Celebrating Girls in ICT

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OVERVIEW

OF THE

CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

GIRLS IN ICT PARTNERSHIP

CARICOM Girls in ICT partnership

Background

Women and girls participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, commonly known as STEM, is one of the areas which is seemingly experiencing some lag. Although just as many girls as boys are completing high-school level education, and more women graduate from university worldwide than men, women remain a minority in the STEM fields.

The reasons for this systematic underrepresentation are multiple and complex, but three things seem to matter most: 1) Aspirations that are molded by social norms and parental expectations; 2) information failures that affect the decision to enter and stay in a STEM field; and 3) institutional factors that constrain women's ability to enter a STEM job.

Evidence shows that an early exposure to STEM (which includes ICT) has a positive impact on students' perceptions towards those subjects and can ensure that students are digitally competent when they leave school.

Children are growing up in a world where social media, mobile technology and online communities are fundamental to the way that they communicate, learn and develop.

"Knowledge related to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) is crucial in responding to the challenges we are facing as a society..." Tibor Navracsics European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport[1].

Tested interventions in developed countries that have made role models available to girls, introduced inclusive language in the classroom, brought in non-stereotypical role models, and given information about STEM workplaces show a lot of promise.

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimates that within the next 10 years, there will be more than two million technology jobs that cannot be filled because of a lack of digital specialists.

Girls and young women who learn coding, app development and computer science will not only be well-placed for a successful career in the ICT sector; but advanced digital skills are rapidly becoming a strong advantage for students in almost any other field they might choose to pursue.

One of the global responses to deal with the afore-mentioned challenges is the Girls in ICT Day observance. This is the annual observance spear-headed by the ITU to raise awareness of the opportunities and needs for women to join the workforce in STEM and ICT careers. The observance is celebrated on the 4th Thursday of April every year.

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[1] Breaking the STEM ceiling for girls, Ana Maria Munoz-Boudet's

Regional Response to Girls in ICT/STEM

The Region's policy framework for addressing issues related to girls, boys and youth and digital/future activities include:

- **CARICOM Youth Report: Eye on the Future**
- **CARICOM Single ICT Space Roadmap and Integrated Work Plan**
- **CARICOM Human Resource Development Strategy 2030**
- **Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics**
- **CARICOM Strategic Plan 2015-2019**

In an effort to respond to the need for raising awareness about the ICT/STEM/STEAM opportunities and challenges - the CARICOM Secretariat has established an internal Girls in ICT Team comprised of technical staff members from Human Resource Development, Education, Youth, Gender, Culture, ICT4D, Communications and the Documentation Centre.

Through the work of that team, the Secretariat has hosted Girls in ICT Day Workshops for the past five years. The project aimed at primarily educating girl students, ages 13-17, from various schools and communities close to the CARICOM Headquarters in Turkeyen, Greater Georgetown, Guyana. To date, some 1000 students have been exposed to these workshops.

In the course of delivering the afore-mentioned workshops, the CARICOM Secretariat has collaborated on this project with: Ministries of Education and Public Telecommunications; IT and other businesses in Georgetown, Guyana. The initiatives have been dedicated to fostering public awareness, engagement, and understanding of careers and opportunities in STEM.
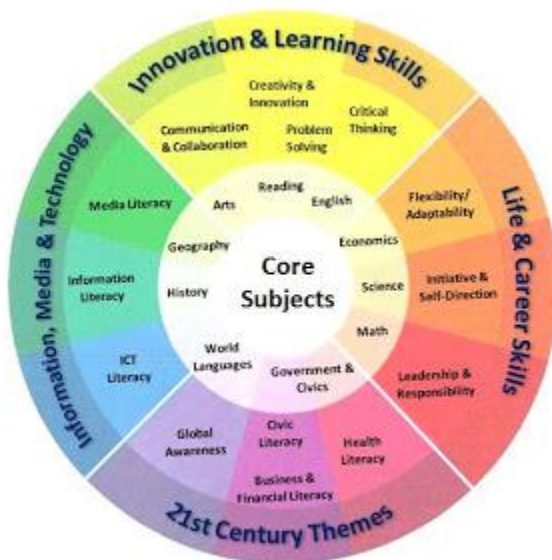
Noting the global developments related to focused programmes targeting girls and young women and the fact that several CARICOM Member States are actively involved in promoting STEM/STEAM activities - the formation of the Girls in ICT partnership, to co-ordinate and support the ongoing and planned efforts, was determined as one of the key activities on the approved (by CARICOM Member States) ICT4D Work programme 2019-2020.

To inform development of the 2019-2020 programme a short Questionnaire was developed and forwarded to Chief Education officers (CEO) in CARICOM Member States and Associate Members**.**   Responses were received from – Antigua and Barbuda,

Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, and the Cayman Islands.

In CARICOM like many other developing countries, there is the need to keep learning more, but it is clear that a large-scale intervention programme is needed which addresses:

1.   Quantifying the gender imbalance

2.   Raising awareness (opportunities, benefits, challenges)

3.   De-mystifying the perceptions of the Sector(s);

4.   Involving young people in development of policy which concerns them;

5.   Attracting girls (**and boys**) into Tech/STEM roles;

6.   Redefining the role of employers, private and public sector relative to the Future of Work

7.   Developing Policy to guide the sector(s):

a.   Determine What is developmentally appropriate (stages of education) when it comes to Technology?

b.   Future of work – technology component in many career paths

c.   Digital skills

1Picture: Educationninspiration.com

It is therefore vital to co-create with partners a regional vision for increasing STEM/STEAM /digital skills. That vision needs to be agreed, shared and owned by all partners with sufficient weight to influence others, particularly at the national level, and to take action.

Objectives of the CARICOM Partnership

The Partnership will respond to the issues outlined above in this paper and will support new challenges faced by CARICOM Governments of the 21st century, with an extremely dynamic environment, a rapidly changing labour market, and increasingly diverse societies – in essence, helping to "future proof" CARICOM development.

This regional partnership programme is envisaged to deal with four main target groups (beneficiaries and end-users) –

1.	Students (Girls **& Boys**)

2.	Employers/Private and public sector

3.	Teachers/Educators/Parents / Academia

4.	Policy Makers

The partnership will be based on the following:

- Belief - in the importance of digital skills for every one of every age
- Commitment - to take action to raise digital skills for CARICOM young people
- Passion - to sustain this action, passing on the learning and experiences to others and to inspire further/future activity.

At the global level, provide practical and policy input towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5, 9 and 17.

In supporting the SDG and related Regional goals, the Partnership will:

- Form part of a regional/ global ECOSYSTEM to create sustainable enabling environments for STEM development, ICT innovation and economic development;
- Provide avenues for empowerment for boys and girls in the areas of STEM / STEAM / TVET;
- Provide support to Governments to design national strategies to develop young people's digital skills and build an enabling environment for innovation, entrepreneurship and job creation in the digital economy;
- Help to bridge the gender digital divide and support the digital skills initiative in CARICOM;
- Facilitate the link between policy and practice (concurrent):
    - raise awareness of the policy implications for a future qualified workforce
    - skilling girls for better life outcomes through STEM/STEAM

- - - gender-transformative TVET to increase girls and women's workforce participation
    - provide input for curriculum reform in CARICOM Member States
  - Provide a platform for sharing lessons learnt and speak on the challenges that women and young girls face globally and in CARICOM, in STEM fields and for Mentoring;
  - Deliver Career expositions with regional and international companies that showcase career directions after STEM-field education;
  - Exploit opportunities to introduce youth to internship/apprenticeship and job prospects in CARICOM and other regions;
  - Provide visibility of ICT / STEM products and services designed or created by women;
  - Engender Digital skills for CARICOM Digital economy:
    - Commission and support studies of the impact on the different genders of how digital technology is perceived, and how young people's choices are impacted by the way in which it is presented, including in the curricula of ICT-related studies;
    - Engendering and supporting research (e.g. repeated observations of the same subjects (a cohort of students) over a period, allowing researchers to analyse changes at the individual level depending on multiple factors, including the effect of public policies enacted;
    - Support initiatives to monitor and evaluate the programme
  - Attract more resources (human, technical) to the CARICOM Region, and
  - Provide the regional link to existing global and international partnerships related to developing digital skills

How the Partnership will work

The CARICOM Girls in ICT Partnership will work as a network of networks (i.e. building and collaborating with the networks available to or associated with the identified partners in the CARICOM Partnership), creating synergies among current initiatives; provide input to future actions; exchange information and good practices, including funding possibilities.

The partnership will also make use of existing bodies (e.g. Technical Working Groups, Chief Education Officers, Senior Officials groups of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), and Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE), and organisations to ensure that the activities are delivered in every CARICOM Member State and Associate Member. The ICT lead Agencies (COTED ICT) (*Appendix 1*) will be utilized to support the 'roll-out' at the regional level and to provide the international perspectives, as far as possible.

Reports of the work of the partnership will be tabled at the Meetings of the COTED, COHSOD and CONSLE as well as other related/relevant regional Meetings.

As much as possible, the partnership will utilise electronic means for Meetings. However, it is hoped that partners will budget for at least two (2) in-persons meetings per year.

Governance

1. A top-level Board or Steering Group comprising members of the CARICOM Secretariat, and other relevant regional institutions will be established;
2. There will also be a consortium of partners which will work with the Steering group around delivering one or more specific aims of the Partnership and which will be outlined in the Work programme and Action Plan.

Partners identified by the CARICOM Secretariat

Ultimately, the Partnership is about changing the lives of CARICOM young people: enabling them to safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world; and to thrive with digital technology, whether in their personal lives or at work. Consequently, partners must be priority stakeholders for change.
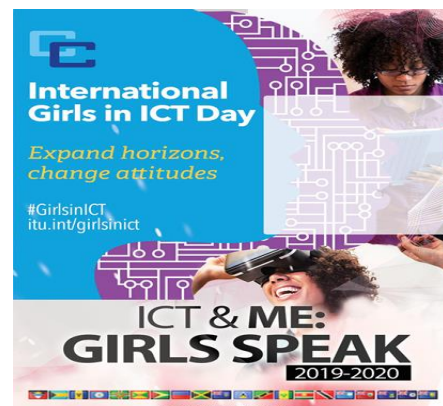
Given the ongoing symbiotic and reporting relationship with the CARICOM Secretariat, the main partners will be Ministries with responsibility for Education, Youth, ICT in the first instance, strongly supported by Culture, Gender, Labour.

Other partners for the Steering group already identified include the OECS Commission, CXC, CANTA, CANTO, CYAP, UNICEF, ITU, UNESCO.

For the consortium, partners will be identified from groups and bodies with regional remit for areas identified for the partnership (as far as possible) and will include regional and international firms, national organizations and other bodies operating in the Region.

Launch of Partnership

In observance of Girls in ICT Day 2019, there was a 'soft' Launch of the partnership using primarily social media. The theme chosen for the partnership in 2019-2020 was "ICT & Me: Girls speak".

APPENDIX 1 – ICT LEAD AGENCIES (COTED ICT)

	ICT LEAD AGENCY
1.	Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU)
2.	CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS)
3.	Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU)
4.	Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD)
5.	Caribbean Association of National Telecommunication Organisations (CANTO)
6.	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)
7.	Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)
8.	University of the West Indies (UWI)
9.	University of Guyana (UG)
10.	International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
11.	Caribbean Examination Council (CXC)
12.	Caribbean Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ)
13.	CARICOM Youth Ambassadors (CYA)
14.	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
15.	International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)
16.	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)