



**EMERGING LEADERS**

**FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD**

**EXTRACT**

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## Duksh Kumar Koonjoobeeharry from Mauritius believes in the power of personal contributions



**I am from** the beautiful tropical island Mauritius, situated in the heart of the Indian Ocean. The total population of Mauritius is over 1.2 million, composed of various communities, religions, and ethnicities which settled here during the British colonial era.

I was born in a small village called Sebastopol, situated on the eastern side of the island, which has always been surrounded by sugarcane fields, rivers, and mountain ranges. My village is a very calm place to live, where most of the inhabitants are labourers, skilled workers, farmers, vegetable planters, and some have their own little businesses.

I live with my mom, who is a housewife, my father, who is a retired administrative officer, and with my brothers, an uncle,

aunties, cousins, a sister-in-law, and a cute little nephew. I am the eldest son in the family.

### The learning begins

After Mauritius gained its independence, primary and secondary education became free for everyone. I went to the village's primary school, spending six years there, after which I was admitted to the secondary college in the next nearest village. It was during my college time that I got a PC (thanks to my dad and mom), and from that time I started showing an interest in computer studies. During that same period, I started doing art and technical designs. These subjects were what would make my future.

At that time, Mauritius had only one university serving the





whole island: the University of Mauritius (UOM). God knows how my heart beat every time I passed by the university, thinking that one day I would be there. Unfortunately, after completing my secondary education, I was not admitted to the university because of tough competition and entry requirements. However, I was not discouraged. I applied to a private institution which was just getting started at that time and which was offering Bachelor programmes in IT and computer studies, using distance learning methods from a UK-based tertiary education institution.

Due to the high fees, I could not complete my Bachelor studies, so I finished them with a diploma in IT.

### Embarking on a professional life

As I was fond of technical design and art, I had been playing around with Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator software since college. Then I discovered Macromedia Dreamweaver during

my tertiary education. Whenever I could, I used to design websites and their multimedia content. Eventually this became my passion, which I still have. After completing my diploma, it was hard for me to find a job so that I could finish my studies. I started doing every small job I could find. For some jobs I was either over qualified or under qualified (the latter due to lack of experience at that time). Some of the early jobs I did were carry-boy in textile factories, salesman, part-time graphic designer, and web designer and developer. Life taught me that there is no big or small job; any job done with honesty, which at the end of the day makes someone's life better, is a great job.

So, after having done almost more than a year of part-time, graphic designer and web developer jobs, I got my first permanent job in a well known, established Mauritian company that was providing web-based solutions to its local clients. From there, I started my career as a web-based application

developer, multimedia designer, and project manager.

### A career evolving

After some years of experience in the local market, I shifted to the emerging business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors of Mauritius. These BPO sectors were serving American and European markets in terms of online services, like web applications, online support and interaction services, and multimedia content. I got the chance to experiment with more than 90% of what an ICT-related profit-making business has to offer, ranging from technical tasks, like system and network administration, security, application development, technical support, end-user training, and project management, to non-technical tasks, like marketing and communications, and public relations management.

Despite not having any specialised training, I was able to do all these tasks in different posts and was able to deliver



quality work. Without any hesitation, I give all the credit to my colleagues and teams who shared their knowledge with me and provided their support during my career evolution.

After spending more than four years in European profit-making organisations based in Mauritius, I felt that I needed to do something that could reach more people in the region. I decided to shift to the non-profit-making world, which indirectly led to me direct involvement in the world of the Internet; this was far more than what I could have imagined at that time.

### Moving to the Internet world

In 2007, I joined the African Network Information Centre (AfriNIC) as webmaster and multimedia designer. Compared to my previous posts, this role was, if I may say, in a lower hierarchy, but at that time I wanted to contribute to a cause that was greater than just making a profit for a business organisation and which could reach a greater audience. AfriNIC is one of the five regional Internet registries (RIR) in the world responsible for the Internet number resources management for the African and Indian Ocean region. AfriNIC is a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation, which is run independently of governments and private sectors operating in its service region.

At AfriNIC, we have a small team of people who invest their

time and effort in maintaining and bringing more Internet development to the region, despite the limited financial and human resources.

At AfriNIC, I am exposed to the international world, so that I can qualify as being more 'connected' to the big, renowned organisations in the field of the global Internet, such as, but not limited to:

- IANA / ICANN
- NRO/ ASO
- ITU
- ISOC
- IGF
- Cisco (trainings)
- Google

At regional level, I have the opportunity to get directly involved with entities, like African Network Operators Group (AfNOG), African Asian Forum, and African Government Working Group (AfGWG).

At AfriNIC, apart from my technical job, I have the opportunity to push my limits by multitasking and becoming multiskilled, delivering quality

services with fewer resources. I serve the technical department, communication and marketing department, and the training section at the same time. I do this by managing projects that enable the quick and smart implementation of online solutions through rich multimedia web content and applications, while having the least cost involved.

### Continuing my education through work

As a direct result of my exposure to the Internet world, I started orientating myself towards:

- open source technologies;
- policy discussions going on in the African region regarding Internet number resource management;
- Internet governance (IG) issues;
- infrastructure, network technology, and application;
- standards, accessibility, and usability issues; and
- topics related to IPv4 and IPv6 at the regional and international levels.

After almost four years in such a dynamic environment as AfriNIC, I have become more aware of what I call the 'ICT governance issues' (rather than just calling it IG, for Internet governance) in the African region.

Why 'ICT governance?' In my opinion, we can start discussing the Internet if, first, we have the required basic infrastructure needed for the Internet to exist. For that to



happen, we need reliable energy sources, combined with data transmitters (coppers, fibres, or wireless), whereby, in the end, we have data-capturing devices, such as mobile computers, phones, or PCs.

Some of the major issues in the African region that we, as individuals, have to face are infrastructure implementation, awareness, and education. Luckily, there have been encouraging steps taken by several stakeholders and the younger generations to move forward with ICT development in the region. One such example has been the development of mobile services and open source technology development and adoption in order to provide easily accessible education, which is the source of all development.

After a long time, I decided to complete my Bachelor's degree. This time I was accepted to the BSc (Hons) Business Information Technology course at Greenwich University in the UK. I completed it through distance

learning, while working at the same time.

During that same period, a colleague from the office circulated an e-mail regarding the Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP11) course by DiploFoundation. I applied and received a scholarship. The IGCBP introduced me to something that I can say has become a growing passion: ICT governance and capacity building through interaction, awareness, and education for, not just technicians, but for everyone, without any form of exclusion.

Before joining the course, I had the perception that my country was not well positioned or was lagging behind when compared to those African countries, like Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and many others, which are catching up quickly in regard to Internet connectivity and bandwidth. I was always complaining that the local bandwidth is not worth the price we are paying for it and about the poor service

quality. During the course, I had the privilege to join the Pacific group. That was in itself a different experience, which put me in contact with several technicians and non-technical people. I learned about their situation related to their ICT operational conditions, which were facts based on their geographical, cultural, economical, and educational background.

Since then, I have learned to value what I have as ICT-related facilities on my island, which are not the best or of worldwide standard, technically speaking, but I now love my 512 kbps dsl Internet connection more than I did before joining the IGCBP.

## Taking the initiative

### *What I did*

The more I learned from my classmates and course lectures, the more ready I was feeling to start initiatives based on the capacity building programme. The first initiative that I took during the course was to become a sustainable member of the Internet Society (ISOC). Sadly, the local ISOC chapter was in a 'coma' period, due to several factors. Nevertheless, with the support of my CEO (Mr Akplogan) and CTO (Mr Goburdhan) of AfriNIC, I started contributing actively to the preparation of the first stakeholders meeting for the ISOC Mauritius Chapter rejuvenation. During that initiative, I got in contact with the ISOC Chapter and Members Manager, with whom I coordinated the preparation of





the meeting. At the same time, I took care of all the logistics, along with the reception of the meeting attendants.

Why did I invest my personal time and effort in all this? I believe in contributing to the establishment of an organisation which could become a platform for all the inhabitants of a country where they voice their opinions and concerns regarding ICT development and the services available to them. If I am not wrong, I was among the first group of people on the island who started using Facebook when it still had less than one million members. As someone from the new generation, I started setting an example, and that was my first effort to show other youngsters that

technology ameliorates certain aspects of life, but it also requires contribution (technical and non-technical) from each and every person who is or could be a potential user. That contribution can range from something as simple as replying to an ICT policies-related mailing list, to joining forums/platforms/organisations which operate for the promotion of ICT development.

That was also why, during the IGCBP foundation class chat sessions, or in my hypertext entries and forum posts, I always made the argument with my classmates that you must start making changes to yourself instead of counting on others (governments, business sectors, and regulators) to do the work for you.

### *What I plan to do*

My second initiative, about which I am currently in negotiation with potential support partners and stakeholders, is to provide ICT governance workshops (based on the IGCBP foundation model) to students from colleges and universities, as well as to the general public. Also, as part of the capacity building initiative, I am preparing a course targeting small and medium-sized local enterprises, especially for women entrepreneurs. This particular capacity building programme will be about equipping the entrepreneurs with necessary online skills that will allow them to communicate and market their products using many of the freely available open source tools and social





networking techniques based on a set of compiled tutorials. I plan to provide these courses myself.

### Educating for the future

After successfully completing the IGCBP foundation level, I had the privilege and honour of receiving a second scholarship from DiploFoundation for the advanced course with a focus on the intellectual property rights (IPR) module. I have also been selected as the alumni moderator for the IPR forum.

During this phase, I am expecting to learn more about the IPR digital era as compared to the classical IPR era. This will help me in the preparation for the LLM course in ICT law that I am planning to take next year, after which I want to become an ICT governance practitioner and advisor once I have reached the required level of expertise. During that period, I am thinking of two possible theses which I can research, either related to e-governance and/or an ICT legal framework template for quick adoption by developing countries.

### Moving forward

The IGCBP opened my eyes regarding several matters, but it also confirmed one of my opinions. I won't say that the situation is alarming, but I believe that, with the collaboration of the required stakeholders, we can still do a better job at achieving sound and flourishing ICT development, not to compete

with others but rather to make one's life easier.

I also noticed from the network which I developed during the foundation course that the first thing we should start working on is the mindsets we have

inherited due to our cultural and economic backgrounds. Then the rest of the elements will gradually follow.

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