



ADDRESS

BY

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Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today about a topic that holds immense potential for the future of our beloved Saint Lucia: artificial intelligence, or AI, and its applications in developing countries like ours.

UNDERSTANDING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

To begin, let me say upfront that I am not an expert in AI. I approach the subject as a layperson with a curious mind, trying to stay abreast of diverse issues like sports, politics, innovation, technology, climate change, and healthcare. AI has surged in importance worldwide in recent years, awakening my own interest as well. The potential impacts of AI advancements on academia, industry, government, politics, and the environment have become global talking points. No doubt, this is why you are here for this summit.

What is AI - A google search revealed that AI is a set of technologies that enable computers to perform a variety of advanced functions including the ability to see understand and translate spoken and written language, analyze data, make recommendations and more”.

I note that this Summit is an AI South Summit. This is a significant and timely venture coming at a time when the digital divide reveals the stark reality of how far behind are the countries of the South in relation to countries in the North, I sincerely hope that this exercise will result in the sharing of knowledge and expertise that will help in creating more awareness and the useful practical application of AI to the people of Saint Lucia and South in general.

Recognizing the wealth of expertise present today, I was both honored but somewhat reluctant to accept this invitation to share a vision for how Saint Lucia might harness the power of AI and other emerging technologies. The chance to discuss these topics with such knowledgeable individuals is

invaluable. While I know there is much I can learn from each of you, I look forward to sharing my [layman's](#) perspective on how these advancements can support Saint Lucia's developmental goals, strengthen our economy, and create new opportunities for our people.

My most vivid experience with AI took place at a store in New York a few months ago. The experience was so vivid that I instantly realized AI was at work in a real sense.

AI is, indeed, a complex and rapidly evolving field with implications that reach far beyond technology alone. For developing countries like Saint Lucia, understanding and leveraging AI isn't merely about keeping pace with the rest of the world; it's about finding practical ways to improve our daily lives, strengthen our economy, and provide new avenues for our youth to thrive. In our context, the question becomes: how can we effectively apply AI to drive economic growth, build resilient infrastructure, and promote equitable access to opportunities?

A common feature of countries in the South including Saint Lucia is a youthful population.

Not surprisingly, unemployment, underemployment and crime are more acute and prevalent in the youthful segment of the population of the South.

In Saint Lucia, we created a new sector in the economy called the Youth Economy where with the support of the Caribbean Development Bank, government provided support through financing, mentoring, training and marketing to young people wishing to convert their hobbies to entrepreneurship and skills into business. The response from the young people of Saint Lucia has been amazing. They have sought support for a number of ventures ranging from light manufacturing to creative expressions.

Government has also supported a company operating an Innovation Hub which will no doubt be using AI. This Innovation Hub is intended to support the work of technology driven entrepreneurs

in Saint Lucia whose work is focused on the development of digital platforms or Internet of Things (IoT devices).

The challenge is how can we use the opportunities of AI to improve, expand, or introduce new business ventures for these ambitious young people.

In the field of sports, a favorite area for many young people AI technologies can be used to improve performances, expand coaching and fitness programmes and generally enhance the field and off field knowledge and experiences for sports persons.

The Government of Saint Lucia believes that economic development must be about enhancing the welfare of people. I noted the use of the word computers in my definition of AI. In this regard, the government of Saint Lucia has embarked on a one lap-top per student initiative in the education system of the island.

To date, every secondary school child has access to an electronic device to enhance their learning experience. Government is also training teachers and curriculum developers to prepare subject matter to be downloaded for teaching and learning purposes. It is hoped that with the early introduction of computers our population will become globally competitive and able to have the required skills necessary for a changing technological work place.

I see AI being used to provide personalized learning that caters for the needs of children with diverse abilities and talents. The technology can be used to single out these children and in a scientific non-discriminating fashion improve their learning experience.

I can imagine the possibilities of every child at all levels of the school's system being tutored in smart classrooms powered by AI technology tailored for the unique requirements of our communities regardless of their location.

In this regard, it is important that good internet is accessible, stable and affordable. It must be seen as a public good in much the same way as electricity.

In Saint Lucia, our education system while becoming technologically compliant must provide skills that enable people to work from home. The global market will require data analysts, software developers and content developers who can provide services in remote locations and lower unemployment for people who possess these skills.

As AI technology becomes applicable in many different ways, the nature of the workforce will of necessity undergo rapid transformation.

Without a healthy population economic development is hampered. A few years ago, the world suffered from the devastating effects of the Covid-19 virus, of course the South suffered disproportionately to the North in many ways including the availability and cost of medicines and vaccinations.

Other diseases such as cancers, effects of noncommunicable diseases and results of undernourishment, famines and drought caused by climate change have a more lasting impact on the South. I expect the Summit to provide the ideas for the use of AI to improve the access, affordability and quality of health care to our South.

Can the use of AI platforms provide more opportunities in telemedicine, early detection signals that allow medical experts networking in research and the ability to perform medical procedures that will be made available to more people in the country - we look forward to answers to these important questions as we all struggle to achieve universal health care for all in Saint Lucia.

As our economies become more dependent on tourism, the South including Saint Lucia is in the unique position of having to compete for visitors from source markets that themselves depend on the tourism industry as an economic driver. Some vivid examples are the United States and Europe.

Facing such competition from the more powerful North, small islands have to leverage AI to enhance the visitor experience and market the uniqueness, charm, natural beauty and most importantly the friendliness of our people.

I expect the conference to advise our tourism stakeholders on marketing techniques that can provide personalized travel options to the different segments of the market.

AI can be used to assist in leveraging our competitive advantage in tourism to analyze information on visitor preferences, expectations, dislikes and the overall experience.

Potential visitors can be exposed to virtual tours of our landscape and attractions thus creating the desire to visit the destination.

The Government of Saint Lucia has declared this year of Infrastructure and my annual budget was entitled “Building our infrastructure for a Resilient Economy”. We reminded the public that the term infrastructure embodies physical, social, digital and means of improving the delivery of public services.

Government continues to implement measures to enhance our digital framework and facilitate the delivery of services to the Saint Lucia public. A key initiative is a web-based “Digi Gov” platform where we aim to provide 154 government services across eight ministries. Forty-six government services are already available on the platform. In the future this platform must consider the use of AI to further improve efficiency in service delivery.

AI can assist in decision making to allow public servants to use data driven information to advise policy makers on what are the priorities of the people of the country.

CONCLUSION

To my mind, the question that has to be answered by decision makers is not why AI but what degree AI. The future calls for a united approach among the public, private and business sectors working together not only in the use and implementation of AI technologies but to cushion the possible negative effects of AI on the lives and livelihoods of the citizens.

It seems inevitable that our lives will be driven by some form of AI we need to invest in the technology to make the use of AI possible and accessible.

In the final analysis, I believe that the positive effects of AI must benefit the people of the country to enjoy a better quality of life.

The ills that presently plague the majority of mankind in the South – poverty, unemployment, climate change can be lowered by effective use of AI but the question remains will the digital divide be re-enforced by AI and lead to more inequalities.

I invite you to consider that preposition and use that Forum to find ways and means to avoid what some believe is inevitable.

I end with a quote from Canadian Professor, Jacque Murray

“The digital divide is shedding light on a bigger societal issue of privilege and marginalization”.

I thank you.

