



Address

By

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Minister of Public Administration**

4th Caribbean ICT Collaboration Forum

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Theme: Digital Transformation – Do it!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends.

Good morning and welcome to the 4th Caribbean ICT Collaboration Forum.

If I may, with your indulgence, I would begin by asking you to take a trip with me into the future. Imagine what the world will be like 10 years from now, or maybe even 5 years from now:

- How will we communicate?
- Will language barriers still exist?
- How will we interact with each other and do business?
- What will be the new jobs of the future?

Most of us here have families, children and for some, even grandchildren. I want you to “imagine” your family in 5 years time.

What did you “imagine”, what came to mind?

Did you imagine:

- Tablets or electronic devices rather than books
- Holograms rather than face to face communication, or perhaps
- Driverless cars

- Think about shopping, where will we shop, and how would these goods and services be delivered to us?

Well, the reality is there is no need to imagine, the future is already here, the future is now and the Caribbean Region as a whole must hasten its steps if we are to keep pace with the rest of the world.

Technological advancements and innovations are exploding exponentially, bringing opportunities for not only enhanced productivity, but also new categories of products and services. Big Data, Cloud computing, Fintechs, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things and 5G are constantly shaping our digital future and presenting new opportunities for National and Regional development.

It is evident that technological changes will continue to significantly impact and, in some instances enable or drive, economic growth and development, and; very importantly, government will want for its citizens improvement in standards of living and the quality of life.

If we implement and effectively utilize new technologies, the potential benefits are unimaginable. Advances in Information Communication Technology are increasingly making physical distance less of an obstacle to development. In particular, technology such as submarine fiber optic cables and advances in mobile telephony, will reduce the constraints imposed by geography and together have the potential to change the economic landscape if these technologies are applied appropriately.

However, there have been concerns over “disruptive technologies”. It has been argued that disruptive technologies may lead to “technological unemployment,” i.e., the loss of jobs caused by technological change. But proof of this remains to be seen, as the world continues to push the limits for ICT advancement, solidifying the role of new technologies as a major development enabler across different sectors of the economy. But disruption ought not to be considered negatively. It requires a strategic and deliberate approach to ICT implementation and undoubtedly, societies, institutions and policy makers will need to think carefully about issues such as re-deploying, capacity building, retraining, re-tooling, and other means of supporting workers who may be displaced by disruptive technologies.

We have grown to depend on technology. Increasingly, it has become more and more a part of our daily lives. Take a moment and look around you. What do you notice? Do you see tech, gadgets, computers, video monitoring?

We are surrounded by technology. Your PC to your IP Phone on your desk, the cell phone next to your bed, the WiFi router, even your thermostat. I have even seen persons viewing their Home Security Systems while on vacation, keeping a close eye on things. Technology has transformed every aspect of our lives, our homes, and business, but maybe you need a bit more convincing. So I challenge each of you here today to go one day without your cell phones, just 24 hours. Maybe some of us can, but for most of us, it is highly unimaginable. As we demand more, innovators and developers find new ways of delivery services, businesses adapt and so must Government.

Consider for one moment, the deployment of technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), in urban areas or in agriculture and combined with Big Data or Artificial Intelligence. In urban areas IoT devices will detect flood threats; alert and provide Disaster Management Agencies with timely data – enabling them to improve their response times. Also, citizens via an App on their mobile phones, will be able to report to a Local Government Authority, the existence of open manholes or fallen electrical lines. And in agriculture, farmers will be able to monitor the conditions of their fields – be it moisture, acidity and so on. They will be able to upload the data from the field that will allow them to receive advice on remedies.

It is for these reasons that I am delighted to say that the Ministry of Public Administration continues to set the stage for the further progression of ICT through continued implementation of **The ICT Blueprint**, Trinidad and Tobago's National ICT Plan for the period 2018 to 2022. This Plan proposes a digitalization framework in support of our wider National Development Strategy, Vision 2030 and it declares a bold vision for Trinidad and Tobago characterized by "Empowered People, Competitive Businesses, (and) Transformational Government through ICT".

To achieve this Vision, and to deliver on our objectives, the Plan focuses on 5 overarching Strategic Thrusts. These are:

1. Improving Connectivity;
2. Increasing Human Capacity;
3. Digital Government;
4. Fostering Economic Development; and
5. Advancing the Environment for Societal Benefit.

Through **The ICT Blueprint**, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago embraces the potential for growth, prosperity, and transformation that technology offers. In this regard, many of our ICT investments continue to change the way people live and operate. These investments include:

1. GovNeTT – Our Government backbone ICT Infrastructure that facilitates the delivery of Government services through shared ICT infrastructure;
2. TT GovPay – Government's payment platform which will facilitate Ministries, Departments and Agencies to accept electronic payments;
3. ttconnect – Our single interactive face of Government that utilizes ICT as a medium for enhanced service delivery and citizen interaction; ttconnect also provides a mobile bus service, in addition to ttconnect offices located in several communities, into underserved areas facilitating access to the services provided by Ministries.
4. TTBizLink – The single, secure, user-friendly online interface for businesses and individuals that facilitates access to government services for trade and business;
5. TT-WiFi: Government's national free WiFi initiative that focuses particularly on underserved areas where it may not be economically viable for private sector investment; and
6. ICT Access Centres: This initiative also serves to provide access to Wi-Fi and computers for communities in which they are located.

It is evident that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to leveraging technology to drive social and economic development and as Minister of Public Administration, I fervently believe that ICTs can facilitate greater efficiency and more effective government systems as well as reshape our economy to one characterized by innovation, growth and resilience, where results are reflected in improvements in the quality of life of citizens.

Digital Transformation is at the heart of Government's Agenda, especially given the significant resource constraints that we are currently facing and I am certain the same can be said regionally. Nearly any Government form or service can be offered digitally, from filling tax returns to renewing a driver's license to applying for import licenses. However, many challenges continue to hinder our progress, most of which are related to internal risk aversion and user adoption. But these challenges are easily overcome and quickly replaced by the many benefits, such as:

- Better online user experiences for citizens.
- Increased public participation.
- Improved internal efficiency and productivity.
- Less burden on IT (consider cloud-based technologies).
- Better collaboration among Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs).
- Reduced costs.

But how do we translate this "Digital Push" across the region? It requires a collective effort and an integrated Caribbean or a unified Caribbean Single ICT Space. Then and only then we can realise true benefits and deliver borderless

services to citizens anytime, anywhere, and on any platform or device across the region.

As I speak to you today, I know that the Ministry has a mammoth responsibility for advancement of the National Information Communication Technology Development (ICT) Agenda and also, regional ICT development. Yet I am filled with great enthusiasm. Today you have all reinforced my commitment and bolstered my confidence for the future. Your attendance here today gives me the reassurance that we can get it done, a unified Caribbean Single ICT Space is possible and we will build it together. This 4th Caribbean ICT Collaboration Forum has assembled a wide range of individuals, companies, governments and policy makers to share information and resources. Your collective interactions will create a network effect and impact that will increase access and value for us all. Your steadfast commitment is commendable and it is a major step towards building a digital Caribbean Community.

Building the next generation of ICT infrastructure will power the evolution of smart, sustainable cities and communities throughout the region. Making modern ICT access more widely available, will serve as a catalyst for domestic economic growth, especially at a time where many are faced with significant economic challenges. I understand the difficult times we exist in now, as I am sure you do as well, and when I use the word “together”, I say it with conviction and purpose, because only through real collaboration, strategic alignment of purpose, shared goals and common interest can we move forward.

Many times the collective discussions tends to focus on ICT initiatives and other technical issues; and I suppose that is inescapable. But for us to truly realise real benefits through ICT, it is impossible for us to consider the technology issues separate from the associated policy and regulatory framework. We need to bring together technologists, regulators and policy makers, not only from the ICT sector, but all the sectors that will increasingly depend on the technology in order to address these challenges. We must consider regional development and again, your collective participation here today underscores the potential for ICT development across the region.

I must, however, hasten to add here that, for ICTs to deliver on the aspirations of both citizens and Governments, it is imperative for us to take advantage of digital platforms and improve the efficiency of public service delivery.

In addition, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago undertakes to continue putting in place a conducive ICT policy and regulatory environment to ensure continued strategic development of the ICT sector and the efficient delivery of Government services.

Ultimately this 4th Caribbean ICT Collaboration Forum serves to propel our national development as well ICT development throughout the region.

I encourage you to form lasting working relationships with your colleagues throughout the region.

As I close, I must commend Secretary General Lewis and her team at the CTU for their unwavering commitment to their mandate and dedication to the promotion of a unified Caribbean Single ICT Space. I look forward to a productive and professionally stimulating Forum.

Thank you.