

Feature Address

by

Senator the Honourable Donna Cox

Minister of Social Development and Family Services

In partnership with Digicel Foundation

**Launch of the Adult Education Programme's
Information Communication Technology Lab**

Friday October 2nd, 2020

10 a.m.

Salutations.

- **Mrs. Sheila Seecharan**, Acting Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
- **Mr. Michael Reid**, Chief Technical Officer
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
- **Ms. Alicia Hospedales**, Senior Government Relations and Affairs
Executive
Digicel Foundation
- All Managers, Supervisors and Staff of the Ministry of Social
Development and Family Services
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

I am honoured to bear witness to an extremely significant day in the modern history of the Adult Education Programme (AEP), as we officially launch the AEP's first Information Communication Technology Laboratory that is owned and operated by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. The significance of the day has been made even more memorable by the donation of ten (10) desktop computers from the Digicel Foundation, which will now become a part of government's strategic focus to revitalize the national economy and increase sustainability throughout our households and communities.

The Adult Education Programme was first introduced to Trinidad and Tobago in the early 1940s, as part of the remit of the Social Welfare Department, which is what existed prior to the establishment of a formal Ministry. From then to now, the AEP has always played a vital role in the empowerment and transformation of the lives of our most vulnerable, allowing for certifiable improvements in their academic, as well as, technical and vocational knowledge, behaviours and competencies.

I am told that today's small, but meaningful gesture between Digicel Foundation and the Ministry, has been in the making for some time, and

is the outcome of a proposal that was submitted for consideration under Digicel Foundation's ***EPIC*** (*Extraordinary Projects Impacting Communities*) programme. ***EPIC*** is responsible for identifying small scale, high impact initiatives such as the AEP's Information Communication Technology Lab, which was established to support lifelong learning throughout communities.

Today's exercise is symbolic of the greater good that can come out of alliances between the State and the private sector, especially within this period of unprecedented global developments. Within recent months, the world has been experiencing dramatic shifts in our relationships with technology, which of course, come with many positives such as today's event. I therefore thank Digicel Foundation for partnering with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to ensure that *no person is left behind*, as we work towards empowering our human capital and building a resilient framework for a brighter and more prosperous future.

It is anticipated that the establishment of this Information Communication Technology Lab in San Fernando, will greatly add to the value of programme offerings for seven hundred and eighteen (718) registrants of the AEP in San Fernando, of which, fifty-five (55) persons are registered for ICT studies. Additionally, today's donation from Digicel

Foundation, will help to improve the methodologies that are used to unearth, build and assess the capabilities and talents of each participant.

As previously mentioned by Permanent Secretary Seecharan, another sterling example of the computers' immediate impact on the AEP, will be the strategic role that the use of these devices will play in the transitioning of the Adult Education Programme to an online platform, in partnership with the University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC). Such a move complements government's thrust towards a more data-centric society, through the fulfillment of tenets II and IV of the National Development Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago, which speak to good governance, excellence in the delivery of public services, as well as, the growth and sustainability of globally competitive businesses.

In a few weeks, Trinidad and Tobago will join the international community in commemorating the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17th. Education as you know, is a fundamental tool in the fight against poverty. As such, through this initiative, the Ministry has also gone one step further in reducing the digital divide and creating avenues for decent work, quality education and enhanced standards of living.

Ladies and gentlemen, now more than ever, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the holistic

development of the most vulnerable of our citizens, as we work to rebuild and sustain self-sufficiency, integrity and pride within all households and communities. However, while this Ministry continues to lead the way for social support and services, we declare that we cannot do it alone. As such, when entities such as Digicel Foundation rise to the occasion, we must stand and applaud them because their contributions carry the potential to positively change the lives of not only individuals and communities but our entire country and region. This, my dear friends, is the potency of that little mustard seed.

I look forward to hearing great things from the participants of this programme, as we launch this ICT Lab. I wish all of you God's continued favour.

I thank you.