

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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MINISTER OF STATE – MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY,
INVESTMENT & COMMERCE
JAMAICAN GIRLS CODING SUMMER PROGRAMME
JAMPRO
AUGUST 22, 2014

Salutations:-

- Hon. Lisa Hanna, Minister of Youth and Culture,
- Hon. Julian Robinson, Minister of State, Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining,
- Ms. Diane Edwards, President of JAMPRO,
- Distinguished guests,
- Members of the media,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

First, I must congratulate the Department for International Development (DFID), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Jamaica Coalition of Service Industries (JCSI), and JAMPRO for the important role you have played in making possible the **Jamaican Girls Coding Summer Camp** project.

The government recognizes that it cannot do it alone and continues to partner with the private sector whenever it can to build on programmes such as the Jamaican Girls Coding programme to expand the opportunities to our youth. This tripartite partnership – Government (JAMPRO/Jamaica Coalition of Services Industries), donors (UK Department For International Development and Caribbean Development Bank) and local private sector (Women Who Code – Productive Business Solutions/Mussons Group) is a great example of what can be achieved when we all work together.

We recognize, therefore, that the success of the programme could not have been achieved without the help of PBS, Mussons Foundation and DELL computers.

The message is clear. The development of our youth is a responsibility shared by all, government, private sector and citizens. We must continue to work closely together, therefore, to ensure that we introduce sustainable programmes that will allow youths to be entrepreneurial and competitive. I want to also use this opportunity to note the strong collaboration between my fellow colleague Minister, Minister Julian Robinson and our agencies in support of this programme.

As a result of your actions, we have here today these lovely young women, who have been exposed to coding, an area of ICT not widely available to the 12-14 age group. Twenty girls were invited to participate in this programme and the result today is that we have 20 budding coders who will now build on the skills learnt during the Jamaican Girls Coding Camp.

From all indications, the Coding programme has not only been exciting, interesting, but equally rewarding and productive. Girls, I congratulate each of you, and wish you all the best for the future. Continue to make us proud of you.

Ladies and gentlemen, innovation and technology are critical to Jamaica's growth and development. In that regard, it is important that we not only develop our ICT skills from an early age, but also inculcate, from early, a culture of entrepreneurship.

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Policy published in May 2013 notes that **“Innovation and creativity are the bedrock of true entrepreneurship.”** It further makes the point that **“the entrepreneurial spirit is characterized by innovation, risk-taking and is an essential component of a nation's ability to succeed in an ever changing and more competitive global marketplace.”**

It is therefore, important that when initiatives such as the Jamaican Girls Coding Project are implemented, it is because we recognize that entrepreneurship is something that has to be instilled from an early age. “Entrepreneurship and innovation must be underpinned by creativity”, which, as defined by Franken is the “tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives or possibilities that may be useful to solving problems, communicating with others”.

In understanding the world of coding, a child is exposed to the unique opportunity of applying all of these elements just mentioned, to their daily lives. For example, in creating a game, skills such as problem solving and logical thinking must be applied to the creative elements if the game is to be both challenging and fun.

This Ministry wholeheartedly supports the engagement of young persons in activities that direct their creation towards an entrepreneurial culture that will not only harness their enthusiasm and innovative ideas, but also increase their personal development, social stability and eventually, their economic growth.

Given that ICT is one of Jamaica’s fastest growing sectors, currently employing approximately 14,000 persons and which will

expand by another 3,000 persons over the next three years, there must be a stronger effort to encourage our youths, especially our girls to choose career paths in ICT and to move away from mostly “support functions” in ICT.

Indeed, the GEM 2013 Jamaica Report indicates that Jamaicans continue to view entrepreneurship as a highly favourable career choice. Close to 80 per cent of Jamaicans view entrepreneurship favourably in terms of career choice. Jamaica’s entrepreneurial intention rate has also been increasing. This involves the percentage of individuals in the working age population who plan to start a business within three years. In 2013, the intention rate for Jamaica was 39.5 per cent – twice the 19.5 per cent rate of 2011.

The point is, ladies and gentlemen, we continue to see in Jamaica a favourable and improving environment for entrepreneurship. We must take advantage of it by investing in ourselves, by engaging in entrepreneurship at all levels, and by ensuring that we start to build a foundation for growth and development, from the earlier years of our lives.

As it has been said: “Teach a man to fish, rather than giving him a fish”. That way, he will never again be hungry.

We continue the efforts, therefore, to develop a deep-seated culture of entrepreneurship in Jamaica, which includes a thrust towards introducing entrepreneurship in the curricula of our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

We want to see more of our women becoming programmers and coders, who develop applications that present solutions for our country.

In closing, let me again thank DFID and CDB for funding this gender-based project and recognize the work of the JCSI in its successful execution. I commend you all for your support and participation and look forward to more programmes, such as this one, in the near future.