Remarks
Hon. Fayval Williams
Minister of Science, Energy & Technology
Caribbean Girls Hack 2019 Hackathon
May 14, 2019 at 9 am

Salutations:

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Good Day ladies and gentlemen!

The privilege is mine to share in this event, as SheLeadsIt, and Restore a Sense of I Can (RSC) Tech Clubs collaborate to stage Caribbean Girls Hack 2019 Hackathon in observance of international Girls in ICT Day.

I am aware that this is the first leg of the hackathon which has not only engaged females in Jamaica but also Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada.

Fora such as these are timely and significant as they are integral to:

- creating an enabling environment for innovation;
- bridging the gender digital divide;
- while empowering and encouraging girls and young women like you, to become content creators and developers of solutions to real life problems.

Women in Tech

Dating as far back as 1843, with Ada Lovelace who was called the first computer programmer, women have played a vital role in the development of the technological era serving as computer programmers and software engineers during the 1940s to the 1960s.

Despite the groundbreaking work and the vast number of women who were employed in the technology field in the past, in today's society, women are generally underrepresented in this area.

And, while women outnumber men at our Universities, men are outnumbering females in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

In a 2018 ICT in Education Research conducted by the Ministry, we saw that based on enrollment in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) for Information Technology, there was no significant difference between males and females. However, a gender disparity (3 to1 male to female ratio) was evident at four of our leading tertiary institutions at the undergraduate level.

The study captured data from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018 academic year from the University of Technology, Northern Caribbean University, University of the West Indies (Mona) and the Vocational Training Development Institute.

Today, I encourage you ladies to get involved in innovation by enrolling more in ICT disciplines especially at the tertiary level and stay the course after your academic pursuits.

Creating a digitally inclusive society

We need more women in technology! as we work to build a knowledge-based and digitally inclusive society.

In a rapidly changing technological era, we cannot afford to have distinctions between men and women. I believe that you, our girls and women have tremendous knowledge that when harnessed can contribute to building a strong technology infrastructure for Jamaica.

Technology ought not to be seen as a man's world but it is indeed our world! That includes both males and females alike.

Technology is a great enabler and driver for growth and it is essential that we have a digitally inclusive society where both men and women can actively participate and share for the benefit of this nation.

STEM and women

As a nation, we want our girls excited about technology and the wider STEM areas at a very early age.

This must start in the home and at school. As such I want to encourage both parents and educators to expose our young ladies to the many opportunities which STEM provide, because **girls can rock I.T!** and **girls can rock science!**

Closing

In closing, we are at a critical juncture in our ICT development. Indeed, the times are changing and we need all hands on deck if we ought to be competitive in the technological era and our women must have a space at the table.

My commendations once again to SheLeadsIt and RSC on staging this hackathon. Your investment in the lives of these ladies will pay dividends in the future.

To the participants, I wish you all the very best with your innovations and in your pitch sessions.

I want to encourage you to continue in this field and to be resolute despite the challenges that you may encounter. Continue to blaze a trail that will burn brightly for others to follow.

Thank you.