and the subscriber is able to access these interactive services including the Internet through this

POP. The interactive services will exclude any services for which a separate licence is specifically required, for example, real-time voice transmission, except to the extent that it is presently permitted under ISP licence with Internet Telephony."

Year Ending	Internet Subscribers	Broadband Subscribers
2005	6 million	3 million
2007	18 million	9 million
2010	40 million	20 million

Overall, these policies have laid down groundwork for the government and private sector to follow. While India's government has sometimes been a detriment to the development of ICT infrastructure, these policies helped give the private sector a roadmap once key industries were liberalized. There have been many successes with these policies in the recent growth of Information Technology Parks in some major cities. Rural populations, however, face problems of having access to these ICT facilities. The cultural and political differences prevalent in India have led to much of the failure of recent attempts at reaching out to these communities with public kiosks and programs of this nature.

