



EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Arlene Buckmire-Outram from Grenada seeks to marry education with ICT



I was born in Grenada, a small island at the southern end of the Caribbean archipelago, and grew up amongst books, as my mother was chief librarian on the island. From an early age, I was immersed in learning – reading was my only pastime. I was the youngest of three daughters, and while my two older sisters were one year apart in age, I had come nearly four years later. I was the sister no one knew, shy and content to live with my books.

I have overcome that shyness sufficiently and now have a family of my own with two children, one boy and one girl. I have delved into various fields of study, including Public Administration, International Relations, Tourism Management, and Human Resource Management. Now, somewhat

out of necessity, I am studying Education and working towards the marriage of Education with ICT.

Enthralled by Internet governance

My early thirst for knowledge has persisted to some extent, since for no good reason I have become enthralled in ICT and Internet governance (IG). My introduction to IG was at a brief 'lecture' at an ICT-related conference, and I was immediately taken by the complexities of the issues. Now, having completed the DiploFoundation course, these complexities no longer seem esoteric but, instead, extremely relevant for us in the Caribbean region as we journey towards becoming knowledge societies.



Coming from a small island, with no natural resources other than our people, ICT is now being considered a possible vehicle for development, as is the case with so many other sectors. My island is currently very dependent on tourism and the provision of like services, alongside, of course, the traditional agricultural base. However, ours is the quest to diversify and to find the niche that can transform our economy, one which will allow us to climb out of the poverty cycle and improve the lives of our citizens. Traditionally exporters of cocoa and nutmeg, our agricultural sector was completely devastated in 2004 with Hurricane Ivan. Since then, the country has been struggling to rebound and has recently identified ICT as one of the 'pillars' on which it hopes to rebuild its economy.

Dedicated to ICT

The identification of ICT as such led to placing the ICT

portfolio under the Prime Minister's Office, and I became the first dedicated Permanent Secretary to that area/sector. ICT was certainly not within my areas of training, and so I had to learn and learn quickly. The opportunity to explore the field of IG has been invaluable. It has opened my eyes to our everyday use of the Internet, which I had never focused on in any organised way before, but many issues are relevant and important for all users to be aware of. It is an interesting and fascinating field, and I have enjoyed exploring it tremendously.

The ICT sector here has, however, been hit and miss up until now. As with many of our Caribbean neighbours, policy is determined in five-year spans, and there is often little continuity between changing administrations. This, I believe, has plagued our approach and ability to benefit from the sector. Changing administrations, coupled with

a general lack of understanding of ICT by policymakers within the region, provides a clear picture of the problems we face. Admittedly, however, the islands are all at different stages in the adoption and use of ICTs for development.

I am now part of an IG community with a cadre of people within the regions of Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean, who are able to advocate the need for collective decision-making with regard to the governance of the Internet. This community can, through collaborative effort, develop greater general awareness of the importance of IG and of the need for us in the developing world to ensure that our voices are heard and our interests recognised and considered.

Serious about responsibility

The implications for the use of ICT within the educational system are of particular importance. There has been



the trend towards one-to-one computing within the educational system, with one laptop per child becoming a popular and largely political tool. However, even as we move towards creating greater access for school-aged children, it is increasingly necessary to control what youths are being exposed to. It is necessary to ensure the responsible use of technology and to stress the innovation and knowledge sharing that technology allows over the opportunity for piracy, slander, and other 'negative' activities.

Of critical importance here is social networking awareness in our students. Again, the value of such networking must be weighed against other factors. Whatever is placed on the Internet becomes part of our 'footprint' and can be monitored by those who wish us well or by those with less noble intentions. What is exposed in jest can later determine the course of our future employment and other opportunities, and our young users must be made aware of

this. From my perspective, little has been done to create such awareness or to stimulate thought amongst young minds in Grenada, and this is one area to which I will turn my attention.

As Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, my journey into the realm of Internet governance, and now

into ICT Policy and Strategy, has equipped me to assist in shaping the structured and productive approach to ICT and Internet use within the school system and thus to contribute to the development of my country.

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