The National IT Skill Development in Cayman Islands

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Specifics

The aim of this study is to develop and suggest a National IT Initiative leading to skill development in knowledge based society. The study also highlights some of the critical elements pointing to the crucial development of IT initiatives in the Cayman Islands.

A Matter of Concern

The study explores existing programs and initiatives for national IT development movement. One element of this work is to identify the elements affecting the progress of IT development in general and the future of Cayman Islands as a developed nation in particular. The core idea is to suggest measures that can reduce the current trend of heavy reliance on foreign workers and create a balanced with progressive IT skill development of Caymanians and ultimate induction in the work force of the future.

Outline

Part I - Understanding IT Literacy and its Elements

Introduction

Technology is of increasing importance in people's everyday lives and its presence will most certainly increase in the coming years. No longer relegated to specialized workplace settings, information and communication technologies have become increasingly common in community settings. Whether looking up a book on a computerized card catalogue at the public library, making a withdrawal from an automated teller machine, or accessing telephone messages, everyday activities have been transformed by IT.

The advent and rapid development of technology has fundamentally changed almost every aspect of life, learning, and work. It will continue to evolve, stimulating further changes that will continue to affect our lives in the future. Such evolution will occur along the entire technology spectrum, from the simplest life tasks to the most complex innovations. While industry leaders and policy makers have acknowledged this evolution of technology globally, the ability to adopt IT varies substantially across the countries and within communities. Because much of an individual's future success may rely on IT literacy, access to and opportunities to learn how to use IT must be made as equitable as possible. The absence of this equity is what has been referred to as the *digital divide*. There is growing emphasis to drive public and private investment and planning toward knowledge-based economies and information-age societies. New computer and communications technologies are penetrating the home, the workplace, the marketplace, government, and the community.

Requirements for the life skills of citizens, over the last ten years, have created a new political debate on digital divide issues - issues which challenge leaders, industry and educators to address a growing gap between individuals with access to technology and those people still isolated from technology and information. IT can be a powerful enabler of

development goals because its unique characteristics dramatically improve communication and the exchange of information to strengthen and create new economic and social networks.

Definition of IT Literacy

IT literacy cannot be defined primarily as the mastery of technical skills. The concept of IT literacy has to be broadened to include both critical cognitive skills as well as the application of technical skills and knowledge. These cognitive skills include general literacy, such as reading and numeric, as well as critical thinking and problem solving. Without such skills, true IT literacy cannot be defined. Just as we no longer think of general literacy in terms of absolute terms, IT literacy ranges from simple uses of technology in everyday life to uses in performing complex tasks.

Reflecting the growing importance and ubiquity of new technologies in work, education, and everyday life. IT literacy is using digital technology, communications tools, and networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society.

The Definition of IT Literacy and its various tiers can be reflected as follows:

Access - knowing about and knowing how to collect and/or retrieve information.
Manage - applying an existing organizational or classification model.
Integrate - interpreting and representing information. It involves collecting, collating and interpreting information.
Evaluate - making judgments about the quality, relevance, usefulness, or efficiency of information.
Create - generating information by adapting, applying, designing, inventing, or authoring information.

Digital Divide in the Society

The digital divide can be explained as the ability or disability of certain segments of the society to access information and knowledge, thus being deprived of the due share in the current IT driven world. The current public policy focus is on the adverse impact of limited access to hardware, software and networks such as the Internet. This characterization of the digital divide must be changed to include the impact of limited reading, numeric and problem-solving skills.

Measuring the Digital Divide

There are numerous ways to measure the digital divide, and some data may exist to define these measures. However, the data is invariably reported in one dimension: access, such as telephones and computers per household, Internet connections per household, or measures such as effect of telephone industry deregulation. In the education environment, statistics are also dominated by access measures such as computer or Internet connections per student or the existence of computer laboratories. These measures, while important, provide an insufficient view of this issue. Access and technology skills are only a part of the digital divide. What we need is data to help us understand the digital divide in terms of literacy and effective performance - that is, the extent to which our students and adults are able to use and successfully integrate technology into their lives and work thus creating equal opportunity in terms of employment against better qualified foreign work force. Developing data to understand this gap will be crucial to identifying and measuring the effectiveness of what we have done so far to lessen the digital divide and prepare Caymanian for successful lives in the 21st century.

Focus of Resource Allocation for IT Development

A continued focus on building infrastructure for IT Development has been the corner stone of IT Policies in National Strategic Plans. This historic focus on hardware and access is all the more alarming in case of limited resources. In most countries including Cayman Islands, communication deregulation and government spending on infrastructure, hardware, and software is consuming valuable resources under the premise that it will lead to economic prosperity and global competitiveness.

In comparison to access, fewer government resources are being devoted to creating new training and education

curricula and measuring and understanding their effectiveness. While installing hardware is a necessary step toward ensuring that all citizens benefit from the new learning opportunities of the information age, it is not sufficient to guarantee success in this endeavor. The need is to make concerted efforts to identify those without an ability to manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in a traditional sense and to provide them with the necessary tools to acquire these critical skills. Since policies to address the digital divide, like any social problem, require policy makers to make difficult decisions about the allocation of finite resources, "money spent on information technology without investments in organizational change and training is largely wasted" (UNDP Report on ITC 2001).

IT Skills Development

As technology approaches ubiquity, an increasing importance must be placed on educating and training citizens in the IT skills necessary to function effectively in a global economy increasingly dependent on IT. The cognitive skills have become increasingly critical because of major reliance on IT in all walks of life. Consider a student or employee who is asked to prepare an electronic presentation based on information from the World Wide Web. That person can access vast quantities of information without a lot of understanding. Search engines make accessing information almost trivial. But using the search engines requires an increased skill level. Evaluating and synthesizing information found in a variety of sources requires even more advanced skills, representing a literacy that is far beyond what is needed in a more constrained environment, such as with textbooks where all the information is contained within one source. In effect, because technology makes the simple tasks easier, it places a greater burden on higher-level skills to effectively use the technology.

IT Skills Assessment Measures

Specific assessment tools to measure IT proficiencies and skills of individuals are needed to establish quantifiable measure of various IT Skill levels vis-à-vis present and future market demands. Large-scale skill assessments help in the macro analysis of where we are and provide the basis for analyzing existing and new public policies. Instruments for measuring individuals' skills in particular contexts are valuable for microanalyses, by sector, by schools, and by industries. Teachers and industry use these measures to understand the IT literacy of their students or workers. Such tools provide data to understand the effectiveness of IT strategies and curricula. Without this data and analysis, we can have no understanding of what is working and not working in our environments.

IT assessment tools also help to balance the conflict between academic institutions' missions to offer broad skills development via educational programs and the specific requirement among employers for on-the-job training. Similarly, effective diagnostic tests for new and existing employees are an important asset as employers continue to make training investments and recruitment efforts more productive. A severe skills gap has been recognized in the information technology industry, as well as in other industry sectors and governments, dependent on skilled technology workers.

Meaningful data from broad assessments of existing skills, and using smaller diagnostic tests aims to inform governments, schools, and private sector organizations, is crucial in understanding the breadth and gaps in IT literacy. Such comparable information is not easily available today. The data is also important in analyzing the outcomes and effectiveness of current public policies, education strategies, private investments, and community initiatives.

Integrated Learning

Knowledge is both the engine and product of economic and social development. Knowledge is dynamic, rather than static, and the *production* of knowledge has more value than knowledge *acquisition* alone. Education is at the core of the knowledge economy and learning society. Correspondingly, the role of IT in schools is shifting dramatically. The traditional role of IT has been that of a minor curricular subject, sometimes called informatics, computer literacy, or keyboarding. Alternatively, it has been used as an instructional aid (i.e., computer-assisted instruction) to help students learn other subjects, such as math or science.

Too often, curricula emphasize and test the memorization of facts and procedures. This pushes IT to the periphery. The

IT education needs to be aligned with traditional curriculum and assessment reform that emphasize integrated teaching aimed at solving complex real-world problems, producing knowledge products, conducting investigations, and communicating and collaborating with others. IT needs to play a central role in this alignment and it needs to be integrated throughout the educational system.

IT Skills and Work Force

Historically, businesses could change technology; now technology advancements are driving businesses. Changes in technology, skill requirements, and in the structure of jobs have increased the demand for better-educated and more literate workers with stronger communication and critical thinking skills. The cumulative impacts of these changes in the job market have, on the one hand, increased the economic premiums associated with formal schooling, literacy proficiencies, and technical skills, and, on the other hand, increased the economic costs associated with a lack of these characteristics for less qualified local work force.

Furthermore, IT skills necessary for individuals to function in the new economy and in every day life in the 21st century are continuously changing and emerging. The Internet, e-commerce, and other new economy workforce needs will have a large impact on the nature of job skills and life skills. Workers will require new proficiencies, skill sets, and relationships. Employers, training institutions, and higher education are having difficulty keeping pace with the changing job and life skill requirements, and are not currently prepared to assess employees' required skills and knowledge.

Workers need to master many new skills to adapt to these changes. They need to develop the vocabulary and fluency required to understand technological concepts and they have to learn to use it. Correspondingly, Caymanians will have to adapt the way they work to exploit technology or else face bigger challenges in the future.

The Knowledge Work Force

A significant amount of money has to be spent by the industry to keep its work force trained and ready for the future challenges. Much of this investment is obviously crucial to industries where the majority of their revenue derives from new products and services. However, some private sector training is remedial and many recruitment efforts are thwarted by an inability to assess a worker's existing and potential proficiencies, particularly as they apply to IT skills. Thus many corporations are frustrated, believing that the traditional educational system is not working.

While learning technology skills can be the easy part, a lack of literacy, numeric, problem solving, and teamwork skills in new and existing workers reflects the gap between technology proficiency and IT literacy. It is not uncommon for companies to test over 100 candidates to find 2 to 5 potential employees who have the necessary cognitive skills to successfully absorb technical training delivered within a company.

Defining Literacy in realm of the modern society

What does it mean to be a literate member of society? The growing acceptance of lifelong learning has expanded the views and demands of literacy. Literacy is no longer seen as a condition that one either has or is lacking. Rather, it is seen as a continuum of knowledge, skills, and strategies that individuals acquire over the course of their lives in various contexts and through interactions with their peers and with the larger communities in which they participate.

As historians remind us, literacy in its earliest form consisted of little more than being able to sign one's name on a legal document. It was not until later that fluent oral reading became important and not until the 20th century that reading to gain information was given primary emphasis. As we move into the 21st century, our conception of literacy is evolving once again.

The true potential of IT is the ability to transform individuals and societies -not just from being wired together but also from having the knowledge and skills to use technology and to understand the roles it can play in our lives. As the president of George Brown College stated, "Merely having access to a box - an information box - does not necessarily

mean that you have improved, or that you're more literate, or that you're better able to solve problems in the community".

Understanding IT Literacy at National Level

The prevalence of technology in the everyday lives has grown at a rate that many would have found hard to imagine 25 or even 10 years ago. Policy makers, business leaders, and educators should expand their notion of a literate populace to include the skills and abilities that will enable the public to function in an increasingly technological world.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) represents the set of activities and technologies that fall into the union of IT and communication technologies. Global industry, international media, and academics increasingly now use ICT to describe this union. The real benefit of adding "communication" doesn't derive from including specific technologies, such as routers or servers, but from the dynamism implicit in interconnected social, economic, and information networks.

IT literacy is a continuum of skills and abilities. Just as we no longer think of general literacy as an either/or proposition in which an individual is either literate or not, IT literacy ranges from simple uses of technology in everyday life to uses in performing complex tasks.

As technology evolves, becoming simpler and more transparent, one might argue that the need to develop IT literacy would lessen. In fact, the opposite is true. Simpler interfaces may broaden access to technology, but they cannot make people IT literate. In order to take full advantage of the opportunities that technology presents, individuals still need critical cognitive and technical skills. This creates a difficult challenge for investing in training and education. While digital technology, with its immense capacity to present, access, and manage information, is seductive, there must be a balance between the need for cognitive skills, literacy, and knowledge and what the technology can achieve by itself. Further, these new education tools will be that much more difficult to use by those who possess low or mediocre literacy levels.

Single-focused strategy is insufficient and could, in fact, perpetuate a society of haves and have-nots, thus widening the digital divide, severely deteriorating the ability of employers to find skilled and capable workers from under developed areas, and limiting the benefits of technology applications and tools to help the local population meet fundamental needs, such as quality health care, public safety, and good jobs.

The Stakeholders in IT Vision

The major stakeholders who should be interested in the transformation framework and its resulting assessments should include government policy makers, corporate leaders, industry workers, workforce groups, educators and public interest groups. The mutual cooperation and support of these groups will be essential in the achievement of National IT Skill Development. IT has become a permanent part of everyday life. It fundamentally changes how we live, learn, and work. Since IT is considered an emerging and fundamental literacy skill, significant attention must be paid by all stakeholders to ensure that all citizens have access and opportunity to gain the needed skills to function effectively in a knowledge society.

Understanding National Skill Initiative and Knowledge Society

National Skill Initiative is envisioned as one of the key aspect of monitoring and evaluating the National Information Technology Initiative. National Skill Initiative is aimed at transforming society into an information or knowledge society within a prescribed time. Towards this end, it is recognized that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the key enablers of higher productivity, increased competitiveness and improved social cohesiveness. All these in turn are necessary conditions for improving the quality of life and building information and knowledge societies. This is possible because of the way ICT facilitates and enables the creation, distribution and utilization of data, information, knowledge and resources. However, this may not be the sufficient condition for building knowledge

based society, if individuals and communities are not willing and prepared to embrace the emerging IT opportunities in a proper manner.

The access to data and information is growing by leaps and bounds. Information is transported globally in various forms such as text, graphics, audio signals, video signals, in animation or still form and singly or in an integrated fashion. People are able to communicate efficiently and effectively and able to share information and knowledge irrespective of color, race and creed. New platforms, environments, protocols and standards as well as new markets and opportunities are emerging worldwide in business sector. At the same time, this whole new phenomenon has led to the formation of virtual communities engrained with new culture of knowledge and resource sharing. These phenomena are also growing at an unprecedented rate and Cayman is no exception ever since the commercial introduction of the Internet in 1992.

Definition of National Skill Initiative (NSI)

NSI is a means of gauging the level of change in the formation of an information or knowledge society, arising from the impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The ICT is driven by modern hyper electronic technology. NSI has both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The qualitative aspect covers projects, programs, regulations and evaluation conferences pertaining to ICT and knowledge society development. Annual reports, national development plans, research papers and conference materials record the qualitative dimension of progress in ICT. The quantitative aspect covers statistical measures on ICT and knowledge society developments.

Essence of a Knowledge System

Like any other system, a knowledge system is also made up of many assemblages and imperatives. These include the contents per se, methods, processes, procedures, infrastructure, organizational network, institutions, modus operandi, inter linkages and evolutionary processes.

New inventions and innovations have introduced greater efficacy and value in the development of a knowledge system. Nevertheless, technology on its own cannot produce or distribute knowledge without the involvement of people. Conversely, knowledge processes cannot take effect efficiently and effectively without technology.

The activities and processes in a knowledge system also change with greater complexity, resulting in the emergence of new features and characteristics. Activities involving knowledge may take place in isolation or in combination. They can be simple or complex, depending on the need and nature of the activity. With the introduction of the Internet, the availability of such information from networked computer systems worldwide is expanding rapidly. This new phenomenon has grown to such an extent that knowledge seekers now have to cope with new issues such as the explosion of information, authentication, privacy, validity, reliability and ethics. Know-how and know-who types of knowledge, on the other hand, arise from a variety of practical experiences. These include apprenticeships, the building of social relationships, business dealings, attendance at educational institutions, research and dealing with a network of academic experts.

The level and commitment of people involved in the present knowledge system also varies greatly. These depend on their experience, expertise and needs. Despite technological sophistication and complexity, the knowledge system is also becoming increasingly versatile, flexible and user-friendly.

In a nutshell the foregoing indicates that the assemblages, correlates, modus operandi and contents of the knowledge system continually change and become more complex; in some instances, overlapping in form and meaning. Therefore, any attempt at measuring the knowledge system without detailing its structure, inter-relationships and components in a distinct manner will result in problems. Identifying the structure of the knowledge system is particularly vital for outlining the policy, identifying the appropriate variables, creating a data collation mechanism and making institutional arrangements.

Part 2 - Analysis of Current State of IT Skill Development in the Cayman

Islands

The Digital Divide & Cayman Islands

The National Strategic Plan 1999-2008 lays emphasis on the regulation of IT environment and has primarily assigned the responsibility of IT development to ICTA (Information and Communication Technology Authority). The Island has a population of over 40,000 people and yet to develop quantifiable data to highlight the Internet accessibility figures for the population. The emphasis of the public policy has been tilted towards the hardware installation and an investment in the training of the general population needs further attention. This present emphasis on hardware infrastructure can further increase the gap between having surplus hardware and under-developed user skills. The deregulation initiated by the ICTA aims at creating price driven market economy for the access technology, but has yet to address the issue of creating the IT skill training resources available to the general population. With few and far expertise available in terms of internet technology, it is feared that the portion of population unable to access IT resources will remain unchanged even with the deregulation of ICT environment.

The use of the World Wide Web as the source of information and education has not yet emerged as the popular source of business and communication information due to this invisible digital divide. The per capita usage of the network is much lower as compared to the developed countries (CIA Report 2002). The digital divide beyond the realm of access technology also seems to be unnoticed as the basic literacy skills such as problem solving skills, math skills and communication skills are some of the weak areas, recognized by the education sector.

Support for IT Infrastructure

A continued investment has been made over the years to improve the IT infrastructure on the Islands. The growth has been focused around providing the hardware for technology development. This resource allocation has created an environment that requires technical support with variant expertise. The Computer Services Department entrusted with technical support for government funded projects needs further training as foreign consultants are hired to provide advance computing support skills for modern networking technology. The resultant effect is greater reliance on foreign consultants and experts to provide mission critical support. The hardware platform, since a result of reactive deployment is heterogeneous in nature, thus creating long term support issues as well as lack of local skill development.

Existing ICT Infrastructure

The Island has been serviced traditionally for its ICT services by a single service provider. The company is known for its slow turn-around time in terms of provisioning due to monopolized hold on the market. One of the major reasons for the slow growth of the IT awareness is the difficulty faced by the local population in securing the services from the service provider based on fair market prices. The deregulated environment is likely to alleviate the problem. The Local loop on the Island, before the deregulation took place, was being serviced by only service provider, after the deregulation the maintenance status of the local loop is not very clear. This ambiguity will need to be addressed very soon to salvage the existing infrastructure from being crippled by non-standard practices. ICTA will have to play a proactive part in development of these services and go beyond the role of enacting regulations.

Organizational Changes & IT Developments

The existing IT infrastructure on the Island is in its initial phase of development and is emerging as an isolated environment that needs to be integrated under a National Policy. Given the financial affluence of the country, it would be cost effective and more efficient to integrate the service structure and develop a unified database system to serve the country. The case in point is the isolated IT environments of Motor Vehicle Registration System, Immigration Services, and Health Care that are running and at times duplicating the same personal information.

Organizational Training initiatives for IT

The IT departments of various organizations on the Island work within their exclusively defined business models yet have certain common functions and skills. Presently no exchange of information, expertise or ideas takes place within these organizations and businesses. An effective National IT Policy can look into this aspect and create a smart movement to reduce reliance on foreign expertise and leverage the common expertise available on the Islands. The existing budget allocation for IT trainings is without any due consideration to 'skills wanted and skills held' on the national level. An isolated review of these resource allocations has resulted in the shape of slow IT skill development and constant dependency on foreign staff/consultants.

Human Resource Development Initiatives for IT

The public and private sector cooperation has been limited to restricted exchange of human resource development in IT Skills. There are no IT Coop opportunities or apprentice training programs running between various educational institutes, the government or the industry. There are no human resource development centers catering to the needs of the local population, providing the much needed services such as skill assessment, skill development or job placement services on the Island.

National IT Skill Development Programs

Initiatives at the School Level (Grade 1 to High School) - The major effort at the moment is the ITALIC project. The project aims at improving the technological access of IT at the school level. The project also aims at improving the IT skills of the teachers using a teaching portal called the LEARNING VIILLAGE. The project also aims at creating Internet Local Loop using wired and wireless network access. Centralized Student Information System and creating a state-of-the-art network for the Education Department is also part of the project. The project has very limited budget allocations for technical staff trainings and has limited vision on the subsequent support infrastructure for the project.

Initiatives at the Post Secondary Level - The only Community College on the Island is not part of the ITALIC project. The College has an infrastructure that can support classes at the Associate Degree level. The College needs IT research and development facilities to support IT development project on the Islands. No resources are currently available to support advance IT research at the College. The College has a computer science faculty with doctoral level teaching staff.

Specialized IT Training Programs - The Community College runs selected advance IT trainings on-demand. There are no quantifications in terms of trained students and their post qualification placement on the Islands. Similarly there is no data available to suggest the percentage of Caymanians under taking advance IT Skill trainings and their future career development.

Initiatives at National Level - The general population relies on media to gather information about the availability of IT training resources on the Islands. A centrally managed information portal with content management is not available. Very few programs are available to involve the community in the development of IT Skills for a knowledge society. These programs are again running without any quantifiable objectives.

National IT Skill Assessment

The skill assessment systems being used by various organizations on the Islands are working within self defined parameters and do not rely on any predefined National Skill Assessment Policy. The job placement process on the Island requires the local businesses to recruit Caymanians for the available job, and hire foreign staff only in case of vacancy unfilled by Caymanians. The IT skill assessment system in place needs analysis and improvements to validate the current IT skills standard on the Islands.

Integrated Learning and Curriculum Development

The current educational system and curriculum in vogue is based on treating IT as an elective subject with minor

emphasis on IT Skill development at all levels of education. The focus of IT policy remains on improving access methods and requisite importance is not being given to curriculum development and revisions. The current curriculum being taught at various levels in the country is not preparing the students for present job market or the life in the 21st century. The old paradigm of IT Literacy affiliated with computers exists and thus the requisite problem-solving skills, math skills and communication skills are not being emphasized in the curriculum.

When some teachers were asked about the barriers to the use of IT in their classes, they mentioned that there is no emphasis in the curriculum for IT activities nor is IT included in national assessments. This makes it very difficult for them to find time in their planning and the school day to integrate IT into their courses. (Survey conducted at two schools on the Islands)

IT Infrastructure may lead to Businesses Relocation

The current state of limited IT infrastructure to support businesses and the lower skill standards of local IT work force is forcing certain business managers to look for alternative location in the Caribbean or elsewhere. The example of few financial institutions is a case in point. The inability of the financial sector to execute real time transactions with the rest of the world increases the cost of business and limits the competitive edge of the local market, even with tax haven incentives.

Dialogue between Stake holders

The existing IT policy rests the responsibility with ICTA to provide directions for the future development of ICT on the Islands. This unidirectional policy limits the efforts to develop IT Skills on the Islands. The stake holders in the process, namely the government, the educators, the business sector and the public are working in isolation, lacking multi-directional approach and solution to this enterprise.

Part 3 - Recommendations

National Skill Development Council

The first and the foremost requirement is to create a national body with the mandate to study the current state of IT Skill Development, Digital Divide and Skill Assessment in the country. The Council should have equal representation from the following segments of the country:

- Government
- Business Sector
- Education Sector (Government as well as Private)
- Public Representatives

The Council should formulate the National IT Policy based on the data collected from all the segments, quantify the data and suggest a National Skill Initiative Model. The true design of the model based on the integrity of the data collected will form the foundation of the future IT strategy for the country. The council while working as one cohesive force will also help forge better understanding between the various groups involved and create a national spirit to propose the right solutions.

National IT Literacy Program

The current state of national educational policy that considers IT as one of the elective competencies should be replaced with a comprehensive and cohesive national program running simultaneous efforts at all levels of education in the country. The effort should use IT as the engine and base the entire learning life cycle of core competencies around the IT environment. The need of the time is to recognize that all members of the society should be educated at their respective levels to increase the gross national productivity in terms of IT literate work force for the 21st century. The

focus of the National IT Literacy Program should encompass:

- Problem Solving Skills
- Math Skills
- Communication Skills
- General ICT Skills

National Skill Assessment Standards

The core skills required on the Islands can be quantified by the joint efforts of the National Skill Development Council. Once the core skills have been recognized that are driving our economy and would continue to drive will form basis of the National Skill Assessment Standards. The defined standards will then be easily transformed in a National Skill Assessment Standard that will lead to better employment of our indigenous work force as well as reduce reliance on the foreign skilled workers.

Human Resource Development Centers

Properly funded, staffed and equipped electronic centers are the urgent need of the Islands to provide IT Skill Development and electronic job placement services. An electronic center in each of the towns, with few computers and qualified career and skill advisors would help promote IT Skills on the Islands. A central Job Bank with well managed content suited to the Islands would help reduce unemployment as well as highlight the available jobs in the local market. The Portal will also be able to encourage the local talent to seek advice on career development as well as play a major part in providing real time information about the local skills vis-à-vis the job market. The suggested model of a HRDC (Human Resource Development Center) is as follows:

Suggested Staff

- Trained HR Counselor with strong IT Skills
- Information Officer with IT technical Skills

Center Layout

- 4-6 computers with web access
- Job Bank Portal
- Fax/Photocopy facility

National Statistics Initiative

No policy or reforms can be qualified in the absence of readily available and reliable data. The need of the hour is to create a National Statistical Initiative as part of the National IT Policy to collect data that can provide quantifiable bench marks to all stake holders. The data collected has to be secured and shared according to the defined hierarchy as per the outlined policy. The data collected will also serve to carry out resource and quality audit of existing initiatives and program in progress and will help the policy maker in balanced allocation of national resources.

Creation of 'Caribbean ICT Corridor'

One of the major initiatives that can be considered to boost the local economy and pole vault the National IT Initiative would be to create 'Caribbean ICT Corridor' in the Cayman Islands. The creating of such a IT Trade/Development Zone requires building the requisite infrastructure and combining the effort with out lucrative tax free environment. The ICT Corridor can bring the following benefits for the Islands:

1. Foreign Investments in building ICT infrastructure.
2. Leading IT Companies can be invited to open research and development centers thus improving the learning

opportunities for the local population.
3. The current outsourced billion dollars Call Center Industry that has helped countries like India boost the national productivity, can be made part of our economic road map for the next millennium.
4. Emerge as the regional leader in ICT.
5. Preparing for the economic and technological challenges of the 21st century

Conclusion

The current trend in the Cayman Islands is definitely towards improving the ICT initiative. The need of the hour is to open the initiative to dialogue and research between all the stake holders. The Islands have to define the ICT objectives within the realm of the local needs and the stakes involved with the technological advancements in the region. A unidirectional approach that does not allow participation within the frame work of a National Policy will lead to half hearted and loosely implemented programs that will not serve the interest of the country. Our youth and local population deserve a chance to play a greater role in national development - a step towards self reliance and national skill development.

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