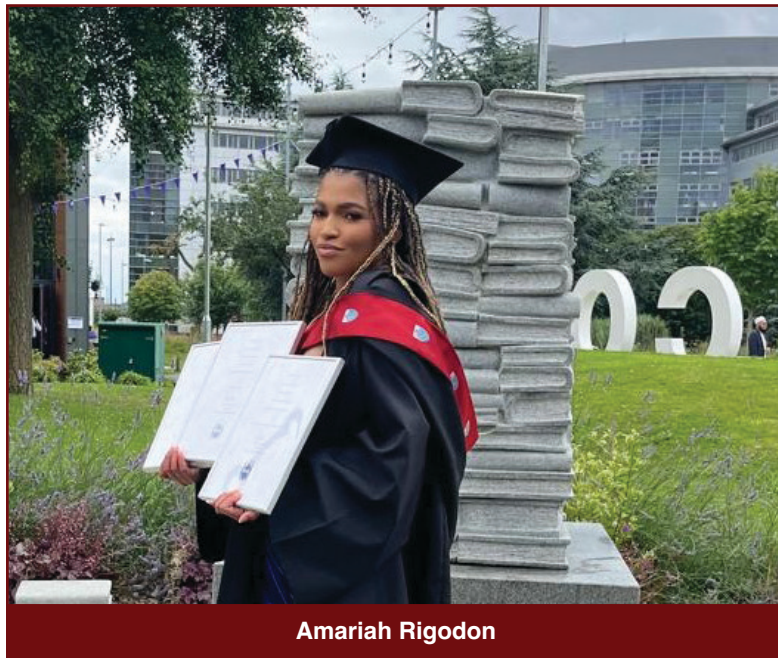## UP CLOSE

Carving a niche in the Tech industry

Amariah Rigodon

As a driven and dynamic young woman, Amariah Rigodon has carved her place in one of the most male-dominated industries – the Tech industry. Currently serving as a Senior Analyst Programmer at the Department of Information Communication Technology (DICT), she is paving the way and opening doors for women to step in with confidence and take up space in the field.

Amariah's educational journey

"I grew up in the district of Anse Etoile and my childhood was full of learning. I have always been studious and engaged in my studies from a young age. Today, I am a Senior Analyst Programmer, an entrepreneur, and a fitness lover who is passionate about promoting health and wellness," said Amariah, adding that she also enjoys reading, learning new things, and pushing herself to grow both personally and professionally.

After finishing secondary, she received a scholarship to attend the Independent School for her A-Levels which she considers a testament to her hard work and strong performances in her IGCSEs.

"Coming from a state school, I felt a bit out of place at first, but that feeling pushed me to work even harder. I spent a lot of time doing past papers, asking for help when I needed it, and really immersing myself in my studies," she shared.

At A-Levels, Amariah studied Computer Science, Business, Mathematics and History securing three A* and one A. She finished her studies with multiple Cambridge awards which includes Top in the world for Cambridge AS level History, Highest mark in Seychelles in Cambridge AS level Computer Science, third place in Seychelles for best across four Cambridge AS level, and highest mark in Seychelles in Cambridge A Level Computer Science, Business and History.

She later earned a fully funded scholarship from the Agency for National Human Resource Development (ANHRD) and went on to pursue her dream of studying in the United Kingdom, at Aston University. She proceeded to complete a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science with Business and graduated with First Class Honours and three academic awards; Computer Science Subject Group Prize for Excellent Performance on the Computer Science with Business Programme, Final Year Project Prize for Outstanding Final Year Project (awarded to the student who scores the highest grade in the Final Year Project module), Professional Membership in the British Computer Science Society.

"University for me was transformative, not just academically but personally. I gained exposure to different cultures, ways of thinking, and professional experiences. I attended networking events, met founders and CEOs, and developed a much bigger vision for myself."

"I did not just learn to code. I learned how to think strategically, solve real-world problems, and communicate across disciplines."

Making it in a male-dominated field

"During my course, I was the only Seychellois student and one of just 10 women in a cohort of around 300 students," shared Amariah, adding early on, it was clear technology was a male-dominated field. She did face some instances where male peers undermined her in projects simply because she was a woman. But overall, Amariah expressed that her experience was positive.

Her course was 75% tech and 25% business, exactly how she wanted. She explained that she has always had an entrepreneurial mind set, and she knew that she did not want a purely technical degree. This combination gave her the best of both worlds; the technical skills to build solutions and the business acumen to make sure that those solutions actually add value.

"Interestingly, I didn't initially choose tech. At IGCSE, I picked ICT at the last minute all thanks to a teacher who saw potential in me. I ended up really enjoying it. But it wasn't until A-Levels that I knew this was what I wanted to pursue long-term."

Amariah explained that from the Covid-19 pandemic, she saw first-hand how crucial technology was in keeping the world running and realised that tech had the power to create change, not just in Seychelles but globally.

"Being in a male-dominated field is not always easy as we have to navigate more than just the work itself. It is about knowing how to set boundaries, dealing with unwanted advances in a professional way, and constantly walking that fine line of not being 'too nice' so it is not misinterpreted, but not being 'too harsh' so that you are not labelled as difficult," she elaborated.

Supporting women in tech

Amariah strongly believes that women belong in these spaces as they are just as capable, just as smart, and just as deserving. She emphasised that gender should never be the deciding factor as opportunities should be based on merit.

"But for real progress to happen, there needs to be clear measures in place to ensure women's safety and hold people accountable when lines are crossed. We are seeing more women entering these spaces, and that speaks to how far we've come. But it also reminds us that there's still work to be done in shifting workplace culture and creating environments where women can thrive, not just survive."

Moreover, she explained that her department has close to a 50-50 gender split, and her immediate team is mostly women, which has created a really supportive, empowering environment. She does work alongside a lot of men and some of them are respectful, kind, and always willing to help. However, she has heard comments from male colleagues that they would probably not have said to another male colleague.

"Nothing major, but subtle reminders that unconscious bias exists. Those moments have made me more aware of how important it is to keep pushing for gender equality and not just where I am, but across the tech space as a whole." she told *Seychelles NATION*.

"I have overheard conversations or comments that reflect outdated attitudes toward women, even if they were not aiming at me personally. Things like casual 'boy talk' that makes it clear that some mindsets still have a long way to go," she highlighted.

Breaking the barrier

According to Amariah she has never felt the need to prove herself more than her male peers as she is still early in her career. She mentioned that she has been very fortunate to work in supportive environments where she has been treated fairly and judged on the quality of her work and not her gender.

"I have had the privilege of learning from both men and women who genuinely want to see me grow. My more experienced peers have always been encouraging and willing to help and that kind of support has made a huge difference."

"That said, I am aware that not everyone has had this experience. Gender discrimination is still very real in many parts of the world, and even in some workplaces. I don't take my situation for granted but I just hope more women get to say the same in the future," she emphasised.

Future goals

Amariah revealed that if she were to lead a tech company in the future, she would start by creating a workplace environment where respect is non-negotiable. This means introducing training on appropriate behaviour, harassment prevention, and what to do when someone makes others feel uncomfortable.

She explained that it is important that both men and women understand that harassment, bullying, or discrimination of any kind won't be tolerated and that there are clear systems in place to take action when needed.

"So, I'd launch initiatives aimed at girls from the age of 13, showing them that tech is for them. Many don't choose tech simply because they don't know what the field actually includes. It's such a dynamic space and I want them to see that."
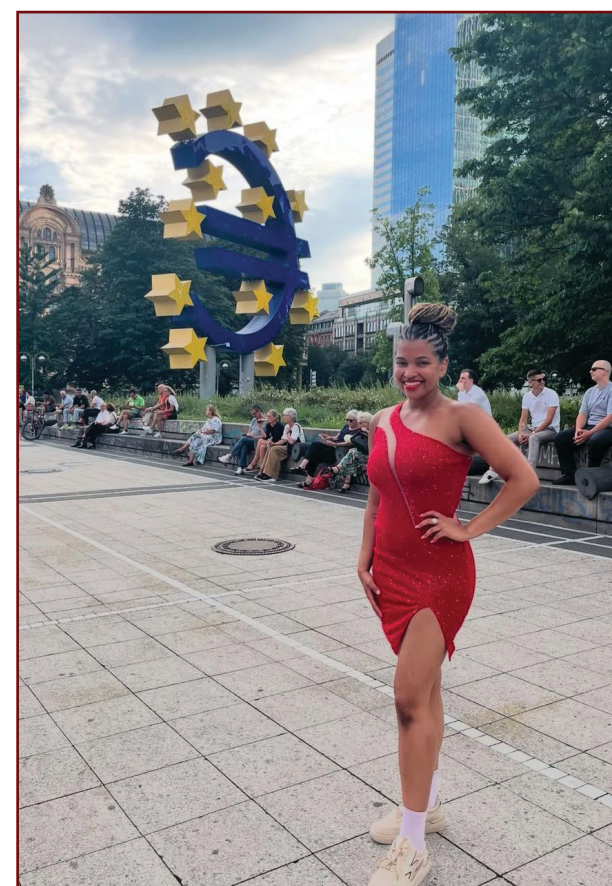
"We'd run immersive programmes that expose girls to the different branches of IT from software development to data analysis, cybersecurity, networking, AI, and IT support. We'd bring in real professionals, both men and women to speak with them, answer questions, and show them what's possible. The goal is to shift the narrative and help them feel like they belong in this space," she explained

Amariah advises young women to not let intimidation stop them from achieving their dreams.

"You belong in the room. You are just as capable, more than you even realise. Your voice matters. Your presence matters. Yes, there will be moments that test you, but don't let anyone make you feel like you're less than. Stand your ground. Learn to advocate for yourself, and most importantly learn how to set boundaries. You will need them," she said.

She added that they should surround themselves with people who uplift them and find mentors who will guide them, support them and help them grow. She highlighted that young women should invest in themselves; get education, sharpen their skills, and become an expert in the field they are in.

"Whenever you doubt yourself or feel like you don't belong, remember that you are standing on the shoulders of women who paved the way. And one day, someone might be standing on yours."

Chelsea Laporte
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