



**Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

**Feature Address by**

**The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, MP  
Minister of Planning and Development**

**at the**

**Skills for Global Services Awards Ceremony**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

**SALUTATIONS:**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a pleasure to welcome you here this morning, to recognize and celebrate six awardees whose projects, both individually and collectively harbor the potential to make a significant difference in various sectors which have been deemed to be of critical importance to the country's diversification thrust, and ultimately, our national development of Trinidad and Tobago.

In keeping with the values of "Limitless Possibilities" under the aegis of the Global Skills Promotion Programme, this program focuses on providing businesses with the opportunity to look at innovative ways to increase exports and employment in the Information Technology-enabled Services (ITeS) sector in Trinidad and Tobago. The specific intent of this program is to assist with these gaps through sector-specific training and support services, investment promotion, branding and capacity building, so as to improve the business climate and regulatory framework in Trinidad and Tobago.

These six finalists being recognized today: Anima Caribbean Festival, Avasant T&T Consulting Limited, Coded Arts Limited, Fujitsu Caribbean (Trinidad) Limited, Lagoon Animation Studios Limited and Social Justice Foundation were chosen from a field of 26 extremely competitive submissions under the Global Services Promotion Programme, undertaken as part of this Ministry's continuing partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank. I hasten to add that these submissions represent symbols of the local human capacity to use imagination, skill and resources to create solutions that are relevant to our culture and business climate in a global context.

In all, these entrepreneurial minds will be awarded a total of TT\$3.2 million dollars, an average of half a million dollars each, to undertake their projects, and hopefully, in so doing, create ripples of a massive change that we hope will result in a tsunami of opportunities and economic prosperity for our citizens.

Today's celebration of these awardees comes in a week where much has happened in the national landscape to cause us to believe again in the greatness that is possible when citizens dedicate themselves to perfecting their craft, and rising above the din of doubt and the noise of naysayers. Your presence here today, is evidence enough that there is a lot more going on in our country than the tip of the proverbial iceberg reveals.

One of the criticisms repeatedly levelled against this Government is the failure to diversify the economy, or the absence of tangible and demonstrable efforts in that regard. Your presence here as recipients of these awards puts the lie to that criticism. Like Dylan Carter and Michele Lee Ahye, you represent the best that Trinidad and Tobago has to offer. Your ideas, your creativity, your instinctual desire to make a difference in this country of your birth, while hitherto unrecognized, will now be forever recorded for posterity.

Both the awardees and the twenty other applicants have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that we possess the capacity to achieve the apex of success among the biggest and best the world has to offer, and I urge all to continue striving to fulfill the potential that lies within.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government is not unaware that information and communications technology breakthroughs are radically transforming the global services sector; and that this sector is faced simultaneously with new opportunities as well as tremendous challenges. And while Trinidad and Tobago is not an insignificant user of technology, having one of the highest mobile penetration rates in this region for example, there is still a long way to go in how we translate our propensity for that technology into making it easier for companies to set up and operate businesses with the minimum of bureaucratic interference. When coupled with the complexities involved in integrating into global value chains where the competition is extremely fierce, then we have a better idea of the enormity of the task that lies ahead of us.

There are fewer ways today though of signaling Government's intention to make 2018 a landmark year of continued delivery, transformation, innovation and growth for Trinidad and Tobago. I am confident that the seeds we are sowing here today will be harvested by future generations thereby promoting sustainability in the information technology enabled services sector and by extension the national economy.

Ladies and gentlemen, it would be remiss of me if I did not advise that the development of the platform for the Information Technology-enabled Services sector which this Global Services Promotion Programme supports, is not being done in isolation. Indeed, it filters directly into this Government's National Development Strategy, Vision 2030, which has as one of its themes: "Putting people first: Nurturing our greatest asset". Ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago has a modern, relevant education and training system is one of the goals in achieving this overall theme. The relevance of our education and training system to the

development needs of our country is being addressed in part by the work which these six companies will undertake.

According to the World Economic Forum's most recent Global Information Technology Report, there is a lot more we can do to increase the contribution of our ICT sector to the national GDP, which in 2015 stood at TT\$5.5 billion or 3.4 per cent of GDP. All government entities are now online with a range of services on a centralized portal supporting businesses, citizens and non-residents of Trinidad and Tobago. Information Communications Technology is also placed high on the legislative agenda, with the proclamation, either in full or in part, of several key pieces of legislation providing significant facilitation of ICT transactions. The Electronic Transactions Act, the Data Protection Act, and amendments to the Exchequer and Audit Act are some items currently on the Government's radar.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are many other indicators signaling progress made in the ICT sector. One such global indicator is this country's progress from position 70 in 2015 to 67 on the 2016 Global Information Technology Report put out by the World Economic Forum. Internet household penetration has also improved from 58% to 65% from 2014 to 2015. Although these might be perceived as small victories, through events like these, we are creating more. Indeed, more of the iceberg is being shown. While generally we are still playing catch up to the more developed parts of the globe, I do not believe we are that far behind if we take a chance on our talent and skill.

Since its inception in this very hall in January 2017, the Global Services Promotion Programme, the sister programme to the Global Skills has trained over 400 participants in the ITeS sector. Facebook' officials trained 360 participants in digital marketing in November 2017 and were also made aware of the IDB's ConnectAmericas platform and Challenge Programme. Additionally, 25 trainers from State Entities benefited from a "hands-on" digital marketing training programme. In November 2016, Google conducted training with over 50 entrepreneurs and 20 Tertiary Level students in Digital Skills. Work has been progressing, ladies and gentlemen, and there is more to come.

I am confident, ladies and gentlemen, that this Programme, based on a loan agreement signed with the IDB in the amount of US\$18 million, is one that will bring about economic transformation through the growth of the Digital and Information Technology enabled Services sector in Trinidad and Tobago. At the height of its execution, it will offer a

multitude of opportunities for employment, innovation, efficiency, networking and business creation among others. The Programme is geared towards combining the strengths and capabilities of the public and private sector towards improved ICT enabled service delivery and exports on not only a local level but on a global scale.

This Ministry's passion and enthusiasm for your success and the limitless possibilities that this sector inherently possesses, is the reason why we are aggressively pursuing avenues to continue clearing pathways and building bridges for you to achieve this outcome.

Through this Global Services initiative, you will soon be able to benefit from state of the art Digital Acceleration and Internationalization facilities at our GSI Hub in development at the Tamana InTech Park and at the University of Trinidad and Tobago's Tamana Campus. There is no doubt, that we must work together to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the digital economy, while simultaneously molding human capital through additional skills development.

In this way, we are of the strong opinion that this intervention will provide the country with innovative methods to develop human capital, re-imagine export strategies, and encourage new investment from both domestic and international sources.

Part of the reason why so many of you who are directly involved in our transformation drive were invited to today's event, is to celebrate these pioneers in the Digital and ITeS sector who have prioritized skills development and capacity building as a means to growing and fully internationalizing their businesses.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the volatility of global commodity prices, the traditional model of attaining economic prosperity through the exploitation of natural resources and large-scale industrialization is fast disappearing. We must look towards new sectors and new approaches to fuel Trinidad and Tobago's continued social and economic development.

Often, when technology and growth are mentioned in the same sentence, there is an automatic, though unfortunate, presumption of job loss. However, strategically planned growth in the ITeS sector is more likely to increase employment, as it did in the Indian

economy. The most recent data shows that Indian ICT exports were projected to grow at 7-8 per cent in 2017-18 to **US\$ 126 billion**, in addition to adding **130,000-150,000 new jobs** during the same period.

We believe that the promise of the Global Services Promotion Programme demonstrates a new economic paradigm in which competitive advantage is built not on natural and non-renewable resources, but rather on ideas, creativity, innovation, productivity, technology and the quality of human capital. In the digital economy, new technological trends such as blockchain, augmented, mixed and virtual reality, machine learning, data science and artificial intelligence are radically changing the business landscape, reshaping the nature of work, the boundaries of enterprises and the responsibilities of business leaders.

These trends have the potential to do more than just enable technological innovation in Trinidad and Tobago. They can enable innovation in business models, business networking and the transfer of knowledge, while facilitating access to international markets so badly needed by small island developing states such as ours.

Greater autonomy, increased self-determinism, entrepreneurialism, networking, skills and talent as well as agility within the business landscape are emerging factors driving the contemporary models of global business. With the extreme revenue volatility and uncertainty now faced by our extractive-resource based economy, we must see our thrust to enable and develop the ITeS sector as a cornerstone of an alternative, diversified, transformed and sustainable revenue generating and foreign direct investment pipeline.

Our awardees today are the foundation of our multi-pronged initiative integrating state-of-the-art facilities, training, investment promotion, sector branding, as well as strengthening of the policy and regulatory environment - and we believe the work that they are about to undertake is therefore absolutely essential for Trinidad and Tobago's continued economic growth. Through them and their efforts, more and more of the iceberg of diversification, will be revealed.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Planning and Development, as project champion and implementation agency, commits to working hand-in-hand with you, our industry partners and tertiary institutions, to ensure that local companies and individuals can more effectively compete, and indeed be successful in the global Digital Economy.

Once again I offer my sincerest congratulations to all the awardees today, and wish you the best of luck as you transform ideas to reality, and plans to action.