



**Presentation by the Honourable Fayval Williams, MP**

**Minister of State**

**Ministry of Finance and the Public Service**

**at**

**The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics Workshop**

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***Salutations...***

I thank you for the opportunity to speak at such a timely and important event. The launch of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), organized by STATIN and the Partnership in Statistics Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) is indeed relevant and on-the-pulse given the wave of policy changes now afoot on the local landscape.

I will focus my presentation today on the value that the NSDS will bring for us as a people and national development policies.

To set the context, I ask you to imagine, getting up daily to no weather forecasts or reports. Imagine, listening to the newscast every day and being told of everything else that is happening expect, whether it will rain or you will see bright sunshine.

What if you are an event planner and you have a wedding to set up? Do you put the chairs outside or do you set up the party indoors? About what time will the sun set? As an event organizer, this bit of information would be very helpful. You would be able to guide the photographers so that the couple gets to capture that embrace they desire right on the sunset.

Personally, the weather forecast helps you to decide if you will need to take an umbrella with you to work today?

In other words, how do we see what will be needed and therefore craft our preparation?

Ladies and gentlemen, in the same way that weather forecasters are able to read weather patterns and trends to supply a forecast to the public, helping us to plan our daily activities, statistics allows us to forecast, guides our policy directions and offers invaluable insight into issues that will need a plan of action.

### ***BODY***

The NSDS being launched by STATIN and PARIS21 will support the country's National Development Plan and serve as a bank of information for us to pull from as we build.

The value of national data can be viewed against our mission to accomplish the goals of the National Development Plan or Vision 2023 as it more popularly referred to.

Vision 2030 sets out, among other things, to make Jamaica's economy prosperous. This can be greatly enhanced through an efficient, up-to-date and robust data system from which we can gauge our improvements and plot the continued path to accomplishment.

Data will not only aid but will drive the tasks under Vision 2030, our country's first long-term National Development Plan, toward setting Jamaica on a path to developed country status by 2030.

For example, goal number one of the Vision 2030 plan speaks to empowering Jamaicans to achieve their fullest potential through world class education and training. How will we know if the policies and practices implemented in the Education Ministry and its stakeholders are effective? How will we know how many persons need to be trained in specific areas based on global or national trends?

Data, ladies and gentlemen, data.

Just recently some 39,000 students sat the Grade Six Achievement Test. The government and the private sector need to be ready to absorb these students in another 5 to 10 years when they would have completed high school, college or university and are ready to access financial services, jobs and even establish businesses.

On a micro level, we can consider that the education system puts out a similar number of students year after year. Knowledge about the number of students within each age cohort helps educators to plan.

This level of planning requires data driven policies that must seamlessly integrate all aspects of government and governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, another example of data supporting national growth is the value it brings to accomplishing the National Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Financial inclusion is an important enabler of job creation and development and is a key part of the government's strategy to promote sustainable economic growth. It means placing **ALL** Jamaicans in a position to access the offerings of the financial sector in a safe, cost effective and convenient manner.

However, in the absence of solid data on the persons in the market that we seek to serve, how will we know which services are needed?

How do we even know what they need and how do we target these services toward those who need them to drive their own growth and by extension, that of the country?

These decisions rely on information. Information is now commodity in which countries and companies trade or as Clive Humby states, ***"Data is the new oil."***

Data are important to everyone. Companies pull data on global and local trends to aid their marketing decisions. Taxi operators use data to decide which routes are more viable; hairdressers use it to decide which products to stock to cater to their clients' needs.

Armed with information on the tastes and needs of their clients, firms tailor their offerings to their customers' needs.

The private sector is adept at this. But, I must concede that as a government, we need to leverage the value of statistics to advance our various roles.

### ***THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE***

Locally, there is growing demand for data on Jamaica, for this data to be provided in a timely manner and for greater accessibility to users.

Investors and international bodies rely on statistics to inform their decisions on how to interact with us. The recent expansions in the Business Processing Outsourcing sector, for example, were all underpinned by reliable data.

But ladies and gentlemen, there is a gap. As Jamaicans we tend to rely on anecdotes. Yes, there are ministries, departments and agencies that collect and analyse statistics suited for their needs and that we do draw on as a resources, agencies such as STATIN and the PIOJ, to name a few. But the absence of a systematic reliable network for building on and sharing this information hampers us as a people.

### ***LACK OF INTEGRATION AMONG DATA PRODUCERS***

The main problem as identified by STATIN is the lack coordination among entities regarding collecting, collating and storing of information about ourselves.

Inter-agency access to data from administrative and official sources is inconsistent and the quality of information is not guaranteed as the data is not always compiled for statistical purposes.

Currently, as well, the process of information sharing between these government bodies is not legally mandated. For the most part, information is shared at the discretion of the relevant bodies.

Additionally, the information often isn't available for use by other agencies because officers are either unaware it even exists or are unable to access it.

This is a hurdle that we must overcome. These are areas of opportunity that we can work on to help reduce bottlenecks and red tape and improve access.

I must therefore commend STATIN for leading the charge among local stakeholders in this regard and urge other government agencies to begin the conversation toward creating partnerships that will lead to statistical platforms that can aid in national development.

An example of what can happen when agencies collaborate on data provision is the launch of Jamaica's National Summary Data Page (NSDP).

This is as a result of work between the Bank of Jamaica, STATIN and the Ministry of Finance.

As you may know, the NSDP allows for the publication of certain key macro-economic indicators on Jamaica in a one-stop web portal. This information is critical for monitoring the economic performance of Jamaica, provides easier access to our stakeholders in the public and private sectors, researchers and international data users including, investors and rating agencies.

The NSDP is part of Jamaica's participation in the IMF's Enhanced General Data Dissemination Standard (e-GDDS) and is an important step towards Jamaica subscribing to the more stringent dissemination standard, the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS).

Systems such as this demonstrates our a level of integration that investors find appealing because it means they can be strategic in the leg work they must undertake, and this ladies and gentlemen, drives growth.

As a statistical tool, the NSDS will assist in harmonizing statistical information which is an essential ingredient in planning, monitoring and evaluating the development of the country.

Additionally, it will also reduce the duplication of efforts in the public sector.

The provision of data to monitor Vision 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the CARICOM Regional Statistics Work programme demands strong coordination and the strengthening statistical capacities.

Similarly, the NSDS will provide the pathway to the development of a robust, reliable platform and I must thank PARIS21 for its technical support in this regard as well as the STATIN team for your hard work and initiative.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, let me leave you with this quote by John Tukey, ***“The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to see what we never expected to see.”*** The same can be said of statistics. It points us to intricacies we neither expected nor realized where there. It solidifies our thinking or shifts it all together but either way, we see clearly with data.

I thank you!