



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By

The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP

Minister of Public Administration & Communication

National Launch

World Economic Forum

“The Role of Digital Technology in Innovation”

Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business

July 7th, 2016

Salutations:

- His Excellency, Dr. Lutz Görgens Ambassador of Germany
- Ms. Lydia Jacobs, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications
- Ms. Denise Duncan and Mr. Kurt Meyer, Deputy Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications
- Board of Directors of the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT)
- Board of Directors the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT)
- Mr. Trevor Libert, CEO, (iGovTT)
- Mrs. Cynthia Reddock-Downes Acting Chief Executive Officer, (TATT)
- Professor Miguel Carrillo, Executive Director and Professor of Strategy, UWI-ALJGSB
- Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon, Senior Economist
- Ms. Annie Baldeo, Executive Officer, Policy Planning and Market Economics, TATT
- Mr. Sherwin Ragoonanan, Head Operations - iGovTT
- Executive of iGovTT and TATT
- Other Ministry Officials
- Faculty and Staff –UWI-ALJGSB
- Alum and Students - UWI-ALJGSB
- Other distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- Members of the Media

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business for its continued work in partnering with international agencies such as the authors of the World Economic Forum, to provide for us here in Trinidad and Tobago, the benefit of robust research and analysis.

Our drive to improve our standing in the World Economic Forum's global ratings owes much to the drive initiated by the late Prime Minister, Patrick Manning who had a vision of this country achieving first world status in a very short period of time. I wish to salute this vision today as we remember Mr Manning for his immense contribution to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr Manning himself would admit that we have fallen short of the lofty goals we set for ourselves and there is plenty blame to go all around. Governmental engagement of hard empirical data such as what has been revealed this evening, in planning and policy development, has been sorely lacking for some time now.

I am certain there are many who would contend, that any improvement in a world ranking index ought to be a cause of celebration. I share the view too that all success should be applauded, and it with that in mind that I note and applaud the upward movement in the country's Networked Readiness Index from 70 to 67, and the almost imperceptible improvement in our overall score to 4.1 from 4.0 over the last year.

Our best showing is in the Readiness sub-index while our Usage and Impact sub-indices are weaker.

This seems to suggest, ladies and gentlemen, that while we are providing infrastructure, making it more affordable and within reach of most people, and possess the skills level to make this work for us, we are unable to attract the level of usage by sectors, especially at the level of government and business.

A closer examination of the numbers reveals that our affordability and skills levels are on par with the high income countries that top the index, but we lag significantly on the other pillars, most notably on the pillar of political and regulatory environment, which is identified as a catalyst for improving usage especially among businesses.

It is important for us to note that some of the other strong indicators which would have contributed to our improved showing include, among others, our judicial independence.

The quality of our Management Schools (Congrats Arthur Lok Jack), the quality of our education systems, the intensity of local competition, and the levels of ICT use in Business to Business transactions.

Conversely, some of our weaker indicators include the absence of laws related to ICT, the inordinate number of procedures it takes to enforce a

contract and the attendant number of days therefore necessary for that, the low impact of ICT on access to basic services, and of course, our capacity to innovate.

The stark numbers alone do not tell the complete story. The story is that while our ranking may have improved in this current year, and indeed we can boast of a gradual annual improvement from 2013 to current, both in our ranking and score, there are still 72 countries performing better than we are, the same number as in 2013. So have we really improved?

The answer to this question, ladies and gentlemen, is important for us who form the current administration, especially as we seek to give life to our declared intention to exponentially increase citizens' access to broadband through a national broadband policy. To get back to Mr Manning's vision of first world status.

That is why, on this government's legislative agenda, recently laid in the Parliament, we have committed to ensuring the passage and implementation of the Electronic Transactions Act and its companion, the Proceeds of Crime Act. This government is committed to ensuring that there is sufficient legislative clothing to cover the forfeiture of assets found to be illegally obtained, and legislation to deal with the use of internet to cover one's corruptly inspired tracks.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no acceptable reason that can be advanced, to explain why citizens cannot now apply for and purchase Government services on line.

Similarly, there is no acceptable reason that can be proffered to explain why on the first and fifteenth day of every month, there are **thousands** of senior citizens lining up outside banks throughout this country, hours before the banks are open, so as to receive in their hand, the monies provided to them by the Government to make the winter of their days more manageable.

Our business houses should be engaged in redoubling their efforts to increase their use of ICT to do business, rather than increasing their efforts to bring people to their doors. A recent study by MasterCard shows that the T&T's economy can **grow** by 3.5 per cent if the country increased electronic payments by 30 per cent in a four-year period.

The real question is what we do to achieve this? What is the source of our collective inertia in moving ICT for development? It is a simple root cause analysis which, I am certain, is not beyond the scope and imagination of the audience gathered here this evening.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is one recurring point that leaps out of the pages of this report, and that is, there is still a huge digital divide between the high income countries and those not so well off. This divide is also very

pronounced between the urban and rural communities even within countries.

The report reveals very pointedly, that the top ranked countries have all been successful in using ICT in new business models and in innovating existing businesses.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, unfortunately, lag far behind in this respect.

Clearly then, ladies and gentlemen, there is a growing and inescapable conclusion to which we must arrive – that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, must develop their ICT ecosystem to achieve even higher levels of usage, and in so doing, bridge the digital divide.

This, like so many other areas, requires the involvement of all key stakeholders, namely, government, local content providers, telecommunications, businesses, operators and global platform providers to help jumpstart the early stages of the ICT revolution.

It would be unfair of me though, if I were to pose the multiplicity of questions that I have, and not proffer for your consideration, at least one possible response.

There is a school of thought which argues that technology's power to connect us with each other, whether to do business, to interact socially, or even to explore new horizons in health care and social service delivery, is only one part of the story. The other more critical part, is the human part.

There is no doubt that with each passing year, it has grown much easier and infinitely more convenient for persons, businesses and governments to communicate and interact with each other.

Largely because of this increased use of technology the simple, though often overlooked element of human trust that must exist between users of this technology, has become one of the most important attributes of the post-modern culture. Trust, we are told, is the lubricant that allows these technologies to work so efficiently.

I want to suggest as well, that one of the primary reasons why trust between technology users has become so evidently important, is due simply to the increase in transparency that attends the tsunami of interconnected social media and other electronic communications capabilities. We have truly never really lived in a world in which we are quite so exposed.

As with everything though, there are pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages. The negative side of the transparency coin is the ever-escalating potential threat to one's personal privacy. Legendary are the tales

of hacking that have revealed the dark sides of people, businesses and governments.

And no one is immune from this threat, as even the former head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict discovered when personal details were leaked by his Butler.

One of the current contenders for the Presidency of the United States, Hilary Clinton, still has numerous questions to answer about emails which she allegedly sent and received. And not to be outdone locally, we have our own, yet to be completed email-gate.

Perhaps if there was greater trust inspired transparency between representing trade unions, political parties and Government, the creation of the Revenue Authority which would revolutionise the way business is conducted between government agencies like the Customs and Excise Division, the Board of Inland Revenue and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, would have already been successfully completed.

As the line Minister charged with the responsibility of bringing into reality the Government Campus Plaza which will house these three entities, I look forward to the possibility that the sheer proximity of these agencies, operating so close to each other, will break the silos often found in government agencies, and cause almost by osmosis, a closer, healthier and more productive working relationship.

This, I am certain, will result in the greater ease in doing business, in reducing the amount of procedures and the number of days necessary for the enforcement of a business contract.

In addition to transparency though, trust also plays a critical role in helping citizens contend with the burgeoning mass of information that now inundates our ever-connected and over exposed lives.

At every turn, ladies and gentlemen, we are swimming in what one writer calls a “cacophony of messages, communications, data, and opportunities to engage with others.”

For most of us, therefore, our willingness to trust either the message or its source, becomes the single most important filter for deciding what messages or interactions deserve more of our attention. Which messages are from the most trustworthy sources? Which interactions involve the most trustworthy people? Which emails are likely to affect us the most or to contain the most reliable information?

With close to 40 radio stations, a multiplicity of television stations, daily and weekly newspaper, and ordinary citizen’s capacity to become an instant disseminator of news, whom do we trust?

In other words, ladies and gentlemen, trust is the single most important ingredient in any human-to human interaction or relationship, whether

personal or commercial. As the volume and velocity of these interactions continue to increase with technology, so too will the importance of trust increase as well.

So whether you are telling or selling, cajoling or consoling, right swiping or left, what matters most is the level of trust others have in you, and I assure you today, the administration of which I am a proud member, will do everything under our purview, to not only engender and inspire the trust of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but to sustain the trust you reposed in us some 10 months ago.

Passage and full implementation of the pieces of legislation, I mentioned earlier, the Electronic Transactions Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act, along with the Data Protection Act and the Cyber Crime Act, will go a long way to ensuring greater trust in the system.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't think I have to work especially hard this evening, to convince anyone of you gathered here, of the importance of significantly increasing our usage of digital technology in innovation. And this government is committed to putting the necessary mechanisms in place to do so.

There is still so much to be done in the areas of education and health, in our commercial transactions and business applications, so much more to be done to improve the speed and efficiency of the daily interaction of citizens in the quest to enhance the quality of their daily lives.

I am equally convinced that in front of me this evening, is a cadre of people who can make this happen. We have representatives from the world of academia, various arms of the business sector, representatives of the State from National Information and Communications Technology Company Limited, representatives from the regulatory body, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, and other like-minded individuals, who could make this happen.

The question remains: do we trust each other enough, to make it happen?

The late Patrick Manning trusted that we could and it is one area that I am hoping and trusting that we will be able to prove him right.

I thank you.