

CARIBBEAN INFORMATION ACTION GROUP
(Carinfo)

Report

Briefing/Dialogue Session

on the

World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS)

held at

United Nations House
Marine Gardens
Hastings, Christ Church
Barbados

June 21, 2002

Dated: July 12, 2002

A Brief Report by CARINFO

Background

The United Nations General Assembly on 21 December 2001, adopted a Resolution (A/RES/56/183) endorsing the organization of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be convened under the patronage of the United Nations Secretary-General. This Summit aims to 'develop a common vision and understanding of the information society...and to draw up a strategic plan of action for successfully adapting to the new society'. The Summit, which is two-phased, will be in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis in 2005. Proposed themes of the Summit include: building the infrastructure; universal and equitable access to the information society; services and applications; the needs of the user; developing a framework; information and communications technologies (ICTs) and human development (education). According to ITU, the anticipated outcome of the Summit is to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete action plan for achieving the goals of the information society, while fully reflecting all of the different interests at stake.

CARINFO was asked to convene a special briefing session by Ms. Gillian Marcelle, who is a member of the UN-ICT Task Force and as a result coordinated this activity with the Resident Co-ordinator of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean States, Ms. Rosina Wiltshire. Presentations were made by Mr. Phillip Cross, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Resident Representative; Mrs. Kathleen Gordon, Deputy-Director, Information and Technology Management Services Division, Caribbean Development Bank, and Ms. Gillian Marcelle, of the UN-ICT Task Force who gave a background to the WSIS. Ms. Wiltshire chaired the session.

Participants were drawn from representatives of government, civil society, the media, the education sector, the library and information sector and the private sector.

Objectives of the Briefing Session

The Dialogue briefed development partners on the WSIS in order to stimulate dialogue between development partners on what each respective agency has undertaken and what plans are in progress as regards ICTs for development.

The Dialogue was important as a step towards the preparatory process in the lead up to the WSIS where development partners can create a space to discuss, debate and vision strategic approaches for ICTs in the region.

Issues Raised

The presentations and discussions raised several issues, among them were:

- Lack of coordination between agencies on various ICT programmes and activities. Participants were of the view that it was necessary for development partners to create synergies among each other so that programmes and projects can perform efficiently and effectively and that activities are not duplicated. Participants viewed this as extremely critical for the success of a true Caribbean Information Society. This resulted in a lack of knowledge and awareness of ongoing ICT projects between possible partners.
- Absence of a define strategy for ICT development. The participants were of the view that it was necessary to establish a working group or forum for continuously developing ideas and exchanging knowledge that would ultimately lead to an ICT strategy.
- Information overload – result of impact of new ICTs and the need to effectively share information among all stakeholders. The Non-use of information in spite of its availability was recognized as a result of this overload. The meeting agreed that there was need for mechanisms to be put in place to ensure appropriate application and use of information
- Relative to ensuring a Caribbean Information Society, is the need to identify appropriate financing to implement project activities and programmes.

Recommendations of the Meeting

The half-day briefing/dialogue session arrived at the following conclusions:

- The need to establish a sub-regional Task Force for the Caribbean was recommend;
- It was suggested that the regional agencies engaged in ICT activities, CDB, ITU, UWI, CARICOM, CTO, UN/ECLAC, OECS, CARICAD, UNESCO, etc. collaborate in the work of the sub-regional Task Force;
- It was suggested that visionary leaders and champions from the Heads of Government and or CEOs of the private sector be sought to lead and direct the Task Force.
- It was suggested that the Task Force identify an issue of crucial importance for the Caribbean and develop proposals around that issue for presentation at the World Summit.

Based of the foregoing suggestions and issues raised, CARINFO should be an active participant in the Regional Task Force. It is therefore necessary that the Work Programme as set out by CARINFO and approved by the Secretariat, be seen as a start on following up on initiatives already in train.

July 2002.