



4TH INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON  
**Small Island  
Developing States**  
27-30 MAY, 2024  
ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

## **SIDS4 Conference Side Event**

### **Digital Transformation for Resilience in the Eastern Caribbean: from crises to opportunities**

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May, 8:00-9:30am, Room 9, American University of Antigua**

**Organized by: UN Sub-regional Team for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean and the Government of Antigua**

#### **Background on the event**

Recent crises in the Eastern Caribbean highlight the importance of digital technologies for public preparedness and emergency response, continuity of public services (e- government and telehealth), improving access to and equity in quality education (e-learning), strengthening effective risk and natural resource management, and ensuring continuity of economic activity. This side-event aims to convene cross-sectoral stakeholders, practitioners and advocates of digital transformation in the sub-region to explore entry points and opportunities for accelerating digital transformation across four key areas: a) improving public service delivery; b) navigating climate change and risk management; c) harnessing artificial intelligence for resilience; and d) fostering digital services for financial inclusion.

## Key Issues discussed

- How the sub-region has navigated various crises demonstrates a readiness to adapt, transform and adopt new technological solutions to ensure continuity. The need to improve UN support to SIDS in driving digital transformation to ensure prosperity and strengthen social cohesion.
- Four main challenges: i) The high cost and subpar quality of digital services; ii) Limited interoperability of digital services; iii) Lack of specific and measurable goals for national strategies; and iv) Limited digital skills training which impacts capacity to expand digital businesses.
- There needs to be intentional effort and Caribbean leaders are demonstrating this. UNDP has developed a digital for development hub for LAC where experiences are gathered, and lessons learned. One of the commitments is to update the UNDP SIDS Digital Transformation Strategy and connect it to ABAS 2024-2034.
- The recent Conference in Trinidad & Tobago– SIDS 2.0 – focused on how to move from SIDS to “Small Island Digital States”. Tackling issues of infrastructure, regulation and cyber security, private sector participation and people can be addressed at the regional level, but the approach is yet to be identified.
- Caribbean and SIDS are doing well despite the challenges. Small markets will continue to limit operator numbers and return on investments. There is also a need to strengthen the policy and legal frameworks to ensure that people can be safe online, particularly children.
- The explosive use in social media, e-learning, and web applications for financial services needs to be supported by technology. There is an appetite for the private sector to innovate but this needs to be supported by governments and development partners.
- There are two additional challenges to boosting private sector participation: access and building the business case – which requires that people are ready to use the technology and capacity when it becomes available. Partnerships between government and private entities are important as they have mutual dependency, therefore national strategies should be clear on such outcomes.

- There is insufficient coordination at the regional level with OECS and CARICOM, and an unclear division of labour at the regional level – creating inefficiencies. Cyber security will have an important impact in the future and on the potential for increased investments.

### **Key recommendations for action**

- The **SIDS Center of Excellence**, as proposed by ABAS 2024-2034 should be considered as the most tangible step to **promote entrepreneurship** in the digital space. The UN and development partners need to explore how to best use ABAS 2024-2034 to accelerate digital transformation and a multi-sectoral approach.
- Digital services should be considered a **global public good** and force for sustainable, inclusive and resilient development in the region. The rollout of **Digital readiness assessments** is critical to leverage analysis and diagnosis in individual countries and tailor interventions to their progress.
- **Data is the foundation** of artificial intelligence (AI), and SIDS should be supported in their efforts to collect and process data to **foster, track and monitor ethical use of AI**.
- **Partnerships and capacity building** remain at the forefront of accelerating digital transformation. This includes fostering innovation, upskilling citizens and building a sustainable **pipeline of talent** to sustain the momentum of transformation. This agenda requires the encouragement for youth to leverage their knowledge in formal decision-making through a **whole-of-society approach**.
- Partnerships between **private and public sector** require flexible governments that can keep pace with change and pivot quickly as the sector evolves. This includes investing in modern infrastructure and **matching technology with local needs**.