How to Build Open Information Societies
A Collection of Best Practices and Know-How

AZERBAIJAN
Azerbaijan

Population (millions): 8.1
Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and over): 97.0
GNI per capita (WB Atlas method, 2002, $): 710.0
Telephone mainlines (per 1,000 people): 104
Mobile phones (per 1,000 people): 56
Personal Computers (per 1,000 people): 150
Internet users (thousands): 1.5
Human Development index rank (out of 173 countries, 2003): 89
National ICT Strategy (Y/N): Approved in 2003
E-assessments (0,1,2...N): 3 completed

UNDP staff in ICTD

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ICTD Partners

• International: UNESCO; CISCO; OSI-AF; WB; Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI)
• National: State Commission for Admission of Students (SSAC); State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan Republic (SCC); State Agency of Standardization, Metrology and Patents; Ministry of Justice, Scientific and Training Centre (STC), State Social Protection Fund;“Multimedia”Information Centre,“Gelecek Namin”(For a Stable Future)

ICTD Activities

• National ICT for Development Strategy Project (NICTS)
• Internet promotion and Development Project (NICTS related)
• Data Transmission Network for the Notary and Civil Status Acts’ Department of the Ministry of Justice (NICTS related, with OSI-Soros)
• Regional Academy for Online Network and Governance and Administration Project
• Capacity Building and Data Transmission Network Implementation for the State Customs Committee
• Capacity building of the State Agency of Standardization, Metrology and Patents
• Coordination with State Social Protection Fund
• Development Gateway (NICTS related)
• Funding of UNDP-supported activities: US$ 1.0 million (annual)

Pipeline Programmes

• ICTD Strategy development and prioritisation: In June 2003, the Prime Minister issued special regulation to prepare an Action Plan for the implementation of the National ICT Strategy (developed with support from UNDP). The project’s major objectives are to promote national dialogue for the completion and approval of NICTS and subsequent selection of the priority areas for application of NICTS; provide training and practical work experience to the government entity leading the process of NICTS implementation
• E-Government Capacity Development & Application Implementation: (1) Establish the first national Wide Area Network for online transmission network between the State Customs Committee (SCC) main office and customs border checkpoint and support the operational effectiveness of the network through a pilot project and training in the specific areas with a view to demonstrating the potential of ICT for accountability and transparency and better civil services and development of private business; (2) Data Transmission Network for the Notary and Civil Status Department of the Ministry of Justice in partnership with OSI-Soros and (3) Capacity building of the State Agency of Standardization, Metrology and Patents and further development of ICT in the state management services and use of ICT for better civil services
National ICT Strategy Formulation Process for Azerbaijan

Rafal Rohozinski and Sultan Gadjiev

Abstract

In 2002, UNDP Azerbaijan undertook an extensive programme aimed at assisting the government with the preparation of a national ICT strategy (NICTS). The programme was ambitious in both scope and purpose with government providing over 50 percent cost-sharing for the USD 1.2 million programme, and was mainstreamed under the UNDP’s governance programme. Within 12 months, NICTS has reached two of its three main milestones with signing into law of a National ICT Strategy and publication of a national e-readiness report. In late 2003 an Action Plan was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers and is expected to be ratified with implementation beginning during the 2004-2005 budget year. However, the NICTS accomplished much more than the preparation of a strategy document. It has served as the nucleus of a broader effort of leveraging ICT throughout the government sector, imbued with UNDP’s concern for core development concerns. The success of this programme benefits from the interest and support of the Office of the President of Azerbaijan. UNDP’s success as facilitator and trusted partner in this effort is a result of a bold approach that blends public sector sensibilities with a private sector approach to management. This chapter briefly summarises the UNDP Azerbaijan NICTS process and suggests some lesson learned and best practices that may be relevant and beneficial to other UNDP offices undertaking similar endeavours.

The Context

In 2002, UNDP Azerbaijan undertook an extensive programme aimed at assisting the government with the preparation of a national ICT strategy (NICTS). The programme was ambitious in both scope and purpose with government providing over 50 percent cost-sharing for the USD 1.2 million programme, and was mainstreamed under the UNDP’s governance programme. Azerbaijan is a transition economy country and the sizeable proportion of government cost-sharing is an indication of the level of interest and confidence the leadership of the Republic ascribes to prioritising ICT as an enabler of its overall development strategy, particularly in the all important state sector.

Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic with a population of eight million, is situated on the west coast of the Caspian Sea. With large oil and gas reserves, Azerbaijan is rich in both natural and human resources. However, the recent history of the country is full of ups and downs. During the early 1990s Azerbaijan became increasingly involved in a bitter military conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian military formations occupied the Nagorno-Karabakh region followed by six others: Agdam, Fizuli, Gubati, Jabrayil, Kelbajar and Zangelan. Occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijan’s territory and the presence of around one million refugees and internally displaced persons has significantly affected Azerbaijan’s economic performance. After a period of internal instability, in October 1993, Heidar Aliyev, former communist-era leader of the Azerbaijan Republic, was elected President of Azerbaijan and a Russian-mediated cease-fire accord was achieved in May 1994.

Azerbaijan has enormous economic potential. In addition to its well-known oil and gas reserves, Azerbaijan is also a producer of cotton, tobacco, fruits and vegetables. Increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) and production in the oil and gas sector contribute to macroeconomic stability and relatively high growth rates. The exchange rate of the national currency, the manat, has stabilised.

Under the Soviet regime, Azerbaijan played a significant role in the Soviet IT industry. In particular, as Azerbaijan was the centre of the Soviet oil industry, it developed an expertise in the manufacture of specialised electronic equipment, networks, and especially software for controlling the process of extracting and refining oil. This technology is still used and supported in the Russian oil industry to this day. As a result, the Azeri industrial and academic elite possess practical knowledge in applying ICTs to management and administration, and the country still maintains a sizeable cadre of trained experts.

The NICTS project was founded on the principle of combining the government’s commitment to harnessing the potential of ICT with UNDP concern that focus of attention remain on commitment to core development values, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To begin the process of engagement, a UNDP expert consultant was invited to assist with the initial programme formulation. The expert brought to bear a wealth of comparative experience, and his mission included a number of stakeholder meetings and broad consultation across the government, civil society, private sector, and academia. In part, because of this broad-based approach, which took into account government concerns and priorities, the project proposal moved rapidly into a signed programme of action.

However, while the NICTS project document provided a normative framework for UNDP’s engagement with the government, the evolution of that relationship was the key to the success of the initiative. The government appointed a relatively junior entity, the State Student Admission Commission of Azerbaijan (SSAC), as UNDP’s counterpart. While this may have seemed an odd choice, the SSAC possessed proven capacities in the IT and programme management fields, and had the personal trust of the President of the Republic. In previous years the admission of students to higher education institutions was a persistent source of corruption. Bribery and nepotism were critical components for ensuring the success of student placements. The present Chairperson of the Commission presided over a remarkable cleaning-up of the process, accomplished via a thorough modernisation of the application and testing process. Standardised machine-readable tests were introduced and the process of assigning and marking tests centralised. Additional steps were taken to ensure the privacy of each
applicant. Taken together, these steps severely limited the scope for corruption. As a consequence, the designation of the SSAC as UNDP’s counterpart, and its Chairperson as the national coordinator, was a shrewd decision by the President’s office to give the process a boost by combining the proven capabilities of the Chairperson, with the relatively low profile of the committee (whose Chairperson is not a minister) in order to prevent the overt politicisation of the process.

For its part UNDP prioritised the project within its governance practice, recognising that success of the process would depend upon gaining trust and respect among other governmental institutions. UNDP worked with the SSAC to ensure that coordination with other UNDP projects and activities with government ministries occurred and made certain that a number of much needed activities (ostensibly mini projects) such as the standardisation of a Azeri codepage (font coding) and an online dictionary were undertaken in parallel with the ICTD project. In general, UNDP used the interest generated by the strategy formulation process to initiate a number of ICT programmes with other government ministries, including the State Customs Committee (see the SCC case study in the next chapter); the State Social Protection Fund; the State Agency for Standards, Patents and Metrology; the Counting Chamber; the Ministry of Justice; with even more at the stage of preparation.

Additionally, a strong ICT component has been ensured for a number of other UNDP involved projects and this multi-pronged approach created significant momentum among all government ministries and ensured that the strategy process and its resulting action have widespread support and endorsement of all government ministries. The above has enabled the NICTS to start moving to the regions - the first project-sponsored Regional Information Centre to operate as a training unit and a kind of telecentre was very recently opened. Following official governmental requests, NICTS has represented the Azerbaijan Republic at a number of top-level ICT events (e.g. the WSIS Prepcoms and Pan-European Ministerial Conference). In other words, UNDP started the ICTD snowball rolling in the country, thus far managing it well to use NICTS to boost the country’s overall development.

For UNDP, this means state ICT programmes increasingly incorporate core development values, and have resulted in a successful track record of raising significant government cost-sharing equalising more than 50 percent of the overall programme portfolio.

UNDP has also applied a ‘leading by example’ approach in becoming the very first entity in the country to apply elements of online tender and recruitment as a tool both spreading ICT in private sector and HR market and demonstrating advantages of the sector. The UNDP Country Office website is widely recognised as one of the best in the country in terms of quality and speed of reflecting on the events, and also for developing national content.

NICTS also contributes to overall development of the ICT sector - the very first Azeri brandname computer production invented slogan strongly supported by the government. This mixture of national pride and global policy document based on expert input and sound assessments, and capable of being adopted as normative government policy was clearly achieved.

In fact, the relatively junior status of SSAC, the executing agency, meant that it has not been burdened with the vested interests that tend to pervade other line ministries previously responsible for ICT in Azerbaijan (i.e., the recently disbanded State Committee for Science and Technology and the Ministry of Communication). Moreover, the open tender system used to solicit experts for the sectoral working groups attracted candidates with significant experience working with the state and academic sector, who were also highly familiar with the politics of these institutions. As a result, the experts were able to draw upon their knowledge of the institutional order without being prejudiced by the need to represent the interests of these organisations in the recommendations they put forward (at least not met the second of three important milestones with the adoption of the National ICT Strategy by the government of Azerbaijan. The first milestone, a national e-readiness assessment was carried out concurrently with the strategy formulation process, and was published in January 2003. Currently the programme is about to meet its third milestone with the submission of a plan of action to the Cabinet of Ministers. Full implementation of the National ICT Action Plan is expected begin in 2005, with appropriate coordination and harmonisation measures, along with a significant pilot project beginning during the 2004 budget year. Momentum continues with the initiation of parallel projects with additional ministries and sectors. There are some initial strong indications of top-level officials both at the central and sector level considering ICTD as a tool of transferring country’s potential into population’s welfare, in other words, “converting black gold into human gold” - an UNDP invented slogan strongly supported by the government.

**Lessons Learned**

In some respects the process of formulating the national ICT strategy in Azerbaijan followed an unusual trajectory, setting it apart from other examples in the CIS and elsewhere. In general, experience has shown that these processes generally follow one of two patterns:

1. **Open participatory consultation** - The formulation process is carried out as a part of an awareness-building campaign. Working groups are held as public hearings and the resulting document is meant as a declarative rather than normative agenda for action; or

2. **Expert driven process** - The process is managed by a relatively closed expert group working closely with line ministries to develop a normative plan, which is linked to existing or proposed government priorities and planned expenditures.

For the Azeri case, the process followed neither pattern. The preparation of the draft strategy was carried out by a relatively small group of experts selected on the basis of a public tender, and not by representatives of the line ministries who would bear the financial and managerial brunt of implementing the resulting agenda. Further, the Azeri process did not use public hearings and open sessions as a means to gather public input and maximise the awareness building that could be accrued as a result. And yet, the stated objective of formulating a credible public policy document based on expert input and sound assessments, and capable of being adopted as normative government policy was clearly achieved.
in any overt or evident manner). The project managed to keep ICT high in the society's development agenda through the open and participatory approach applied. Good use of the Internet, several project-supported ICT reports and publications including the Country Profile on ICT Export Potential (jointly with ITC of WTO/UNCTAD) and the skillfully managed media campaign meant that the process appeared transparent and fair and received a good degree of coverage in the domestic and Diaspora Azeri press.

The successes of the NICTS process can be summarised by five basic inter-related factors and associated lessons learned:

1. **Key choice of national coordinator and high-level political support** – The proven personal competency and public integrity of the national programme manager were critical. As a consequence, she was vested with authority and enjoyed the trust of the Presidential administration and the President himself. This high level support was critical to ensuring cooperation and compliance from the state sector throughout the NICTS process. Moreover, the personal competence of the national coordinator created the possibility of bridging the relationship between the state sector and critical partners in the private sector, civil society and academia.

   **Lesson Learned:** The right choice of national coordinator is critical for the success of the project.

2. **The credibility, experience and professionalism of the executing agency (SSAC)** – The previous successful experience of the SSAC in implementing a complex ICT-based reform initiative for the higher education admission system (a system previously renowned as a hotbed of corruption and nepotism), gave it credibility with other, more powerful state entities.

   **Lesson Learned:** The executing agency must have a credible track record and respect of other state entities in order to successfully carry out a coordinating role.

3. **Junior status of the coordinating body** – The junior status of the SSAC helped to isolate it from vested institutional interests and bias, and to protect the strategy formulation process from accusation of bias or favouritism. This neutrality was largely achieved by the fact that the SSAC is not a line ministry and therefore does not have (and is not seen to have) a vested interest in controlling or manipulating the substantive aspects of the strategy, and was not perceived to be a competitor or threat to the ministries.

   **Lesson Learned:** A high level status is not a prerequisite for success. Relatively junior agencies can also be effective as they may serve to mitigate against the over politicisation of the process.

4. **Use of public tender to identify members of working groups** – The public tender used for identifying candidates for the working groups tasked with formulating the draft strategy yielded an impressive pool of independent expertise. These expert participants were freely free to evaluate proposals without reference to any pre-existing institutional ties or biases. Additionally, the relatively small nature of the groups involved meant that the process of preparing the draft strategy proceeded at a fast pace.

   **Lesson Learned:** An open tender for specialists in policy-making can be as effective as holding open public hearings during the formulation phase of preparing a national strategy. Tenders can ensure fairness, transparency in the process, result in high calibre working groups, and avoid charges of bias or under-influence.

5. **Hands-on approach taken by UNDP** – The political acumen and exceptional initiative of UNDP sustained the flexible hands-on approach to the needs of the project and its evolving needs and opportunities. This was key to success of the NICTS process and was highlighted in all evaluation reports.

   **Lesson Learned:** UNDP must be willing to take risks and maintain a high degree of hands-on involvement to ensure the success of the project and its own relevance and the overall success of the national strategy process. This lesson learned should be a best practice for UNDP.

**Relevant Best Practice**

The Azeri model provides an excellent example of a mainstreamed governance-based approach to ICTD. UNDP Azerbaijan’s programme of assistance targets ICT as a major component of its good governance programme recognising its centrality to establishing modern transparent and accountable institutions, and the significant role that the state sector can play in leading the adoption of these technologies throughout all sectors of society and the economy. The approach also recognises that the significant gains and benefits that ICTs can accrue in education, rural poverty alleviation and meeting the MDGs, are difficult to sustain without government support, leadership, and where necessary coordination.

UNDP Azerbaijan’s specific value-added centred on its strategic approach blending political acumen with operational flexibility. This was evident in four main features of UNDP assistance:

1. **Importance of a flexible hands-on approach** – The hands-on approach was critical to UNDP’s successful engagement and management of the strategy process. Using a mixture of political acumen and operational flexibility, UNDP established a relationship of trust at the highest level of the Azeri leadership and was able to respond to emerging needs in a flexible and timely fashion. This was particularly significant in the deployment of targeted, high-level advice and expertise to inform and shape the strategy formulation process and its outcome. At the same time, flexibility allowed UNDP to take advantage of the interest generated by the strategy process to elaborate new projects with other government partners and generate additional momentum to the process, as well as accrue significant development outcomes.

2. **Willingness to play a political bridging function** – As a result of political acumen and operational flexibility with which UNDP was willing act, it was highly successful in leveraging its mandate focused on sustainable human development to bridge the dialogue between ministries, and between government, the private sector and civil society. UNDP was seen as a neutral actor by government
partners, and its offers of advice (based on the credibility established in managing the NICTS process), allowed it to act as an honest broker in situations where otherwise inter-ministerial rivalries, or distrust on the part of the private sector or civil society may have worked to undermine the process and its outcome.

3. **Investment-oriented resource mobilisation strategy** – UNDP was able to mobilise considerable resources and bring these to bear in support of the strategy process and other ICT initiatives under its governance programme. However, to raise funds from government and other sources, UNDP was prepared to aggressively invest its own resources. This willingness to lead helped to inspire confidence especially among government actors. The success of this approach is evident in an increasing number of other donors and government ministries now looking to partner with UNDP.

4. **Strategic use of evaluation and assessment missions** – As part of its approach, UNDP Azerbaijan built in a regular monitoring and evaluation cycle within the NICTS project. These periodic evaluations allowed UNDP and its government counterpart to substantively take stock of the project, its outcome, and interim outputs and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the milestones achieved. This interim process of assessment also allowed UNDP and its government counterpart to strategize and maintain flexibility and perspective.

5. **Partnership and alliances** – NICTS has managed to establish very efficient relations with a number of other ICT players both national and international e.g. OSI-Soros (with negotiations underway for large-scale academic research Internet project), the Development Gateway (Azerbaijan was the very first country for UNDP to become Task Manager of DG), GIPI-Internews, UNESCO, UNECE, etc. It is in recognition of the country’s achievements in promoting and applying National ICT Strategies and e-Governance that UNDP in conjunction with the government of Azerbaijan hosted the International ICT Forum on National Strategies and E-Governance to take place in Baku in November 2003.

### Are UNDP Azerbaijan’s Best Practices Replicable?

In some respects, the approach taken by UNDP Azerbaijan and the resulting success was possible because of Azerbaijan’s specific situation. As a post-Soviet country in the midst of a difficult process of transition, Azerbaijan is endowed with some unique qualities, which include a dominant state sector, high literacy rates, a modern secular state and the nucleus of an IT industry possessing both resources and trained cadres. At the same time, Azerbaijan’s oil wealth allows government ministries to be less dependent on donor funding and more willing to cost-share activities where they see value-added from specific donors being worthwhile. For these reasons alone, some aspects of the Azeri experience would be difficult to replicate in countries with a different natural resource endowment and historical past.

UNDP Azerbaijan has combined a public sector concern with core development issues with a private sector approach to building and establishing relationships of trust, managing and responding to changing needs and opportunities. The processes employed the full range mechanisms that UNDP has to offer, such as use of evaluation missions, and investment in programme development activities. This entrepreneurial spirit can be applied with equal success in other settings and contexts. The overall lesson learned from the Azeri experience is that to remain vital and relevant UNDP offices have to apply political acumen to their work, understand policy as political and be willing to take risks within the framework and mandate that our organisation has to offer. This is a best practice that should be applied widely.
Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become a major factor affecting social and economic development. Their sphere of influence includes government structures, civil society institutions, economic and social fields, science and education, as well as culture and living conditions. The majority of developed and developing countries have fully understood the advantages of ICTs, and their tremendous potential. There is no doubt that the way forward to an information society is the way to the future of civilization. Guided by a clear understanding of the above, the government of Azerbaijan and UNDP launched a special programme to prepare a “National Information and Communication Technologies Strategy for Development” (NICTS), for more information, see <www.nicts.az>.

Assisting the government at the central level in harnessing the potential of ICT for development, UNDP is also supporting a number of sector-based interventions, to ensure the transfer of know-how backed up by show-how (i.e., demonstrating to a wide range of partners the advantages of ICT applications). Being linked to the NICTS project, such interventions constitute a programme of UNDP-supported “ICT for Development” in Azerbaijan.

The “Capacity building and data transmission implementation for the State Customs Committee (SCC) of the Azerbaijan Republic” project is one of the first and the most successful projects of this nature. The SCC is one of the most reliable UNDP operational partners, actively advocating and sampling ICT applications in customs procedures and making e-government more efficient and accountable.

Background of the SCC Project

The Republic of Azerbaijan’s State Customs Committee (SCC) has been in existence for over eleven years. It currently employs 1900 officers, based in 14 regional and 44 border and internal posts. Nearly 60 percent of all freight clearance takes place in Baku, the capital and principal port of the country. Goods declarations and additional papers amount to an average of nearly 400 per day. In addition, the SCC collects foreign trade statistics which are disseminated to other government departments and institutions. Azerbaijan became a member of the World Customs Organization (WCO) in 1996, and actively participates in all relevant events.

The SCC is a pioneer in ICT and e-governance applications in the country, and UNDP has been its main partner in efforts to streamline and guide the process. UNDP Azerbaijan has also assisted the SCC in building a modern, more effective and transparent customs administration, able to make full use of the opportunities offered by ICT and to improve its overall working practices. This has led to increased efficiency in the foreign trade environment and improved revenue collection for the state.
used intensively, resulting in paperless working processes. The main project highlights are as follows:

• Substantial training has been provided within the project (such as Cargo Management and Cargo Evaluation, and intensive English language courses). Authorised SCC staff has access to a process of IT-based management decisions, based on local and international experience.

• ICT has been acknowledged by the customs management as an efficient and effective tool for ensuring accountability and transparency of the customs administration. This is to be further reinforced through adoption of an Automated Customs Control and Clearance System, which will remove the need for direct contact between customs officials and clients;

• Dialogue has been launched with the private business community introducing a new culture of relations between the state management entity and the community. This last point deserves special attention since it is a new concept for customs officials who are characteristically renowned for their reluctance to initiate an open dialogue or to present clients with a full explanation or outline of the system being introduced. A number of specific recommendations made by private sector representatives during meetings have enabled a constructive dialogue between civil service providers and their clients. This has also been acknowledged by the local media as a new model of interaction within the state governance system.

The new working environment and the increased degree of ICT utilisation in daily activities have prompted SCC’s internal management to promote the Information Technology and Statistics Departments to the level of a SCC Division. It is expected that the planned activities will result in reforms of both structure and internal regulations, due to the necessity of providing a legal framework for e-documents to be widely applied.

Project activities have significantly enhanced the SCC’s capacity to perform its mandate. The overall number of personal computers utilised by the SCC increased from 188 in 1998 to 400 in 2002. An online mode has been introduced over the last three years, and is currently used in 21 customs checkpoints. The number of software packages in use has also doubled within the same period.

Largely because of project innovations and introduction of ICT applications, the total amount of customs collected budget revenues has increased steadily, growing from USD 132 million in 1998 (at the beginning of the project) to over USD 190 million in 2002. Such an increase has been achieved despite the fact that the overall volume of the export-import operations had not drastically increased.

Also of interest is that a ‘Customs and Gender’ survey was implemented during the second stage of the project. As a result, the number of female staff at the SCC has almost doubled over the last four years and women have been actively involved in a number of training activities.

ICT implementation has fortuitously brought about profound changes for SCC operations. These outcomes were not however derived by chance, rather they are the carefully sought outcomes of a long process. The on-going desire to introduce more change and improved automation indicates that ICT has been generally perceived by SCC officials as a positive and efficient tool. This feature has been emphasised by two separate international evaluators.

Lessons Learned

The following points indicate the major success avenues of the project, both in terms of capacity of standard technical assistance and as a nucleus of e-governance in a transition economy.

Agent of Change

The interest demonstrated by the state agencies is increasingly being translated into new projects, and is facilitating Azerbaijan’s transition toward the information society. Projects signed with the State Social Protection Fund and the State Agency for Standards, Patents and Metrology (SASPM) have been clearly triggered by the SCC project. A number of similar negotiations are underway with other state agencies. Since SASPM is the central executive authority responsible for providing security of products and services, compliance of technical issues, products exchange and environmental protection, that project will also involve interaction with the SCC. Once implemented, this will mark the launch of the first ICT-enabled daily operational interaction between two separate state agencies – a clear example of e-governance in action.

Ownership

A specific aspect to be highlighted is the strong sense of ownership shown by the SCC with regard to the project’s implementation activities and funding mechanism. The overall budget of the project is USD 2.1 million (including the cost of hardware, software and communication infrastructure), more than 65 percent of which has been provided by the SCC. This represents the largest cost-sharing experience of the government of Azerbaijan.
Impetus to the Overall ICT Development in the Country

While the role of a national strategy (NICTS) is crucial to overall ICT development, initiatives like the SCC, widely recognised from within and outside of the country, are indeed instruments of change. Overall, this will substantially facilitate the process of ICT introduction in various sectors, thus enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the new systems. It is also worth mentioning that the project software has been developed by a local IT company.

Recognition and visibility

The project has been widely covered by the media, both within the country and at a regional level. It has also been presented at a number of international meetings, forums and conferences, generating a strong interest from the customs services of other countries.

The SCC project was founded on the principle of combining a particular entity’s needs with the government’s commitment to harnessing the potential of ICT. It is expected that the planned roll-out of the Automated Clearance software will further strengthen the role of ICT for accountability and transparency. Indeed, with UNDP’s support, SCC has become an important leading example. It is now widely acknowledged that the SCC administration is in possession of the most advanced and efficient ICT systems in the country.

About UNDP Azerbaijan

UNDP Azerbaijan gives priority focus to the following four areas of intervention: eradication of extreme poverty, consolidation of respect for individual rights, natural resources protection, and democratization of the country through national level reforms, with a particular focus on democratic governance in line with the principles of the United Nations Charter. Moreover, UNDP also recognizes the necessity for Azerbaijan to close the digital divide, both domestically and with regard to more advanced economies in the world. The recently approved NICTS presents a new area for UNDP involvement, and has potential benefits across the other existing programme areas.

All photos are courtesy of NICTS project and UN DPI

1 Sultan Gadjiev is the National Programme Officer responsible for ICT for Development Practice for UNDP Azerbaijan. As a team leader for the ICT for Development Practice, Sultan has played a key role in building partnerships between UNDP and other ICT for Development players, resulting in the government’s decision to designate UNDP as its key partner in this area. Mr. Gadjiev serves as an advisor to the government for its World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) preparation, and represents UNDP and Azerbaijan at a number of international forums. He is also an active contributor to the global UNDP ICT for Development Practice Network.

Rafal Rohozinski is the Director of the Advanced Network Research Group, University of Cambridge, and a senior visiting scholar at the International Development Research Centre Centre (Canada). He has over 10 years of experience designing, managing and evaluating ICT project in over 26 countries covering four of UNDP’s five regional bureau. His UNDP publications include a global evaluation of ICTD programming (Essentials, 2001), regional guidelines and practice notes addressing National ICT strategies, privacy and security issues. He is also a contributor to several national and global Human Development Reports and features in “Choices” magazine. He is presently acting as a facilitator for the UNDP’s Virtual Development Academy.

2 This includes apart from those listed, a possible project aimed at sensitising state employees about the need to balance security needs with fundamental privacy and human rights in an environment where increasing amounts of personal information kept by government entities are becoming available electronically.