

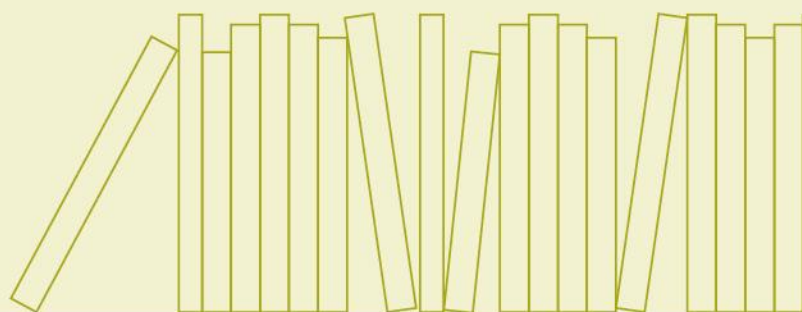
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

**ECLAC SUBREGIONAL HEADQUARTERS
FOR THE CARIBBEAN**



Report of the expert group meeting on harnessing artificial intelligence and digital government

Perspectives for Caribbean small island
developing States



UNITED NATIONS

ECLAC



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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Expert group meeting on harnessing artificial intelligence and digital government: perspectives for Caribbean small island developing States

Virtual meeting, 17 September 2024

Distr.
LIMITED
LC/CAR/2024/10
26 September 2024
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON HARNESSING
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT:
PERSPECTIVES FOR CARIBBEAN SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES**

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. Place and date

1. The Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) subregional headquarters for the Caribbean convened a virtual expert group meeting entitled “harnessing artificial intelligence and digital government: perspectives for Caribbean small island developing States” on 17 September 2024. The programme is available in annex II of this report.

2. Attendance¹

2. There were representatives from four member States: Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, and one associate member: Aruba. Also in attendance were representatives from: Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In total, 23 participants attended the meeting, 10 of whom were female. The list of participants is available in annex I of this report.

3. Meeting agenda

1. Welcome and opening of the meeting
2. Presentation of study entitled “Caribbean artificial intelligence readiness: an exploratory review”
3. Advancing the adoption of artificial intelligence in Latin America and the Caribbean
4. Digital government to smart government
5. Notification of high-level meeting on the information society in Latin America and the Caribbean
6. Closing remarks and vote of thanks

4. Objective

3. The overall objective of the expert group meeting was to review the findings of the draft study entitled “Caribbean artificial intelligence readiness: an exploratory review”, by presenting an overview of the study and its methodology and inviting feedback from experts, including Caribbean policymakers and regulators. Additionally, through the two panels, the meeting facilitated discussion on ongoing artificial intelligence (AI) adoption and digital government initiatives, which are integral to understanding AI readiness in the Caribbean.

B. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting

4. Participants were welcomed by the moderator of the meeting, Associate Programme Management Officer of the Caribbean Knowledge Management Centre (CKMC) at the ECLAC subregional headquarters

¹ See annex I for a full list of participants.

for the Caribbean. She then invited the Officer-in-Charge to deliver opening remarks on behalf of the Director.

5. The Officer-in-Charge welcomed and thanked participants for joining this expert group meeting to review the study “Caribbean artificial intelligence readiness: an exploratory review”. He noted that the aim of the study was to consolidate the data on the Caribbean subregion to provide insight and information for policymakers and stakeholders to assist in future strategies. The Officer-in-Charge introduced the two accompanying panels: (i) “Advancing the adoption of artificial intelligence in Latin America and the Caribbean” and (ii) “Digital government and smart government”. He expressed hope that the panels would deepen understanding of what is already being done in the region and highlight areas for further action. The Officer-in-Charge thanked the attendees for their participation and noted that the meeting was an opportunity for participants to provide feedback on the study and invited them to also submit written comments.

2. Presentation of study “Caribbean artificial intelligence readiness: an exploratory review”

6. Introducing the draft study prepared by CKMC, the Programme Management Officer, presented the methodology for the study. The study explored three areas of AI readiness: government readiness, Caribbean digital readiness and sustainability considerations for small island developing States (SIDS). The data used to inform these areas was sourced using international indices and models including United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) “Readiness Assessment Methodology”, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Artificial Intelligence Readiness Assessment” and Oxford Insights’ “Government AI Readiness Index”.

7. In discussing the first dimension, government readiness, the Programme Officer noted the results of Oxford Insights’ 2023 Government AI Readiness Index, which relied on the three pillars of government, technology sector, and data and infrastructure. He highlighted that the Dominican Republic was ahead of the other Caribbean countries in the index, followed by the Bahamas and Jamaica. He noted that this is likely correlated to the fact that the Dominican Republic is the first Caribbean country to publish a national AI strategy.

8. Continuing under the first dimension, the Programme Officer discussed strategic and regulatory readiness as key elements in understanding government readiness. He was pleased to note that the study discovered that the adoption of AI is well-supported by strategies at the global, regional, and subregional level as well as through the SIDS and Commonwealth mechanisms. Focusing on efforts at the national level, he noted that countries such as Cuba, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are in the process of developing AI strategies. The Programme Officer discussed strategic readiness as evidenced by digital transformation priorities, noting that countries such as the Bahamas and Belize have assigned dedicated departments and ministries. He highlighted the Caribbean Digital Transformation Project, funded by the World Bank, that Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are part of. In discussing regulatory readiness, he noted that the subregion is affected by global laws that have extraterritorial effects and that in the case of Antigua and Barbuda, these global laws are sometimes used to inform national approaches.

9. Discussing the second dimension, Caribbean digital readiness, the Programme Officer noted the deployment of UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment, which highlights countries’ digital context and has been carried out in Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. He discussed the issues of technology infrastructure, the private sector and population readiness as indicators of digital readiness. The state of technology infrastructure informs at what level Caribbean citizens are able to fully leverage artificial intelligence and its adoption. He noted an interesting figure from the study which shows that when compared to global citizens, Caribbean citizens have better 3G and LTE coverage and use more Internet broadband but have to pay more for broadband Internet access. The study noted a desire in the private sector

to adopt AI and that the public is generally open to adopting AI, but knowledge and upskilling are the biggest barriers.

10. The third dimension, sustainability considerations, is especially important for the Caribbean, as there is a unique experience as SIDS. When adopting artificial intelligence to the public space, the Programme Officer noted specifically the issues of energy consumption, water usage, and e-waste as issues that are important for policymakers to consider. He underscored that true AI readiness involves addressing the environmental consequences of the use of AI and its associated infrastructure.

11. Concluding the presentation, the Programme Officer touched briefly on three select recommendations, namely: (i) strengthening the strategic framework, (ii) prioritizing digital skills and (iii) for policymakers to keep the environmental impact of AI at the forefront of their efforts.

Open discussion

12. The Deputy Secretary-General of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) sought clarification on how many countries were included in the study and whether ECLAC had any further research in the area planned. The Programme Officer clarified that the study's desk research covered 26 countries and territories, based on the availability and recency of data. He emphasized the Caribbean Knowledge Management Centre's ongoing focus on digital inclusion and that future studies will continue to be informed by this foundation.

13. The Director of Public Sector Modernization inquired the extent to which the study assessed data availability as an aspect of AI readiness. The Programme Officer emphasized data availability as an ongoing challenge in the subregion that is not unique to AI and has been acknowledged by Caribbean governments. He noted that there is a bias, as many data models are built externally, and therefore do not consider Caribbean realities. As a result, it is crucial that Caribbean entities prioritize data collection and sharing to ensure that AI development is informed by local contexts. The Director of Public Sector Modernization agreed with these sentiments and emphasized the importance of infrastructure as another key factor, noting that change management is a critical component to changing mindsets in both areas. He suggested that standards be developed to assist the islands and support how data is captured moving forward.

14. UNESCO Advisor for Communication and Information thanked ECLAC for the study and underlined the importance of its work for the region. He noted that the number of private sector initiatives discussed piqued his interest and suggested that there be more collaboration and cross-country sharing to raise awareness of these initiatives. He recommended the development of case studies, which could be beneficial for highlighting both government and private-sector initiatives that have worked. The Programme Officer agreed, noting that case studies are a critical priority of CKMC.

15. ICT consultant commended the study as an edifying piece of work. He suggested that institutional strengthening be greater emphasized in the recommendations, stating that more governments need to establish institutions that implement the developed policies and legislations, as the effectiveness of these institutions directly impact the trust aspect of digital inclusion. He noted the case of data protection acts, which many countries in the subregion have developed but only a few have forged ahead to establish information commissioners to implement the legislation.

16. The Director of Public Sector Modernization supported the sentiment of strengthening institutional frameworks. He inquired whether technical assistance will be provided to member States. In response, the Programme Officer assured that there are frameworks in place for providing support and that the opportunities from the ECLAC headquarters and subregional headquarters for the Caribbean can be further explored by countries who request it.

3. Advancing the adoption of artificial intelligence in Latin America and the Caribbean

17. The first panel, “Advancing the adoption of artificial intelligence in Latin America and the Caribbean”, which was moderated by the Assistant Programme Management Officer, CKMC, featured the initiatives of international organizations on supporting AI adoption in the region. The panellists represented the work of the CTU, ECLAC headquarters, and the UNESCO Office for the Caribbean, and discussed key tools such as the Latin American Artificial Intelligence Index, the UNESCO Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Policy Roadmap and the UNESCO Readiness Assessment Model which are useful in assessing AI readiness and guiding strategy formulation in the region.

18. The presentation, “Engaging the Caribbean”, by Deputy Secretary-General of CTU, discussed the initiatives that the CTU has been working on in the region. He noted that harmonizing policy formulation is a key mandate of the CTU. The organization is involved in the development of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single ICT Space, which involves regionally harmonized ICT policies, national and regional broadband infrastructure, and common frameworks for governments, ICT service providers and consumers. The organization’s hope is that the space will also facilitate harmonized AI policies in the Caribbean. While widespread progress has not yet been made, there have been developments in certain aspects. He noted five areas of Caribbean AI policy development that the CTU has been involved in: (i) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Caribbean AI Policy Roadmap, (ii) a Caribbean AI policy working group, (iii) International Telecommunication Union (ITU) AI for Good, (iv) the United Nations High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence and (v) AI-specific submission to the United Nations Global Digital Compact.

19. The presentation “Engaging Latin America”, by the Senior Economic Affairs Officer of ECLAC discussed the AI adoption process in Latin America. He noted that nine Latin American countries have developed national AI strategies, including Chile, Colombia and Mexico. These strategies heavily focused on AI ethics and less on other aspects such as human talent, productivity and economic growth, and data governance. He highlighted the newly developed second Edition of the Latin American Artificial Intelligence Index. The index looks at infrastructure, data availability and human talent as key enabling factors. The index revealed that governance is an aspect where Latin America is far behind and that other challenges to AI adoption in Latin America and the Caribbean include restricted access to capital, an absence of data culture, a skills and talent gap, and a lack of institutions. The results of the second Edition of the Latin American Artificial Intelligence Index will be presented on 24 September 2024, in Santiago, Chile.

20. The Advisor for Communication and Information of UNESCO Office of the Caribbean presented UNESCO Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Roadmap. The Roadmap started in 2021 and was part of the Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Initiative, in collaboration with the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica. A regional survey conducted to inform the roadmap revealed that 98% believe that there is a need for increased education and awareness among Caribbean citizens and that 68% do not think the Caribbean has sufficient legal frameworks to govern the use of AI. In keeping with these findings, the goals of the road map include raising awareness of AI and supporting the development of strategies for collaboration. To do so, the roadmap focuses on four pillars: (i) culture and creativity, (ii) governance and transformation, (iii) upskilling and education and (iv) resiliency and sustainability. The Advisor noted that safeguarding the unique Caribbean cultural identity was a critical consideration in the development of the Roadmap to ensure that the Caribbean does not adapt to fit AI but instead, AI adapts to fit the Caribbean. He concluded by sharing UNESCO portfolio of tools and resources to support SIDS in their AI aspirations.

21. The presentation “Recommendation on the ethics of AI: Readiness Assessment Methodology” by UNESCO Programme Specialist discussed the implementation of pilot projects in the Caribbean, focusing on the Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM). The Programme Specialist discussed the values and principles that the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence involves, including the

promotion of human rights and ensuring diversity and inclusiveness. The Recommendation serves as the guiding framework for UNESCO as they work with countries to develop ethically-sound AI frameworks that put humankind at the center. To help make the Recommendation operational, UNESCO has developed the RAM tool to assist member States in identifying their AI-readiness status in five dimensions. The RAM has been piloted thus far in Antigua and Barbuda and Jamaica, and additional countries are under discussion. She noted that the tool aims to engage in a multi-stakeholder process, involving national institutions, private sector entities, civil society and academic institutions.

Open discussion

22. The Programme Management Officer, CKMC, inquired whether the UNESCO Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Roadmap is intended to evolve with future developments. The Advisor for Communication and Information assured that UNESCO realizes the rapid development of the technology which leads to new possibilities and risks, and thus views the document as a living process. While the pillars that the document is founded on will remain the same, the tactics and strategies must evolve over time.

4. Digital government to smart government

23. The second panel, “Digital government to smart government” addressed methods Caribbean governments can use to advance their progress towards smart government. The panellists represented the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) - ECLAC, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) - DESA and CKMC - ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean. The panel discussed the importance of evolving from digital to smart government, and how governments can foster changing mindsets to support this evolution, while effectively using AI in the process.

24. The presentation “Changing mindsets for innovation and digital transformations for improved public service delivery” by Interregional Adviser on Governance and Public Administration discussed how changing mindsets can be encouraged to embrace digital transformation, which plays an important role in accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Three key challenges when discussing digital transformation are cultural and organizational barriers, human resource capacity, and data and infrastructure barriers. She noted that the first two challenges are critical when discussing changing mindsets. If we want to change the mindset of the public sector when it comes to using technology, we need to overcome the aversion to experimentation and failing and embrace new agile ways of working. She underlined the importance of mindsets as they influence the way one sees, thinks, and acts within their institution. She highlighted the DESA framework on mindsets needed for SDGs implementation, which discusses mindsets of inclusiveness, accountability, and effectiveness, and includes digital mindsets as a component of all three categories. A digital mindset is willing to use technology, open to new technologies, and understands the use of technology to implement SDGs. She noted that this needs to be paired with a growth mindset and that changing mindsets takes time and is not a linear process. Concluding, she identified five steps to changing mindsets at an individual, organizational and institutional level. The five steps are to identify, realize, understand, adopt strategies, change beliefs and transform behaviours.

25. The presentation, “From digital government to smart government”, by Chief of Public Management and Open Government Area at ILPES, ECLAC, discussed how the integration of AI into digital government strategies brings unique opportunities that can advance the sustainable development of SIDS. She noted that the accelerated digital transformation of societies imposes a challenge on governments to deliver quality public services that adapt to people’s needs. She highlighted the DESA e-Government Development Index, which is the only report to assess e-government development of all United Nations Member States. The Index reveals that Latin American and Caribbean countries have remained dedicated to pursuing e-government strategies for the past two decades. She noted that the strong institutional framework of the Bahamas has enabled it to rank highly on the index compared to other Caribbean countries.

However, the region faces persistent challenges such as digital literacy, Internet access and connectivity, governance, inter-institutional coordination, and trained personnel. To advance from a digital government to a smart government, governments should focus on innovation, gradual transition, public value and citizen experience, social impacts and a holistic view of the state.

26. The presentation, “Harnessing the potential of artificial intelligence to create public value in the Caribbean” by the Programme Officer of CKMC, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean, discussed the importance of adopting AI effectively for public good, in the context of digital government. He noted that it is beneficial for Caribbean governments to map where they are on the continuum towards smart government and where it correlates compared to other islands. Public value creation involves a shift in public administration from outputs to outcomes. He discussed the public value creation paradigm, which is a citizen-focused evolution of the new public management paradigm, that extends the value chain to consider effects, trust and legitimacy. Related to the new paradigm is the framework for assessing the effectiveness of AI on public value creation, which similarly extends the traditional managerial model involving economic and administrative dimensions, to include democratic and citizen dimensions. These added dimensions consider issues of access to public services, transparency, protection of human rights and e-participation. He recommended that policymakers consider a mapping of AI and technology as a whole and how it speaks to the four dimensions. He concluded by proposing the following policy recommendations: develop national strategies, assess the roll-out of AI to ensure it is creating public value, examine national capabilities to support the adoption of AI and integrate AI systems with a changing mindset approach.

Open discussion

27. The Policy Advisor of Aruba inquired if there are any plans to calculate the economic impact of AI in the Caribbean, noting a recent ITU report discussing the contribution of AI to the global economy. The Programme Management Officer mentioned previous discussions had about building out quantitative and qualitative models to see tangible numbers relating to AI and that this will be an area of consideration for his Unit moving forward. He emphasized the importance of capturing the experience of associate members in any models that are created.

28. The Interregional Adviser underlined the importance of running models to understand the economic, social, and cultural impact of AI, and ultimately inform the strategies and policies implemented. She warned against adopting technologies for the sake of technologies. Instead, policymakers must have a clear vision for the use and purpose, keeping people at the centre of the technology.

29. The Chief of Public Management and Open Government Area encouraged the promotion of regional cooperation and creating opportunities for countries and territories to share and exchange initiatives that are using AI in public sector. She expressed appreciation for meetings like this that contribute to that goal.

30. In relation to the discussion, the Associate Economic Affairs Officer mentioned a tool that ECLAC is working with, through its Working Group for Artificial Intelligence, to assist governments in identifying AI initiatives and tools. He offered more information to those who were interested.

5. Notification of high-level meeting on the information society in Latin America and the Caribbean

31. The Senior Economic Affairs Officer of ECLAC discussed the upcoming ninth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the new regional digital agenda, eLAC2026, will be presented. The agenda is a multi-stakeholder agenda that involves three thematic pillars

focusing on digital transformation for productivity, well-being and social development, and digital transformation of the State. The pillars are supported by three enabling axes and 35 strategic objectives. The conference will take place in Santiago, Chile, from 5 to 8 November 2024.

6. Closing remarks and vote of thanks

32. In concluding the meeting, the Associate Programme Management Officer of CKMC thanked all the participants for their attendance, review of the study and for their provision of feedback. She underscored the importance of the ideas shared and the discussion had, as this will be instrumental in shaping the approach to advancing digital governance and AI for sustainable development in the Caribbean.

Annex I**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****A. Member States****GUYANA**

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B. Associate members**ARUBA**

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C. United Nations Secretariat**Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**

- Cristina Rodriguez-Acosta, Interregional Adviser on Governance and Public Administration, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), email: cristina.rodriguezacosta@un.org

D. United Nations Specialized Agencies**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

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- Paula Isturiz Cavero, Programme Specialist and Head, Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO Office for the Caribbean, email: p.isturiz-cavero@unesco.org

E. Intergovernmental organizations

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F. Other participants

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Annex II**PROGRAMME**Tuesday 17 September 2024

- 0930 hrs – 0945 hrs
- Opening of the meeting**
- Welcome Remarks
Lika Døhl Diouf, Associate Programme Management Officer, ECLAC, subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
 - Welcome Remarks
Abdullahi Abdulkadri, Officer-in-Charge, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
- 0945 hrs – 1015 hrs
- Caribbean AI readiness**
- **Presentation of study entitled “Caribbean AI readiness: An exploratory review”:** Dale Alexander, Chief, Caribbean Knowledge Management Centre (CKMC), ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (*15 Minutes*)
 - **Discussion** (*15 Minutes*)
- 1015 hrs – 1105 hrs
- Panel 1: Advancing the adoption of AI in Latin America and the Caribbean**
- Lika Døhl Diouf, Associate Programme Management Officer, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (*Moderator*)
- **Engaging the Caribbean:** Nigel Cassimire, Deputy Secretary-General & Head of Regional Policy Development, Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) (*10 minutes*)
 - **Engaging Latin America:** Sebastian Rovira, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ECLAC Headquarters, Chile (*10 minutes*)
 - **UNESCO Caribbean AI roadmap:** Paul G.C. Hector (PhD), Advisor for Communication and Information, UNESCO Office for the Caribbean (*10 minutes*)
 - **Recommendation on the ethics of AI: Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM):** Paula Isturiz Caveró, Programme Specialist and Head, Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO Office for the Caribbean (*10 minutes*)
 - **Discussion** (*10 Minutes*)
- 1105 hrs – 1110 hrs
- Break (Mentimeter)
- 1110 hrs – 1150 hrs
- Panel 2: Digital Government to Smart Government**
- Lika Døhl Diouf, Associate Programme Management Officer, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (*Moderator*)

- **From Digital Government to Smart Government:** Valeria Torres, Chief, Public Management and Open Government Area, Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), ECLAC Headquarters, Chile (*10 minutes*)
- **Changing mindsets to advance digital transformation:** Cristina Rodriguez-Acosta, Inter-Regional Adviser on Governance and Public Administration, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)/(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (*10 Minutes*)
- **Harnessing AI to create public value in the Caribbean:** Dale Alexander, Chief, Caribbean Knowledge Management Centre (CKMC), ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (*10 Minutes*)
- **Discussion** (*10 Minutes*)

1150 hrs – 1155 hrs

Notification of high-level meeting on the information society in Latin America and the Caribbean: Sebastian Rovira, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ECLAC Headquarters, Chile

1155 hrs – 12 noon

Closing remarks

- Lika Døhl Diouf, Associate Programme Management Officer, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean



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