



Caribbean Telecommunications Union



Harnessing the Power of Innovation - the Engine for ICT-Enabled Caribbean Development

The future of Caribbean countries is being threatened by rising crime, porous borders; the effects of climate change; flight of intellectual capacity and the dismantling of preferential trade arrangements for agricultural products. These challenges have been further compounded by the contagion of the global financial crisis and the resulting deepening economic fragility. As a consequence, there is a move in the region to identify new sustainable models for development. Caribbean leaders have recognised that information and communication technologies (ICT) present new opportunities for fostering social and economic development.

The Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) has embarked on an initiative designed to educate, raise public awareness and establish strategic programmes to foster innovative and beneficial use of ICT in Caribbean countries for national and regional development. The initiative, the Caribbean ICT Roadshow, integrates ICT capacity building with meaningful activities which will deliver tangible benefits to the citizens of the region and lay a foundation on which knowledge-based societies and economies may be built.

The Caribbean ICT Roadshow was officially launched on 28th July, 2009, in Grenada, by The Hon. Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister of Grenada and CARICOM Head of Government responsible for Science and Technology. In his address at the launch, the Prime Minister noted the challenges faced by the region and the opportunities presented by ICT to mitigate their effects and to foster national and Caribbean advancement.

From August 2009 to June 2010, the Roadshow visited Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Curacao, the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Republic of Suriname, Montserrat, the British Virgin Islands and St. Lucia.

While each Roadshow was customised to reflect the special circumstances of the countries visited, the following core elements were addressed throughout the region:

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1. ICT capacity building
2. ICT innovation and entrepreneurship
3. Building ICT policy and regulatory capacity
4. Network Operators' Issues
5. Fostering local content development
6. Encouraging collaborative work in ICT
7. Fostering responsible use and ICT innovation in Youth

Interspersed with these country visits were ICT stakeholder meetings in the five (5) countries as well as an Executive Lecture Forum in St. Lucia and a series of IXP Workshops in the British Virgin Islands, Grenada, St. Maarten and Trinidad & Tobago.

The Roadshow adopted a unique approach, which linked the dissemination of information to activities that reinforced the message and initiated activities that will produce tangible benefits in the long term. The very highly interactive country Roadshows featured the following modules:

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1. POLICY MAKERS' & REGULATORS' FORUM

The regulatory imperatives for an environment of rapid technological innovation and the convergence of formerly distinct disciplines are addressed in this Forum. The transformational potential of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a means of fostering sustainable economic and social development is considered.



2. SME BUSINESS FORUM

This forum considers key areas for redefining small business and how existing ICT tools can be used in small and medium size businesses to improve their efficiency and extend their reach to markets which could not be tapped in traditional ways. Particular applications for research, accounting, procurement, inventory management, marketing and customer service are explored.



3. THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

The value of the Internet and how the global decision making process operates by engagement of all stakeholders is discussed in this Forum. The value of Generic Top Level domain names and the options for the management of these resources at the country level are explored along with the imminent exhaustion of the IPv4 numbering and naming system which will be replaced by IPv6.



4. NETWORK OPERATORS' FORUM

This forum seeks to facilitate the collaborative work of operators in the establishment of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) and Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTS) and in the work of a Caribbean Network Operators' Group (CARIBNOG).



5. ICT INNOVATORS' FORUM

ICT Innovation is the focus of this forum which presents a variety of opportunities for the effective use of ICT. It promotes a better understanding of the innovation ecosystem. The experiences of practitioners in the field are shared and the prerequisites to encourage innovation and the use of the technologies to advance the region to higher levels of prosperity are discussed.



6. YOUTH FORUM

The keen affinity of youth to ICT as a motivator for innovation is exploited in this forum which deals with issues directly focused on the youth. Dangers in cyberspace are discussed and instructions for content creation are given.



7. CTU AND PARTNERS AT YOUR SERVICE

The respective roles and work of the CTU and its partners are presented in this forum which makes a case for Caribbean ICT stakeholders to participate in the activities of regional and international ICT organizations.



8. THE BANKS AND BUSINESS FORUM

This forum explores banking tools available to small and medium size enterprises and the benefits of incorporating ICT tools in banking and business.



9. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Roadshow visits selected communities to discuss the potential of ICT to enhance lives. The capabilities of mobile phones are demonstrated and the efficiencies that can be achieved are discussed. Participants have the opportunity to seek answers for ICT-related questions in an informal setting.



10. HOT SEAT DISCUSSION PANEL

Issues of national importance are discussed by stakeholders with a direct interest in the selected topic. The panels are configured to ventilate concerns, present perspectives and identify challenges, to arrive at consensus on possible solutions.

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Without exception, the first nine ICT Roadshows were enthusiastically received and highly commended by CTU members, ICT stakeholders and citizens for the insight provided and the prospects of real and sustainable benefits accruing to their countries. They noted the timeliness, necessity of the initiative and the effectiveness of the various programmes in improving public awareness, educating, mobilising ICT communities and prompting action in ICT development. In addition the Roadshows have unearthed not only obstacles to the effective use of ICTs but also a considerable reservoir of ICT innovative talent in the region.

The benefits of the Roadshow were clearly demonstrated in that:

- The elements of a National ICT strategy and a framework for developing one were presented in some countries enabling their administrations to begin the process.
- Stakeholders in the English-speaking countries were convinced of the need for and committed to the establishment of local IXPs in so much as there is now a race on to have the first IXP in the English speaking Caribbean.
- There was a real commitment by stakeholders to collaborate on ICT issues for mutual benefit and to participate in the CARIBNOG programme.
- ICT communities were mobilised to strengthen and support ICT development in each country.
- Stakeholders, introduced to the work of the organisations that direct the development of the Internet, expressed interest in participating in their activities.



- The seeds of a local content industry were planted through the training of youth in content creation.
- Young people were made aware of the dangers of cyberspace, while parents and guardians were educated on their role in the children's ICT development.

The value of the Roadshow is summed up in the following comments from some of the participants.

- *"...it's been a long time since we've had so many IT professionals in one room in Belize...if nothing else you have at least motivated some of us to try again...we did indeed have an IT association in Belize, it had just become dormant.....the Roadshow has motivated a number of us who were on the board of that organisation to revive it again." - IT Professional, Belize*
- *"I thoroughly enjoyed the days... it's now for the actions to be implemented." - ICT Innovator, Antigua and Barbuda*
- *"It was a gathering of talent and ambition and this was without a doubt an added value for the development of the Island... I learned more about ICT in two days than I did in the last two years. For this I thank you and am eternally grateful." – MP, Curacao*
- *"I learnt how to create my own podcast and of the dangers in cyberspace" Student - St. Vincent and the Grenadines*

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Based on the outcomes of the Caribbean ICT Roadshows, there is no doubt that the initiative is filling a void in the Caribbean ICT landscape. It has been very effective in educating and raising awareness on ICT innovation and has mobilised ICT Stakeholders to commence work on a number of beneficial ICT activities that will foster ICT enabled development. Following are examples of some of these activities.

1. Establishment of the first IXP in the English-speaking Caribbean: It is expected that the facility would be commissioned in the British Virgin Islands in June 2010.
2. Support for ICT Innovators: A young innovator from Montserrat is now being assisted by two British Organisations in monetising his ICT ideas.
3. A Caribbean ICT Innovation and Entrepreneurship Foundation: Plans are underway to establish a framework for ICT innovators to be mentored. The first step is the staging of a regional Innovators' workshop in Dominica in October, 2010.

The 2010 Roadshow programme commenced in March and will culminate in Trinidad and Tobago in November 2010 with an ICT Symposium at which a comprehensive report highlighting recommendations for fostering ICT innovation and development will be presented and ICT innovators will be recognised.

