



FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MAXIE CUFFIE, MP

**MINISTER OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**NORTH EASTERN SECONDARY SCHOOLS ICT EXPO
“*DEMONSTRATING ICT’S AS A VIABLE CAREER CHOICE*”**

University of Trinidad & Tobago, O’Meara Campus

WEDNESDAY MAY 31st, 2017

Salutations:

- Teresa Wankin, Secretary General, CANTO
- Petriann Trancaso, Guest Speaker
- Dr. Joseph Jacob, Manager Student Recruitment, UTT
- Elizabeth Ammon, Vice President (ag.) Cable & Wireless Business
- Camille Campbell, Vice President Marketing, TSTT
- Teachers
- Students
- Other specially invited guests
- Members of the media
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

It is a distinct pleasure for me to be able to spend this time here with you today, as we explore the viability of ICT's as a career choice for the young students of the north-eastern portion of Trinidad and Tobago.

The pleasure is doubled as I stand here not only as the Minister entrusted with the responsibility for the development of the ICT sector, but also as the Member of Parliament for the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, in which a significant amount of the Government's resources have been allocated for such development. Additionally, the planned expansion of the road network through Valencia and Manzanilla all the way to Toco, will impact tremendously on the level of development that would now be possible, opening up vistas of opportunity for you that were never possible in the lifetime of your parents and grandparents.

Allow me though to backtrack a bit, and crave your indulgence just briefly. Can I see by a show of hands, how many third and fourth form students we have in the audience? And for those who raised their hands, let me ask three quick questions: how many of you use the laptops you received in Form One for actual school work, one hundred percent of the time? Secondly, how many of you use it to help your parents with any kind of work? And finally, how many of you use it actively during school time?

The laptop project was an attempt to get you and friends more familiar with an ICT tool that is important to your future well being. Your grandparents were told by the Father of the Nation, Dr Eric Williams that their future was in their school bags. Today, your future in is your laptop.

Today, you will be exposed to the many careers that are available in the ICT sector in the hope that you will find something that attracts you to the

computer beyond Facebook, YouTube and Netflix. But there is a whole lot more to today's event. Today's event is one of the many equalizing factors to which the students of the north-east must be exposed, if you are to compete on a level playing field with your counterparts from other areas of Trinidad and Tobago.

For developing countries like Trinidad and Tobago, ICTs have the potential for increasing access to and improving the relevance and quality of education. It thus represents a potentially equalizing strategy not only for developing countries, but for even specific communities within the developing countries. One of the greatest hardships endured by the poor, and by many others who live in the poorest communities, is their sense of isolation. The new communications technologies promise to reduce that sense of isolation, and to open access to knowledge in ways unimaginable not long ago.

It is for this very reason ladies and gentlemen, that the Government took two very important decisions, both aimed at bringing a level of equality to the education playing field. These two decisions were firstly, the removal of the unnecessarily onerous Continuous Assessment Component from the Secondary Entrance Examination, and secondly, the placement of computers in the schools rather than for individual students.

The Continuous Assessment Component severely disadvantaged students from regions such as this who, because of their own economic circumstances, were unable to successfully compete with their counterparts in other, more developed areas. Moreover, by placing the computers in the school laboratories, the Government has now made it possible for every student to be exposed to the same level of access and instruction that others would have.

One of the most commonly cited reasons for using ICTs in the classroom has been to better prepare the current generation of students for a workplace where ICTs, particularly computers, the Internet and related technologies, are becoming more and more ubiquitous. Technological literacy, or the ability to use ICTs effectively and efficiently, is thus seen as representing a competitive edge in an increasingly globalizing job market.

Technological literacy, however, is not the only skill that well-paying jobs in the new global economy will require. EnGauge of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (U.S.) has identified what it calls “21st Century Skills,” which includes digital age literacy (consisting of functional literacy, visual literacy, scientific literacy, technological literacy, information literacy, cultural literacy, and global awareness), inventive thinking, higher-order thinking and sound reasoning, effective communication, and high productivity. Today’s event, my dear students, is about exposing you to the endless possibilities of careers in the 21st century, made possible through technological literacy.

I want to give you the assurance as well that this exposure is not being done in a vacuum. Located just a few minutes away from this UTT Campus is the Tamana InTech Park, Trinidad and Tobago’s first green-field technology campus, our very own Silicon Valley where innovation and ingenuity can abound, where creativity and collaboration will collide to produce new, high-paying, sustainable careers.

Today event is to ensure that you are prepared for a career that is in your backyard.

Only recently I held a virtual meeting with iQoR, which is a Business Process Outsourcing operation attracted to Trinidad and Tobago by the Tamana Intech

Park. I am extremely delighted to say today, as I reported to the Parliament before, that iQoR has reached agreement with Amazon to provide BPO services to some of Amazons clients in the USA, using Trinidad as a base for their BPO operations. So far that policy will create just over 1,000 jobs in Trinidad and Tobago including the workers already serving the existing US clients Sprint and Metro from Tamana. These are all new jobs in the ICT sector, jobs which, in the not too distant future could be yours.

As the current stewards of this country's government and economy, we do not intend to stop until the Tamana Intech Park is fully subscribed and operational. In furtherance of this ideal, Cabinet has also inked an agreement with the Government of India to bring Indian ICT expertise to Trinidad and Tobago. The Centre for Excellence in Information Technology will also be opened in the Tamara Intech Park aimed at giving students like you.the best access to hardware and software tools to prepare for tomorrow's job market.

I am extremely happy to announce also that Cabinet has approved a Private/Public/Partnership for a data centre to be located at the Park, thereby opening up tremendous additional opportunities for gainful and sustainable employment. You will be hearing more about this shortly.

For persons resident in this north-eastern portion of the country, your very proximity to this InTech Park, and the opportunities for further education here at this UTT campus, places you in an almost enviable position.

This space has the potential to continue the transformation of every aspect of business, of government, of society, and our daily lives. What we need is the perseverance and the industry to make it happen. This technology park was never meant to be a facility in isolation. This facility, along with the

improvements to the road network and the resulting business activity will see the creation of a new town with new opportunities in areas that were predominantly rural. Just think of the possibilities too, not only for you who are resident here, but also for our brothers and sisters in Tobago, who will be able to access this Intech Park and UTT Campus via the port to be built in Toco. Ladies and gentlemen, the possibilities are endless.

With this massive infrastructure already in place, the Government remains committed to seeing this project through to the end. This is but one phase, but there are many other facets to this park that must still be built. I want to give the assurance today that this Government's commitment is not only to the completion of this project, but to the opening up as well of this entire north-eastern region of Trinidad and Tobago.

The plethora of opportunities being made available to you, could potentially come to nought though, if you do not first understand and appreciate the goldmine on which you sit. More than a decade ago, Clive Humby made headlines when he declared that "data is the new oil." It is a great metaphor – but just like oil, in its rawest form, data is almost useless. Only when it is refined it can be turned into something much more valuable.

With data being produced in mind-boggling quantities by ordinary people like you and me, combined with the amount that this Intech Park has the capacity to produce, we believe we are sitting on a huge reserve of untapped wealth. Indeed, I make bold to say that data will be our new currency.

Our ability to convert that data we produce into films and documentaries, into applications that enhance the quality of lives of our senior citizens, into

programmes that make boat-building and boat-engine repair cheaper and more manageable, into tools and equipment that convert the apparent drudgery of farming into something more appealing, that help us to produce seeds and plants that are stronger and more resilient to pests, that will make fantasy gaming even better than what it is currently, is what will ultimately make the difference in our society.

My dear students, the opportunities that are currently available to you are infinitely greater than what was previously available to your parents and grandparents. Indeed, the traditional jobs associated with this region, as well as those associated with your counterparts in south, central and west, all pale in comparison, to what is now before you. Current studies reveal that many of the jobs that now exist will no longer be necessary in another generation, and those that will be needed are not even yet named.

You stand therefore on the threshold of a new and exciting era, on the cusp of greatness for yourselves and your families. As you go through the many exhibits today, and listen to the different presenters, I urge you to think beyond today, to think beyond your present economic circumstances and family situations. I urge you to see yourself, standing in all your glory, many years from now, pursuing a career that you thoroughly enjoy.

In fact, so much should you enjoy a career in the ICT industry that you will never have to work a day in your life, as your job will become your hobby.

I know you will have a wonderful time today. I wish you all God's blessings and may God bless our nation.

