



EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Lenandlar Singh from Guyana talks about incorporating Internet governance issues into teaching



I was born one Saturday morning in February, 1979, in Cotton Tree Village, West Coast Berbice, Guyana. My village was so named by the Dutch. Apparently, it was once a cotton plantation. My parents were both farmers who were themselves raised by farmers. My mother later became a full-time homemaker, while my father still farms up to this day. My great-grandparents came to Guyana from India as indentured immigrants. Incidentally, I spent most of my early years growing up with my great-grandmother, while my parents were busy with farming.

Legend has it that I was destined for something outside of farming and perhaps in 'education'. This, I unapologetically say, was as a result of what appeared then to be my over-sized head. This did not prevent my grandfather

from presenting me with a calf from his flock on my '9-day' (the official christening). The story continued through my first ten years. I spent most weekends looking after cows, while juggling school work on weekdays. I enjoyed both thoroughly. In 1990, high school called. My dad had no hesitation to part with the cows, much to my chagrin. He was convinced, beyond any doubt, that 'schooling' was better than 'chasing cows'. He often reminded us of the times when his parents had no choice but to send him to the farms instead of to school. The old saying was something to the effect of 'they can take all the cows from you, but they cannot take away your education.'

I am the oldest of four siblings and have been happily married for almost a decade. For about



six months I was a happy father-to-be, but disaster struck in July, 2010, and I lost my son. It was equally devastating for both my wife and me. I have often said that I would give up all my education for my lost son, but life does not work that way, I suppose.

Graduating without the Internet

I entered high school in 1990, and by 1996, while pursuing A-levels, I thought about university. My dream at the time was to do well at my A-levels, try out for a Guyana scholarship, and head to England. This never materialised, as I lost all of my teachers halfway through my A-levels. I resorted to plan B. A

number of areas interested me, including my parents' dream – medicine. However, for some strange reason, I opted for Computer Science. Interestingly, I hadn't touched, owned, or seen a computer before. I was encouraged by an elder cousin and grew to like the idea of studying Computer Science. I started at the University of Guyana in 1996 and graduated in 2000 with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. In 1997, I had my first experience with the computer. In those days, it was MS DOS, DB4, Pascal, etc. There was no Internet! In fact, my entire undergraduate years were spent without the Internet and without my own computer. The Internet came to Guyana in the late 1990s and was very much out of the reach of the

majority. It was only after 2000 that more people started to have access. Needless to say, my first years online were spent accessing www.yahoo.com and the directory services provided then. It was as if Yahoo! were the Internet for me.

Engaging with Internet technology

In the summer of 2000, I submitted my undergraduate thesis on 'A model of E-Commerce Integration in Guyana'. Yes, e-commerce, even though I hadn't spent a single session in all of my undergraduate years studying anything remotely related to Internet technologies. I tried something, as they would say, and it worked. I started



job hunting, and after dozens of application letters and a similar number of ‘Sorry, we have no vacancy’ replies, I was offered a job in my department as an assistant lecturer. I started learning about Internet technologies with the help of a VSO colleague and friend from England. I was soon teaching HTML and JavaScript and learning server side programming with PERL and Java. This was effectively my official introduction to the Internet. During these years, I pursued a Postgraduate Diploma in Education – so I am qualified to teach. In 2006, I was offered a Commonwealth Scholarship to pursue a Master’s degree in England. My dream of studying in England finally came true. I completed an MSc in Internet Applications Development at the University of Brighton. I returned home in 2007 and continued engaging with Internet technologies.

Contributing to Guyana’s National ICT Strategy

In 2005/2006, I was invited by the Government of Guyana to work on a team, put together by the President to develop the Guyana National ICT Strategy. I was designated chief rapporteur of one of five thematic areas covered in the Strategy, that of capacity development. This was a first for me. Afterwards, I felt satisfied, having worked on a project that is potentially significant for national development. I have since contributed to other similar projects, including the Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plan for Distance Education.

I have been fortunate enough to study on scholarship courses in e-government, ICT4D, and e-learning. Personal growth and development are my own personal responsibilities, and I pursue them deliberately

and with a passion. I strongly believe that personal development is most important for my teaching and research. Indeed, I have always been keen to improve my areas of expertise and share newly acquired knowledge with my students.

Completing this course on Internet governance with Diplo, through the Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP), has been most timely and fulfilling for me. Interacting with the course material, participants, and especially with the tutors, has provided me with a solid foundation on IG issues. Incidentally, I have already been incorporating IG issues into my teaching. For a number of years, I have engaged my students with discussions on technical, social, and other issues associated with the Internet. I have indeed been imparting knowledge on IG



issues but under another name and the IGCBP solidified my appreciation of IG, enhanced my understanding, and facilitated the development of my confidence to go forth and continue the work I have begun.

Future vision and aspirations

I would like to contribute in specific areas of capacity development. I have pledged to introduce a course on Internet governance in my department. I will be pursuing that with more energy shortly. I hope to

have this course developed and approved within the next six months or so. I will continue my research on cybersecurity and information-sharing frameworks to mitigate cyberthreats. I have already researched and presented a paper on 'The role of information sharing amongst stakeholders' in the fight against cybercrime'. I hope to increase this and engage national stakeholders on the issue. Hopefully, my research aspirations will culminate in PhD studies on IG. At national level, I would like to continue

working with institutions on policy development, education, and technical capacity development in IG. I believe that education is a key element to development and that it is no less important for IG. Armed with the tools I learned on the ICGBP, I will continue to share my knowledge and understanding of the issues at every possible opportunity and forum.

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