

## **CANTO 2014 Report on Public/Private Sector Dialogue on CARICOM Single ICT Space**

**By *Philip Cross and Ayanna Samuels***

The public private sector dialogue on the CARICOM Single ICT Space (SICTS) was held on Monday August 11, 2014 during CANTO 2014 in the Bahamas.

- **Panelists:**

Chair: Dr. Hamadoun Touré, ITU Secretary-General

Ms. Jennifer Britton, Deputy Programme Manager for ICT4D, CARICOM Secretariat,

Mr. Kenneth Sylvester, CEO, Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network

Mr. Dirk Currie, Chairman, CANTO

Mr. Chris Dehring, Chairman, LIME Caribbean

Mr. E.J. Saunders, CEO, Digicel, Turks and Caicos Is.

Ms. Rhea Yaw Ching, VP Sales and Marketing, Columbus Communications

Mr. Isaac Solomon, Director, Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority

### **Introduction**

This was the first formal public private sector dialogue involving Caribbean ministers of government, senior Caribbean government officials, private sector entities, regulators and other ICT stakeholders; aimed at developing strategies for the CARICOM Single ICT Space (SICTS) which is one element of the CARICOM Regional Digital Development Strategy (RDDS). The RDDS was approved by CARICOM in 2013 and two key elements are:

1. the CARICOM Single ICT Space (SICTS);
2. the CARICOM Digital Agenda 2025.

Dr. Touré introduced the session, during which he highlighted the importance of the Single ICT Space and the Digital Agenda 2025 for the Caribbean. He made reference to the HIPCAR project, which had assisted Caribbean countries in harmonizing policies, legislation and regulations. He highlighted the following five priorities for fast-tracking and developing strategies for the RDDS which could only be achieved through public, private, people partnerships:

1. a Single CARICOM ICT Space to enhance the environment for investment and production;
2. bringing technology to the people and transforming them into digital natives and digital entrepreneurs;
3. cybersecurity;
4. resource mobilization and commitments of member states to invest in ICTs;
5. developing the CARICOM Digital Agenda 2025.

Dr. Touré also mentioned that 67% of the world's population is off-line and there will be huge traffic jams if the Caribbean does not invest in additional ICT infrastructure. The Single ICT Space, he said, would allow for important economies of scale and efficiencies. The main purpose of the session was to have PEOPLE, PUBLIC, PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPPP) discussions on the Single ICT Space and propose future actions.

**Ms. Jennifer Britton - CARICOM**

Ms. Jennifer Britton, speaking on behalf of the CARICOM Secretariat indicated that it was necessary to have partnerships in order to ensure the success of the Single ICT Space in the Caribbean. She stated that the CARICOM region under consideration consisted of 15 full members, 5 associates and encompassed a total of 15 million people. She then made reference to the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which established CARICOM and the Treaty of Basseterre which established the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the importance of these treaties for ICT cooperation in the Caribbean.

With respect to CARICOM activities, she stated that the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) was the flagship programme and it was intended to create a single seamless economic space. The SICTS would support the advancement of the CSME and would provide a solution to the present barrier of the region's difficulty in achieving economies of scale in all endeavours of economic and social development. A SICTS would also bring benefits to the public sector, entrepreneurship and new business development, research and development and new ICT products and services. Caribbean Heads of Governments have agreed to facilitate the collaborative process needed to achieve the objectives of the RDDS and its various components.

Regarding ICT statistics, she said that there was a message within them and there was a particular challenge regarding content. There were many consumers and few providers. ICT investment, she further stated, was not providing the promised returns. Heads of Government in the Caribbean had agreed to a CARICOM digital economy, with specific goals. This was included in the Regional Strategic Plan for the period 2015 – 2019. In this regard there were specific requests to CANTO to assist in moving this agenda item forward. She suggested that CANTO should support a RDDS Technical Working Group which would include important Caribbean organizations involved in ICTS, ITU, UNESCO and CIVIC (civil society virtual group).

**Mr. Ken Sylvester – CEO, Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN)**

Mr. Sylvester explained that C@ribNET, a research and education network came about as a decision of Caribbean governments and was implemented by the CKLN. It was necessary to have such an entity since the Caribbean was left out of the global education and research network. C@ribNET links the Caribbean to similar networks, globally. C@ribNET uses Caribbean fibre, which was implemented by the CKLN and was built in collaboration with Caribbean operators including LIME, TSTT, BTC and Belize Telemedia Ltd. The bulk of the infrastructure was provided by LIME. Through C@ribNET, the CKLN is able to provide

regional and international connectivity through a closed network for members only. It provides a single virtual space which connects educational, health and security institutions.

The CKLN allows members to share resources and participate in collaborative activities and is well-positioned to be the region's knowledge centre. Countries participating in C@ribNET must nurture the development of National Research and Development Networks (NRENS). All countries are able to build national networks which would be connected to all other participating networks. So far there are 13 Caribbean countries and 40 institutions that are members.

Phase one of the build-out has been completed and the next phase will involve community schools. One of the main barriers is the high cost of bandwidth (compared to other regions). A *PPP* approach would be suitable and in this regard the involvement and assistance of CANTO could help to move the project forward.

### **Mr. Dirk Currie, Chairman, CANTO**

Mr. Currie expressed the view that CANTO was pleased to be associated with this CARICOM initiative and he pledged the support of CANTO in future activities. He indicated that CANTO had contributed to the CARICOM discussion paper on SICTS in which CANTO had outlined possibilities for accelerating the rollout of Caribbean national broadband plans.

He stated that CANTO would be happy to partner with the CKLN as requested, as well as other stakeholders. However, the financial aspects in respect of expenses that would arise would need to be clarified.

Following his comments, the ITU Secretary-General stated that the ITU would assist in activities related to SICTS as well as in getting partners together. He also stated that where there is a good project, funds would be found. Therefore, the Caribbean should focus on developing bold new projects.

### **Mr. Chris Dehring, Chairman and Chief Marketing Officer, LIME**

Mr. Dehring used the analogy of the 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC) which was held in several Caribbean venues. In this regard, he said that a single Caribbean space was created for the event. Consequently a blueprint for a single space in the Caribbean actually exists and may be of use in developing the SICTS.

As far as LIME is concerned, Mr. Dehring stated that there was support for the SICTS. He also supported the idea of a unified regulator as well as no roaming charges in the Caribbean. In order to deliver on the promises for ICT development, a suitable platform must be established, since it is difficult to have any real achievement when the goal post is constantly moving.

Regarding content, he stated that there were difficulties in the Caribbean in raising funds for this purpose. Therefore, banks need to better understand intellectual property and content matters. He

indicated that should it be decided to establish a fund for the purpose of achieving the SICTS then LIME would be interested in contributing.

**Mr. E.J. Saunders, CEO, Digicel Turks & Caicos Is.**

Mr. Saunders gave examples of various activities which were important for the development of content. In this regard, he referred to CANTO's *iCreate Mobile Apps* competition, which he said could help to develop young talents in the region. He also made mention of Verizon's *Powerful Answers* competition and the significant prize money which it provided.

He then mentioned the situation in the Turks & Caicos Islands and the connectivity programmes provided. Government offices were upgraded with data speeds of up to 10Mbps. At the moment schools in that country were being connected to broadband and virtual classroom desktop software was being provided. He was in favour of higher data speeds in the country and he wanted to see an important role for Digicel in the achievement of the SICTS.

**Ms. Rhea Yaw Ching, VP Sales and Marketing, Columbus Communications**

Ms. Yaw Ching stated that Columbus Communications was ready to work with all stakeholders in order to make sure the SICTS becomes a reality. She mentioned that her company had made significant investment in the development of broadband in the Caribbean and they had also established successful partnerships with both Digicel and LIME.

She also mentioned that Columbus had supported mobile app. development through Caribbean workshops. They were also involved in e-music, which was a part of the development of local digital content.

She suggested that the SICTS should be established on the basis of openness. In this regard she further suggested that there should be an open Internet and open collaboration with no boundaries. Consequently, the SICTS should be built on a foundation of openness.

She also mentioned the collaboration between the CKLN and Columbus. In this regard, the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) approached Columbus with a view to obtaining suitable bandwidth for their activities. A project was agreed and Phase one has already been completed. A CXC Digital Media Syllabus was established in six months. This project with the CXC helped that organization to reduce their costs.

**Mr. Isaac Solomon, Director, Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL)**

Mr. Solomon stated his appreciation for the positive energy in the room regarding the implementation of the SICTS. He mentioned the activities of ECTEL, a Caribbean regional regulator, stating that ECTEL had been successful as a regional organization which has undertaken a significant amount of work in respect of regulating the ICT sector. With reference to the SICTS, his view was that it should not be compared to the Cricket World Cup, since it does not have a timeline like CWC did.

He went on to state that a single regulatory body needs harmonized policies and processes. In the case of ECTEL there are many similarities between the countries, yet differences remain. Consequently one may have harmony without harmonized legislation. Nevertheless, the ECTEL model works.

He closed by stating that ECTEL was willing to work with other countries and stakeholders to create a SICTS.

## **Discussion**

The first question concerned the managing of personal data.

**Dr. Touré** stated that cybersecurity should be taken seriously and emergency centres are needed in the Caribbean. Also, police training schools should be included in cybersecurity and forensic matters. If cybersecurity is adequately dealt with, he said, this will bring confidence into the ICT processes.

**Mr. Sylvester** stated that peering exists with other major networks and the same level of security is required for all these networks. He then said that the CKLN has met international security standards regarding the protection of data.

### **The second issue raised was a comment concerning the cost of bandwidth in Grenada.**

**The Grenadian ICT Minister** lamented the high cost of bandwidth in Grenada, especially in comparison to Trinidad & Tobago, in which he said Broadband costs three times less than in Grenada. This cost in Grenada should thus be reduced, he said. He also stated that for the SICTS to be successful, a level playing field is required.

In the general discussion there were many suggestions that there has been some reduction of bandwidth costs. **Ms. Yaw Ching** indicated that they have very competitive broadband costs in the countries where Columbus operates, following a general fall in broadband prices. For example, she detailed that in 2013, Columbus increased the bandwidth available in Grenada and as such there was a general reduction in *prices per Mb*. She further assured the meeting that Columbus is continuing to assess the situation to get the pricing formula right for its customer base. The general rubric she opined is that the cost of bandwidth should be at a benchmark level of less than 5% of the “home basket level” for each home.

**Dr. Touré** also contributed to this conversation indicating that in the Caribbean, broadband prices are five times the world average. He consequently firmly believes that prices thus have to be driven down for the region.

**Mr. Dehring** detailed that the audience should also keep in mind that there are factors in each country that affect broadband pricing, and these differ per island. Listing amongst such factors are electricity and labour costs for example.

**Dr. Jerrol Thompson** also raised concerns about the cost of broadband in the region

The third point was a general comment about support of public educational agencies, such as the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC)

**Dr. Didacus Jules**, Secretary-General of the OECS, stated that the ICT Single Space exists at two levels – CSME and OECS. He then referred to bandwidth as oxygen. He further stated that when he was with the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), he got very little cooperation from LIME and the CKLN when the CXC needed assistance in implementing an e-learning platform. This resulted in the CXC forming a successful partnership with Columbus.

### **Signing of Nassau Statement on Public Private Sector Dialogue on CARICOM Single ICT Space**

Mr. Leon Williams, CEO of BTC and co-Host of CANTO 2014, read the Nassau Declaration (ND) on the CARICOM SICTS. Subsequent to the reading of the declaration, comments were then sought on same by Dr. Touré. In response, a Mr. James Fletcher kindly asked for more time to assess the ND before moving to adopt it. Dr. Touré responded advising that the declaration was indeed shared with heads of government before the SICTS session, but that he would be happy to have it re-circulated.

Dr. Jules asked that there be an OECS presence on the SICTS working group. Additionally, Minister D'Abreau queried as to whether the CTU was included in the SICTS working group and was assured in the affirmative by Dr. Touré.

### **Next Steps:**

A short term next step for the SICTS initiative is for the adoption of the 2014 ND.