EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Michele Marius in Jamaica ponders the impact of development on a society

I never anticipated the journey my life has taken so far...

My life began in Jamaica, where I was born the elder of two sisters to a doctor and a teacher. My father is from Saint Lucia, and so when I was six, my family migrated to Saint Lucia, where most of my schooling took place. My parents considered me a bright and disciplined child. In Jamaica, the school I had attended was guiding me through an accelerated learning programme, but similar schemes did not exist in Saint Lucia. As a result, the pace of my education slowed down considerably, so much so that I sometimes wonder how different my life would have been, had we remained in Jamaica.
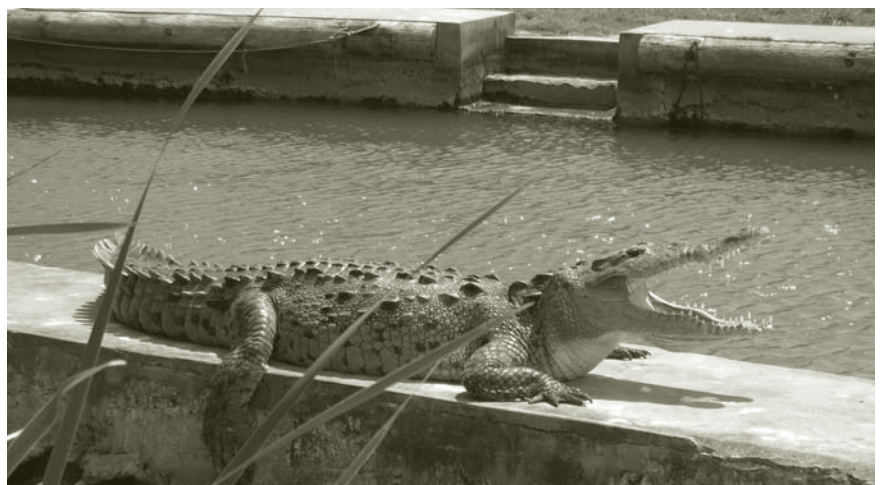
Nevertheless, I attended the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago, where I studied Electrical and Computer Engineering. Thereafter, I pursued a Master's degree in Communications, Controls, and Digital Signal Processing at the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. After that, whilst living and working in Saint Lucia, I attained a Law degree through the University of London's External Programme.

A tale of two cultures

The slower, and at that time, simpler way of life made growing up in Saint Lucia an excellent foundation for the experiences I have had to date. Since my mother is Jamaican, my sister and I grew up experiencing two cultures at the same time – Jamaica in our home and Saint Lucia outdoors – and we married the best of both into our psyches.

Additionally, at the time we immigrated to Saint Lucia, the country was on the brink of

change. The banana industry was about to experience a boom, and comprehensive electricification, construction, and telephone roll-out projects were imminent. In less than ten years, radical economic development occurred. People's lifestyles and spending power improved considerably, but I was of the view that attitudes and outlook lagged behind. The transformation I witnessed is an experience that I continually refer to whenever I have to consider a small, developing country's desire to improve its economic position, and the price that it might have to pay to achieve it.

Regulating telecommunications

I have had many opportunities over the years to ponder the impact of development on a society. A considerable part of my professional life to date has been in the field of telecommunications regulation. Telecommunications, and now Information and Communications Technology (ICT), are considered key drivers of economic development. To varying degrees, and in diverse roles, such as chief executive, regulator, and consultant, I have been involved in telecommunications regulatory processes in Saint Lucia in the Caribbean, and in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu in the South Pacific.

Telecommunications regulation is challenging, but I have greatly enjoyed the experience and am grateful for the opportunities it has afforded me. It has allowed me to contribute, be it directly or indirectly, to improving a country's economic situation and to increasing the availability and affordability of telecommunications services in a society. However, over the last few years, I have been keen to broaden my skills and experience, and ICT, which

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is a natural progression of telecommunications, is where I have been directing my attention.

Embracing ICT

I must admit that I was initially hesitant about, or perhaps defiant of, embracing ICT. Although I recognised that the shift to ICT was inevitable, I sensed that people, especially policymakers, did not appreciate the importance of telecommunications as the foundation for ICT. Further, they had no idea what ICT truly entailed and the diverse issues that needed to be addressed. Hence, when I decided to jump onto the ICT bandwagon, and taking into account my professional background, I wanted to focus on policy and governance issues as they relate to ICT.

Due to my experience in regulation, I had been exposed to a number of the topics that are considered to fall under Internet governance (IG). However, the topics are diverse, and when I began my own research on global IG policy, I became overwhelmed by the number of issues being discussed, the organisations involved, and their individual jurisdictions.

Internet governance: a holistic view

Participating in Diplo's Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP) 2011 has really helped me to develop a holistic view of the IG discussion. I am more aware of the salient issues that are currently being discussed, the key arguments that are being made, and the main entities

involved. As a participant, I was also impressed and proud of the contributions and views of my fellow classmates. Many were erudite and eloquent in their comments, so not only were they a joy to read, but they added such value and perspective to the discussions. They really reminded me of the breadth and depth of the expertise and experience we have in the Caribbean and of what we can offer to the rest of the world if given the opportunity.

Perhaps more importantly, the programme brought home to me how uninvolved and underrepresented the Caribbean region has been in this global conversation. I am currently based in Jamaica, a country that is seen as a leader in the region, but in the global IG conversation, it has not been

present. Perhaps, similar to how I felt prior to the IGCBP, many are grappling with 'where to start?'

Having a voice

I am also very concerned that civil society and the public at large within the Caribbean do not appear to have a voice in IG issues. This is the area where I hope I can make a difference.

A critical activity will be information dissemination – educating people about IG issues and assisting them in formulating views and opinions that can not only be applied to their lives, but which can be communicated to national and regional leaders as appropriate. In January 2011, I launched *ICT Pulse* (www.ict-pulse.com), a blog aimed at discussing ICT issues from a Caribbean perspective. To date, a number of the articles I have published have dealt with topical IG matters, and thanks to my own increased awareness of the issues, I intend to use the blog as a platform for generating more discussion on the subject.

Additionally, since my professional endeavours are still focused on telecommunications and ICT development, I fully expect to have the opportunity to continue to promote IG as a part of substantive projects I am involved in. In that regard, I hope to help developing countries around the world understand IG issues that should be important to them, especially as the world transitions to information societies and knowledge-based economies.

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