

India Study Tour Report
2009-10-17 to 2009-11-01
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Sagie Chetty is a Senior Manager at Eskom, South Africa's largest Electricity Utility and a Masters of Management student in the field of ICT Policy and Regulation at Wits University. My research dissertation is entitled "Analysing processes for regulating interconnection in India and South Africa." Wits LINK Centre and the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) in Bangalore arranged for a study/lecture tour to India for the period 17th October 2009 to 1st November 2009. As part of the tour, I presented a number of talks to students and faculty members at various universities and institutions around the country, on the subject of the *Telecommunications Landscape in South Africa*. I used the opportunity to inform students on the development of the telecommunications sector in South Africa; to build relationships between the LINK centre and the institutions I visited; and, most importantly, to conduct interviews with academia, economists and regulatory authorities in India to gather essential material for my research paper.

Presentations were held at a number of universities, namely the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Chennai and IIT Mumbai; the International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Bangalore; and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS) and the Jamia Millia Islamia University – all based in Delhi. The visit concluded with meetings with officials from the Telecoms Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

The presentations were well attended and discussions were robust and thought provoking. The South African telecommunications sector was seen as being non-competitive with unnecessarily high ownership by government in the telecommunications sector. From the information provided, students concluded that the SA telecommunications regulator was weak and lacking in the commensurate skills to manage this highly technical sector.

On the other hand, students gravitated between having admiration for India's own telecommunications regulator, TRAI and criticism of TRAI's inability to improve broadband take-up in India. Students commended TRAI's technical skills, independence and its courage in standing up to powerful mobile companies and incumbent telecommunications companies. However lack of policy direction with regard to broadband rollout is seen as a major failure. Comments regarding this failure are attributed to TRAI's driving down of telecommunications prices to levels that do not allow for infrastructure investment.

The future for broadband in India lies in mobile technology and some predict that fixed line will be defunct by 2025. Some academics also believe that there are too many players in the telecommunications sector in India making spectrum allocation highly competitive and therefore very expensive. These costs will have to be recovered and the end users will pay dearly for this. Therefore the model that the Department of Telecommunications (DOT) is using for spectrum auctions is being questioned by students and academics.

The innovation that I observed in India relates to CIS's early work in projects assisting the visually impaired to read; the writing of 4G standards at the IITs and the innovation with regard to interconnection usage charges (IUC) at TRAI. These are some of the lessons that I have taken back to South Africa.

My observation of students in India is that they are highly motivated and eager to learn. Entrance to the universities is highly sought after and

universities have high standards and are generally difficult to get into. The IITs certainly are increasing the requirements for students to get into them. The institutions are vibrant and are fertile grounds for thought leadership and innovation. India is producing a veritable number of PhDs and institutions seem to offer funding for capable students. South Africa needs to re-examine the funding model for students here. My impression is that students in South Africa do not have similar support as their counterparts in India.

The talks generally concluded with a re-affirmation of the strong historical and cultural links between South Africa and India. Mahatma Gandhi's time spent in South Africa developing his notion of non-violent protest is well known in India and will always bind our countries together.

India is a vibrant country with an economic engine that is gathering revolutions. Its future is bright and its institutions are producing bright young minds to take their place in this awakening economic giant. South Africans can do well in learning from this super power in the making.