

**March 16<sup>th</sup> 2018**

**Excerpt from the 2018 Budget Address on ICT development**

**Introduction**

This Government is committed to utilizing information communication technology (“ICT”) to drive and accelerate transformational development in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Our ability to create an environment for the productive and inclusive use of ICTs is dependent on (i) expanding and improving ICT infrastructure; (ii) creating the necessary legal, institutional and policy frameworks for effective ICT adoption and use; (iii) expanding the necessary skills within government, the private sector and civil society; and (iv) facilitating the growth of ICT-enabled innovation, particularly among the youth, small businesses and entrepreneurs.

The effective rollout and mainstreaming of ICT solutions is a complex and painstaking business, especially for a Government that sees inclusive ICT access and development as a fundamental pillar in stimulating economic growth and development; and integral to obliterating, rather than entrenching, existing socio-economic inequalities. We seek to advance – within our budgetary constraints – impactful, sustainable ICT strategies that are part of a wider development policy.

In a sector that changes as rapidly as ICT, there is often a temptation to drop existing plans in pursuit of the latest shiny gadget or cutting-edge concept, or to pursue a discordant mix of uncoordinated and ill-conceived externally-driven experiments that neither fit our local realities nor our strategic objectives. It is important to keep our eye on the ball: ICT in the Vincentian context is a developmental accelerant, a leveler of playing fields, a means for enhancing new and existing businesses, and an avenue for the delivery of improved services to the Vincentian people.

**Achievements in 2017**

In 2017, the Government was proud of its best-practice implementation of the Caribbean Regional Communications Infrastructure (“CARCIP”) incubation programme. Currently, there are sixteen (16) firms within the business incubation programme. Businesses including manufacturing using wood and metal, development of robotic arm using 3D printing, video and media production, software development, mobile application development and web development. Most of these small businesses have been performing above target and have experienced significant growth. To date, the programme has expended over \$1.1 million.

On the training component of the CARCIP programme, approximately 400 persons have been trained in ICT courses such as CompTIA network and security, digital animation, computer fundamentals, mobile application development and web page design. Over \$ 1.2 million has been spent on the programme so far.

We have also mandated the inclusion of a job placement component in ICT training activities, and emphasized the creation of local content, rather than the passive consumption of externally-generated material.

### **2018 Projects**

The 2018 Budget includes critical infrastructural investments in connecting the Grenadines to our expanding national fibre backbone. \$9.2 million will be spent under the World Bank's CARCIP programme to facilitate the process, which will be executed in collaboration with a regional service provider. Such a significant investment in the ICT broadband infrastructure will ensure:

- A full integration of the entire government service and reduction in administrative waste. The expansion of the Government Wide Area Network (GWAN) will connect all government buildings, health centres, the modern medical complex and statutory corporations to a dedicated secure fibre line with high-capacity bandwidth; and
- Access to high-speed broadband at an affordable price with increased penetration rates.

### **Conclusion**

This year, the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines National Centre of Technological Innovation ("SVGNCTI") will conduct ICT readiness assessments for local businesses. These assessments will evaluate the potential of those entities to incorporate ICT solutions in their business practices, and provide the necessary training to improve their tech competency. This initiative can serve as a catalyst for increased private sector investments in ICT as a means of increasing innovation, productivity, competitiveness, and, ultimately, growth.

We expect to see improvements to efficiency and security in the state bureaucracy, with the completion of the Taiwan-funded Electronic Document and Records Management System ("EDRMS"). This system, which complements our strategic priority of developing digital government systems to improve administrative efficiency and transparency, implements e-document exchange and public key infrastructure to move paperwork decisively away from the colonial-era system of myriad office attendants trudging around Kingstown with confidential documents in tow. We formally launched this project during a visit by the Taiwanese Foreign Minister. I also secured a pledge from His Excellency the Foreign Minister for the Taiwanese Government, to design and fund a system of networkable closed-circuit

television cameras to be deployed throughout Kingstown, and at bus stops nationwide. That system is expected to be launched in the fourth quarter of this year.

We also plan to enact comprehensive modern telecommunications legislation this year that will promote net neutrality, facilitate greater e-commerce, and, importantly, give the regulators increased powers to enforce basic customer service and quality standards among our providers. Such legislation is long overdue.

The adoption, penetration and effective use of broadband Internet in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be constrained by insufficient investment from private sector partners. The competition that we anticipated in the wake of the deregulation of the mobile telephone sector has devolved into a low-budget war of attrition between mobile service operators, with tacit ceding of various subsectors, like cable TV and fixed-line broadband, to monopolies.

Meanwhile, oft-promised investments in upgraded mobile broadband and data, have not materialised. While we value tremendously our partnership with the telecom providers, and we recognize that the changing economics of voice and data usage have upended their traditional business model, we intend to use all regulatory and legislative means to secure a better deal for Vincentian consumers.