

Why a National ICT Strategic Plan?

In terms of traditional forms of development and economic growth, Barbados has come a long way in a relatively short time. Education, health care and other social services are second to few countries in the world. Institutions are relatively stable, human rights are respected. Agriculture has given way to services as a major foreign exchange earner. Compared to many less advanced economies, Barbados is doing well.

However, evidence is showing that for countries to compete in the new global economy they have to nurture and effectively use new telecommunications infrastructures and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to enhance education and health care, improve service delivery, refine policy formulation and implementation, empower citizens, and increase business opportunities for the private sector.

Indeed, new digital ICT frameworks like the Internet facilitate greater access to information and more effective communication. They might be thought of as the value-added in economies, connecting the dots between people, companies, and economic / social sectors. They enable on-demand availability of services, greater personalisation of products, and pave the way for effective implementation based on transparency and openness.

Yet, past studies have shown that in Barbados the private sector is not innovating or producing in ways that support the country's development going forward. In addition, policymaking and implementation are fragmented at all levels. There also is a weak culture of research and development that hurts the ability of Government and the private sector to carry out their normal functions effectively. Perhaps most importantly, Barbados is failing in its efforts to unleash the creative potential of its people in areas outside of the cultural industries and fine arts.

The world is in the midst of a revolution in which new and evolving digital ICTs are extending the horizon of what countries, companies, institutions and individuals might achieve if they work together to create rich collaborative networks from which new knowledge, ideas and innovations spring. Indeed, the CSME creates new opportunities for Barbados and other Caricom states to develop a stronger cooperative network that spans the region and that is enabled by the power of the new technologies and frameworks.

The National ICT Strategic Plan is designed to move Barbados into the realm of networked societies. It is certainly possible that within the next ten years, as Barbados' new ICT mission statement says, *Barbados can secure its regional and international standing by becoming a major information, communications and services' hub where innovation fuels efficiency, drives competitiveness, strengthens export capacity, stimulates local knowledge creation, empowers citizens, preserves security and sustains equitable growth.*

Barbados is at a crossroads. It has a unique opportunity to take its development to the next level, guaranteeing for its people a more secure future. If people lie at the heart of development and if knowledge releases the hidden potential in a people, then the



new digital ICTs and frameworks can unlock the promise of the Barbadian people, empowering them to create a genuine Caribbean civilisation through which innovation and creativity continuously flow.

