

Address
Hon. Andrew Wheatley, Ph.D - Minister of Science, Energy and Technology
Jamaica Open Data Portal Launch
June 24, 2016

Salutations:

Introduction

As a proud Jamaican, there are so many moments when I pause to celebrate the many accomplishments of our country and the strides we take each day to break barriers and set new trends. Today is one such moment when we recognize our country as a trend-setter in the region and across the globe.

The launch of Jamaica's Open Data Portal signifies another historical success, for Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the way we collectively treat data in this country. WE have now joined the Open Data revolution, a growing global network of over 60 countries that have adopted open data platforms in their governance framework.

Today, WE have become the **first country in the Caribbean** to claim this achievement! St. Lucia, I understand, will in short order, follow in our tracks, to become the second in the Caribbean region to establish an open data portal.

I recognize our partners and stakeholders who have invested in this project, and have brought us to this juncture in our history.

I specially recognize the:

- World Bank – who conceptualized and have funded the project.
- Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) that have cooperated throughout the different phases of the project and who are responsible for creating the data sets that have already been uploaded to the portal,
- Nu Civic, which has been contracted by the World Bank to develop the portal.
- Open Data Committee – comprises approximately twenty government including E-Gov, NLA, STATIN, PIOJ, MOF. The committee was established to drive data gathering activity for the project.
- E-Gov Jamaica who will, after one (1) year, host the portal.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Jamaica Open Data Portal is a game-changer!

This is a practical demonstration that Government is determined to change the way data is treated and to increase accessibility and transparency of Government.

We are creating greater access for the people. By making data more freely and openly available to all Jamaicans, we are driving investments in the country. Simply, the major objective of Open Data is *Government - Connecting With the People*, and reversing old bureaucracies that impede national advances.

Open Data

Over the years, there have been incremental steps to improving access to data. A number of Government entities have established their own websites. However, these have been inadequately used to provide general information to the public. Consequently, we have not made sufficient strides in increasing access to data.

As a society, we must adapt to newer ways of data storage. For us to want to compete successfully on the global stage and attract investments, we must create and utilise strong ICT infrastructure that improve access to data.

There is NO REASON that in Jamaica today, anyone should have to join a line or be placed in an un-ending queue or be put on hold for an inordinately long period in order to get data from a Government office.

Not only, does this tie up our phone lines, it also is a real pull on our human resources as too many of the calls that are placed to Government offices relate to data that could be placed online, instead of in a folder on an individual's desk.

In much the same way, that Google has become the best friend of many persons who wish to find information, I would like the Jamaica Open Data Portal to become the first point of access for anyone who wishes to find data on Jamaica.

As an administration, we have committed to transforming Jamaica into a digital, knowledge-based society. This Portal is one component that is geared towards increasing efficiencies across Government, and will aid in making the public sector an example of competence and productivity.

We intend to go even further in our digital transformation by:

- Introducing automated business processes to reduce bureaucracy and strengthen record keeping
- Making health records digital
- Equipping schools with management information systems
- Enabling government to process electronic payments and accept electronic signatures for certain transactions
- Eliminating barriers to electronic commerce

Opportunities Created by Open Data

The establishment of an open data framework opens the door to tremendous opportunities for us as a country. Not only does this signal OUR commitment to good governance, transparency and improved public services but it also provides an opportunity to boost to the economy.

Researchers have found that:

- Globally, as a result of open data, 7 sectors (education, transportation, consumer products, electricity, oil & gas, health care and consumer finance) alone could potentially generate more than \$3 trillion a year - and perhaps as much as \$5 trillion a year - in additional value.
- Studies further show that, although Open data is in its early days, it can potentially increase entrepreneurial endeavours while assisting established

companies to segment markets, define new products and services and improve efficiency and effectiveness of operations

- Additionally, the Caribbean Policy Research Institute estimates that J\$30 billion a year could be earned from open data initiatives.

With the launch of the Jamaica Open Data Portal, we expect to derive a number of benefits, including:

- Promoting greater transparency to the citizenry and wider stakeholders and interest groups
- Making data available to the private sector for creating new products and services
- Creating greater engagement with citizens and businesses with open opportunities to play an active role in influencing and improving government policies that have impact on them and their quality of life.
- Ensuring Government data can be made available, is readable by the public in an open format and can be manipulated.
- Removing Government bureaucracy in accessing data
- Speeding up the pace at which government does business
- Helping to drive investment: one central point to access all government data.

We also anticipate that the Jamaica Open data Portal will aid in the improvement of our ranking on the Global Open Data Index- currently, Jamaica is ranked as being 42% open. This places us at 37 out of 122 countries, up from 45 in 2014 and 61 in 2013.

CHARGE TO GOJ MDAs

You, the stakeholders, as originators of the data sets, will be critical in creating the cultural shift that encourages persons to check the Portal before picking up a telephone to call our institutions for data.

Closing

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government is serious about making Jamaica the place of choice to work, raise families and do business. We are depending on your continued partnership for the success of this Portal.

Today's event is a testimony of the great things that we can achieve as a people. My hope is that this tool be utilized to its fullest potential as we work towards achieving our developmental goals.

Commendations once again to the team that has brought this tool from concept to reality.

Thank you.