



OPENING REMARKS

BY

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GRAND BAHAMA

The Office of the Prime Minister

Department of Transformation and Digitalization in

conjunction with the Inter-American Development

Bank's

Official Opening of the Kick Off Workshop of the Government Digital Transformation to Strengthen Competitiveness

Wednesday, November 13, 2019

I begin with a quote from the Most Honourable Prime Minister which is printed on the back of your programme:

“Ladies and gentlemen, finally our eGovernment transformation has begun. These include providing a single online window facility through which multiple services can be accessed; interoperability for transporting data securely between the relevant agencies and the user or citizen; data ownership and retraining for citizens and public officers.”

Earlier this year the country signed a contract to fund a 30 million dollar loan for one of the largest e-government overhaul projects in our history. In order to access the funding the government was required to achieve certain milestones. I am pleased to say the Government has now met all the requirements which will allow this project to accelerate.

However, since that time we are pleased to report progress on our overall e-government project. Last month the Passport office and the Department for Transformation and Digitization completed the online application for renewal of E-Passports. The Online service which can now be accessed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website has the ability to take online applications, pay online for renewal of E-Passports and send an electronic message that the Passport is ready for collection. In essence the user will only have to physically attend the Passport Office to collect the renewed passport. This process will cut down on the long lines experienced at the Passport Office.

We have received and assessed expressions of interest for an E-Cabinet Management system to innovatively streamline and automate the managerial operations of the Cabinet Office, Implement advanced security features, Provide mobile accessibility for Ministers, the Secretary to the Cabinet, Permanent Secretaries and delivery of Government services.

We have engaged the University of the Bahamas to begin a public survey on our existing e-government services and assess the public e-government needs.

We have assembled a talented and experienced group made up of IT specialists, lawyers and accountants to make up the Project Execution Unit.

Designed a pilot for the interoperability platform which will allow Government agencies to digitally talk to each other. The design has been submitted to a local company that has partnered with an Estonian company to build the platform.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As I advised the media at the Press Conference for the signing of the contract with the University of The Bahamas, we are fixed on a digitized public service environment where customers can expect an improvement in the ease of doing business through a reduction in the time it takes to incorporate a business; greater transparency in the government processes; improvement in the procedures and delivery of services; better data collection and analysis to assist with more informed decision making; and greater public private ICT partnerships and innovations.

This Whole of Government transformative programme, which will encompass a series of projects, is funded by a thirty (\$30) million dollar loan from the Inter-American Bank, or the IDB. I take this opportunity, once again, to thank the members of the IDB and in particular Daniela Marquis, Alexandre Veyrat-Pontet

and Inga Carey along with our own Elise Delancey, Marlon Johnson, Carol Roach, Tonya Adderley and Carl Oliver for their guidance, patience and support on this journey.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me set the context for my Charge.

On 1st September 2019, Abaco and Grand Bahama were hit by the most devastating hurricane in our recorded history. I am reminded of the hurricane of 1929 that wreaked much devastation on the city of Nassau and the outer bands of Hurricane Matthew in 2017 that devastated south New Providence. I place this before you, “What if the outer bands of Hurricane Dorian, another Straw Market fire, a pandemic or Cyber-attack had hit New Providence?” Picture if you will, your offices as you left them yesterday afternoon: an abundance of paper files, manual processes, redundant procedures, an unsatisfied clientele and a defensive public service. It is safe to say that Government would have been shut down for about one month – no birth certificates, social service records, health records, education records, drivers’ licences, NIB records, police records, no access to health, education and security services, roads impassable, no electricity, water or telecommunications, homes lost, no banking services and the list goes on. Consider it!

We, as a people have come through a past of slavery, and discrimination into a place of improved healthcare, education, infrastructure, ICT development, open radio waves and freedom of speech without victimization, more police and defence officers, majority rule and being known on the world stage for tourism, banking and sports. We have patted ourselves on the back for our achievements, and then stopped, it would appear..... and nations have passed us by. But here is our opportunity to reset, to re-boot, to realize that development is transformative and is a process, not a goal. That success and productivity are measured not by busy-ness but by achievements.

And now my charge.

This visionary and Whole of Government digitization programme will:

- (i) Streamline Government procedures and make them available online to reduce the cost of Government bureaucracy;
- (ii) Increase the use of ICT's in the Public sector and by the Government; and
- (iii) Increase transparency of Government activities and strengthen auditing and control mechanisms.

Ben Roseth, is one of the guest speakers here and hopefully will expand on the study he and his companion authors conducted named "Wait No More". I note a few of his recommendations which we should adopt.

- (1) Learn how citizens experience procedures so that applications or solutions are created in line with real world experiences;
- (2) Redesign Government transactions with the citizen experience in mind and
- (3) Facilitate access to digital procedures

These support the following principles to be employed in the rollout of this programme:

1. Single message; "Making Government Work For You"
2. Single window facility through which we can transport inquiries, requests, documents etc. to transact business
3. Electronic or Mobile Identification Card with biometrics for security coupled with an electronic signature to allow persons to communicate and transact business with Government and to be verified from anywhere in the world including their living rooms
4. Interoperability for transporting data securely between the relevant agencies and the user or citizen. And cyber security will be a major factor.
5. Once only concept enshrined in legislation that once one Government agency has the information no other agency can ask for it.
6. Legislation review and amendments to allow for digitization.
7. Twice at least which governs the usefulness of information in that more than one agency should be able to use the information, for example, your birth certificate.
8. Data ownership in which your personal data is owned by you and you can see who is looking at it.
9. Public Awareness and Education for the preparation of citizens and public officers.

10. The retooling and re-skilling of the Public officer for new and relevant jobs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a message to the public service,

The Department of Transformation and Digitization, which now has two sections, the Project Execution Unit and DIT, as you knew it, will determine what is required for you to become ready for digitization and will work with you to make it happen. So what is required of you?

While we proceed with this workshop and proceed with the project, the people of The Bahamas need you to:

- Become the Champion and agents of the change
- Contribute to the Public Awareness and Education strategy
- Agree services provided, requirements and business processes in a timely manner
- Assist in the review of the legislation
- Implement and monitor the change
- Create a digital agenda for your ministry, department, and authority to include process review and re-engineering, and document management
- Implement a programme for data storage
- Identify talent and encourage innovations as we will be developing a strategy to reward innovations
- Implement a Cyber security strategy as most breaches occur inside the organization
- Implement systems that will assist the Auditor General in his functions.

The next three days are critical to the planning and ultimate success of the programme. I urge you to give it your full attention, time, talent, ideas and focus. Learn and contribute.

Colleagues, Public Officers, fellow sojourners and Bahamians alike, I put before you the fact that no nation will remain the same. If we remain in a static position our rankings will continue to fall as other countries improve. It is they who will get the investor and the winter resident who have proven so beneficial to The Bahamas

in past years. The sustained development of The Bahamas depends on each one of us. I charge you, therefore, like Paul in Hebrews 12:1b, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” so that our legacy will be a digital society that is globally competitive resulting in the improved standard of living for all in The Bahamas.

This Government is committed to eBahamas 242: Making Government Work for You! Together we can do it!

Thank you.