

**Caribbean e-Government Strategy Planning
21-22 April 2009
Barbados**



UNITED NATIONS

**DIVISION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT (DPADM)
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (DESA)**

**Opening Remarks from the UN
Delivered by Jonas Rabinovitch, Senior Adviser, UNDESA**

I would like to thank you for inviting us to be here today and make a few brief comments on the growth of e-Government and citizen engagement, on selected regional features for ICT and knowledge management and on trends and opportunities for connecting e-Government with public administration practices

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to continue working with CARICAD and Caribbean countries in the development of a Regional e-Government Strategy. As you are aware, the CARICAD and the United Nations have had a long and productive history of cooperation, particularly in the area of e-Government as shown by our cooperation as partners in the UN Public Administration Network (UNPAN) and in our cooperation for the development of the previous regional strategy for 2004-2007.

1) Growth of e-Government and Citizen Engagement

As more and more countries begin to implement e-government solutions to improve their service delivery to their respective citizens, the issue of treating the citizen as a client becomes critical. Too many countries view e-government only as a means to automate their existing services to make them more efficient without taking into account the views of their respective citizens. As a result, many e-government solutions have not fully met their objectives, which is to transform government to empower citizens to participate in democratic processes. On the other hand, many countries believe that e-Government could be an automatic solution to all public administration challenges. Let's make no mistake: e-Government is not a substitute for i-Government (inefficient Government). If workflows, institutional coordination, human resources, capacity and overall public administration services are inefficient, having the latest computer model with the latest software on everybody's desk will not make much difference. However, as you are aware, ICT and knowledge management can provide both momentum and tools for active improvements in public administration. UNDESA is proud to work with countries in the Caribbean Region to support linkages between knowledge management and public administration in supporting the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, in line with the priorities that you will define.

2) Regional features of ICT and Knowledge Management

Many Caribbean countries have started to invest resources in developing e-government solutions and services. They are revamping their existing web sites and portals to be more citizen-friendly by providing more information and services online. The use of mobile phones in the Caribbean region has expanded tremendously over the last few years and thus the opportunity to link mobile to e-government solutions and services will be critical to the transformation of these countries. I am pleased to acknowledge that

from 2005 to 2007 the Caribbean showed the highest growth of e-readiness (8.69%), web measure (11.19%), and e-infrastructure (25.78%) within the Americas region. I am equally pleased to acknowledge that the Caribbean sub-region showed the highest global growth in terms of e-participation worldwide (59.27%). The latest 2008 UN e-Government Survey highlighted various good practices in this Region, including the site of the Ministry of Health in Trinidad Tobago displaying video clips on health-related issues, the site of the Ministry of Welfare in the Dominican Republic encouraging citizen participation with a one-stop shop for health information, and the site of the Ministry of Labour in Grenada which allows citizens to create online accounts and download statistics, among other good examples.

3) Trends in connecting e-Government with improved public administration practices

What we witness today is a gradual transition from isolated e-government services to connected e-governance, inaugurating an era of 24-Hour Government, 7 days a week. The decreasing ICT transaction costs also allow for a gradual shift to more dynamic interactions between Government and citizens, from static websites to integrative portals and platforms, for example. We currently witness the growth of networked Government promoting collective action to advance the public good. We witness a trend towards enhanced institutional coordination in the back office to improve service delivery to the public at the front office. At the same time, it is important to avoid the trend to worship technophilia or the “upgrade-and-be-happy” syndrome which moves billions of dollars worldwide without necessarily addressing citizens’ needs. The optimum balance towards investing financial, material and human resources in e-Government to address development goals is a sovereign national policy decision. At the same time, the Caribbean Region provides a relevant lesson to the world by demonstrating that national e-Government strategies can be complemented by a regional e-Government strategy. Within a global context, this is a remarkable undertaking.

To conclude, I would just like to mention that within the context of the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN), we are globally consolidating an electronic/mobile e-Government Knowledge Repository (emGKR). The EMGKR should be considered as a knowledge portal that will house key e-government documentation and information on individual countries. We see it as an important tool in building the e/m government capacity in government civil servants and in ensuring that our development partners have a space to share their knowledge on e-Government. UNDESA also views this initiative as a means to strengthen regional integration within the Caribbean region and create a robust network of e-government practitioners, working in cooperation with CARICAD to provide innovative e-solutions and e-services to others in this region. In summary, we will spare no efforts in working with you to advance our common objectives. Thank you.