

# *A Cry to the Diaspora from the Caribbean - A Technology Appeal*

by [Roosevelt O. King, Secretary General - BANGO](#)

**As the tentacles of globalization create a greater impact on the Caribbean, the mandate resonates from the Caribbean and to its Diaspora, the imperative to declare, “step up to the plate” and face globalisation head on. Your Caribbean islands and homes need you now more than ever, they are crying. You must listen!**

It has long past the time to unlock the potential of the Caribbean, however better late than never, and we can begin to do it through Information and Communications Technology (ICT). However we need your help to expedite the process, at least by December 2005.

The Key word is Empowerment. We are presently locked out because we need greater Empowerment; in Empowerment lies knowledge, and in knowledge lies information. Living in a developed country, I know you understand the importance of ICT in unlocking the true potential of the Caribbean peoples. The world is in full experience of it, excluding the creativity and the ingenuity of the Caribbean. As small open economies, vulnerable to global trends, we have withstood all that has been thrown at us including the IMF, even though there have been some casualties along the way and the healing is slow.

The movement to take CARICOM into regional unity through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is an attempt to bring the healing process to an end. However, there is a major problem. We are divided by waters and do not have easy access to one another. CARICOM is a market of 15 million people and it is economic sense for Barbados to move from a market of 279, 000 to 15 Million and Guyana from 765,283 to 15 Million and even Haiti from 8,121,622 to 15 Million. We need your help to assist in achieving this? Yes, you are an integral part of the region’s development in all its phases.

**Present Challenges:** The intra-regional transportation system makes it expensive to travel from country to country. **The most cost efficient means to open up meaningful possibilities is through communications by the use of information technology.**

**Solution:** ICTs is a simple answer for the beginning. Every household must have a computer, as they now have radios and televisions. **Using programmes like “Skype”, “Yahoo” and “MSN” messengers, calls can be made free of cost** using the Internet; an avenue which is being marketed in developed countries. This measure assists in keeping more money in the pockets of the consumer and provides a greater stimulus to the economy. Therefore it decreases the opportunities of international conglomerates exploiting the region, which eventually results in great losses to the country’s economy.

As you may be aware civil society is becoming a major player in the development of the region, as government grapple with the enormous challenges of national, regional and global

governance. Hence a renewed focus must be given to equip Civil Society with the relevant technology, to be effective and efficient in their new and most important role. However, there is a major challenge present, hence our appeal to you the Diaspora. Let me share some of the ways in which this technology has contributed to major developments.

Through the use of the Internet, BANGO initiated dialogue with key Civil Society Organisations in the other CARICOM States and now we are about to launch Civil Society Fora in every CARICOM State, leading to the establishment of a regional forum that will be able to interact with the Heads of Government and participate in the organs of CARICOM.

At home, more NGOs are now being fed information which once clogged the system, causing opportunities for building capacity to fall by the wayside. By linking the NGOs with computers and internet to a bulletin board or internet group, they are now able to get information in a timely manner so as to take advantage of opportunities such as scholarships and funding.

But most of all it has increased networking. The 147 NGOs now on our network can make announcements or share news by sending just one e-mail message. From BANGO's end we are able to keep them up to date and now they have the opportunity to participate (once reserved to a few well placed ones) in seminars, consultations and other meaningful events not only in Barbados but across the region.

However, not every NGO (Non governmental organization) in the Caribbean has a computer and access to the Internet and no one must be left lacking in this regional civil society movement. Further, we must start owning and operating some of the technology to have control over our information and greater security of information transmitted. Ownership of technology helps the circulation of more money in the economy, thus contributing to a stronger economy and a higher standard of living for all. I must state that the high rates charged for technology, for example the Internet and cellular phones are (economically) seriously hurting of the Caribbean people.

The average citizen is losing much of their spending power to cellular phones. As someone who took part in the Rate Hearing, which prevented Cable & Wireless from increasing the rates in Barbados, the preceding information was disclosed. Categorically, the reason for the high rates is that providers are charging each other high rates which are then being passed on to the consumer. Without these providers, telecommunications rates would be as much as 80% cheaper.

Your most urgent and needed contribution: Encourage Caribbean organizations to start sending computers to voluntary organization in the Caribbean. Barbados has nearly 900 voluntary organizations. Also check with organizations and libraries who would facilitate and support this initiative, and where possible start sending computers to your friends and family. Also needed is Wi-Fi equipment that will allow the Internet to be cheaper and bring us closer to local ownership of cellular phones. The Caribbean is in a hurricane prone region, having a cellular phone is very important to disaster preparedness and mitigation. It is very important in emergencies especially in facilitating broadcasting to remote areas. Cellular phones, as you know, can save lives.

There are also business opportunities in ICT Solutions and in the open market. First, we should have four providers, but now Digicel bought Cingular and it does not seem that Sunbeach will start operations. We are therefore left with two business opportunities and for any qualified

Caribbean national who wants to enter the market, we will give you support by advocating to the Government for the issuance of a license.

Second, Globalisation will bring a rebirth of the Caribbean into a new world order. It is time for the Caribbean Renaissance that will open a whole new world of opportunities in art, music and sports which you are already experiencing under the USA brand. This will be a Caribbean brand; more user friendly and based on a very rich Caribbean creativity, ingenuity, hospitality, values and Culture.

On behalf of your brothers and sisters of the Caribbean, I wish you the best of health and prosperity, as we urge you to make an investment into the Caribbean countries. In closing, I can only say to you let us use free trade to our best advantage. I reiterate that the most urgent need to civil society operations and viability is computers and Wi-Fi equipment and with our focus on creating jobs for the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of the quality of life in the Caribbean, a benefit returning to you is intimate access to us as a resource that will help you to explore new areas for establishing businesses and creating jobs in the Caribbean.

[Back to Regional Connection](#)