EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Gaongalelwe-Gaolaolwe Mosweu from Botswana fulfils a promise

The first time I ever saw a computer in my life was at a neighbour's house at the age of nine! That was 20 years ago in Serowe, the village where I grew up, located in the Central District of Botswana. After that, I saw a computer in my mother's office. She knew how to use the 'little TV with a typewriter attached to it' (at least that's how I saw it). The first time I used a computer would be some five years later, in my first year of secondary school. To say I was fascinated would not even begin to describe how I felt. I made a vow that I would learn everything about computers that I possibly could. (Ok, I don't think I know everything now either, but at the time I graduated from secondary school, I had learned quite a lot. I graduated with an A in Computer Studies, so I reckon I did learn a lot there!)

Education and IGCBP

I was going to study Computer Science at university, but by some twist of fate I studied Business Administration instead, specialising in marketing, for which I received my Bachelor's degree. I then studied for a diploma in Computer Studies. At 24, I was chosen to be one of three youths to represent Botswana at the NEPAD eAfrica ICT Youth Conference, where we met other young people from across Africa. I met a fellow youth from Egypt, who then introduced me to the world of Internet governance (IG), and I subsequently took part in Diplo's online Internet

Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP).

During the IGCBP course, we received a call for applications through the mailing list for the first ever ICANN fellowship programme. I applied and was chosen to be one of the pioneers at a meeting held in San Juan, Puerto Rico in June 2007. From that meeting alone, I learnt so much about ICANN, its role in the Internet, the processes it undertakes, and the greater Internet community. The contacts I made there came in handy later.

Botswana: a bright ICT future

It is worth noting that, in terms of information communications technology (ICT), Botswana is relatively young when it comes to the Internet and even younger with regard to IG issues. As with most developing countries, there are more fundamental bread-and-butter issues, such as connecting to power sources. Because Internet adoption and access is still relatively low in Botswana, IG issues have not been a priority. I am optimistic, though, that the landscape is set to change in a few years' time, as the last-mile connectivity costs decrease, thereby increasing access. The government has invested in major cables to increase bandwidth capacity.

I can confirm, however, that the level of awareness of IG issues is increasing amongst the general ICT community, and even more people from Botswana are getting involved in IG issues at local level and key stakeholders are finally taking notice. IG issues are now being added to the agenda at many national ICT fora.

Wearing two hats

I am passionate about development issues and, in particular, have focused on how ICT can contribute to the development of people in Botswana and beyond. I have applied my knowledge, passion, and experience in the local ICT industry with a view to contributing to catapulting Botswana into an information and knowledge society. This is something that really excites me and I look forward to the future of this country. To this end, I wear two hats.

With my civil society hat, I am Vice President of the Botswana Information Technology Society (BITS). BITS is a non-governmental, voluntary organisation that is emerging as the voice for ICT in Botswana. Over the last two years in this role, I have organised capacity building initiatives for women in ICT, along with other general training.

The other hat I wear is being in charge of marketing and communication for the Botswana Innovation Hub, a science park geared towards ICT and other high-tech services. This is an exciting venture both for me personally and for the entire country, as it is set to transform Botswana's economy. On a personal level, it is a perfect marriage with my passion for ICT4D and my professional qualifications, so it gets the best of out of me!

Reflection and advice

I have always had a passion for uplifting the lives of other people in my society and have thus taken to doing this through my voluntary involvement in ICT for

development. In particular, I took a keen interest in IG and received some recognition within IG circles, which ultimately helped me gather the confidence to become more involved at local community and national level. This has helped me to become a voice and agent of change for IG issues in Botswana.

If you are thinking of going into the same area, I would advise you to learn about particular ICT policies that apply to your own country. Get other people from other countries to share their experiences with you. Have the confidence to seek out those who are in charge and offer your assistance. (I have done the latter a number of times – it works!) It also helps if you are part of an established group, as it makes it easier to be taken more seriously.

In closing, I have learned that one of the most important things is to network, to meet people, and to introduce yourself to them. You never know when these connections will come into play. Be yourself: don't try to act too cool – be honest and pleasant.

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