

CANTO 2014
CARIBBEAN WOMEN IN
ICT FORUM
(CWIC)

THE CWIC REPORT

September 1, 2014

INTRODUCTION

One of the signature events of CANTO 2014 was the launch of the Caribbean Women in ICT Forum at a breakfast session on **Tuesday August 12 at CANTO 2014** in the Bahamas.

The brain child of Regenie Fraser, Secretary General of CANTO and Jennifer Britton, Head of ICT at the CARICOM Secretariat, the session consisted of a panel of female executives in ICT who addressed women in the industry on a variety of topics including:

- 1) Challenges and benefits for women entering the ICT profession
- 2) How to encourage more women and girls to enter the sector
- 3) Recognition and retention of women in ICT
- 4) The role of CWIC in the CARICOM Single ICT Space
- 5) Ideas for collaboration on a “joint project” for girls in ICT Day in April 2015

While the session targeted women in ICT, male supporters of women in ICT were also in attendance. One of those high profile supporter/attendees was the Secretary General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Dr. Hamadoun Toure

THE PANEL

The proceedings were coordinated by Maxine Barnett, Consultant and Liaison to the Secretary General to CANTO who also served as Chair of this inaugural CWIC Forum. The speakers /panelists came from both the public and private sectors as follows:

Maxine Barnett, Chair- Consultant, Maxine Barnett Consulting

Regenie Fraser-Secretary General of CANTO

Rhea Yaw Ching- Corporate VP sales /Marketing, Columbus Communications

Lisa Lewis-Group Projects Director, Digicel

Patricia Walters-VP Customer Services, Bahamas Telecommunications Company

Ingrid Serratan- PS, Ministry Science & Technology, T&T

Jennifer Britton-Deputy Programme Manager ICT4D, CARICOM Secretariat

Mitzi Miller, Feature Speaker: Editor –in- Chief, Ebony Magazine

SPONSORS

The event was sponsored by both Columbus Communications and Alcatel –Lucent.

Their representatives were as follows:

- i) Wendy McDonald, Director, Corporate & Government Affairs, Columbus Communications
- ii) Hector Nava, MD, Caribbean & Central America.

They both brought greetings on behalf of their organization and expressed their organisation's excitement about being associated with this initiative.

ATTENDEES

Approximately 100 persons registered their attendance at the breakfast meeting. A list of the attendees with their contact information is being prepared.

The panelists addressed the attendees on a variety of topics listed above. Some speakers also included their own personal career story, their journey up the corporate ladder, and even their company's current initiatives for girls and women in ICT. The common thread among the speakers was that women in ICT have made some strides but still have a long way to go. They stated that women are represented but there are not enough women at the managerial levels. The panelists then responded to questions and comments from the floor, facilitated by the Chair.

In order to ensure that this event would not end up as a 'talk shop', the Chair sought to involve the attendees at the end of the presentations.

Each participant received an index card on which she/he was asked to place a suggested project or initiative which CWIC should undertake. The women were so motivated that some identified more than one project.

These cards were collected and three (3) were pulled. The persons whose cards were pulled are:

- i) Cleveland Thomas
- ii) Nekisha Simms
- iii) Annesa Ali Bocas

These winners received gift bags and their suggestions will be among the early projects to be pursued by CWIC. All other suggestions will be collected and grouped under.....short term, medium term and long term for consideration. and possible. Some attendees committed to actively assist with implementation. (The attachment shows the list of the suggested projects).

Most of the attendees expressed the view that the allocated time for the session was too short and that at least an entire morning should be allocated at CANTO 2015. This will allow for more dialogue and involvement of the women.

THE CHAIR'S RECOMMENDATIONS..... for the near future

In order to maintain the interests of the women who attended, there must be action on the heels of the launch that is interesting and exciting. The following identifies some actions which can be done immediately and serve as a means to connect with the attendees and a catalyst to get them involved:

- 1) Chair to meet with the Founders : Ms Fraser and Ms Britton to discuss way forward
- 2) Send thank you emails to the CWIC Panelists
- 3) Establish a CWIC Steering /Working Committee....involve panelists and other women who are willing and committed. The CANTO Secretariat will serve as the base of the Steering Committee

- 4) Identify a point person to lead the charge in each territory, beginning in the first instance with the ones where Board meetings, AGMs etc will be held over the next year
- 5) Prepare guidelines for formation of CWIC in various territories
- 6) Review all suggestions which were submitted by the attendees, first consideration to be given to the 3 “winners” and identify the “low- hanging fruit” for implementation
- 7) Begin immediate planning of the “Girls in ICT day” on April 25, 2015.....create buzz and excitement by making it competitive
- 8) Effect immediately the suggested project of the Winner #1 : Cleveland Thomas .i.e. a Caribbean Women Portal on the CANTO website so that the women in ICT can connect with CWIC.
- 9) Select a team to draft a CWIC policy

CONCLUSION

Once the recommendations above are effected and committed women get involved, the CWIC forum will begin to grow. Like all start-ups, the ‘low-hanging fruit’ must be accessible and information must be shared to maintain interest and commitment.

A bright future lies ahead for CWIC.

M.Barnett

Chair, CWIC Forum & Liaison to Secretary General, CANTO 2014