



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

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**Ministry of Public Administration  
and Digital Transformation**

**World Telecommunications and Information Society Day 2021**

**“ACCELERATING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN CHALLENGING TIMES”**  
MONDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2021

QUESTIONS POSED TO SENATOR THE HONOURABLE ALLYSON WEST, MINISTER OF PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AT THE ITU’S HIGH LEVEL PANEL  
DISCUSSION TO COMMEMORATE WTISD 2021

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*Moderator Question 1:*

**What were some of the key challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago during the past year and how have you sought to resolve them?**

Trinidad and Tobago, is in the peculiar position of being classified a high-income country and a small island developing nation. Despite widespread internet availability, with a broadband penetration rate of 77.3%, and an even higher mobile penetration rate of 158% - the country has an uneven rate of technological adoption. The majority of the population are not comfortable with the digital world as a means of conducting business, but rather engage via the lens of personal entertainment. Within the last year, however, we have seen a pivot in the private sector, to offering online commerce options. For many Small Island Developing

States, the challenge is rooted in coordination and administration as opposed to the adoption of technology.

In the government sector, we still have too many processes that are traditionally manual and paper based. Government's focus has been centred on **Digitising records** and **Business Process Re-engineering** to allow for digital services. However, given the ongoing pandemic, getting traction on these initiatives are a significant challenge for Trinidad and Tobago. The priority of the government is first and foremost on the well-being of our citizens. We must safeguard our people from the ravages of this disease, whilst ensuring service continuity.

In 2020, the GORTT moved to encourage and adopt a model of flexible working. However, many government agencies did not and still do not have access to files and documents remotely. As such, one of our pivotal initiatives has been the development of **Enterprise Document Management Solutions** which can be rolled out across all our Ministries, Departments and Agencies. It is hoped that this will result in significant economic savings as previously, each department and agency developed its own ICT agenda. By transitioning to **a centralised model of data governance** we can expect a significant return on our ICT investments.

Our **National ICT Plan - Blueprint** outlines a strategic and cohesive approach to digital transformation and we all recognise that Digital Transformation is multi-faceted. While technology is widely available, the greater challenge is change management and user adoption. The government is designing a **Digital Skills Training Programme** to ensure our staff has the necessary tools to work in a digital environment. Our senior Public Servants hold a

wealth of institutional knowledge and we are resolved to ensure that as we move forward, **none are left behind** and we are committed to digital equity.

Specific interventions are needed to train persons to manage a hybrid work force i.e., blended offices where some persons work remotely and others are in office. It requires a significant shift in management styles to focus on performance rather than traditional standards. In this respect, we are rolling out a revamped **Public Sector Performance Management System** which will allow for these new working arrangements and provide guidance and performance metrics.

To this end, we are also examining the administrative processes, to increase efficiencies and reduce redundancies. With the introduction of our **Digital ID Programme**, we will eventually eliminate the need for citizens to present multiple forms of ID or present in person in order to access government services. Even as we attempt to streamline and digitise these services, we are in the process of upgrading existing legislation to allow digital transactions to be legally recognised and binding. While much of this is covered in our existing **Electronic Transactions Act**, there are still areas which must be amended and proclaimed for us to have the maximum benefit of a digital society.

Remote working in itself requires government and the private sector to invest significantly in ICTs as staff need access to devices, and the country as whole must invest in **ICT infrastructure upgrades**. We have been working assiduously with ISPs to enhance their services and ensure reliable connectivity across our islands. Government has also **removed taxes on the importation of computing devices** and incentivised digitisation and the ICT economy with a tax allowance set at 150% at a cap of \$3million dollars to tech start-ups and businesses that provide technology solutions.

**Moderator Follow up Question:**

*Given the constraints on your resources how has GORTT adapted your Digital Transformation Strategy?*

In the past, a lack of evidence-based decision-making has led to conflicting ideas on where to allocate resources for maximum impact. Currently, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) is conducting a **Digital Inclusion Survey**; approximately 6000 households will be surveyed from various communities in the country. The information collected from this survey will be used to inform public policy related to improving ICT access in key areas and to address issues affecting population groups at risk of being digitally excluded. TATT also administers the Universal Service Fund and this survey -which is usually conducted every three years - will guide our capital investments moving forward.

The CARICOM region is a relatively small population pool with about eighteen million inhabitants. **Disaster Risk Management** and the continued inherent risks of our geography with respect to earthquakes and volcanoes, and seasonal hurricanes, means that historically resources are often diverted to survival rather than development and innovation. This situation has been exacerbated by COVID 19 and the stymied access to vaccines, which has impeded our return to normalcy.

Trinidad and Tobago, is a fraction of the Caribbean community with just over 1.3 million citizens. We do not have a large pool of human resources with the technical skills and

expertise to enact a lot of our digital agenda. Government therefore often finds itself in competition with the private sector.

Alternatively, we hire the private sector to do a lot of the work for us, which leaves government in the unenviable position of having limited expertise resident in our agencies. We have sought to alleviate this problem by engaging with our regional counterparts and seeking expertise internationally. Most recently, we have engaged in talks and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Estonia but these interventions come at a considerable cost to taxpayers at a time where our finances are limited.

We would like to encourage greater collaboration and resource sharing at a regional and international level so that all can benefit from economies of scale. While there have been many sessions where we share information and approaches; we think there can be even greater synergies if we collaborate on a regional digital ID, vaccine passports and even government e-services. Shared technologies and shared resources are key to our future development. Creating an enabling environment through CARICOM and regional outreach is one major component of Trinidad and Tobago's revised Digital Strategy; as we've learned over the past year, we are all in this together.

Thank you.