JOHN WALUBENGO

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

My name is John Walubengo, a Kenyan, born in Nairobi in October 1969. My dad was a secondary school teacher and my mom was a telephone operator at the national telecommunication company. I went to the local public schools for my primary education, but was lucky to get into the reputable Strathmore School for my secondary education. In school, I studied science and interacted with computers during extra-curricular activities, and later did a BSc in Mathematics and Computing at Kenyatta University, Nairobi. There, I completed my first degree in 1992 and immediately found employment as a computer trainer at a small rural town. In 1994, I was "poached" by my former school, Strathmore, to be their information technology course director in their newly opened Strathmore faculty in Nairobi. The high school had grown into a college and has since matured into one of the leading private universities in East and Central Africa.

I would say that the six years (1994-1999) I spent as the information and communication technology course director at Strathmore enabled me to expand my knowledge in the rapidly changing industry. My favourite courses to teach were programming and networking and, towards the late 1990s, I preferred Internet technology. The thing I learnt the quickest while at Strathmore was that with regard to this technology, what you learn at the university is never sufficient. This is because it is maybe obsolete by the time you get employment. Therefore, we had to learn fast and keep learning each day in order to be able to teach tomorrow.

In 1999, I married and made another move to a public telecommunication training school, Kenya College of Communication Technology, where I am today. What made me move was simply that the public college had more training opportunities and capacity to sponsor candidates for a Masters degree. Here I got the opportunity to take a Masters programme in Strategic Business Information Technology from the University of Portsmouth and take industry qualifications such as the Certified Cisco Network Associate and the Certified Information Systems Auditor. The Portsmouth MSc programme blended computing with business strategy and, what was even better, the course was offered online! I could study anytime, anywhere, at my convenience. It was at Portsmouth that the wonders of the digital world was opened to me, since students and professors e-studied, e-chatted, e-discussed and e-whatevered in ways that I thought would have been impossible had I attended the local university for my post-graduate studies.

CURRENT WORK

When I moved to Kenya College of Communication Technology, I was placed in charge of the newly opened City Center Branch that specialised in offering information and communication technology courses. For the next five years (2000-2004), I spent a lot of energy putting together a new campus that initially had no students, no facilities, and no lecturers. By the time I was redeployed to the main campus, I had developed a full-fledged campus with over 500 students and 60 lecturers giving courses. It was at the City Center Campus that we launched the first ever e-learning centre in Kenya in the year 2000. This was a joint effort between the school and a leading university partner in South Africa, the University of Free State.

It was also at the City Center Campus that we executed a couple of consultancy jobs for the government, such as an analysis of the existing Kenya National Assembly information system with a view to modernizing it. Another interesting project was the design and development of the Ministry of Education information and communication technology policy. This three-month exercise was the first of many that would make use of the strategic business component of my Masters programme.

During my spare time, I am also actively involved in national and international initiatives. Three bodies, Diplo, the Kenya Information and Communication Technology Action Network, and the Information Systems Audit and Control Association - Kenya Chapter have continued to give me sufficient challenges to apply my knowledge.

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I found that living in a developed economy is quite different from living in my developing country environment. Things like the Internet are taken for granted and yet, when I think retrospectively, I realise that most of the technical research I was able to do in Geneva could not be effectively done at home since here, 90% of my technical research resources get pulled off the Net at very high speeds, with no disruption and at minimal time. The quality and reliability of the Internet seems to be a requirement for the work or output I can deliver within a given time. In sub-saharan Africa, lack of the same (Internet) resources would automatically discourage me from exploring certain lines of action or research, given the constraints on the quality, cost, and availability of the Internet.

THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Diplo IGCBP brings contemporary, future, and global Internet issues to focus. I did this programme in October 2004. The call for applications popped up on one of the many lists I belong to and since I had a craving for e-learning, I thought I could join and see how different the experience might be from my Masters programme.

Indeed, it was quite different in many ways. The programme was not strictly academic and so there was slightly more flexibility. However, it had more of practical experience and demanded more from the students in terms of research contributions. It was a perfect example of the increasing pedagogical shift from teacher-centric to student-centric education. The online tutor facilitates the learning, giving pointers for the student to dive deeply into the unknown and come up with new knowledge. Once one successfully completes the program, he or she tends to have the electronic skills to be on a continuous learning path.