

Digital Jam 2.0 spells hope for youths

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Young Jamaicans looking to be entrepreneurs in the virtual economy will be able to show their skills and learn from industry bigwigs at the end of the month.

This face-to-face interaction will be a key element of Digital Jam 2.0. The event will see the participation of national private-sector information and communications technology (ICT) companies, potential national and international investors, young start-up companies, as well as the broader youth population. Digital Jam 2.0 is part of the Caribbean Growth Forum, an initiative led by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank. It will be held at the Jamaica Conference Centre from June 28 to 30.

"There will be companies from Silicon Valley, from Australia and Europe coming to Jamaica to see how they can engage with the youth of Jamaica in terms of microwork and applications

development," explained Giorgio Valentini, World Bank representative in Latin America and the Caribbean. Valentini and other stakeholders were speaking at Wednesday's Gleaner Editors' Forum on youth employment opportunities in the virtual economy.

Among the activities at Digital Jam will be a series of 'app contests' where teams of young Jamaicans can compete to develop specific applications (mobile or web-based). Valentini noted that applications development is growing worldwide.

"Jamaican youth almost all use cellphones and there are lots of clusters of developers in Jamaica, and so they were very keen on learning that there were potential opportunities for them to participate in the developing applications industry without leaving Jamaica," he said. Valentini also said the companies were glad to see the talent here and were looking to match supply and demand. Marcia Brandon, regional director, Caribbean Centre of Excellence for Youth Entrepreneurship, felt that such an initiative could benefit the wider Caribbean.

Multifaceted approach

"Where we come as the Caribbean Group of Youth Business Trust ... is to help these young techies to become young entrepreneurs," she explained. She noted that lots of young people across the Caribbean are starting businesses in their bedrooms. Professor Alvin Wint, pro-vice-chancellor at the University of the West Indies, said the Digital Jam was a step to fixing the wider problems of Caribbean growth.

"In terms of solving these problems, we have to have a multi-faceted approach. So I think in that context it's a great initiative. But it has to be seen in a menu of things that have to be done simultaneously to improve the Jamaican and regional economy."

Françoise Clottes, country director for the Caribbean at the World Bank, felt one of the important things the three-day event would give was hope.

"I think it is very important in today's environment in Jamaica that the youth feel that where they have talent, passion, motivation and capacity there is an avenue for livelihood," she said.

Digital Jam 2.0 will present new developments in the global virtual economy that can offer employment opportunities for young Jamaicans and showcase young Jamaican achievements in the ICT sector. International companies who may have an interest in outsourcing employment opportunities to Jamaican youths via the global virtual economy will be present. Valentini noted that via tech camps, teaching youth how to develop applications have been going on for about two months.

"It is already a practical example of how in a short period of time you can develop something of this magnitude in order to satisfy the curiosity, but also the opportunities for young people."

Rolande Pryce, coordinator of the World Bank's Caribbean Growth Forum, said that Digital Jam was ideal to get youth in direct contact with ICT players.

"There will be two days of seminars where youth can go in person ... and get a chance to talk with Jamaicans who work in the ICT industry, and also talk with people who are working in this industry ... and say 'here is my vision, where is the place for me?'" She specified that Digital Jam was targeting young people but not exclusive to them.

There will also be a job fair and marketplace where Jamaican and international companies will set up booths and it is expected to attract between 3,000 to 5,000 youth who will be able to interact with companies, obtain information, drop CVs and receive career advice for the ICT sector.

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