



Artificial Intelligence Forum for Small Island Digital States (AI for SIDS 2.0)

Key Takeaways: Feb 18th 2025 Session Summary

The debut Forum of the “AI for SIDS 2.0 - Caribbean” online series was held on Tuesday 18th February, 2025 @ 10:00am AST via Zoom, with livestream via YouTube.

This first session addressed foundational concepts for the use of AI in Public Institutions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – PROFESSOR DAVID EAVES: Associate Professor in Digital Government, UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP)

➤ *Global South has many innovative applications of tech in government*

- Approximately \$700 billion spent on technology by governments and educational institutions around the world: approx \$600 billion in the global north, \$100 billion by the rest of the planet
- The digital implementations in the global north, are by and large **not** referenced as models for replication, notwithstanding the magnitude of the tech expenditure in those regions. There are, however, interesting innovations and models that are used in the global south where more is being done with less.

➤ *Interoperability is needed for more effective AI implementations – the case for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)*

- Government services and applications are siloed by Ministries and Departments resulting in varied standards; and creating duplications in data, infrastructure, software licensing fees, and authentication mechanisms. This makes it difficult, for even AI effectiveness, as many different, duplicative datasets must be queried and compared.
- Interoperability is required and needs to be such that it does not delay processes and/or create new inefficiencies. Interoperability must be enabled in a way that allows different parts of government to evolve at different speeds. This makes the case for shared infrastructure (digital public infrastructure), which can improve the supply and quality of training and post-training data for advanced AI models. (Explanation, along with use cases provided in video recording)

➤ *AI is the Icing on top of the cake – not the cake*

- AI would be better implemented if the underlying infrastructure is done correctly. The proposed model for the underlying delivery stack (building from electricity and the grid) is provided in the video recording.

- Other important considerations for effective AI implementations are AI cost structures, AI and data governance, interoperability with legacy and/or modern software, remediation and the maximising of citizens’ trust in government, among others.

➤ *Cautious implementation advised*

- Government must consider the rate of implementation as they want to guard against losing the trust of its publics. Moving too quickly may break public trust and, on the flipside, falling too far behind current developments may also break trust. A safe government position is to be a fast follower – not becoming first adopters, but observing what is working before making the step to adoption.
- A cautious approach is to implement AI for backend users, that is, for public servants within government to support their front-end delivery to the public.
- Globally, there is not a high number of instances of AI in production or at scale in government.
- Using leads to understanding - Public servants should be allowed to experiment with AI to become familiar with its benefits as well as its limitations, towards becoming both healthy enthusiasts and healthy skeptics simultaneously.
- Adoption of AI or any new technology in government should be consultative to ensure that the pursuit of efficiency leads to positively impacting lives. Roll out to citizens should also be iterative, starting with small groups, slowly ramping up to the wider population, and learning as you grow.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – Ms ERICA SIMMONS: M. ED, SMIEEE, Co-Author of the UNESCO Caribbean AI Policy Roadmap

➤ *What is AI?*

- AI can be likened to a librarian who has access to a rich set of information, can query it in various ways, and bring it forth for many different use cases.

➤ *Benefits of AI*

AI can:

- Enhance data processing, thereby improving decision making.
- Contribute to improving citizen services and citizens’ interactions with government e.g. AI’s Natural language processing can enable citizen service delivery through chatbots and virtual assistants.
- Reduce costs through minimising errors and replacement of inefficient, paper-based processes.
- Enhance government transparency and broaden services to be more inclusive.
- Optimise HR by freeing up resources to focus on strategic initiatives.
- Facilitate economic growth and competitiveness over the long term.

➤ *Case studies (details given in video recording)*

- Government office in Santa Monica, California – AI system for customer service management, HR service delivery and IT service management.
- Government office in South Dakota, USA – AI citizen portal for government services.
- There are also current cases where AI has been used in urban planning, fraud detection and healthcare.

➤ *Points of Advocacy*

Ms Simmons is a keen advocate for:

- AI skills development and focus groups - Education and access to case studies may help to alleviate resistance to change around AI adoption.
- Creating our own datasets in the Caribbean to ensure data readiness and security.
- Data harnessing, governance and management. Data and information will be worth more than oil and gas.
- Working as an integrated Region rather than working as islands in isolation.

➤ *Quick tips for Early AI Uptake by Governments:*

- Assess the benefits.
- Remember that AI is a continuum which can be sliced up and applied to specific use cases.
- Get started with low-risk use cases. For example use easy uptake AI applications such as chatbots and virtual assistants which can provide guidance and information to citizens on well established Ministry processes.
- Start with something that has high citizen visibility. If there is a good experience and a positive case study, this can augur well for future adoption.
- Carry out pilot projects.
- Establish policies to ensure that citizens are protected around AI.
- At least for the next five years, humans are going to continue to be involved in AI processes. AI will be used to augment human capacity in delivering government services.



KEY TAKEAWAYS - OPEN DISCUSSION

- The Region should collaborate with other parts of the world to train our datasets, but we should have local capacity around keeping our data local and keeping it in the Region. This should be an integrated effort.
- Not all problems need AI to be solved, particularly when identified AI solutions are more complex or expensive than other efficiency solutions.
- Be cautious about putting AI to service a citizen without a path back to a human or to remediation; otherwise, this could undermine public trust. Early cases of AI use should be back-ended and to support public servants in their service delivery to citizens.
- Geopolitical risks should be considered when partnering with other countries/regions. Localised and diversified strategies should be considered to manage these risks. Moreover, Caribbean countries should act as a bloc in their negotiations with other countries and regions.
- Cooperation and collaboration across the Caribbean can help to maximise the AI opportunity.
- A solid data exchange within Caribbean countries can go miles in delivering citizen services more effectively.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SHARED CONTENT

- See full recording of the session [here](#)
- This session is the first of a 4-part series. The sessions will be held monthly from February to May 2025

Useful Resources:

- [AI Playbook for Small States](#)
- [ITU Academy's online course on Inclusive Digital Transformation in Small Island Developing States](#)