

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

*Key Takeaways: Mar 25<sup>th</sup> 2025 Session Summary*

The second Forum of the “AI for SIDS 2.0 - Caribbean” online series was held on Tuesday, 25th March 2025 @ 10:00 am AST via Zoom, with Livestream via YouTube.

This session addressed concepts applicable to Beginners/ New Users of AI in Public Institutions.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS – DR GALE RIGOBERT:** Dean of Academics, University of St Martin

Dr Rigobert’s presentation addressed the topic: What should Governments in Caribbean SIDS bear in mind to assess if they are ready to implement artificial intelligence effectively & ethically?

➤ *AI and Emerging Technologies...the Panacea?*

- Over the years, the benefits of technology adoption have been well touted, but the Caribbean has not been able to apply those technologies to cure problems of implementation in the public sector.
- Time has taught us that emerging technologies such as AI will not, on their own, correct government inefficiencies. If not carefully and sensibly adopted, they may exacerbate existing organisational maladies.
- Technophobia associated with job security, the age of management/ decision makers and the need for process reengineering have contributed to delays in the uptake of emerging technologies.
- The model for technology adoption has to be relevant to the beneficiary context, being mindful of considerations such as infrastructure, digital usage skills, legislation, etc.

➤ *The more things change, the more they remain the same*

- The current conversation about AI and what it means for employment and development is very similar to the conversations that were had more than 20 years ago in the context of emerging developing technologies being the panacea to the 3<sup>rd</sup> world development woes. Disruptive technologies, even back then, held the promise of bringing new hope.
- A 2004 publication (i.e. some twenty years ago) highlighted some reasons for the lacklustre success of strategic technology adoption in the Caribbean public sector. Many of these reasons continue to apply today. These reasons include:
  - The mismatch between institutional, cultural practices and emerging technologies suggests that process innovation and re-engineering are needed to benefit from technology infusion. Process re-engineering requires unlearning and relearning.

- While internet penetration, electricity distribution and mobile penetration statistics are good in the Caribbean, transforming our countries cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional discussion about “access” to frontier technologies.
- The international division of labour between the north and the south remains. Caribbean SIDS produce raw/low value-added goods for export to the north, and import high value-added goods and services. This means that the production and distribution of knowledge are still effectively controlled by the North.
- Despite the hype of new technology adoption, there is no evidence to suggest real investment in R&D and the production of knowledge and innovation.
- The education system, too, is not yet prepared to produce the volume and quality of human resources necessary to participate in the new economy, leveraging emerging technologies.

➤ *Recent Progress that augurs well for AI Readiness*

- We have made some strides in partnerships (SDG 17), i.e., in curing interagency competition or reducing the lack of coordination among development and lending partners. The partnership of UNDP, ACS, CAF, CARICOM, IDB, MDT, and UNESCO to host this current AI Forum stands as an example of this.
- We can better benefit from economies of scale due to this partnership approach, as the new and emerging technologies require that we pool and marry our resources.
- There has been some movement through OECS, CARICOM, and UNESCO regarding AI readiness from a policy perspective, such as erecting guardrails, addressing ethical issues, and equipping our citizens with relevant tools.
- Our Caribbean leaders have agreed about the need for a revolution in education.

➤ *Suggested Actions to Promote AI Readiness in the Caribbean*

- We must claim our seat “at the table” or “in the lab” where decisions are made about tech architecture, removal of inherent biases and other corrections.
- Advocate for more tailor-made technologies that speak to our particular needs as Caribbean SIDS. These decisions cannot be outsourced to the technology producers interested in profit maximisation.
- Our thought leaders, custodians of development purses and lending agencies must take the lead to cure the aforementioned maladies and guard against widening gaps.
- We must integrate our various perspectives, overcome political divides, and ensure that there are pathways for our voices and realities to be reflected in the solutions presented.
- Public servants must be assured that there is no malicious attempt to displace workers, but the onus rests with each public service professional to keep pace with advancements.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS – DR KEEGAN MC BRIDE: Lecturer in AI, Government, and Policy, Oxford Internet Institute

Dr Mc Bride’s presentation addressed the following: What are some practical suggestions on how public institutions can start with AI in simple, achievable ways? And what should they avoid when they start?

### ➤ *Historical Context and Drivers*

- While AI is the trending topic, ICT in Government dates to the 1950s and has taken various forms – independent computers, early networking, rule-based AI, the internet, web 2.0, etc.
- Current discussions, themes and topics overlap with those in earlier eras and are generally driven by the pursuit of process and cost efficiency and effectiveness, changing citizen demands and the widespread diffusion of digital technologies.
- There has been exponential growth in the interest of AI in the public sector from 2018 to the present. This is embedded in a context where the public sector is expected to do more with less.

### ➤ *What is AI?*

- There is no widely agreed definition of AI. The goalpost is currently moving.
- Usually, AI translates to “machine learning”, which is an approach where machines learn to make predictions in new situations based on historical data (OECD, 2019).

### ➤ *Key Considerations for Beginners to AI Uptake*

- When considering AI deployment, the vision of your ideal public sector and the process reengineering involved in achieving that ideal should be foremost. Start with the vision and work backwards.
- Value does not only lie in the newest AI development; some older technologies can be considered AI, and can create a solid impact when deployed in your office’s context.
- Everything does not have to be perfect before experimenting, as there are some easy wins that Governments can start working on, while they develop the foundations in parallel (e.g., infrastructure).
- All Governments, regardless of north or south, will experience challenges as they navigate the move to AI. These challenges should not deter a decision to invest in the foundations of AI implementation in the public sector, as there are significant benefits on the upside. AI-ready organizations require the drive of digital leaders.
- There are hundreds, if not thousands, of use cases of governments worldwide using AI to improve internal and external functioning, and public service delivery.
- AI integration can be thought of on several levels:
  - All-of-Government AI, i.e., how do we integrate AI to improve citizen service delivery?
  - Internal, Backoffice AI, i.e., how do we leverage AI to improve our internal operations or make our work more efficient?
  - Shadow AI, i.e., at an individual level, how can AI help me write emails, summarise lectures and generally get my work done more efficiently?

- Most AI in Government is going to be procured and not developed in-house. Therefore, procurement is a key consideration when integrating AI, as AI procurement will require new competencies and processes. Legacy systems and organisational culture may limit AI procurement.
  - Sometimes, the best solution for an issue may not be AI, and knowing how to determine appropriate solutions is critical.
  - Attending education and capacity-building sessions such as this AI for SIDS 2.0 Forum is highly recommended for equipping your organisation as it navigates its AI journey.
  - Diversely constituted forums for discussion, communication, and collaboration are important for leveraging the lessons of the Regional community. Discuss failures and ask questions.
  - People are not going to use a system that they do not trust. Efforts invested toward building that trust will, therefore, be critical. Consider, for example, legal frameworks that help citizens to understand how their data will be used and how decisions are made. It is also important to balance the efficiency gains from AI with Government proximity to citizens, since automating some tasks will make Government more distant.
- *Some case studies (details given in video recording)*
- Food Safety Inspections, Chicago
  - EU Accession, Albania
  - Agricultural Grassland Changes, Estonia
  - GitHub Copilot to assist Government developers to code more efficiently
  - Conversion of Government Paper Forms into digital format, UK. See video [here](#)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SHARED CONTENT

- See the 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

### Shared Resources:

- [AI Playbook for Small States](#)
- [ITU Academy's online course on Inclusive Digital Transformation in Small Island Developing States](#)
- [Hello World: Artificial Intelligence and its use in the Public Sector](#)
- Declaration of Montevideo “For the construction of a regional approach on the governance of Artificial Intelligence and its impacts on our society”: [https://www.gub.uy/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/sites/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/files/documentos/noticias/ENG\\_Montevideo%20Declaration%20approved\\_0.pdf](https://www.gub.uy/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/sites/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/files/documentos/noticias/ENG_Montevideo%20Declaration%20approved_0.pdf)
- Roadmap for Ethical Artificial Intelligence for Latin America and the Caribbean 2024-2025: [https://www.gub.uy/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/sites/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/files/documentos/noticias/ENG\\_IA%20Roadmap%20approved\\_0.pdf](https://www.gub.uy/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/sites/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/files/documentos/noticias/ENG_IA%20Roadmap%20approved_0.pdf)
- Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137.locale=en>
- Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory <https://www.unesco.org/ethics-ai/en>
- Readiness assessment methodology: a tool of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385198.locale=en>
- Chile: artificial intelligence readiness assessment report <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385198.locale=en>
- Uruguay: artificial intelligence readiness assessment report <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391491.locale=en>

### AI Training Programmes Shared:

- <https://ctu.int/event/school-of-digital-transformation-and-innovation-in-the-caribbean-2025/>
- <https://www.teachingpublicservice.digital/en/syllabus-index>
- <https://www.elementsofai.com/>
- [https://go.incusservices.com/ai\\_zoom](https://go.incusservices.com/ai_zoom)