

Report written by Phillip Cross – Jan 2015

CANTO's 31st AGM to focus on “Improving Lives Through Broadband Innovation”

The Caribbean Association of National Telecommunications Organizations (CANTO) will hold its 31st Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Paramaribo, Suriname from the 25 to 29 January 2015, with the theme **Improving Lives through Broadband Innovation**. 2015 will be a very important year, not only for CANTO and the global Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, but also for global sustainable development. One of the main reasons is that 2015 is the target year for both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the World Summit on the Information Society Goals (WSIS). For CANTO it is also important since the very important Broadband Infrastructure and Public Awareness in the Caribbean (BIIPAC) project with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) will continue and is expected to move into the implementation phase .

The ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference of 2014 declared that “despite all the progress made during past years, the digital divide still remains, and is compounded by disparities in access, use and skills between and within countries, in particular between urban and rural areas, as well as in the availability of accessible and affordable telecommunications/ICTs, particularly for women, youth, children, indigenous people and persons with disabilities, including age-related disabilities”. It is against this background that Caribbean countries must take a hard look at ICT development in the Caribbean, especially broadband, and seek ways of improving access to ICTs.

Caribbean countries have signed on to both the MDGs and the WSIS and have been making efforts to achieve the stated goals. Many of these will be met and others will not be met. In some cases the goals were not clearly stated and the impact of ICTs was not evident at the time. 2015 will therefore provide an opportunity for introspection, evaluation and planning so that CANTO can prepare its members for the post-2015 development agenda. That agenda will take into account the global successes and failures of the last fifteen years and it will also develop new strategies for the development and use of ICTs. Since the MDGs were established, the ICT landscape has also changed dramatically. There was very little emphasis on broadband, which has now come to be one of the most important aspects of ICT development.

Caribbean ICT stakeholders, including CANTO members, are expected to be involved in important discussions that will take place in 2015. These discussions will play a very important role in obtaining information and statistics that will show clearly the situation in the Caribbean. CANTO will again be seeking to make inputs that will help in the overall development strategy for broadband.. It will be important to see where the Caribbean stands in broadband development so that decisions can be taken on the way forward.

The ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Digital Development, taking into consideration the impact of broadband, has established several criteria for global broadband development. For 2015, the Commission has established four targets to be considered by all countries. These targets will be examined at the AGM, with a view to CANTO developing its broadband strategy for 2015 and beyond, as well as strategies for the post-2015 development agenda. The four targets are:

- Target 1:** Making broadband policy universal. By 2015, all countries should have a national broadband plan or strategy or include broadband in their Universal Access / Service Definitions.
- Target 2:** Making broadband affordable. By 2015, entry-level broadband services should be made affordable in developing countries through adequate regulation and market forces (amounting to less than 5% of average monthly income).
- Target 3:** Connecting homes to broadband. By 2015, 40% of households in developing countries should have Internet access.
- Target 4:** Getting people online. By 2015, Internet user penetration should reach 60% worldwide,

50% in developing countries and 15% in LDCs.

These are targets which are clearly fit into CANTO's agenda, but now additional discussions are required which will take them into account.

Many countries in the Caribbean utilize Universal Service Funds (USF) for the deployment of broadband, although not all countries have USF regimes. CANTO will continue discussions on how countries can be assisted in developing and maintaining their USF strategies. CANTO is also mindful of the difficulties being faced by telephone companies, including the gradual decline in telephone revenues. A decline in revenues also means declining USF contributions. This factor could affect the ability of some countries to roll out broadband as quickly and as efficiently as they would like. Therefore the AGM will need to focus on various aspects of broadband rollout, the problems being encountered and possible solutions.

The CANTO AGM will also provide an update of the BIIPAC project which is now being implemented. This project is assisting CANTO members in broadband diagnosis and infrastructure maps, regulatory and institutional framework, ICT awareness and capacity building, as well as public policy and regional recommendations. The objectives of this project are closely aligned to the targets set by the Broadband Commission so there are already some synergies in moving forward.

The first phase of the BIIPAC project is being implemented in Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago.

When the MDGs were adopted on 2000, there was very little awareness of the potential of ICTs in sustainable development, both as a means to an end as well as an end in itself. The potential of broadband was nowhere on the horizon. At this AGM, CANTO members will discuss various aspects of broadband and the role it has played and is expected to play in the lives of the people of the Caribbean. In order to develop a realistic scenario, the voice of the youth must be taken into account. It is important to know how young people see ICTs, in particular broadband, the role it plays in their lives and the future that they see for broadband. Consequently, CANTO will host **the CANTO 2015 Youth Forum** which will promote youth entrepreneurship and innovation. It will bring together young, brilliant and creative minds from around the Caribbean so that they can share their thoughts, dreams and visions among themselves and with CANTO members.

The agenda for this AGM is therefore expected to assist in providing a better understanding of the ICT sector in the Caribbean, in particular progress made with broadband rollout, which continues to be an important subject for CANTO.

CANTO is therefore extending an invitation for the 31st AGM, co-hosted by TELESUR, from 25th- 29th January 2015 at the Torarica Hotel, Paramaribo, Suriname. In addition to the various discussions that will take place, note should be taken of the following:

- 27 – 29 January - Broadband Infrastructure Inventory and Public Awareness in the Caribbean (BIIPAC) Inaugural Workshop;
- 27 January – CANTO 2015 Youth Forum

Other CANTO events:

- 26 – 29 July 2015 – CANTO Annual Conference and Trade Exhibition, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Miami;
- 30 – 31 July 2015 – CANTO's 9th HR Forum, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Miami.
- 30 – 31 July 2015 – CANTO's 2nd Marketing Forum, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Miami
- 25th April - CWIC Competition,, Regional
- 17th May -WTISD Video Competition , Regional

- 30st June – I-create E-content Competition, Regional