

Remarks
Hon. Fayval Williams
Minister of Science, Energy & Technology
Caribbean Open Data Conference & Codesprint
May 16, 2019 @ 9 am

Salutations:

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Good Morning ladies and gentlemen!

It is a privilege to bring greetings at this very important event not just for Jamaica but also for the wider Caribbean.

I must commend the Mona School of Business and Management, SlashRoots Foundation and all partners for staging this conference which will enhance and facilitate the open data agenda across the region.

I note your theme-“**Smart Communities, Smarter People**” and it speaks to the growing trend of developing smart cities all around the world. As artificial intelligence and the internet of things become more prevalent the volume of data will grow exponentially.

Therefore, the time to start planning and strategizing is at hand and fora such as these, are crucial in this regard.

Open Data Agenda

Ladies and gentlemen, we live in the information age where ***data is king***. Information that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone is what we refer to as Open Data.

Open data is an integral part of developing a knowledge-based and digital society. This is an age which sees more and more of our citizens and partners requiring greater access to information in an effort to make sound decisions.

In recent years, open data has emerged as one of the most globally significant policy and technological trends to promote transparency, improve public sector synergy and efficiency and facilitate the creation of new businesses.

At the economic level, open data is of great importance. Several studies have estimated the economic value of Open Data at several tens of billions of dollars annually.

New products and companies are also re-using Open Data. Google

Translate for instance, uses the enormous volume of documents that appear in various languages to train the translation algorithms it uses, thus improving its quality of service.

Open Data and Jamaica

I must say that **the Government is committed to the open data agenda.**

In 2016, with the assistance of the UK's Department for International Development and in collaboration with the World Bank, we launched our Open Data Portal, becoming the first English-speaking Caribbean country to do so.

At that time, we joined 40 countries, at different stages of development that are pursuing Open Data policy actions and/or initiatives to influence social, political and economic change.

Further to that, we are also developing our Open Data Policy so that we can tap into the tremendous resources and potential that open data provides.

While we have made some strides in our open data endeavours, there is still much more to be done as evidenced by the 2018 Global Open Data Index where:

- Jamaica was ranked 58th out of 94 countries, with an open data score of 26%

There are many areas where we as Jamaicans can expect Open Data to be of value. There are also many different groups of people and organizations across the nation who can benefit from the availability of Open Data, including the Government itself.

Committed to Providing Access

As a Ministry and certainly as a Government, we are committed to providing our people with access to the internet and information as well as making Government data readily accessible so that our potential investors, stakeholders and citizens can truly see an inclusive and transparent Government.

So far we have:

- facilitated capacity building through data training programmes for our youths;
- increased the number of Community Access Points and public Wi-Fi hotspots; and
- zero rated Government websites so that individuals can access these sites without data charges being incurred and several other initiatives

We are also committed to the legislative agenda of safeguarding the use, collection and storage of information and to this end we have:

- drafted the Data Protection Bill, which is a high priority on this year's legislative agenda

Closing

Ladies and gentlemen, **the future is data.**

As a region, open data has great potential for our people, our Governments and our wider stakeholders and partners. It sends a strong message that we are serious about doing business and building strong economies.

My commendations once again to the Mona School of Business, SlashRoots Foundation and all the partners who have collaborated for this conference and Codesprint.

I wish you all the very best.

Thank you.

