



Address by Mr. Reginald Budhan, Senior Director of Policy, Planning &
Research, on behalf of the Hon. Minister Phillip Paulwell
at JADOL Seminar, Terra Nova,
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Mr. Chairman, Dr. Irvine, Ms. Christine Marrett, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, a very pleasant good morning to you all. Firstly, I would like to tender apology for the Hon. Minister Phillip Paulwell who should have addressed you this morning. He was unable to do so due to foreign travel obligations. In his absence, he has asked me to come and share a few thoughts with you and to indicate that he will try to make up at a future date. So I am just here to pass the time away in the absence of the real macoy!

You know, let me share a little secret. My first job was teaching. I taught grades 7–9 for two years and those were two of the most rewarding years in my work life. They say that your first love is lasting. I have a deep love for teaching and so Ladies and gentlemen, let me say how pleased I am to be here in such distinguished company today. I would like to start off by taking the opportunity to pay tribute to your outgoing (president?), Mr. Wesley Barrett, for his outstanding contribution to the Jamaican Association for Distance Learning, in nation building, and in helping to equip our country for the information age. Mr. Barrett, we know that you have done a great job and would like to congratulate you. We also know that you did a marvelous job at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture. I would also like to congratulate the new president Miss Vilma McClenan. I

know that Miss McClenan is a pioneer in distance education in Jamaica and the Caribbean at large.

Long ago survival of the Homo sapiens relied on the development of the muscles. Those with plenty of strong muscles survived. Those who didn't became extinct. Today there is a shift in that paradigm. Survival among the Homo sapiens is no longer dependent on muscle development but rather on brain development. Through brain development we are able to harness science and technology to master the environment to improve our quality of life. However, brain development requires thousands of hours of initial training. While we may all have the same amount of brain cells with the same amount of potential, without training we cannot benefit properly from that potential. So children have to go to school for many years to develop their brain. Now the need for brain development, which I will equate with education, is even greater than before. This is why education is a big business and will continue to gain importance.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jamaica's most challenging problem today is its limited social capital. In other words, we have too many uneducated people compared to our key trading partners such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Trinidad and Tobago, Japan, China and so on. Competitive advantage is no longer based on natural resources, even though that is a great advantage. Instead, the most important factor is social capital. If we lack the required level of social capital we will not be able to produce goods and services to trade with these countries. If we have nothing to sell, we will not be able to have the foreign exchange to buy goods and services we cannot produce competitively. In fact, with the

coming of the Caricom Single Market and Economy and the FTAA, we could be seriously marginalized and our economy devastated if we are unable to compete on international footing.

In light of our relatively low level of education and social capital compared to our trading partners, Jamaica has to accelerate the development of an educated society. This is critical if our standard of living is to improve or not to decline. This is where online teaching and learning comes in. It has enormous potential to assist us in accelerating the development of an educated society. This workshop on e-learning is therefore both timely and appropriate.

Our research shows that the training industry is estimated to hit \$60 billion worldwide this year (2004), with \$6.6 billion coming from e-learning – approximately 10%. The training industry is therefore a big business. The e-learning market is expected to reach \$23.7 billion by 2006. In that same year, it is estimated that 80% percent of the top 2000 businesses worldwide will deploy video-on-demand (VOD) to employees' desktops.

Recent developments in information and communications technology will have profound impact on education worldwide. On-line/electronic learning is going to revolutionize the classroom. Today online/electronic learning through the Internet can put anyone into a university. Now any one, anywhere at any time can pursue a certificate, a diploma, a bachelors degree, a masters degree and doctorate degree through online learning. This flexibility is just awesome! Some of us who studied through the traditional classroom

mode will no doubt have difficulty grappling with this reality. But it is true. It is real and it is here.

One of my staff members just completed a Masters Degree in Development Finance from his office in what appeared to be a relatively seamless mode. He didn't have to hustle and hustle in traffic to get to classes, reaching late sometimes, can't find a proper seat and can hardly hear what the lecturer is saying, or follow what he is scribbling on the white board. From the comfort of his office he could get that one way transmission of information that you get in a lecture theatre with 150 students. Through ICT he also gets the one-to-one interface with his lecturer/tutor to clarify issues. Learning is self-directed.

Hence, through online learning, students no longer have to physically go to a building. The training institution comes to the student through the Internet. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a revolution. The university is no longer a building located at Mona.

This is also a major challenge for the university which will have to adjust to meet this shift in paradigm. The university can no longer be the ivory tower it once was. Online teaching and learning comprise serious competition for traditional modes of study. Universities therefore have to innervate to cope with the new environment.

The evolution of online/electronic learning with its low cost and extreme flexibility is a great development for developing countries like ours. Through e-learning we can leapfrog and narrow the gap between us and the developed countries in a relatively short time if

we take advantage of the technology. We can use this system and technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning for those in schools. We can use it to provide tertiary education to those who cannot afford to study fulltime in a university. But most of all, I see it as having the potential to salvage the tens of thousands of youth who did not go to high school or who went and did not achieve any worthwhile high school certification.

I can sit in my living room and see a doctor performing an operation live on cable as if I am in the operating theatre. I can watch the Discovery Channel and learn so much about the natural world or the History Channel and learn about a particular war. I can watch on cable same lecture that is delivered in a top US university and learn nearly as good as if I were there. In fact, I suppose you will agree with me that you could watch a lecture on cable delivered by a centre of excellence lecturer and learn more than if you were in a classroom with a poor lecturer or teacher sometimes with an accent that you have difficulty understanding. I remember being in class where I had difficulty understanding what the lecturer was saying because of the foreign accent. I am sure that I would be better off if you give me the lecture notes properly prepared and I listen to a centre of excellence lecturer on cable who says the same thing as if I were sitting in front of him with a piece of paper writing down what he is saying.

Two weeks ago I was in the country casually talking to a group of youngsters. They wanted to know what opportunity exists for them to get low skilled construction jobs. I explained how competitive it is to get those jobs. I tried to emphasize the importance of them developing their educational level. They of course cannot afford to go back to

school. There is no reason why these youngsters should not have the opportunity to get their education online via the Internet and supported by cable.

The Hon. Minister Paulwell is pre-occupied with how we can use the development in information and communications technology to enhance education. His view is that we have now achieved universal access to voice telephony. Between land line and cellular service, we have in excess of 2,000,000 lines out of a population of 2.6M. The Minister has indicated that he is now turning his attention to universal access to data. He wants to focus on improving and expanding broadband to facilitate improved data transmission. Hence we are now looking at upgrading our undersea cable. The objective is to make access to the Internet less expensive.

Jamaicans love to talk. With the achievement in universal access with voice, the goal of the Minister is to encourage people to talk more and use some of that revenue earned by the telecommunications companies to subsidise education. This is in light of prevailing budgetary constraints. Hence, the Ministry is now developing an Electronic Learning Project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture. It is envisaged that the project will be funded by contributions from the telecommunications companies. This is seen as a win-win situation. By encouraging persons to use their telephone more, the companies will earn more revenue. By earning more revenue, they will be inclined to invest in the e-Learning Project and contribute directly to the development of an educated society. The enlightened telecommunications companies who expect to be around for a long time realise that if we cannot create an educated

society, the economy will decline as our international competitiveness falls and social instability

A draft feasibility study has been done for the e-Learning Project. The Minister of Education has directed that this project should focus on the approximately 150 high schools island-wide since other interventions are addressing the needs of other segments of the educational system. The Minister's policy position is that she has made good strides in widening the access to high school education through the upgraded high schools. Her objective now is to improve the quality of education in the high schools. The focus of the e-Learning Project will therefore be on improving quality of education and so will seek to improve passes in the regional CXC/CSEC Examination.

While the project will have an ICT orientation, it is recognised that for it to be successful, other important issues will have to be addressed. The project therefore has several components, which are engineered around ICT. I would like to share with you the main components of the project as conceptualised so far.

(a) The primary focus will be on teachers – The project will develop a comprehensive and detailed set of teachers' notes with suggested international best practice in teaching methodologies. These will be provided in traditional paper-based formats and various electronic forms. Teachers will be able to take these and adapt them to meet their personal tastes and preferences. The materials will be supported by PowerPoint and various interactive formats. Some of these interactive formats will be sourced

competitively from off the shelf while others will be developed where it is inexpensive to do so. The teachers will be oriented in the use of the new materials.

(b) Focus on Students – A corresponding set of core instructional materials will be developed for students. These materials will be perfectly aligned to, and in synchrony with the teachers' notes. These materials will be provided in traditional paper-based formats and in various electronic forms such as web based, placed on CDs, DVDs and so on.

(c) Technology Support – Schools will be supported in establishing technology learning centres, that is computer labs which will be dedicated to the teaching of not only computer science but all ten subjects. Schools will be supported with multimedia machines to enhance teaching and learning.

(d) Lecture Series – A comprehensive set of lecture series will be developed for each ten (10) subject covering grades 7–11 in the high schools. These lecture series will be developed using the best master teachers available. These lecture series will be provided to schools to buttress their teaching as needed. Students will also be able to acquire these lecture series to view at home.

(e) EDUTV – Support will be provided to the Ministry of Education in enhancing its programming on its EDUTV channel. EDUTV is expected to do some interactive programming.

(f) In addition there will be dedicated Subject Channels – The plan is to have ten (10) dedicated subject channels on cable. One channel will be dedicated to each subject. So you will have a channel that deals with only English Language. The lecture series developed by master teachers will be transmitted on each channel 24 hours per day and seven days per week. A particular lecture will be repeated several times over a period of weeks. Subject experts would appear at times to give insights on each subject. Companies will be invited to bid competitively to sponsor the operating cost for a channel. So you might have Microsoft Corporation sponsoring for example the English Channel. Cable and Wireless may sponsor the Math channel. Some cable operators are very upbeat about the model.

The existence of dedicated cable channels will mean that a youngster who did not go to high school could get the student instructional materials and follow the lectures on cable and prepare for CXC. If a youngster takes say a year to prepare for one subject going through materials from say Grade 7–11, in five years that youngster could have five (5) CXC subjects or equivalent.

(g) Remedial Programme

The project also has a remedial programme, which will be based on voluntarism. It will require bright students who get over a certain percentage to provide say 2 hours per week community outreach service by assisting other weaker students. Retired teachers,

qualified retired civil servants and other persons will be asked to become a part of an extensive national volunteer corp. The focus will be on the newly upgraded high schools.

(h) Continuous Assessment –A comprehensive set of examination questions and answers will be developed and made available to schools. It will also be placed on line so that a teacher can simply download a random set of questions on a topic along with the answers and administer a test easily. Students will also be able to do a self-test and get the results following the completion of a topic in class. This will make it easy for teachers to administer continuous assessment throughout the school year. At the end of the school year, a standard examination will be sit by all schools. These are referred to as Pre-CXC Exams. So students will do these in Pre-CXC Exams in Grades 7–10. At Grade 10, they will sit the CXC/CSEC. CXC will provide technical assistance to the schools in setting the questions and marking the papers. It is envisaged that exams will be at two levels for a particular subject at a particular grade. A school will decide which level it wants its students to sit. So for example, the traditional high schools may want to do the higher level exam while the newly upgraded high schools would do a lower level. Flexibility is the name of the game. Over time it is envisaged that all schools will just do the same pre-CXC exams since all their students will have to do the same regional CXC exam in Grade 11.

This continuous assessment system will be used as a common yard stick to monitor the performance of the project over time.

The foregoing represent the conceptual framework of the project. Our major challenge will be funding. We expect the telecommunications companies to assist in the funding. The project is also scaleable, so that if there is a resource constraint, the a part of the project can be implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen in closing, on behalf of the Hon. Minister, I would like to wish you well with your seminar. We believe that online teaching and learning offers great opportunity for our country.

Thank you.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY – VILMA GREGORY

Vilma Gregory describes herself as a Computer and Foreign Language Consultant specializing in Multimedia and e-Learning applications. Since 1987, she has been Executive Chair/Founder of a communications firm, VILCOMM Services Int’L Ltd

which initiated a collaborative partnership with the UTech Multimedia Centre in 1998 at the University of Technology, Jamaica. Miss Gregory has been Head of the centre since its inception and along with her team, she has trained over 250 staff members in e-Learning techniques, developed several online courses, designed and managed the University's Intranet, web site, digital radio, a student kiosk information system and several web applications such as an online elective and help desk systems.

Ms. Gregory recently completed a five year stint, from 2000 to 2004, as Project Leader for the UWI Infocom project which she also initiated at the University of the West Indies, Mona, introducing over 500 university lecturers to computermediated methods for learning. From 1987 to 1992, she introduced over 5,000 Jamaican teachers to computer concepts for the classrooms by hosting workshops in all fourteen parishes using a mobile unit which took computers to the schools all around Jamaica. Over the last fifteen years, she has been designing and delivering summer courses in game development, web design, multimedia, e-commerce and computer applications to over 3,000 Jamaican students. Her firm VILCOMM now boasts an enviable record of having trained over 20,000 Jamaicans – corporate Jamaica included – in computer applications.

She is also the Project Consultant for the UNESCO Office of the Caribbean project called “Multimedia for Caribbean Communities” which involves capacity building for marginalized communities in Cuba, Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Dominica and Suriname. Her community outreach extends to the Marcus Garvey Liberty Hall project where she designed a Community Multimedia Centre and along with her

team, she has been teaching over 100 “downtown Kinston” adults and children her “Techno-Garvey” concept which encourages self-esteem through mastery of computer technologies.

As a Canadian commonwealth scholar, Ms Gregory completed graduate studies in Communications at the University of Quebec in Montreal. As a commonwealth fellow, she completed professional post graduate studies in Information Technology at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India. As a French government scholar, she pursued studies in foreign language pedagogy while teaching English in Bordeaux, France. Her first degree is in foreign languages and literatures (English, French, Spanish, German) from the University of the West Indies, Mona. She also has working knowledge of Japanese, Italian and Kiswahil and has taught five of these languages to several hotels and international businesses in Jamaica and Barbados. As a former sportswoman, her current research interest is in “Sports and Technology applications for global and community development”, using Jamaica and the Caribbean region as a potential sports tourism mecca.