GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2020

Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South

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SAINT LUCIA

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY SENDS A "KWIK?", BUT DOES IT GENERATE A "KWAK"?[1]

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Introduction

When the virus struck – for Saint Lucia that was in mid-March – I found myself suddenly teaching a face-to-face course online, and experienced the difficulty of establishing an exchange, a conversation, with the students using information and communications technology (ICT). ICT is a great tool for the dissemination and amplification of information, but it is meant as a tool for the communication of information, and communication implies not only a call, but also a response. The theme of this year's GISWatch report is "Technology, the environment and a sustainable world". In the context of the lack of response I had observed in the students, I began to wonder about the success of environmental awareness campaigns in Saint Lucia, about the perceptions of the students, and others, of the role of ICTs, about how far we should trust ourselves to use technology effectively to communicate the information, to be interactive. In other ICT-related areas there is a constant call for collaboration, participation and feedback. Somewhere there seems to be a gap. This report is based on a series of interviews with a cross-section of those who use technology to communicate information about the environment in Saint Lucia, as senders and as receivers.[2]

Saint Lucia: History and culture

Saint Lucia is a place that people dream about: sunshine, sand, warm sea, palm trees. It is also a real place where real people live. It is a small island developing state with approximately 180,000 people and a very large economic dependency on tourism. Its colonial history shows a determination to "put all the eggs in one basket" with sequentially the tobacco industry, the sugar industry and the banana industry. The tourism industry follows this historical pattern of a lack of diversity in focus.

To the colonial powers it was not necessarily of major importance if the sugar canes were destroyed by a plague of ants or the bananas blown down by a hurricane, but Saint Lucia is now a sovereign state in charge of its own finances – and tourism is equally vulnerable to environmental change. Saint Lucians, particularly young Saint Lucians, need to be actively aware of what needs to be done now to protect the environment and win them a sustainable future. What should be their perception of the "environment" that needs to be protected? When Saint Lucians tell riddles there is an exchange. The teller defines the context, "*Tout sa bondyé mété asou late*"; the audience agrees, "*Tout chòz*" ("All that the good God put on the earth"; "All things"). This gives us a working definition of "environment".

Currently, many of their parents (and many of them) have lost their livelihoods with the closure of the tourism industry. Lockdown means that they are being pushed towards a particular technology to communicate.

But how will they use it? The colonial past appears to have left us with a psychological difficulty about diversification; we are accustomed to a plantation, monocrop style of economy. If we have not learned to respond appropriately to messages broadcast using ICTs about the environment, then are we condemned to a future which will not sustain us? The sustainable future should belong to our children and to their children. How do we make communication tools work for all of us?

The projects

In 1977, Chief Forestry Officer Gabriel Charles[3] brought Paul Butler[4] to Saint Lucia to assist with a forest conservation project. Together they began a campaign to save the rare, indigenous Saint Lucian parrot, *Amazona versicolor* or Jacquot. Primary school children were major participants in the project. Saving Jacquot saved the Saint Lucian environment – the actions that were necessary to save the parrot were also essential in saving the

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1   "Kwik/kwak" is a mechanism used by Saint Lucian storytellers and their audiences to establish an exchange between them.

2   I thank everyone who gave their time to respond to my questions. Your "kwaks" created this report, whether I have quoted you directly or not.

3   La Force, N. (2011, 5 September). Gabriel "Coco" Charles - St. Lucia's First Chief Forest Officer. *St. Lucia Forestry Department Environmental Education Unit*. http://forestryeeunit.blogspot.com/2011/09/gabriel-coco-charles-st-lucias-first.html

4   https://www.bond.org.uk/outstanding-individual-award/paul-butler-rare

environment – and reopened the possibility of a Saint Lucian sustainable future. This project later moved to Rare[5] and the campaign was replicated all over the world to rescue other people's sustainable futures. Charles and Butler did not have ICTs to help them.

Almost exactly 40 years later, the "1.5 to Stay Alive" campaign began in Saint Lucia, swept through the Caribbean, and caught the imagination of the world. This campaign was supported by ICTs and was aimed at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework on Climate Change (COP21)[6] held in Paris in 2015. The outcome of this conference is popularly known as the Paris Agreement.[7] The campaign had a dedicated trilingual website,[8] infographics disseminated on social media,[9] a theme song disseminated via Soundcloud, Facebook and YouTube,[10] and video explainers. The campaign was recognised globally as a success.[11]

The Paris Agreement is now facing major challenges, and although the 1.5 campaign is still active, the engagement seen in 2015 seems to be lacking.

A focal point of the "1.5 to Stay Alive" collaboration is Kendel Hippolyte.[12] When I contacted him about this report he had a question. "The term itself confuses me. ICT means any use of media?"[13] This is an important question, and I do not have a satisfactory answer.

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5 https://rare.org/our-origin

6 https://www.cop21paris.org

7 According to the French government, "This is the first time that a universal agreement was reached in the fight against climate change." https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/climate-and-environment/2015-paris-climate-conference-cop21/cop21-the-paris-agreement-in-four-key-points; one observer called it "an astounding success for its advocates," adding: "Among its many merits is bringing human rights language into climate treaty discourse for the first time." https://cicero.oslo.no/en/understanding-one-point-five/the-story-of-15

8 http://www.1point5.info/en

9 http://2015.1point5.info/infographics

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH1SwOLFH_w

11 "The Caribbean Youth Environment Network partnered with the Ministry of Sustainable Development in St. Lucia, the Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Programme and the Bank of St. Lucia to launch a regional campaign called '1.5 to stay alive' aimed at raising awareness regarding the dangers of climate change. […] In Paris, the 1.5°C limit is endorsed by 106 countries – a majority of those present. It's become the rallying cry for a broad coalition of climate activists, civil society groups and the climate justice networks, under the banner '1.5 to stay alive'." https://cicero.oslo.no/en/understanding-one-point-five/the-story-of-15

12 https://1point5.info/en/messengers/4-caribbean-artists-united-for-climate-justice

13 Personal communication from Kendel Hippolyte, poet and self-confessed Luddite, 29 July 2020.

Saint Lucian voices

The students

I attempted to consult students and young people, but in many cases my "kwik?" did not receive a "kwak". An exception was Ron Andrew. His initial perception – "I strongly believe that [ICT] is an effective means to spread awareness about the environment and sustainability, mainly because of its ability to reach millions of people at any given time"[14] – was repeated by several others in the course of this research. He proposed social media as an example of ICT use. "The Saint Lucia National Trust has created a Facebook page, on which they share information on environmental issues/concerns," he told me. "However, that information is often restricted to those who follow/like their page."[15]

We talk about "awareness raising" and "capacity building" often without considering it necessary to mention the actual subject of the exercise. The baseline assumption appears to be that the "broadcast" mechanism is sufficient. If it has been done, it can be assumed to have been successful. This case seems to me to be a kwik which lacks a kwak, an uneven perception of the relative importance of broadcast versus response.

Andrew recognised a problem:

> Often times, many people are not aware of the technologies and wide range of information that they can use/get. I myself am a victim of this, as I was not aware that [the 1.5] website existed, even though it was right at my fingertips.[16]

He also felt that I should include the fact that although he had contacted several colleagues whom he knew to have an interest in environmental issues, none of them provided any feedback. "I believe this research is relevant now, especially to young people," he added.[17]

Two Saint Lucian students studying at the University of the West Indies, Cavehill Campus (Barbados), felt that although ICT is widely used to disseminate environmental information, "it has not reached a point of being fully effective, which is evident in the lack of widespread knowledge of such topics within the population."[18] They feel that we are not "asking

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14 Email from Ron Andrew, former student, current colleague, 29 July 2020.

15 Ibid.

16 Email from Ron Andrew, 16 July 2020.

17 Ibid.

18 Personal communication Taton David and Alyssa Gustave, Saint Lucian Students' Association Cavehill (LUSAC), 30 July 2020.

the right questions, listening or acting on the answers,"[19] as, if we were, it would be possible to see the results, ICT being a very powerful tool.

The teachers

Anna-Kaye Boodho, a schoolteacher, suggested that "my viewpoint may be skewed as my networks mainly consist of tech savvy individuals. This would give me a better experience than the majority with [respect to] ICT in St. Lucia."[20] She sees obstacles in lack of knowledge about ICTs, in disconnections of understanding between sender and audience, and in the fact that information is stored rather than analysed and used.

Another respondent, Germain Anthony, works as a curriculum specialist in technology integration. He felt that using ICTs made teachers better able to explain environmental issues in the classroom as long as the teachers had the necessary ICT and pedagogical skills. He mentioned material provided by UNESCO with the intention of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the school curriculum. He felt that this initiative required more training. He pointed to an obstacle:

> Since assessments both at school and national level do not specifically require knowledge of SDGs, I am doubtful that teachers are making a concerted effort to teach it. Nevertheless, SDGs do play a role in other activities like competitions and quizzes.[21]

Considering the issue of the generation of information using ICTs, he pointed to various application and assessment processes which the Ministry of Education has now brought online. However, he added, "we still have a long way to go [...] as information for decision making is still processed via other means than technology."[22]

The institutions

The next response is from the director of the organisation that has a general responsibility in its mandate for environmental conservation, the Saint Lucia National Trust. It was established by an Act of Parliament[23] in 1975 "to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of Saint Lucia, and to promote values which lead to national pride and love of country."[24] (Andrew reported the Trust's social media campaign as an initiative that had reached him, see above.) In Saint Lucia, the Trust has been a powerful voice for environmental protection and sustainable development.

The current director, Bishnu Tulsie, sees the role of ICT in development in Saint Lucia from a different perspective. He is most concerned about the need for transparency in government:

> The first step is to achieve open and transparent government in which citizens' rights to access information they need to make informed decisions for themselves are assured. [...] ICT then becomes the tool through which individuals will empower themselves to achieve their aspirations and the world will transition towards sustainability.[25]

He has reservations about how this will happen:

> Politicians will not willingly share information, because it is one of their sources of power, so I suggest that firstly, ICT should be applied to force transparency, accountability and openness in government.[26]

He is also concerned about exogenous influences facilitated by ICTs. "ICT is used by varied interests to colonise the people's minds as a precursor to controlling their economic and personal futures," he stressed.[27]

Conclusion

Yves Renard[28] is the interim coordinator of Panos Caribbean,[29] which manages "1.5 to Stay Alive". He accepted my "kwik/kwak" meme and offered me a list of "kwaks" from the 1.5 campaign at COP21:

- The # of users of the Caribbean Pavilion at COP21 in 2015, the Pavilion used for key negotiations, and for pushing the agenda → the Paris Agreement.
- Clicks on webpages, # of followers on social media, # of views on YouTube, etc.
- Newspaper coverage (with Google alert), journalists picking up themes and issues.

19   Ibid.
20   Email from Anna-Kaye Boodho, teacher, volunteer and activist, 31 July 2020.
21   Email from Germain Anthony, Curriculum Specialist – Technology Integration, Curriculum and Materials Development Unit, Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development, 27 July 2020.
22   Ibid.
23   https://slunatrust.org/assets/content/documents/SLNT_Act.pdf
24   https://slunatrust.org/about
25   Email from Bishnu Tulsie, director, Saint Lucia National Trust, 16 July 2020.
26   Ibid.
27   Ibid.
28   https://canari.org/associates/yves-renard
29   http://panoscaribbean.org/en/abouten

- Testimonials (Jimmy Fletcher after COP21, evidence of impact on Paris Agreement).
- More and more artists engaged in climate advocacy in the region, but always hard to attribute impact.
- These artists expressing the climate urgency in their own language.
- Use of the slogan, the rallying cry, use of "1.5".

This may help to illustrate the differences in our approaches. Renard is concerned with a large-scale global campaign, designed to reach a mass of people; I am concerned with individual responses. For successful use of technology to build awareness of environmental issues, both approaches are necessary. The kwak that the current 1.5 campaign seeks is a large response of publicity that can change people's minds and affect policy. The kwak that I would like to encourage is the thoughtful individual answer that says, "I heard you. This is what I think."

Going back to the basic principles of both Butler's and Charles' parrot project in the 1970s and 1980s, and "1.5" in 2015, the common factor for success appears to be the genuine human enthusiasm and effort invested on both occasions. Without that, the kwak falls silent. In 1998, Roger Harris wrote:

> It is a myth to believe that technologies prescribe their own course of action. The responsibility for technological outcomes resides within the social order – within individuals and groups and within the institutions through which they organise their lives.[30]

Action steps

To move towards a sustainable future, Saint Lucia should:

- Remember that the technology is a tool.
- Always include human intervention.
- Involve the children.
- Review curriculums to ensure the inclusion of both ICT skills and the SDGs.
- Remember the importance of differentiated messages to reach all audiences.

Avant makak té konnet zaboka, makak té ka swen yche li ("Before Makak knew the avocado, Makak took care of his children").

Kwik. Kwak.

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30 Harris, R. (1998). Information Technology – The New Cargo Cult? *Information Technology in Developing Countries, 8*(1).

Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South

The world is facing an unprecedented climate and environmental emergency. Scientists have identified human activity as primarily responsible for the climate crisis, which together with rampant environmental pollution, and the unbridled activities of the extractive and agricultural industries, pose a direct threat to the sustainability of life on this planet.

This edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) seeks to understand the constructive role that technology can play in confronting the crises. It disrupts the normative understanding of technology being an easy panacea to the planet's environmental challenges and suggests that a nuanced and contextual use of technology is necessary for real sustainability to be achieved. A series of thematic reports frame different aspects of the relationship between digital technology and environmental sustainability from a human rights and social justice perspective, while 46 country and regional reports explore the diverse frontiers where technology meets the needs of both the environment and communities, and where technology itself becomes a challenge to a sustainable future.

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