



## **OPENING REMARKS**

**BY**

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**Seminar**

**“The Power of Data for National Development”**

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Good Morning.

Thank you for the invitation to speak today and deliver these opening remarks. Given the lineup of speakers and the timeliness of the conversation, I am confident that today's proceedings will be most informative and productive.

We live in an information age where the fulfillment of our national development goals requires that the Government harness the power of data. We cannot overstate the need for this to be adequately prioritized and resourced for all governments who wish to achieve success in this day and age.

Data is one of the highest valued commodities in our world today. The private sector has been rapidly innovating ways to activate the power of data with great commercial success, albeit not without great controversy as well. The task for all governments who wish to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to bridge the data divide.

Data for development cannot just be a buzz word for developing countries. For the Bahamas, I am pleased to say, data driven growth is a strategic priority for the Government, and we are implementing a change process that will systematically allow us to transform our capacity to produce, transform and analyse data with high-quality standards, protecting privacy and confidentiality for policy making, monitoring and accountability. It is not enough to simply collect more data. The task at

hand is to produce accurate, timely and disaggregated data that are relevant for achieving our development goals.

### **Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU)**

The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) was set up as a vehicle to give life to the Government's data for development plan. Their operation was designed to demonstrate the value of data driven growth strategies. We have already seen the methodology bear fruit, particularly with the Unit's early work with the Ministry of Finance and the private sector collaborating on a project to achieve ease of doing business improvements around the business licensing process.

By tracking data around the time associated with delivering business license renewals and new business registrations, we were able to set specific targets to reduce the delivery time and adopt new policies to achieve those targets. Earlier this year, the Department of Inland Revenue (DIR) reduced the time to deliver business license renewals from over 30 days to few than 48 hours. To improve the speed of starting a new business, DIR also created a new category of licensing for low-risk businesses to register.

Data drove this process, allowing the Ministry to objectively and transparently assess performance, track progress, and ultimately improve its service delivery to the benefit of the public.

Another example of the priority we place on data is the reform of the Department of Information Technology, which is now the Department of Transformation and Digitization. The change here is not just in the name. The mandate of the Department has expanded, encapsulating the Government's strategic shift to focus on data for development. The transformed Department now orients its information services around the goal of improving the Government's service delivery (through public officers), and improving the accessibility of government services (through ease of doing business). This is significant because DTD is not only providing technology to digitize old processes and change out legacy platforms; it is also driving the process of revamping and streamlining old systems. It makes no sense to simply digitize a 10-step process when that process could and should be 3-steps in the first place. It is a subtle but important shift in focus that is needed to deliver digital transformation in government.

While we still have a long way to go to fulfill the vision of the Government and the national development plan, we must acknowledge the strident efforts being made. You will hear more details about this work today.

It is unfortunate that sometimes in the rough and tumble of governance and partisan politics, many positive initiatives get lost in the mix. This is one notable area that we must not let be overshadowed. We have large and small scale projects taking place across government, many of them

in partnership with the IDB, and they are paving the way for long-term systemic change.

## **DATA FOR DEVELOPMENT AT THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE**

In the Ministry of Finance, the heart of Public Financial Management Reform is the development and adoption of robust information systems. We are in the full swing of implementing the project plan for this multi-faceted reform initiative. One of the ultimate outcomes is the eventual establishment of an Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) that standardizes and centralizes the financial management operations for all ministries, departments, agencies and state-owned enterprises.

If we project ourselves into the future, and envision how IFMIS will digitally collect real-time data for planning, analysis and reporting across government, we can foresee the improvements in accuracy and efficiency in reporting financial data, boosting transparency and ultimately resulting in fiscal savings for the Government.

Combined with the phased roll-out of the new online Customs clearance platform, Click2Clear, and we can see that the future for data in this country is looking completely transformed.

Click2Clear is completely modernizing the way Customs operates. The online system is designed to deliver faster, more efficient and comprehensive Customs processing once fully implemented. This means end-to-end online Customs processing and tracking, automated entry checking, tighter controls and risk management to reduce corruption and fraud, more accountability to protect government revenue, more statistical information and data derived from artificial intelligence that can be used for effective policy making.

From a fiscal point of view, I cannot overstate the potential loss of opportunity for even more robust economic growth when we do not have sufficient real-time data and data analytics on what is happening in our economy. With it, we can see things from enhanced perspectives. We can be more innovative and proactive when it comes to crafting fiscal and economic policy.

While all of this work is in the implementation phase, it is admittedly difficult to see the full benefits. But I am confident that the Government is putting in place a powerful foundation that will benefit us for years to come.

## **CULTURAL HURDLES TO OVERCOME**

Few people would dispute the value of this reform agenda, but let us be frank, these types of changes do not happen overnight, and they don't happen just because the heart and the mind is willing.

The type of transformation we are talking about will require us to boost our human resource capacity: completely retooling in certain areas and adjusting how we recruit new talent in other areas. We cannot overlook the need to develop our human resource capacity to meet the demands of an overarching data for development strategy. And from a holistic perspective, significant cultural shifts are also needed.

In closing, I want to speak to the cultural shifts, as they relate directly to our collective behavior as individuals.

**A culture of open data in government** is a major departure from the way we currently operate, where data is often treated like a personal possession, shield and guarded in ways that are counter-productive to effective governance.

Information and data should be treated as public goods, where it is for the benefit of all. When treated this way, we are able to extract information from the data to support decision making for national development.

To really achieve success at data driven policy development there is an absolute need to break down these walls and treat data and information are public goods.

**In the wider society we also have to increase our comfort level with sharing personal information** for research and data analysis.

The work of the Department of Statistics, for example, is made enormously more difficult because of the skepticism that exists with sharing information. To overcome this cultural aversion we will need to do a better job as policy makers and data scientists at demonstrating the results of using data in a way that improves the lives of citizens.

These are changes we all need to examine at the individual level to support the institutional changes currently underway.

At the end of the day, there is no doubt, when we have more reliable and comprehensive data at our finger tips, and a culture of information sharing, the Government will be poised to deliver better and more targeted national development outcomes.