



PRESS RELEASE

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Data revolution must be powered by ICT – Prime Minister Mitchell

(CARICOM Secretariat, Turkeyen, Greater Georgetown, Guyana) Information and Communication technology (ICT) has to be the tool that powers the data revolution that will be used for the sustainable development of regional economies.

This is the view articulated by Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell, at the opening ceremony of the Second High Level Advocacy Forum on Statistics held in St. George's, Grenada on Monday. The theme of the forum was 'A data revolution for sustainable development with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens'.

The data revolution, aimed at improving the quality of statistics available to citizens, was one of the recommendations of a High level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda that was established by the United Nations Secretary-General. A report, completed by the Panel, also emphasized the need to take advantage of new technology, crowd sourcing and improved connectivity to empower people with information.

Donning his cap as the lead Head of Government with responsibility for Science and Technology in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Quasi Cabinet, Prime Minister Mitchell referred to the potency of ICT in propelling the Region forward quickly and more effectively.

Page 1 of 3

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He warned that ICT and statistics should not be isolated from each other. The data revolution, he underscored, must be empowered by “this important tool”.

“ICT must be the engine to achieve what is desired,” he told participants who included top government officials from across the Community, and representatives from regional and international organisations.

He added that the use of ICT in statistics had to be considered in the context of the Region’s Single ICT space that is to be established to enhance the environment for investment and production. ICT, he said, had the “great potential” to transform national and regional statistics systems, confront data challenges, cut costs, and reduce the time spend on collecting and producing solid data.

“I would like to encourage us to continue thinking of creative and innovative ways to revolutionize our statistical processes through the use of ICT in our national and regional strategic plans,” the Prime Minister said.

Young bright students, he added, must see an exciting career path in statistics and information and be attracted to pursue careers in this area.

Dr. Philomen Harrison, Project Director, Regional Statistics, also honed in on the importance of the data revolution at the Forum.

“Data are all around us, notably Big Data is now with us, data that are generally collected by huge corporations or by Credit Card companies, through online shopping and in the use of social networks and which are all likely to impact official Statistics,” she pointed out.

She called attention to the need to give voice to the data revolution in the CARICOM context, and pointed out that within the CARICOM Secretariat, there was an Office, Regional Statistics, that was completely dedicated to compiling and disseminating data for and from the CARICOM Member States and Associate Members.

“Without such data, countries and the Region cannot plan policy and forecast our future whether in economic, social or financial sectors. Statistics is a basic cross-cutting factor and involves all levels of policy,” she pointed out.

The Forum, she said, was taking place as the global economic and financial crisis continued, and at a time when ongoing and upcoming globally significant events were having an impact on the Community. These events include the Rio +20 Sustainable Development Conference, out of which the goal of eradicating poverty was identified; the approaching timeline of 2015 for the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals; the Small Island Development States (SIDS) Conference in Samoa later this year; and the negotiations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

“Our discussions and activities here this week are therefore quite relevant to the global agenda and our Community’s place in it,” Dr. Harrison explained, referring not only to the High Level Forum, but other side events that will be held in Grenada during the week.

The opening ceremony on Monday also featured remarks by Ms. El Iza Mohamedou, Deputy Secretariat Manager, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-First Century (PARIS21) Secretariat; Mr. Crispin Gregoire, Chief for the Caribbean Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Mr. Ewout Sandker, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and for the Dutch Overseas Countries and Territories; and Mr. McDonald Thomas, Operations Officer, Social Sector Division, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

The Forum, held in the form of panel discussions during the course of a day, was aimed to ultimately position statistics as a critical component of decision-making and citizen empowerment. It was also used to call attention to the necessity for investment in the field.