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this
tech hub islands summit

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EXECUTE
EVOLVE**

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CEO | Atlantic LNG Company
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Commissioner of Police |
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NIRAD TEWARIE
CEO |
AMCHAM T&T



TRISH KERIN
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Lead Like Kerin



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of Trinidad & Tobago



STACY HOMER
Chief People Officer |
National Flour Mills

Find more information at www.amchamtt.com

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The opinions expressed in the editorial contributions in Linkage may not necessarily be those of AMCHAM T&T. We welcome any comments you might have! Simply email a “Letter to the Editor” to the AMCHAM T&T Secretariat to

kennedymaraj@amchamtt.com

AMCHAM T&T'S VISION

As **The Pathway To The Americas**, AMCHAM T&T is focussed on the stimulation and promotion of trade, investment and export oriented growth in the Western Hemisphere.

AMCHAM T&T'S MISSION

AMCHAM T&T will add value to our member companies within the following key focus areas:

- Enhancement of Competitiveness
- Generation of New Business and Market Access for Services/Goods
- Influence on Policies and Legislation
- Transfer of Knowledge
- Contribution to Sustainable Development

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AI POLICY

LINKAGE does not publish AI-generated articles.

Authors that use generative AI to create elements of their editorial content have a moral obligation to label their articles as such. AI-generated images are all designated as such.



A professional portrait of Anna Henderson, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, smiling and looking slightly to the right. She is wearing a light-colored, textured blazer with a dark blue collar and a small brooch. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing pearl earrings and a ring. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

VIEWPOINT

Anna Henderson
President, AMCHAM T&T

VIEWPOINT

By Anna Henderson, CEO Amaranth Business Solutions Ltd. and AMCHAM T&T President

ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.

Three simple words—and in today's business environment, they are more than just a theme, but a roadmap for achieving growth despite the disruption.

If we are honest, many CEOs and business executives here in Trinidad and Tobago and across the world aren't sleeping soundly these days. The reasons aren't hard to find. AI is transforming the business landscape faster than ever before. Cyber threats lurk around every corner. Talent shortages are hitting hard. Customer expectations are shifting faster than we can anticipate. And beneath it all lies the same fundamental question: how do we execute a strategy that balances these challenges and delivers sustainable results?

This is not an easy question to answer. But here's the opportunity: if we engage boldly with these realities, execute effectively on innovation, and evolve how we think about business, we can build not just stronger companies, but a more resilient and prosperous country.

Let's face it: technology is both the biggest disruptor and the greatest enabler of our time. AI, for example, isn't coming; it's already here. From predictive analytics in energy and manufacturing, to AI-powered chatbots in customer service, to smarter tools for healthcare and

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finance, AI is changing how we work and live.

But with every opportunity comes risk. Left unmanaged, AI can displace workers, amplify biases, and widen the digital divide. Add to that the increasing frequency and sophistication of cyberattacks, and you quickly realise that embracing tech requires more than enthusiasm, it demands responsibility, investment and foresight.

So how do we get this right? How does Trinidad and Tobago not only keep pace but position itself as a leader in tech adoption and innovation? I believe the answer lies in three interconnected steps:

1. Engage – We must engage with all stakeholders to build a shared vision of a digital economy. Listen to young innovators, upskill our workforce, create policies that encourage experimentation, not stifle it.

2. Execute – To truly execute, we need scalable digital infrastructure, investment incentives for startups, and strong cyber resilience measures. Execution also means embedding tech into all sectors so we remain globally competitive.

3. Evolve – Perhaps the hardest part. True evolution in business requires letting go of legacy methods and adopting forward-thinking strategies. Remote work is here to stay, customer expectations

for personalisation will only intensify, business as usual is a thing of the past. For leaders, it requires the courage to constantly adapt.

Yes, the risks are real. But the rewards are greater. Think about it: a vibrant local tech ecosystem creates jobs, attracts investment, improves efficiency and enhances our global competitiveness. It also ensures that our citizens, especially our youth, see a future for themselves right here in T&T where they can thrive.

As AMCHAM T&T, our role is to convene, connect and champion. That's why through initiatives like The Tech Hub Islands Summit (THIS), AMCHAM T&T is creating platforms for dialogue and action. But more importantly, we are committed to helping our members navigate disruption by sharing knowledge, building partnerships and advocating for policies that accelerate transformation.

The future won't wait for us to catch up. So, let's engage—not from the sidelines but with curiosity and courage. Let's execute—not halfway, but with precision and accountability. And let's evolve—not reluctantly, but with vision and optimism.

If we do this, we won't just survive the disruption, we will define a future where companies grow stronger, citizens thrive and our nation rises. ■

A photograph of Nirad Tewarie, CEO of AMCHAM T&T, speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark sweater and glasses, smiling. The background is dark with vertical light strips. The word 'WELCOME' is overlaid in large white letters with a red outline.

WELCOME

Nirad Tewarie
CEO, AMCHAM T&T

WELCOME

By Nirad Tewarie,
AMCHAM T&T CEO

ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.

I am excited to share a few reflections from THIS 2025, our Tech Hub Islands Summit where our theme, “Engage, Execute, Evolve” was much more than just a tagline. It’s a roadmap—not just for digital transformation, but for how we move forward in a fast-changing world.

START WITH “WHY”

Whenever we step into the world of innovation, my first question is always the same: why? What is the problem that we are trying to solve? Is it a citizen accessing government services, a customer choosing a product, or an employee seeking career growth? At THIS, we heard practical examples of AI, blockchain and data already reshaping businesses—from Ansa’s smart automation, to Proman’s blockchain-based carbon reporting, to Massy’s data-driven transformation.

If we want stronger tax compliance, easier trade, safer communities and better education outcomes, technology is a key enabler.

SMARTER GOVERNANCE, POWERED BY TECH

If we want stronger tax compliance, easier trade, safer communities and better education outcomes, technology is a key enabler. Imagine using GIS data to find tax leakage. Picture predictive analytics curbing crime by identifying patterns. Think of customs fully digitised with trusted-trader programmes for efficient trade facilitation. These are not futuristic ideas; these things are happening now albeit not being as fully utilised in T&T as they should be.

EDUCATION NEEDS A DIGITAL RESET

Meanwhile, our education system is not keeping pace. Did you know only 45% of CSEC students earned a full certificate including Math and English in 2024? That's not acceptable in a world that expects us to lead with knowledge and creativity. It's time to empower adaptive learning (yes, like Khan Academy) and flexible curricula. Critically, we need to elevate our teachers, making the profession respected, fairly rewarded and accountable. Using school data to spot disengaged learners early and stepping in with support is achievable today.

TECH: THE ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Technology isn't just a means, it's a sector. Think nearshoring tech jobs in fintech, health-tech, call centres, bio-engineering, RPA, cyber security, for example. Our diaspora is ready to invest and return but we need policies like a Digital Nomad Visa to make it possible. The time for dreaming has passed. Now is the time to design, build and live that tech future.

*Now is the time
to design, build
and live that
tech future.*

THE FUTURE IS NOT A DESTINATION—IT'S A DECISION

Perhaps the most important message from THIS 2025 is that the future isn't somewhere we end up, it's what we choose today. The best time to act was yesterday. The next best time is now.

To our members, partners, public sector champions and especially to you—our reader—I invite you to join us. Engage with the “why.” Execute with purpose. And evolve boldly. I think we are ready to build the future that works for all of us.

I hope you enjoy this special issue of LINKAGE Magazine and all of the articles from our amazing contributors that were curated for you around this theme. ■

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A portrait of James McLetchie, a man with a shaved head, smiling, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a white button-down shirt. He is sitting in a light-colored chair. The background is a blurred office setting with windows.

LINE IN CEO'S PERSPECTIVE THE SAND

James McLetchie
President & Group CEO, Massy

**LESSONS FROM LIFE,
LEARNING,
AND LEADERSHIP**

“Son, when disappointment hits, draw a line in the sand! Then get up and move forward!”

Those words from my father came one morning when I was in Form 6 at Fatima College, just months before he passed away. At the time, I didn't realise he was preparing me for the 'what if' of his illness. But that lesson—short, clear, and unforgettable—has stayed with me my entire life.



His death was my first real encounter with disruption, personal and completely outside of my control. Yet, what I could control was my response, which was precisely his point. Many thought I wasn't processing my loss, was perhaps too calm. But I had already framed it differently. I couldn't change his passing. What I did have were excellent memories of a father who believed in my potential (he also set clear boundaries).

At 17, I learned to see disruption not as an ending, but as a starting line, a new threshold to cross. That perspective has shaped how I live and how I lead.

STAYING UNFINISHED

Over time, I've accepted that I will never be a complete or 'finished' leader. And that's a good thing.

The idea of the 'unfinished executive' is simple: I stay energised by constant learning. My passion for and commitment to learning is what sharpens my craft, no matter the stage of life or career. It is what helps me respond to change, adapt to new realities, and see opportunity where others may only see disruption.

Staying unfinished also means staying humble. Over the years, I've dropped the ball more times than I'd like to admit. In the moment, those mistakes always felt bigger to me than to anyone else. Yet often the solution was straightforward: refocus on the goal, learn the lesson, and move forward.

That rhythm—falling, reframing, stepping again—has been as central to my growth as any success. It keeps me grounded, adaptable and willing to take risks without fear of imperfection.

PEOPLE AS THE MULTIPLIER

If there is one constant across my journey, it is people. As I have been learning, I also accept that our role as leaders is to support others if they want to learn and, over time, I've come to think of this power of people in business in quite a simple way:

$$\text{People} + \text{Customers} + \text{Partners} = \text{Results} \times \text{Impact}$$

Results matter, but what excites me is the multiplier: the impact. When people (at all levels) feel their work has meaning and that they matter, they make customers happy, and partners trust us. That's when results compound into something lasting.

This perspective is deeply rooted in my upbringing. My father, self-disciplined and self-taught, served as Assistant Controller of Customs. My mother was the 'entrepreneur of entrepreneurs'. She ran a catering business, a roti shop, and sold roti skins to Hi-Lo. Together, they gave me a model of hard work, professional integrity, and discipline.

My mother's rule was simple: "If you're still in bed after 5:30 or 6 am, you will get lazy." I don't think that's true, but maybe that's why I'm an early riser even now.

Those lessons never left me. They shape how I lead: providing clarity, showing people that their work matters, offering support, and trusting and expecting them to deliver.

MY "FORMAL" JOURNEY OF LEARNING

My career has been one long education. At PwC in Trinidad and later in the United States, I learned professional rigour. At McKinsey, global experience and an environment of excellence sharpened my ability to solve complex problems. At Aveva, I saw firsthand how software and technology could transform entire businesses and industries.

And now at Massy, I carry the privilege and the responsibility of leading a company that is both deeply tied to the region's history and charged with preparing for its future. No organisation gets to 100 years without people, resilience and innovation. We will invest in our people, we have seen our resilience, and we will begin a journey toward a new 'generation of innovation'.

The lesson through it all is clear: adaptability matters more than certainty. Hard work matters more than titles. And people—always people—make the difference.

TECHNOLOGY AND OUR GENERATION'S AI MOMENT

All this learning matters even more today because disruption is unfolding at a historic pace.

In 2010, the world created enough data to fill 8 trillion iPhones (256MB each), enough to cover Trinidad & Tobago 18 times over. Just 15 years later, in 2025, global data production will require over 700 trillion iPhones—enough to cover more than 1,500 T&Ts.

The speed of adoption of AI is just as striking. The internet took seven years to reach 100 million users. ChatGPT did it in only two months.

These are not just statistics. They are signals that we are living through a historic moment where disruption and opportunity are accelerating together. Therefore, as leaders, we cannot afford to stand still. We owe it to the organisation we lead to get going.

In my own journey of learning, I continue to explore how data and AI will reshape leadership, decision-making, and amplify human creativity. For us in Trinidad & Tobago and across the region, we may lack global scale, but we have no shortage of innovation or ingenuity. The opportunity lies in using technology not to replace our strengths but to amplify them.

This moment calls for new learning, new leadership, for me and for all of us. And I believe we can seize it to amplify our people to compete and win globally.

Keep stepping forward over that line in the sand, where opportunity is waiting to be unlocked.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

As I reflect on AMCHAM's theme for the THIS conference—Engage, Execute & Evolve—I don't see a checklist. I see a journey.

Engagement means real connections, active listening, and ensuring People know their work matters. Execution is about grounding ambition in disciplined action, a standard I continue to hold myself to. And evolution is about embracing the fact that I will always be unfinished—that change is constant, and the only mistake is standing still.

Looking back, a thread runs through it all: disruption will keep coming, mistakes will keep happening, but if I keep learning, keep listening and keep stepping forward over that threshold, that line in the sand, there is always opportunity waiting to be unlocked.

That is how I intend to keep leading. Not as someone with all the answers, but as someone unfinished, committed to growth, grounded in people, and open to the opportunities hidden in someone else's disruption. ■

AMCHAM T&T'S NATIONAL BUDGET KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



TAP THE WATCH TO READ OUR FULL 2026 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

HERE IS A SUMMARY OF AMCHAM T&T'S 2026 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS:

National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF): Mobilise private capital between USD500 million and USD1 billion for critical projects such as ports, affordable housing, renewable energy and digital infrastructure—supported by government partial risk guarantees and transparent governance.

Piarco Preclearance & Global Entry: Initiate negotiations with the U.S. to designate Piarco International Airport as a U.S. Preclearance Port and integrate T&T into the Global Entry Programme, allowing travellers to complete U.S. Immigration and Customs in Trinidad and Tobago prior to departure. This would enhance passenger experience, reduce delays and position T&T as a more attractive travel and investment hub.

Digital Nomad Visas: As a means of attracting valuable tech entrepreneurs and workers, the Government should implement such visas to allow qualified non-nationals to live and work in Trinidad and Tobago for periods not exceeding two years.

Nearshoring Strategy: Collaborate with the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence and the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism to implement a national nearshoring plan that creates high-value jobs, facilitates brain circulation and attracts foreign direct investment in IT-enabled services and advanced technologies.

Implement a Professional Standards Bureau in the Customs and Excise Division: Operations at the Customs and Excise Division continue to be a significant bottleneck for trade facilitation and business efficiency. The ongoing challenges around delays, transparency and accountability continue to negatively impact competitiveness and investor confidence.

AMCHAM T&T is recommending the establishment of an Internal Affairs & Professional Standards Bureau within the Division to address issues of integrity and efficiency. Similar units exist in many other countries, and this approach is also endorsed by the World Customs Organisation.

Widen the Tax Net: Leverage technology—including AI, GIS mapping and FIU partnerships—to identify non-compliant businesses, with a one-year amnesty to bring them into the tax system without retrospective penalties.

Boost Access to Venture Capital and Private Equity: Update regulations to allow institutional investors to direct capital into venture capital and private equity funds, supporting entrepreneurship and innovation.

Streamline Approvals and Payments: Accelerate state land and permit approvals for investment-generating projects and ensure timely government payments to improve private sector liquidity.

Settle Government Debt to Private Companies: It is important that Government pays its obligations, as many companies are struggling to obtain positive cash flow, which reduces their tax contributions.

Operationalise the National Statistical Institute (NSI): Transition from the CSO to a robust, well-resourced NSI to provide accurate, timely economic data—improving both policy planning and investor confidence. ■

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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN HSE

AMCHAM T&T Announces Finalists for the 15th
Annual National Excellence in HSE Awards



This year marks the 15th edition of AMCHAM T&T's National Excellence in Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)

Awards—widely recognised as the country's premier platform for acknowledging exceptional leadership in HSE and sustainable business practices.

Officially endorsed by the Ministry of Labour since 2011, the awards reflect AMCHAM T&T's longstanding advocacy for higher HSE standards across every industry sector.

This year, 35 companies submitted entries across four major award categories. After a rigorous judging process, 12 emerged as finalists, evaluated by a distinguished panel of judges drawn from a cross-section of industries, who focused on measurable improvements in safety systems, innovative

health initiatives and clear commitments to environmental responsibility.

The winners will be announced at a glitzy ceremony on November 10th, 2025, at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad.

SPOTLIGHT ON EXCELLENCE

Among this year's outstanding submissions, four companies rose to the top as finalists in the most prestigious category—the Excellence in HSE Award. This award recognises organisations that integrate HSE as a core business value while achieving outstanding performance both in HSE and overall business operations. The 2025 finalists are:

- **Halliburton Trinidad Limited**
- **Sonriz Engineering Services Limited**
- **West Indian Tobacco Company Limited**
- **Yara Trinidad Limited**

These organisations exemplify how embedding HSE into company culture creates safer workplaces, more resilient communities and stronger business outcomes.

AMCHAM T&T CEO Nirad Tewarie congratulated the finalists and emphasised the broader significance of their achievements. “We are extremely proud of all the companies that submitted entries and particularly the finalists who continue to set the standard for HSE excellence in Trinidad and

Tobago,” he said. “These awards are not just about recognition, they are about reinforcing a culture where health, safety and environmental responsibility are embedded in every aspect of how we do business.”

He further highlighted that the private sector's ongoing commitment to HSE is proof that profitability and people-centered practices are not mutually exclusive but can, in fact, drive sustainable growth. “The continued commitment to HSE standards shown by our private sector is a powerful example of how organisations can balance profitability with people-centered practices and sustainable growth. At AMCHAM T&T, we believe that the long-term success of our companies and our country depend on this kind of unwavering dedication to safety and responsibility,” he added.

AMCHAM T&T continues to champion corporate responsibility, innovation and leadership in building a safer, healthier and more sustainable future for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. ■

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Tickets for the awards ceremony are available via AMCHAM T&T at: www.amchamtt.com/hseawards2025finalists.

15th Annual National Excellence in HSE Awards:

FINALISTS

EXCELLENCE IN HSE



Halliburton Trinidad Limited
 Sonriz Engineering Services Limited
 West Indian Tobacco Company Limited
 Yara Trinidad Limited

HSE EVOLUTION AWARD



Acado Foods, A Division of Acado
 Trinidad Limited
 Nu-Iron Unlimited
 Sonriz Engineering Services Limited
 Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust
 Corporation

TOWARDS OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE



ASCO Logistics Limited
 Ben Lomond Industrial and Safety
 Solutions Limited
 Sonriz Engineering Services Limited
 Yara Trinidad Limited

OUTSTANDING OSH & ENVIRONMENT PROJECT



Airports Authority of Trinidad and
 Tobago
 La Brea Industrial Development
 Company Limited
 National Energy Corporation of
 Trinidad and Tobago Limited
 (2 projects: Phase II Renewable Energy and
 Energy Efficiency Education / Port of Galeota
 Entrance Reconfiguration)

BUSINESS CONTINUITY IS A TEAM EFFORT



José Ignacio Quirós, Director at CEPA



AMCHAM T&T Hosts Strategic Session on Building Resilience in Uncertain Times

In today's world of constant disruption, where uncertainty has become the only certainty, one thing is clear: business resilience is no longer optional. Recognising this, AMCHAM T&T hosted a strategic session titled “Why Business Continuity Is Non-Negotiable”—bringing members together to strengthen preparedness and future-proof their organisations.

Feature speaker José Ignacio Quirós is the Director of CEPA (Centro Especializado de Prevención de Accidentes) and a regional authority

on Business Continuity Planning (BCP). With over two decades of experience advising public and private sector entities Quirós delivered a compelling case for why resilience must be embedded into every level of business operations. Continuity planning is more than a document—it's a survival strategy. "Everybody, from leadership to frontline staff, must understand their role in keeping the business running all the time," he said.

The four critical elements for success are risk identification, protective measures, a written, tested and maintained continuity plan and a culture of training, communication and inclusion. "When the whole team is engaged, your continuity plan becomes a living part of your operation. That's how we build sustainable companies," he said.

One of Quirós's key messages was that resilience cannot be siloed. Every team member has a role to play—whether it is knowing how to respond to a system outage, safeguarding physical documents, helping a colleague evacuate safely, or making contact with the customers.

This call to action resonated strongly with attendees, many of whom represent

MSMEs. Smaller enterprises are often most vulnerable to shocks, yet they are critical to national economic stability and job creation.

Melissa Pierre, Senior Trade and Policy Specialist at AMCHAM T&T, reaffirmed the Chamber's role in strengthening the private sector's resilience. "We want to ensure that all businesses—especially MSMEs—are equipped with the knowledge and tools to anticipate, respond to and recover from disruption," she said. "Building future-ready enterprises isn't just smart—it's urgent. And resilience is a team sport. Collaboration is how we support each other, share best practices and prepare for what's ahead."

The session, hosted by AMCHAM T&T's Trade and Investment Committee under the leadership of Committee Chair Marc Persaud, was not only a knowledge-sharing exercise but also a clear signal of AMCHAM T&T's ongoing advocacy for risk awareness and business preparedness, helping companies turn disruption into opportunity—fostering a more crisis-ready, collaborative and resilient business community in Trinidad and Tobago. ■

ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.



TECH HUB ISLANDS SUMMIT 2025: ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.



At the heart of AMCHAM T&T's vision for digital transformation lies a simple but powerful question: Why? Why do we innovate? Why do we adopt new technologies?

(l-r): Colin Greaves - Director, Communications & External Relations at Digicel; Nirad Tewarie, CEO of AMCHAM T&T; Anna Henderson, President of AMCHAM T&T; Richard Sammy, Vice President of Republic Bank Limited; Maxine Williams, Vice President of Accessibility and Engagement at Meta; Julian Belgrave - IDB Country Representative for Trinidad and Tobago

For AMCHAM T&T CEO Nirad Tewarie (below), the answer is clear: because technology must create real value for the wider society.

It was on this foundation that Tewarie opened the Tech Hub Islands Summit 2025 (THIS 2025), hosted July 1–2 at the Hyatt Regency under the theme “Engage. Execute. Evolve.” The conference challenged leaders to think beyond buzzwords and focus instead on solving real problems through deliberate strategies and bold action.

Tewarie underscored that Trinidad and Tobago must seize the opportunity to position itself as a global technology hub through a targeted nearshoring strategy.

“We must push further—and higher—into the tech value chain.”



With the right policies and partnerships, he argued, the nation could build a viable “Global Tech Zone,” positioning T&T as a centre of excellence in select areas of technology while attracting the investment to make this a reality.

Already, growth is visible in sectors like call centres, fintech, health tech and advanced back-office services such as accounting and finance. But this, Tewarie stressed, is just the beginning. “We must push further—and higher—into the tech value chain,” he urged, calling for collaboration with the Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Public Administration and the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism to design



and execute a strategy that creates high-value jobs and opportunities.

He also pointed to the potential of the T&T diaspora—many of whom are excelling in global tech firms but want to give back at home. Policies such as a Digital Nomad Visa could help harness their expertise and contributions locally. “There is so much we can do, and we must act now,” he pressed.

Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Public Administration Dominic Alexander Smith (above) echoed this sense of urgency. “This year’s theme resonates deeply with me,” he said. “These three powerful words represent what we must do—connect with new technologies, apply them with intention, and develop continually to remain relevant.” His remarks reinforced the role of government in modernising systems, investing in digital infrastructure and fostering innovation through AI—all while ensuring inclusion and citizen-first design.

As title sponsor, Republic Bank provided the private sector’s perspective. Richard Sammy, Vice President (below), shared: “We’ve found that executing digital transformation ... allows us to respond to our customers’ evolving needs with greater precision and security... Imagine what would be realised if this approach is replicated across an eco-system?”

INNOVATE, IMPLEMENT, INSPIRE

THIS 2025 delivered on its promise, blending thought leadership with practical tools. Networking hubs buzzed, workshops demonstrated real applications, and panel discussions explored how engagement, execution and evolution must work together to drive impact. From AI-powered customer service platforms to blockchain-enabled certification systems, participants saw how technology is already reshaping sectors and creating competitive advantage. ■



ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.

• Maxine Williams
Vice President of Accessibility
and Engagement at Meta



LEVERAGING OPEN-SOURCED AI

Creating Value and Building for Accessibility

Maxine Williams' message in her keynote address at "THIS" was clear: artificial intelligence is not just reshaping technology, it is redefining inclusion, accessibility and opportunity for billions of people worldwide.

For the 1.3 billion people living with disabilities worldwide, accessibility is

not a side issue—it is a foundation for independence, dignity and participation in society. Williams has dedicated her career to ensuring technology works for everyone, regardless of ability. She partners with engineers, product designers, policymakers and, importantly, the disability community to ensure Meta's platforms are usable and valuable to all.

Williams highlighted how AI is already enabling breakthroughs at the intersection of accessibility and everyday life. Take,

for instance, smart spectacles powered by AI. With a simple voice command, they can describe surroundings to someone who is blind, read currency denominations, navigate spaces, identify what's on a menu. They allow a visually impaired person to gain independence that was once unimaginable.

Williams shared stories of individuals whose lives have been transformed by AI. Colin Hughes, a former BBC producer with muscular dystrophy, now uses AI-driven voice recognition to continue working productively. Kelly Clark, who suffered a traumatic brain injury, uses AI glasses to help her son solve math problems step by step—something she had lost the ability to do.

“These are not just tools,” Williams emphasised. “They are lifelines, restoring independence, connection and productivity.”

Image: RAY-BAN META GLASSES (GEN 1)
(www.ray-ban.com)



OPEN SOURCE AI

Yet, innovation alone is not enough. Affordability and accessibility remain barriers, especially in developing regions.

This is where open-source AI becomes a game changer.

Meta's decision to open-source

Llama, its large

language model, was driven

by the belief that advanced technology should be democratised. “When you make AI free and open,” Williams said, “you empower businesses, nonprofits and social enterprises—regardless of size or budget—to innovate and build solutions for their unique communities.”

From India's Ministry of Skill Development using Llama to enhance student learning, to Argentina's chatbot built on WhatsApp to improve public services, to Fundate, an AI-powered study buddy serving over three million students in Sub-Saharan Africa—Williams illustrated how open-source AI is bridging opportunity gaps across the globe.

Closer to home, she envisioned how even a small family-run restaurant in Trinidad could train an AI chatbot—at no extra cost—to understand its menu, take orders and personalise customer experiences.

While the possibilities are vast, Williams did not shy away from the ethical and structural challenges. Concerns around bias, representation in training datasets, environmental impact and intellectual property are valid. “The solution is not to step away from AI but to build with intent,” she said.

Meta has launched initiatives like Casual Conversations, a dataset designed to ensure AI models work fairly across diverse ages, genders, accents, skin tones and abilities. Similarly, Meta’s Massively Multilingual Speech model now supports speech recognition and text-to-speech in over 1,100 languages, including many that were previously excluded from AI development.

“By prioritising inclusivity from the outset, AI can help preserve culture, reduce inequality, and bring the world

closer together,” Williams explained.

Williams urged businesses, nonprofits and social enterprises to view AI not as a zero-sum threat but as an opportunity to engage communities, execute bold ideas and evolve toward greater accessibility and equity.

“These are still the early days,” she reminded. “But if we keep listening, keep building and keep sharing, we can ensure that AI enhances lives and delivers value to everyone. That’s how we create an ecosystem where no one is left behind.”

Her keynote resonated deeply with the THIS 2025 audience, reminding all that the true measure of innovation lies not just in its sophistication, but in its ability to make the world more inclusive and equitable. ■

DEFINITION

Casual Conversations is composed of over 45,000 videos (3,011 participants) and intended to be used for assessing the performance of already trained models in computer vision and audio applications... The videos feature paid individuals who agreed to participate in the project and explicitly provided age and gender labels themselves. The videos were recorded in the U.S. with a diverse set of adults in various age, gender and apparent skin tone groups. A group of trained annotators labeled the participants’ apparent skin tone using the Fitzpatrick scale in addition to annotations of whether the videos are recorded in low ambient lighting conditions. Spoken words in all videos were also manually transcribed by human annotators and are available with the dataset.

(from: <https://ai.meta.com/datasets/casual-conversations-dataset/>)

DEFINITION

In the Massively Multilingual Speech (MMS) project, we overcome some of these challenges by combining wav2vec 2.0, our pioneering work in self-supervised learning, and a new dataset that provides labeled data for over 1,100 languages and unlabeled data for nearly 4,000 languages. Some of these, such as the Tatuyo language, have only a few hundred speakers, and for most of these languages, no prior speech technology exists. Our results show that the Massively Multilingual Speech models outperform existing models and cover 10 times as many languages.

(from: <https://ai.meta.com/blog/multilingual-model-speech-recognition/>)

ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.

Dominic Alexander Smith
Minister of Public
Administration and Artificial
Intelligence, T&T



FOUR PRIORITIES FOR A DIGITALLY EMPOWERED NATION

Trinidad and Tobago's current Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence, Dominic Alexander Smith, delivered a decisive call to action at the THIS conference: **the time for digital transformation is now, and standing still is no longer an option.**

“For small island nations, speed means more than progress—it means survival and diversification. We must catch up, stay ahead and build systems that are both resilient and scalable to our unique needs,” the Minister said as he outlined four strategic priorities designed to empower citizens,

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:
Appointed to the Senate and Cabinet in 2025, Minister Smith holds a Master's degree in Economics. Before entering Cabinet, Minister Smith founded a Digital Consultancy Company in Port of Spain that supported organizations in digital transformation, content strategy and data analytics. In his current role, he is responsible for modernising government operations, improving service delivery through digital tools and advancing the nation's Artificial Intelligence strategy, supporting the Government's vision of citizen-centered, innovation-driven governance.

(From: <https://mpaai.gov.tt/about/the-minister>)

modernise government, and foster innovation across Trinidad and Tobago.

1. MODERNISING THE PUBLIC SERVICE

“At the heart of digital transformation is a modern, efficient, citizen-centric Public Service.”

Smith acknowledged that bureaucracy, inefficiencies and fragmented systems have long frustrated citizens. But change is underway in form of digitisation of records, process streamlining and introduction of secure digital identity systems to make services more accessible and user-friendly. From birth certificates to business registration, expanded electronic platforms will soon allow citizens to access services online—efficiently and securely.

2. BUILDING A RESILIENT DIGITAL GOVERNMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Modernisation cannot succeed without robust infrastructure. The government’s investments will focus on nationwide broadband connectivity, secure cloud-based platforms, open data frameworks and safe and resilient systems.

“Our goal is a connected, interoperable Government—where agencies can collaborate, data flows securely and real-time decisions improve service delivery.” Smith also stressed that digital inclusion must be a cornerstone,

ensuring marginalised and underserved communities are not left behind.

3. FOSTERING INNOVATION THROUGH AI

“AI should augment, not replace, human capability. It should enable Public Servants to focus on high-value, people-centred work.”

The government intends to support AI innovation hubs and incubators, nurturing home-grown solutions designed for Caribbean realities. With opportunities ranging from predictive healthcare analytics to intelligent traffic systems, the Minister emphasised that AI adoption must balance innovation with ethics, privacy and security.

4. STRENGTHENING PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION

“No Government can do this alone,” Smith said. Collaboration with the private sector, regional partners and international allies will be critical to sustaining transformation. The Minister called on stakeholders to co-create digital policies, establish R&D labs, expand workforce training initiatives and open government data to fuel entrepreneurship.

“Standing still is not an option anymore,” he declared. “We must catch up, stay ahead and build systems that are both resilient and scalable to our unique needs.” ■

ENGAGE. EXECUTE. EVOLVE.

A PRACTICAL PLAYBOOK FOR TRINIDAD & TOBAGO'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Photo: rawpixel / Freepik and Alice Besson



Trinidad and Tobago's digital future will be shaped by how well firms and institutions engage with their stakeholders, execute

on infrastructure and skills and evolve their operating models.

This playbook distills concrete next steps—grounded in local evidence—for leaders who want to see increased digital capabilities, expand inclusion and generate a critical mass of digital competencies to compete in an AI-enabled economy.



WHY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – PRACTICALLY DEFINED– MATTERS NOW

Digital transformation is an organisational process in which digital technologies trigger strategic responses and operating model changes that reshape how value is created and delivered (adapted from Vial, 2019).

Likewise, according to the *Oslo Manual* (OECD/Eurostat, 2018), innovation can be “New to the world,” when innovations are introduced globally for the first time; “new to the market,” when innovations are new within a specific market or region; and “new to the firm,” when existing technologies or practices are adopted by a particular business for the first time. All three matter for competitiveness.

Across Trinidad and Tobago, evidence shows unevenly distributed and relatively low levels of digital technology adoption. Whereas nearly 25% of firms in the European Union introduced information processing and communication methods in the past three years, only 8.8% of firms had done so (IFPG, 2020 and CIS, 2020). And while 90% of large firms in Trinidad and Tobago had a website, only 56% of small firms did (IFPG, 2020). These adoption gaps matter, because digital



By Alison Cathles

Senior Specialist, Competitiveness
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Development Bank

technology adoption at the firm level has been shown to have a positive effect on productivity, especially when accompanied by changes in management practices. In an increasingly digital world, closing these gaps is essential to realising productivity gains. In order to measure progress, it will be vital to have regularly updated statistics about digital technology adoption and use in Trinidad and Tobago.

ENGAGE: BUILD STRONGER BRIDGES BETWEEN MARKET NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS

Engagement is about connecting minds and markets, such as industry–academia collaboration, public–

private partnerships and peer-to-peer learning among SMEs and scale-ups. Speakers throughout the Tech Hub Islands Summit (THIS) 2025 referred to the vast (yet not fully tapped) potential within T&T's talent pool and strategic geographic position as a gateway between the Americas and the Caribbean.

To truly engage in digital transformation at a country level, strong linkages within the digital innovation ecosystems, particularly between industry and academia, are needed. Initiatives to create spaces where cutting-edge research produced in T&T's universities can be further experimented upon and commercialised by the private sector via start-ups or innovative firms are crucial. Publicly funded research centres of excellence or even grant money should build in incentives for collaboration, and incubators and accelerators in the country should be strengthened. Training and financial support opportunities for digital entrepreneurs or groups of small businesses (for example, in creative industries) to support them in different stages or aspects of their digital transformation processes would be ideal. To do that successfully, the firm needs to know how digitally mature it is. Auto diagnostic tools, like the IADB's/ Caribbean Export Development

Speakers throughout the THIS 2025 referred to the vast potential within T&T's talent pool and strategic geographic position.

Agency's digital check-up tool (<https://digitalcheckup.carib-export.com/#!>) will help MSMEs in the Caribbean standardise their assessments about their digital maturity across six key dimensions. These dimensions include Technology and Use, Communications, Digital Sales Channels, Organisation and People, Strategy, Data & Analysis and Digital Processes.

The tool provides a comprehensive snapshot of a business's current digital capabilities and offers tailored recommendations to guide its digital transformation journey. By identifying strengths and gaps, the Digital Check-up supports MSMEs in becoming more competitive, resilient and better positioned for growth in the digital economy.

EXECUTE: BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE, SKILLS AND SOLUTIONS

Execution blends hard enablers (connectivity, cloud, cybersecurity, data platforms) with human enablers (skills, change management, incentives). Without both, pilots stall. The backbone of digital transformation is a solid digital tech infrastructure. Data is the new currency in the digital economy, demanding world-class data centres, high-capacity computing power and connectivity. These elements require investment, but they are fundamental to enable local businesses to store, process and analyse data efficiently, and those capabilities are foundational building blocks for digital transformation.

While digital infrastructure is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient. Execution also means investing in people.

Bridging the digital skills gaps at all levels, from the most advanced (i.e., developing data scientists, engineers, analysts and cybersecurity experts) to intermediate (i.e., mastery of Microsoft Office tools and commonly used business software tools) to broad inclusion to equip all workers with at least basic digital skills, are critical inputs for firms. Partnerships between higher-education institutions and industry mentioned

above, build a pipeline of talent from early on, increasing education quality and opportunities to learn digital skills at all stages of people's educational pathways.

Strong execution is backed by well-balanced regulatory frameworks that can provide safeguards for the newest and least well-known technologies but at the same time, leave room to incentivise innovation, startups and scale-ups. Emerging technologies such as AI offer exciting opportunities across sectors, as many speakers at THIS 2025 highlighted.

EVOLVE: ADAPTING MINDSETS, POLICIES AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

Trinidad and Tobago's future depends on its ability to evolve, to embrace agility, resilience and continuous learning. These will be necessary for dealing with the unpredictable and keeping pace with the speed at which digital technologies are evolving.

Evolving means cultivating a workforce equipped with not only technical skills but also creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence—qualities machines cannot easily replicate. Digital transformation must be inclusive. Social innovation and technological advances can be a mechanism to foster inclusion. And access to digital tools may provide vulnerable populations with

new opportunities, but it is unlikely to happen without concerted efforts.

Lastly, thriving in the digital era demands a vibrant innovation ecosystem—where entrepreneurs can experiment, fail fast and scale solutions.

THE ROAD AHEAD

- Establish responsible and balanced AI guardrails that enable innovation while protecting privacy, security and fairness (IDB, 2025).
- Build digital capabilities in firms and people with inclusive access: ensure that MSMEs have targeted outreach, mentorship and financing to adopt digital channels and payments.

Ensure that all people have access to digital skills training and education opportunities.

- Knowledge loops: share “what worked” across clusters (ICT/digital services, creative industries, business services).

The recent Tech Hub Islands Summit was more than just an interesting gathering of minds. It was a call for Trinidad and Tobago to engage broadly, execute tightly and evolve continuously in a world increasingly defined by rapid technological change—so digital transformation compounds into measurable, inclusive growth. ■

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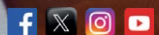
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UNLOCKING OUR COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL. ONE MINDSET SHIFT AT A TIME.



A Caribbean Blueprint for Collaborative Success

From dynamic marketplaces to opportunities that cross borders and oceans, our region is brimming with potential. Yet, with this promise comes the need to keep step with a rapidly changing global landscape. Just how do we go about it? Change often starts with a mindset, and in the Caribbean, the need to



shift toward collaboration has never been greater. For too long, organisations and individuals alike have leaned into siloed thinking. It may be protecting turf, focusing only on our own patch of sand. But as we stand at the crossroads of innovation and tradition, it's time to recognise that collaboration isn't just a buzzword. It's necessary for our survival.

- **Interconnected challenges:** From climate change to economic resilience, our issues span islands and industries. Tackling these as lone sailors leaves us adrift; together, our fleet is unstoppable.
- **Resource pooling:** Collaboration lets us maximise limited human and financial resources, especially vital for smaller Caribbean nations.
- **Learning & adaptability:** When we come together, we learn faster, adapt smarter and create solutions as colourful and resilient as our culture.

As a region, we've always been great at coming together in times of adversity. Now, let's do it intentionally, every day, and watch the magic happen.

DOMAINS OF HUMAN NEEDS

Let's focus on domains of human needs to unlock broader, more inclusive solutions. When we break away from silo boundaries like "company" or "industry" and consider the holistic needs of the people we serve, we unleash creativity and innovation.



By Marsha Ramnanan
Partner | Assurance at PwC

- **Physical needs:** Solutions often overlap when it comes to the basic infrastructure, health and security needs of our people.
- **Emotional & social needs:** We all want and need education, a feeling of community development and a sense that our unique culture will thrive. There is greater potential when ideas flow across domains.
- **Economic needs:** Economic growth is maximised when we think beyond traditional industry lines.

By seeing the whole person (and all of our needs) and not just the problem, we spark progress. Consider disaster resilience. Instead of simply reinforcing buildings (physical need), why not also strengthen social networks in the recovery process, such as by providing

mental health support and integrate local businesses?

THREE STEPS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Here are three actionable steps anyone can take to make collaboration and evolution part of their daily grind.

1. **Embrace Curiosity:** Ask questions—lots of them! Challenge assumptions and seek diverse perspectives.
2. **Build Bridges:** Reach beyond your immediate circle. Connect with people in other industries or regions. Sometimes the best solutions come from unlikely places.
3. **Reflect & Adapt:** Take time to think about what's working and what isn't. Be willing to admit mistakes and celebrate growth.

THREE STEPS FOR THE ORGANISATION

Organisations of any size can catalyse change by embedding collaborative practices at their core. Here's how:

1. **Foster Cross-Functional Teams:** Mix up teams and make collaboration a daily practice, not a special event. A challenging question to ask is this: are you sure that your competitor can't help you better your game? I know this one will require an entirely different mode of operation, so hear me out. What if you and your usual

Caribbean nemesis could come together to fulfil a need that moved your entire industry forward? This force for innovation could make it possible to compete more globally or it could solve a problem so big that our world is forever changed.

2. **Reward Collaboration:** Recognise and reward those who go the extra mile to engage others to drive collective success.
3. **Invest in Continuous Learning:** Provide access to mentorship and new technologies. Encourage lifelong learning as the pathway to innovation.

Organisations that bake collaboration into their DNA are the ones that thrive in turbulence and opportunity alike.

EVOLVING CARIBBEAN-STYLE

When talk turns to mindset shifts, most people imagine stuffy boardrooms and endless PowerPoints. Not here! In the Caribbean, our approach to teamwork is anything but dull.

- **We bring the sunshine:** Our meetings can be as vibrant as a carnival, filled with laughter and lively debate.
- **We celebrate creativity:** Whether it's a new business model or a fresh take on community engagement, bold ideas are always welcome.
- **We dance through change:** When the world moves, we move with it rhythmically and joyfully.

- **The secret sauce of the Caribbean is our ability to evolve.** From hurricanes to global market shifts, we've always found ingenious ways to bounce back. Stronger. Smarter. More united.
- **Resourcefulness:** We know how to make the most out of what we have, turning challenges into opportunities.
- **Resilience:** Our communities rally together, drawing strength from shared heritage and collective hope.
- **Openness:** We welcome new ideas and adapt traditions to fit a changing world.

As we look ahead, let's remember that engaging, executing, and evolving isn't

a one-time event. It's a way of life. The Caribbean spirit is collaborative at heart, and when we work together, amazing things happen.

So let's champion collaboration. Let's innovate in every domain of human need. Let's keep moving forward, together - because in the Caribbean, evolution isn't just possible. It's inevitable.

Here's to our next adventure! Sunny, spirited and unstoppable! ■

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BUILD A HUMAN FIREWALL



By Eduard Mouget

Chief Information Security Officer, Group
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Last year, a multinational firm lost US\$25 million after a finance employee joined a video call with what appeared to be the company's CFO and other executives.

Everyone on that call except the employee was a deepfake. This happened in Hong Kong to a real company with real money that vanished forever. The most sophisticated firewall in the world could not have prevented this attack because the vulnerability was human trust.

When security professionals talk about the “human firewall” they point out a

fundamental paradox. The same individuals who serve customers and keep our businesses running are both the first line of defence against cyber threats and the easiest target for attackers to exploit. Over 90% of cyberattacks worldwide involve some form of malicious email or social engineering ploy. Criminals know that persuading someone to open a door requires far less effort than breaking through a digital wall.

Consider a staff member in accounts receiving an unexpected call from a supplier. The supplier claims there has been an urgent error in an invoice and requests immediate payment confirmation. The voice sounds familiar, the timing feels pressing and the request seems reasonable. Many organisations have fallen victim to scenarios like this because attackers design them to exploit human tendencies such as helpfulness, trust in authority and the urgency effect. These situations are deliberately crafted to cause hesitation or compliance, showing how psychological manipulation can be more effective than any technical exploit.

PSYCHOLOGY

Building the human firewall requires understanding psychology. Many organisations still threaten staff with

We respond to urgency, social proof and authority shortcuts. Attackers exploit these shortcuts to bypass technical barriers.

disciplinary action for failing phishing tests, yet this approach discourages openness. When people fear blame, suspicious emails are quietly deleted rather than reported. Silence is what attackers rely on most. Human psychology is predictable: we respond to urgency, social proof and authority shortcuts. Attackers exploit these shortcuts to bypass technical barriers. Encouraging reflection, awareness and discussion about potential risks strengthens the human firewall more than fear ever could.

Take the case of MGM Resorts in 2023. The breach began with a simple phone call to the IT help desk. Criminals pretended to be an employee locked out of their account and convinced staff to reset credentials. Within hours slot machines went dark, hotel key cards failed and the company faced \$100 million in losses. The breach succeeded through human trust and helpfulness



Photo: The Yuri Arcurs Collection/Freepik

ATTACKS ARE MOST SUCCESS- FUL WHEN STAFF ACT WITHOUT PAUSE OR VERIFICA- TION.

rather than technical sophistication. Learning from such incidents allows organisations to refine protocols and embed a culture of vigilance.

Cybercrime groups such as Scattered Spider have refined these tactics. By studying how service teams operate, they know exactly what to say to sound legitimate. Caesars Entertainment fell victim to similar methods. Persistence and exploiting helpful staff were enough to bypass security controls. These incidents demonstrate how cybercrime often targets humans directly, leaving technology to play a supporting role. The patterns are clear: attacks are most successful when staff act without pause or verification.

VERIFICATION AND TRAINING

The defence against such attacks can be surprisingly straightforward. When criminals attempted to impersonate Ferrari's CEO using deepfake technology, a senior executive asked a simple verification question: "What was the book you recommended to me recently?" The impostors could not answer and the ruse collapsed. Training staff to pause and verify unusual requests is one of the most effective protections available. Simple verification techniques, reinforced through regular practice, create habits that make social engineering far harder to execute.

Cybersecurity training must be regular and engaging. Annual box-ticking

exercises achieve little. Successful organisations create exercises based on real-world threats and focus on reporting speed and accuracy. Scenarios can include simulated calls from vendors, unexpected password resets or requests for client information. Rewarding vigilance and celebrating proactive behaviour reinforces the message that careful attention is more important than perfection. Staff who feel recognised remain alert and engaged. Involving teams in debriefs and discussions after exercises also deepens learning and collectively strengthen the organisation's defences.

Leadership has a vital role to play. Executives and board members are prime targets and require tailored awareness that reflects their specific risks.

When staff see leaders also going through cybersecurity training, buy-in rises. It demonstrates that cybersecurity is a shared responsibility embedded in culture rather than a technical IT problem. By modelling the behaviours expected from employees, leaders reinforce the importance of questioning and verifying before acting. Leadership involvement signals that vigilance is valued at every level, helping to normalise the behaviours needed to maintain an effective human firewall.

When staff see leaders also going through cybersecurity training, buy-in rises. It demonstrates that cybersecurity is a shared responsibility embedded in culture rather than a technical IT problem.

Cybersecurity is never static. Attackers innovate constantly which means training must evolve continuously. AI-driven threats such as voice cloning and realistic deepfakes are becoming more accessible. Criminals can create audio or video impersonations that are difficult to distinguish from reality. Continuous reinforcement of verification habits is crucial. Organisations that want resilience need to engage staff, execute training effectively and evolve programmes in line with emerging threats. Lessons drawn from real incidents keep awareness relevant and prevent complacency. Peer learning, discussion of near misses and sharing positive examples from within the organisation all contribute to a culture of sustained alertness.

STRENGTHEN THE HUMAN FIREWALL

The human firewall strengthens not through fear but through confidence. When staff are empowered to challenge unusual requests and raise concerns, they stop attacks before they begin. Practical techniques include verifying requests verbally, escalating unusual instructions and consulting peers when something feels off. Reinforcing these behaviours with gamification, recognition and team discussion makes the skills stick and ensures a culture of vigilance. Staff who understand that the organisation will support their decisions are more likely to take proactive steps when confronted with suspicious activity.

The narrative that people are inevitably the weakest link misses the crucial point. Technology cannot always stop a convincing voice clone or a fraudster calling the help desk with insider knowledge. The decisive intervention comes from someone who has been trained to think critically, recognises risky behaviour and

Practical techniques include verifying requests verbally, escalating unusual instructions and consulting peers when something feels off.

feels supported in raising concerns. Every major breach involves a moment where human judgement could have changed the outcome. By embedding awareness into daily routines, reinforcing it through repeated practice and rewarding proactive behaviour, organisations create a resilient workforce capable of meeting modern cyber challenges.

The strongest firewall is not built of code. It is built of people ready to defend the organisation every day. ■

DIGITAL TRUST REAL IMPACT

Why Financial Inclusion Must Start with Community-Based FinTech

More than 200,000 adults in Trinidad and Tobago remain unbanked or underbanked, and similar statistics stretch across the region. For many, exclusion isn't due to a lack of smartphones or even interest, but a deep-seated skepticism about the value, safety, or relevance of financial institutions.

For decades, credit unions and cooperatives have stepped into this gap, serving as trusted anchors in communities where traditional banks

often don't reach. They have long been the first stop for micro-entrepreneurs, market vendors, and single-income households needing a loan or a safe place to save. This trust is powerful—and underutilised in FinTech strategies.

If financial technology is to fulfil its promise of inclusion, it must be embedded in the social architecture people already trust. That means working with—not around—community institutions.

EMBEDDING FINTECH IN INSTITUTIONS THAT PEOPLE TRUST

What would it look like to truly decentralise digital finance, not just through blockchain or DeFi protocols, but by placing tools of empowerment directly into the hands of local institutions?

Imagine credit unions offering seamless mobile wallets that sync with their legacy systems. Or cooperatives acting as onboarding agents for digital finance platforms. Or schools not only accepting digital payments for uniforms and lunches, but using those interactions to teach students about financial literacy and digital responsibility.

Executing the Vision: Public-Private Collaboration Is Non-Negotiable



By Dawn Nelson

Vice President, Financial Sector Transformation and Founder of MyCashlessClass

Community trust alone is not enough. Execution requires infrastructure, interoperability, policy alignment and above all—collaboration.

The public sector brings reach, legitimacy and regulation. The private sector brings innovation, speed and product-market fit. But civil society and community institutions bring trust and local context. When these actors align, scalable change becomes possible.

We've seen it in action: When a regional credit union federated its infrastructure to allow for cross-union mobile apps. When a government agency provided regulatory sandbox support for rural FinTech pilots. When a digital wallet



Image generated with AI

company partnered with a bill payment providers.

The outcomes? Higher adoption. Higher retention. And deeper impact.

EVOLVING MINDSETS: FINANCIAL LITERACY IS MORE THAN A BUZZWORD

Let's be honest: the term financial literacy has become a catch-all that often misses the mark. Real transformation demands more than workshops on budgeting or savings. We need to reshape the money mindset—especially for the next generation.

In many households, conversations about money are avoided, loaded with fear, or wrapped in scarcity. Parents unconsciously pass on limiting beliefs about money—“money is hard to get,” “rich people are greedy,” “you’ll never afford that.” These become the operating system for a child’s relationship with finance.

Our job, as ecosystem builders, is to interrupt that cycle. We must create content, tools and systems that help children to see money as a tool for empowerment—not anxiety. And we must support parents in developing a healthier money mindset themselves.

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION DEMANDS A NEW METRIC OF SUCCESS

Too often, success in FinTech is measured by transaction volume, user acquisition, or valuation. But if inclusion is the goal, we need new metrics:

- **Trust built** – Do users feel confident using the platform?
- **Behaviours shifted** – Are families talking more about money? Is it happening earlier in the life cycle on the way to adulthood
- **Access expanded** – Are rural, disabled, or low-income users fully onboarded and supported?
- **Ecosystem strengthened** – Have credit unions, schools and NGOs been empowered as nodes of digital innovation?

If we reframe our KPIs around impact—not just input—we evolve the conversation from “how many users” to “how many lives changed.”

I have tried to walk that talk myself with the creation of the MyCashlessClass platform. I believed that a digital platform that offered parents convenience in managing their children’s school transactions (whether used for sending lunch money, paying fees, or responding to permission slips) in the trusted safe space of the school

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environment, could give persons previously unexposed to the digital transaction world, a low risk experience that we could build on nationally.

More than just being a convenience tool, the aim is to use it as a conversation starter between parents and children about how money works in a digital world and how digital solutions can drive opportunities for them in entrepreneurship. By anchoring itself within the school community, the MyCashlessClass platform is designed to build trust and familiarity, rather than fear and disengagement. The earlier we expose our children, the more digitally comfortable they will be and the more open to being innovators themselves.

BUILDING A FINANCIALLY EMPOWERED CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean has always been a region of ingenuity and resilience. From our informal economies to our tight-knit communities, we've proven that innovation doesn't have to come from Silicon Valley.

The next phase of FinTech here will not be about copying global models. It will be about adapting them to our unique context. That means respecting our trust networks, learning from our community institutions and designing for our real-world behaviours.

To **Engage**, we must meet people where they are—emotionally and institutionally.

To **Execute**, we must build platforms with communities, not just for them.

To **Evolve**, we must let go of outdated assumptions about who belongs in the digital economy—and start designing systems where everyone does.

CONCLUSION: TRUST IS THE CURRENCY OF INCLUSION

If we want digital finance to be truly transformative, we have to do more than build apps. We have to build trust.

Let's anchor FinTech in the power of our communities. Let's move beyond flashy features to meaningful impact. And let's remember that inclusion is not an end state—it's a practice.

Every time we design with empathy, every time we collaborate with care, and every time we teach a child how to budget or a grandparent how to scan a QR code, we're creating a more financially resilient Caribbean.

The future of FinTech is not just faster or smarter—it's more human. And that's a future worth investing in. ■

STEADY GAINS, STUBBORN GAPS

Board gender diversity in 2023-2025

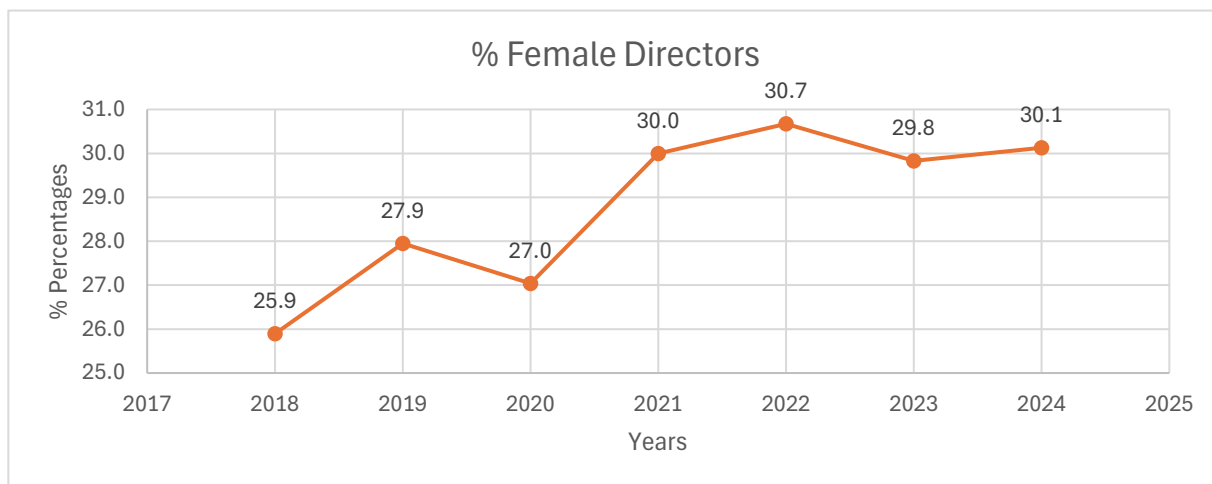


By Joanne G Salazar,
Caribbean Governance and
Diversity Consultant

Over recent years, the global picture on board gender diversity has been one of steady if uneven improvement: more women around the table, but far fewer with the gavel.

Deloitte's latest global scan puts women at 23.3% of board seats worldwide, but only 8.4% of chairs and 6% of CEOs: a stark reminder that power and influence still lag representation.

Looking at the bigger, more widely traded listed companies, the numbers look a bit better: Morgan Stanley's Capital Investment All Country World



Index (MSCI ACWI) finds women hold 27.3% of board seats and 46.2% of companies have reached the “30%” critical-mass threshold, a target used by investors, indexes and campaigns to signal meaningful representation beyond tokenism.

Welcome progress indeed, but most of that progress has been achieved in non-executive directorships. Female representation in top executive posts stalled or fell in 2024, underlining the persistent pipeline problem.

A REGIONAL CASE STUDY: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, 2018–2024

The seven-year dataset for companies listed on the Trinidad & Tobago Stock Exchange (TTSE) tells a clear story of gradual progress:

- The percentage female directors rose from 25.9% (2018) to 30.1% (2024)
- In 2024, there were 40 executive directors, 10 of whom (25%) were

female

- Women as board chairs increased from 4.0% (2018) to 15.4% (2024)
- Women as CEOs were 20% (2024), however, note that because the pool of chairs and CEOs is small, single appointments can shift the percentages markedly year to year.
 - In Trinidad and Tobago for 2024, 15 of 26 listed companies (58%) met or exceeded the 30% mark; 8 were at 40%+; 4 were at 50%+.
- Pipeline reality: As stated above executive seats are just 17% (40) of all board seats; women hold 25% (10) of those executive seats. By ‘pipeline’ we mean the flow of women into the feeder roles boards draw from—especially finance (CFO), operations (COO, BU heads) and technology (CIO/CTO). If women aren’t moving into and through these roles, board percentages can rise while power positions (Chair, CEO, committee chairs) remain stubbornly male.

KEY REPRESENTATION STATISTICS (TRINIDAD & TOBAGO)

Year	% Female Directors	No. of Companies	No. of Companies with more than 30% Female Directors	No. of Companies with Female Chairs	No. of Companies with All Male Boards
2018	25.9	25	12	1	4
2019	27.9	25	14	1	2
2020	27.0	26	11	1	2
2021	30.0	26	12	1	2
2022	30.7	26	13	2	2
2023	29.8	26	12	3	2
2024	30.1	26	16	4	2

The local pattern matches and, in some cases, exceeds the international findings: female representation at the board table has climbed steadily, while conversion into top roles is slower and lumpier—especially in smaller markets where the denominators (chairs and CEOs) are tiny and, as stated above, year-to-year changes can look dramatic.

Transparent public targets, annual league tables and investor scrutiny can deliver strong board numbers—even without quotas.

WHAT MOVED THE NEEDLE

1) Binding rules accelerated change in Europe-and beyond

‘Binding rules,’ mean legal or listing-rule requirements, like the EU’s 2026 targets and Hong Kong’s ban on all-male boards, that force near-term action; these measures have driven faster gains than voluntary codes alone in many markets.

2) Voluntary, target-driven models can work-but need constant pressure

The UK’s business-led FTSE Women Leaders Review reports 43% women on FTSE 350 boards and 35% in senior

leadership, showing that transparent public targets, annual league tables and investor scrutiny can deliver strong board numbers—even without quotas. But the UK itself warns leadership targets may be missed, and female CEO numbers remain thin.

The business-led, voluntary approach adopted in the UK and Australia have both moved the needle significantly and can be replicated locally. Although the pipeline reality mentioned above is a stubborn problem for both the legal and voluntary approached to addressing gender inequality on boards.

THE POWER GAP: WHERE PROGRESS STALLS

Across the G20, the averages tell the tale: 23% of board seats, 8% of chairs, 5% of CEOs and 12% of CFOs are women, underscoring gains at the table, but stubborn gaps in the most powerful positions. For boards serious about sustainable progress, the target has to widen from headcount to succession pathways into revenue-impacting roles, finance and the board leadership track.

The Trinidad & Tobago data echoes that reality: board percentages rose 4.2 points in seven years, while the share of women chairs only inflected meaningfully in 2024. That suggests policy, investor attention or visible milestones (e.g., first female chair appointments) can catalyse rapid catch-up-once the slate is ready.

QUOTAS VS. VOLUNTARY INITIATIVES

Whether jurisdictions adopt quotas or voluntary ‘comply-or-explain’ systems turns on constitutional risk, political appetite, investor pressure, regulatory capacity and the depth of the executive pipeline. Where legal authority is clear and urgency is high, hard floors (e.g., a minimum share of women or a ban on single-gender boards) move numbers fastest. Where legal or political constraints are tighter, standardised targets with mandatory numeric disclosure and ‘comply-or-explain’

Policy, investor attention or visible milestones (e.g., first female chair appointments) can catalyse rapid catch-up-once the slate is ready.

narratives can still deliver progress—especially when coupled with board-refreshment tools and pipeline metrics. For many markets-including Caribbean exchanges-the UK model is politically and practically easier to adopt (targets, public scorecards, investor pressure) while strengthening listing-rule disclosures (e.g., board diversity policies, refreshment and nomination-committee independence) to keep pressure on the system.

TALKING POINTS FOR TRINIDAD & TOBAGO 2024

1) Tokenism is fading; but power is not yet shared

Trinidad & Tobago listed companies, in total, have achieved the magic threshold with 30.1% female directors. However, with only 15.4% women chairs and 20% women CEOs there is still much to do. The implication is clear: board-

leadership roles and executive pathways need explicit attention.

2) Law beats vibes-until culture catches up

The EU and Hong Kong show what happens when rules bite (and when they do, recruiters broaden their nets). For Trinidad & Tobago, there could be an argument for a soft-law hybrid: strengthen disclosure (e.g., require gender-diversity policies, report board and leadership gender annually), publish market-wide scorecards and set voluntary 40% targets with clear timelines and stakeholder endorsement.

3) Refresh the slate, not just the script

Diversity stalls when boards don't turn over, transparency and steady refreshment are essential. Consider

Trinidad & Tobago-specific nudges such as term limits for independent directors, or "comply-or-explain" policies on diverse shortlists for each vacancy.

4) Intentionally build the executive pipeline

Globally, CFO/COO roles remain the feeder pool for CEOs and board leadership; the G20 numbers show the CFO gap (with only 12% women) is still wide. For listed companies, audit committee chairs and nomination committees should sponsor rotations into revenue-critical positions for high-potential women, track ready-now and ready-soon slates and set measurable goals for women in function-critical roles (finance, operations, technology).

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WHAT "GOOD" LOOKS LIKE FOR THE NEXT 24 MONTHS

- **Targets you'll actually hit:** For boards, 40% by 2027 is credible where the starting point is $\geq 30\%$; for leadership, pick function-specific targets (e.g., CFO/COO) with annual public reporting.
- **A nomination-committee charter that bites:** Require diverse shortlists for every vacancy; insist on skills-based matrices (strategy, tech/cyber, climate) to avoid recycling the same profiles.
- **Refreshment and tenure tools:** Adopt soft term limits (e.g., 9-12 years for independent directors) and scheduled skills reviews aligned to strategy cycles.
- **Data and disclosure:** Even if local rules are light, publish a board and leadership diversity matrix annually (gender and—where appropriate and lawful—other dimensions of diversity), plus progress vs targets.
- **Pipeline mechanics:** Put women into revenue-critical rotations, sponsor external board-readiness programmes, and pair each high-potential woman with a board mentor.



Photo: EyeEm/Freepik

BRINGING IT BACK TO TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

The progress over the last seven years has been meaningful, and the sudden step-up in women chairs in 2024 shows how quickly leadership visibility can change once boards insist on it. The next leg requires building an executive pipeline and then making sure the nomination committee uses that pipeline when refresh opportunities arise. A locally tailored targets + transparency regime—learning from the UK and Singapore/HK—could deliver the gains of “hard law” without a full quota model. ■

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO ALLIANCE INTELLIGENCE

How Corporate-University Sustainable Partnerships win at ESG



he thing is, if Trinidad and Tobago's private sector wants to seriously meet ESG targets, we need to adjust our plan of action, and we need to do so quickly because the world is moving away from "prove your ESG" to "show your work". I am writing to offer a pathway, one that has been tried and tested in other parts of the world and that is mutually beneficial, sustainable and has far reaching impact, something I'm coining Alliance Intelligence.

Why the urgency? Carbon pricing now covers ~28% of global emissions and raised \$100+ billion for

By Dr. Craig Ramlal
Executive Director of the Artificial
Intelligence Innovation Centre,
The UWI



public budgets last year. Trinidad and Tobago contributes <0.1% of global emissions but ranks high on per-capita emissions and faces real exposure to trade partners' looming border carbon adjustments, which could mean a tariff on our carbon intensity embedded in exports. Meanwhile, the rules of the game are tightening. The International Sustainability Standards Board's IFRS S2 climate-disclosure standard is effective for reporting periods from January 1, 2024, with first reports recently showing up, necessitating auditable climate data

IN COMES ALLIANCE INTELLIGENCE

In the time of Artificial Intelligence, Alliance Intelligence is how to deliver audit-ready solutions. What does Alliance Intelligence mean? In a nutshell it speaks to pre-competitive collaboration on the parts of ESG that nobody should reinvent, including shared environmental investments, research, datasets, measurement protocols, evaluation metrics and compute. OECD evidence on university-industry collaboration shows that

What does Alliance Intelligence mean? In a nutshell it speaks to pre-competitive collaboration on the parts of ESG that nobody should reinvent.

across governance, strategy, risk and metrics. And for companies selling into Europe, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive regime is expanding, with evolving timelines but higher expectations on Scopes 1-3, water, biodiversity and assurance. Scope 3 emissions average 11.4 times operational emissions, often ~92% of a company's footprint, so one can argue that no amount of "internal-only" optimisation will get you to your ESG targets.

proximity and deliberate knowledge transfer consistently lift innovation performance and diffusion. The UWI St Augustine has recently set up the Artificial Intelligence Innovation Centre (AIIC), a campus-wide centre dedicated to multidisciplinary AI spanning research, commercialisation, policy creation and capacity development. Some of our initiatives include semiconductor, hardware systems and intelligent algorithms design and development; AI ethics, safety and evidence-based guidelines and recommendations. The alliance can work in two ways; organisations can support

Off-the-shelf models trained in foreign assumptions will misestimate Caribbean realities (topography, building standards, supply-chain nuances).

from a selection pool of already ongoing pre-competitive list of R&D projects, through to solution discovery, where institutions bring problems and we work together to research solutions. Globally, such alliances are already compressing abatement cost curves and revealing cheaper, faster decarbonisation pathways.

Why would Alliance Intelligence beat solo efforts? As of early 2025, the global sustainable investment assets reached at least US\$30.3 trillion, and some projections forecast a total of over US\$40 trillion by 2030. Yet, many corporations struggle to move the needle, often because their in-house efforts lack the depth of specialised research. An NYU Stern review of over 1,000 studies found that 58% of businesses saw positive financial

returns from ESG initiatives, but those amplified by collaborative innovation like joint R&D, boosted outcomes even further, enhancing operational efficiency by 44% and slashing carbon-related costs by 43%. Another study showed solo efforts yield linear progress; alliances (especially industry-university) deliver compounding returns, as evidenced by strategic partnerships enhancing ESG performance by up to 25%.



But can't we just buy a tool? Sure, but ESG by import may also be ESG by guess. It's long been agreed that our risk profile, assets and rules are different, catastrophe modellers working in the Caribbean have warned that the exposure data their global models expect is "limited to non-existent" here so, without local experts building the datasets, modellers make assumptions that may or may not be accurate. Off-the-shelf models trained in foreign assumptions will misestimate Caribbean realities (topography, building standards, supply-chain nuances). Alliance Intelligence fixes this by calibrating before calculating, producing sector-specific models, co-validated by business and academia and traceable to international standards. But here's the real crux of the matter: tools don't invent local truth, research does. A pooled research program will build the locally calibrated emission factors, risk

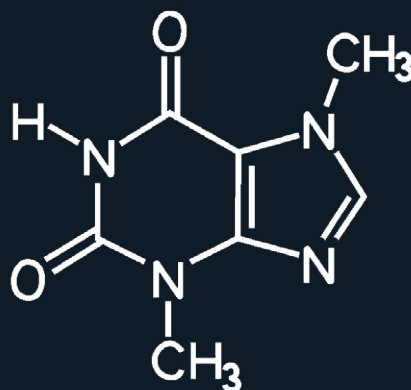
curves and geospatial baselines that generic software lacks. It turns pilots into publishable methods, methods into audit-ready calculators, and calculators into cheaper capital and market access. If your numbers must survive assurance and border regulations, we need to first invest in the science.

GLOBAL COCOA CRISIS

There's a very specific initiative that is already underway.

Did you know that right now, we are in a global cocoa crisis? Extreme drought and floods in 2023 and 2024 due to climate change and the cocoa swollen shoot virus wiped out ~13% of cocoa yields and dropped the global supply to 4.38 million tonnes in 2024. Prices skyrocketed to around US\$12,000 per tonne, hitting 60-year highs in comparison to \$3,500 per tonne pre-crisis average. This caused consumers to see price hikes, cocoa smuggling to rise and industry stock prices to fall. Near-term EU deforestation policy rules still loom, which could initially tighten compliant supply. Many industries and downstream sectors such as chocolate manufacturers, the

food and beverage industry, cosmetics and beauty industries and retail and groceries were all negatively impacted by this. What must happen and how does this help us meet our ESG targets? The world needs better strains of cocoa trees that are drought-tolerant and disease-resistant. At the same time evidence has shown that the cacao agroforestry stores substantially more carbon than



CHOCOLATE

UWI hosts one of the world's most diverse public cocoa collections, the International Cocoa Genebank.

monocultures around 82-154Mg C/ha for total carbon in cocoa systems. As it turns out Trinidad and Tobago has an unfair advantage with cocoa. We are one of a handful of countries certified 100% fine or flavour cocoa and, importantly, The UWI St Augustine hosts one of the world's oldest dedicated cocoa research institutions the Cocoa Research Centre (CRC) that in turn harbours one of the world's most diverse public cocoa

collections, the International Cocoa Genebank, Trinidad. They call this “the wishing well” since the depth of its genetics lets breeders and farmers wish for specific traits and pull the right parents from a single, curated source.

The AIIC and the CRC have partnered to stand up the Digital Cocoa Climate and Genomics Accelerator, which hosts several projects that merge AI, genetics and climate research. Work is on the way to build an audit-ready MRV for agroforestry carbon and pathways have been carved out for research into developing drought and disease-resistant varieties. This initiative has real global implications, and for Trinidad and Tobago it can also mean an exportable service stack we can license across the cocoa belt. We invite the AMCHAM T&T

The AIIC and the CRC have partnered to stand up the Digital Cocoa Climate and Genomics Accelerator, which hosts several projects that merge AI, genetics and climate research.

members to support this initiative, do contact us for more information.

One shared staircase beats twenty bought ladders. Alliance Intelligence ensures that when businesses and universities pool brains, data and purpose, ESG shifts from checkbox to competitive edge. Trinidad and Tobago can export ESG science, not just commodities. Let’s show our work and win together. ■

About the author:

The Artificial Intelligence Innovation Centre (AIIC) is a newly minted UWI St Augustine’s campus centre established to advance research, build home-grown capacity and serve as a campus-wide bridge to industry and policy, delivering consulting, pilots and product commercialisation with AI as the focal point.

Dr Craig Ramlal is the Executive Director of the Centre and the Chair of the CTU’s Caribbean AI Taskforce. He also serves as a lead on the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Global Initiative on the Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems 2.0, on CARICOM’s Security Strategy Steering Committee and as an advisor to the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) on regional AI education policy matters. In 2023, the United Nations recognised him as one of 39 preeminent AI leaders and appointed him to the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence.



STRENGTHENING SAFETY ACCESS IN POINT LISAS & BEYOND

For over a decade, Ben Lomond Industrial & Safety Solutions Ltd. (BLISS Ltd.) has been a trusted leader in workplace safety across Trinidad and Tobago. From the energy and construction sectors to manufacturing and healthcare, BLISS has built its reputation on one core principle - protecting people through quality, innovation, and integrity.

Now, in keeping with its vision to make premium safety solutions more accessible to industries nationwide, BLISS has opened its newest branch at Atlantic Plaza, Point Lisas - strategically positioned to serve the heart of the country's industrial estate. The expansion marks another milestone in the company's journey of growth, commitment, and customer service excellence.

BRINGING SAFETY CLOSER TO INDUSTRY

The Atlantic Plaza branch represents more than just another store - it's a commitment to serving the region's industrial hub with unmatched convenience. Customers in and around the Point Lisas Industrial Estate can now access the full range of high-performance PPE, safety footwear, and workwear, including internationally trusted brands like ARIAT, Puma, Radians, Pyramex, and Goodyear to name a few.

From factory floors to offshore rigs, BLISS Safety Store continues to meet the evolving demands of the modern workforce - balancing safety, style, and comfort with certified protection that meets global standards including ASTM/ANSI, CE, CSA, and OSHA.



A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

Founded in 2012, BLISS has grown from a single location into a multi-branch network comprising five general PPE stores, two safety boot outlets under "The Boot Store by BLISS", and a specialized workwear factory that offers custom garment construction, embroidery, and print services.

Complementing its retail expansion is a 90,000 sq. ft. warehousing facility in South Trinidad - ensuring inventory depth, logistical strength, and prompt delivery of certified protective gear to clients across the Caribbean.

BLISS also proudly manufactures TTBS-certified UltraFit and Citywear FR workwear, helping reduce import costs for customers while supporting local industry and sustainability.



A TRUSTED PARTNER IN SAFETY & SUSTAINABILITY

Beyond business, BLISS is deeply rooted in corporate responsibility and environmental stewardship. The company is STOW-certified, a member of AMCHAM Trinidad & Tobago, and part of the Green Business Benchmark - reflecting a deep commitment to compliance, sustainability, and excellence.

Its ongoing contributions to community initiatives such as beach clean-ups, recycling drives, and safety awareness campaigns reflect a broader vision - to make safety a shared value across workplaces and communities.

These efforts have earned BLISS multiple recognition, including the 2023 SME Medium Award at the T&T Chamber's Champions of Business Awards, Best Booth at AMCHAM's HSSE Conference, and most recently, being named a Finalist in the 2025 National HSSE Awards in the category "Towards Operational Resilience."



SAFETY, INTEGRITY, INNOVATION & PRIDE

At its core, BLISS Safety Store remains about people - the worker on a job site, the company ensuring compliance, and the community that depends on safe, sustainable practices.

With the opening of its Atlantic Plaza branch, BLISS reaffirms its mission to deliver safety with integrity, innovation, and pride, continuing to align with industries and customers who share a vision for excellence.

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WORKPLACE WELLNESS: WHAT EVERY CEO SHOULD KNOW

Investing in health isn't just good for people — it's smart business.

When leaders think about growth, their first instinct is often to focus on things like strategy or markets.

Yet, beneath all these drivers lies a more fundamental asset: people. Employees are the lifeblood of an organisation, but unhealthy employees cost businesses more than many realise. From absenteeism to presenteeism, from preventable injuries to mental health struggles, the hidden costs of poor health ripple through companies and erode their profitability.

By Dr. Mitra Maharaj
Occupational Medicine Physician
AMCHAM T&T Health Working
Group Lead



“the wellness link”, the new column in LINKAGE, seeks to bridge this gap between employee wellness and business success. It is a product of the Health Working Group of AMCHAM T&T’s H.S.E. Committee and will explore critical issues in occupational and employee health, offering practical insights. The goal is simple: to show that investing in wellness is good for people and smart business.

Wellness programmes pay off
Business leaders often ask: “Can we afford to invest in wellness programmes?” A better question might be: “Can we afford not to?”

The workplace is often described as the “second home”, where adults spend the majority of their waking hours. Inevitably, health challenges arise in or outside the office affect work performance, eighteen through absenteeism (when employees miss work) or presenteeism (when they show up but are unwell, leading to reduced performance).

Globally, presenteeism costs companies up to 2–3 times more than absenteeism. Locally, we typically deal with a rise in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity,

coupled with workplace stress and ergonomic-related injuries.

Research consistently shows a return on investment for companies that prioritise health. For every dollar invested in wellness programmes, organisations can see returns of \$2–\$4 through lower absenteeism, higher productivity and reduced healthcare costs. But beyond ROI, wellness initiatives send a powerful cultural message: “We value our people.” That in turn strengthens employee loyalty and enhances the employer’s brand.

In today’s competitive and globalised talent market, younger workers in particular seek employers who demonstrate genuine care for wellbeing. For multinational companies set up in Trinidad and Tobago or for local firms looking to expand globally, this is not a “soft” factor. It is part of being competitive.

put wellness into practice
Wellness at work is not about installing a gym in the office or offering fruit bowls in the lunchroom, though those can help. True wellness involves a strategic, integrated approach. Some of the most impactful interventions include:

Ergonomic design: Proper workstation setups.

Mental health support: Employee assistance programmes, stress management training, a culture of psychological safety.

Preventative health services: Workplace vaccination campaigns, health screenings and surveillance.

Education and empowerment: Health talks, wellness newsletters, initiatives that encourage healthy eating and exercise.

Occupational safety programmes: Compliance with OSH standards, protecting workers from exposure hazards and accidents.

Wellness programmes are scalable. A multinational with thousands of staff may roll out a full corporate wellness strategy, while a smaller local business can start with low-cost but high-impact changes like health awareness sessions or ergonomic assessments.

Here's a simple step-by-step:

Assess needs: Identify the most pressing health risks for your workforce—such as ergonomics or chronic disease.

Start small: Pilot one or two initiatives that address those needs directly.

Measure impact: Track absenteeism, employee satisfaction or productivity metrics.

Scale gradually: Build out a more comprehensive wellness strategy over time.

Integrate into culture: Ensure wellness is not an “add-on” but part of how the company operates.

Even modest programmes can generate visible results in a short time, creating momentum for more ambitious interventions.

the role of leadership

Perhaps the most important factor in wellness success is leadership buy-in. Employees quickly see whether wellness is genuine or tokenistic. A CEO who takes health seriously or participates in wellness initiatives sends a powerful signal throughout the organisation.

Leadership also ensures continuity. Wellness must survive beyond one enthusiastic HR officer or committee, it should be embedded into policies and budgets.

For executives and boards, the argument for workplace wellness can be distilled into four pillars:

Productivity: Healthy employees deliver more consistent, higher-quality work.

Cost control: Reduced absenteeism, fewer medical claims and lower turnover.

Reputation: Being seen as an employer of choice enhances recruitment and retention.

Compliance: Meeting occupational safety and health regulations reduces legal and financial risks.

In Trinidad and Tobago, workplace wellness efforts face a mix of hurdles and opportunities. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension are widespread among working-age adults, driving up health costs and threatening productivity if left unmanaged. At the same time, many professionals report high levels of stress and burnout, often linked to economic uncertainty and the pressure of being constantly available. Occupational risks add another layer of complexity, with industries from construction and petrochemicals to office-based sectors each presenting their own health hazards. Compounding these issues is a cultural perception that health is primarily a personal responsibility rather than a shared priority between employer and employee.

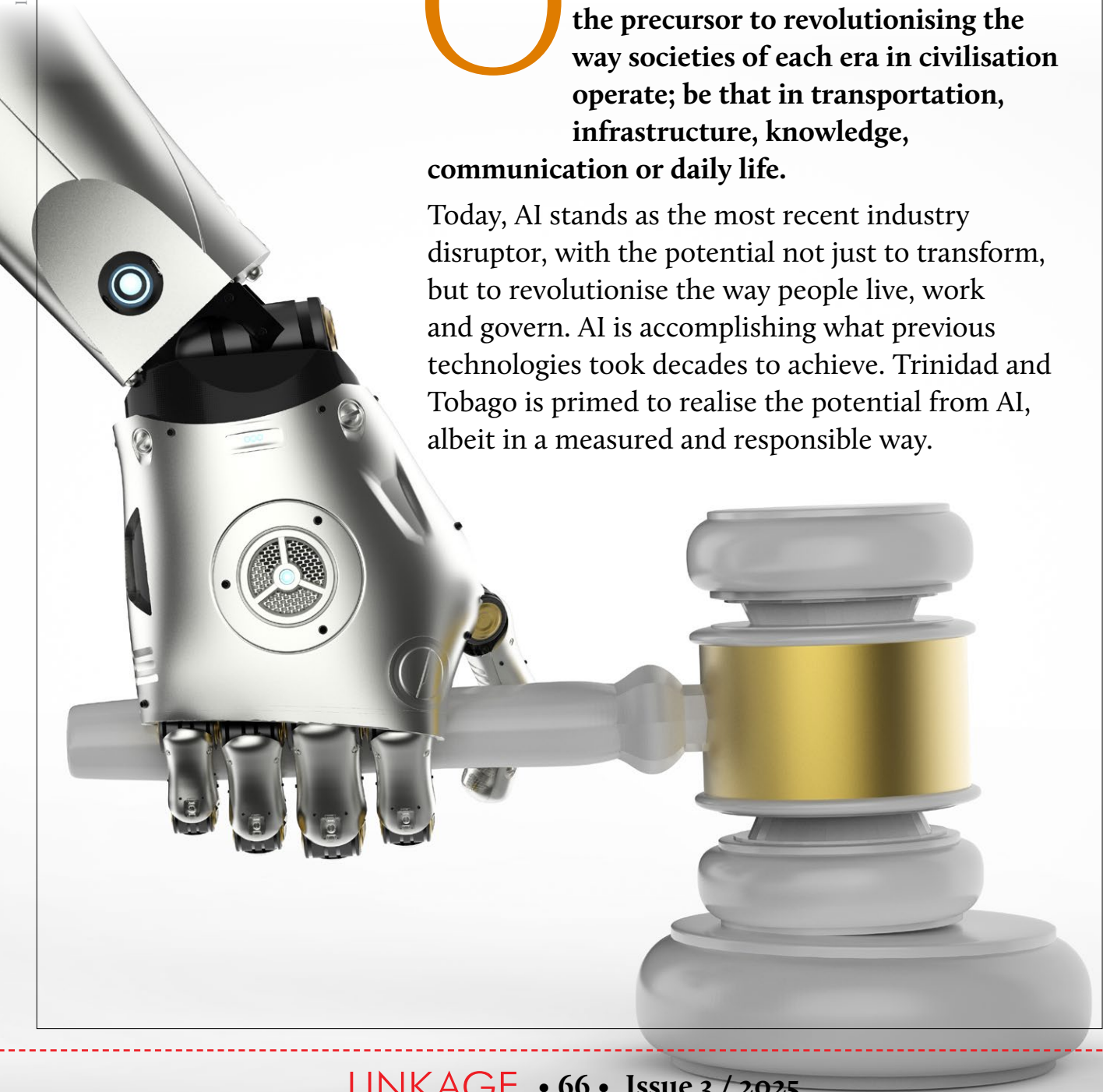
Yet these challenges create a unique opportunity for AMCHAM T&T members. By pioneering wellness initiatives, we can strengthen our workforce, reduce costs and position ourselves as leaders in corporate responsibility across the region. ■

ArtiFicial IntelliGence

COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THE LAW

Over the course of history, technology has driven development and has been the precursor to revolutionising the way societies of each era in civilisation operate; be that in transportation, infrastructure, knowledge, communication or daily life.

Today, AI stands as the most recent industry disruptor, with the potential not just to transform, but to revolutionise the way people live, work and govern. AI is accomplishing what previous technologies took decades to achieve. Trinidad and Tobago is primed to realise the potential from AI, albeit in a measured and responsible way.



To ensure that T&T properly leverages the use of AI, it is essential to understand: (a) What is AI and generative AI; (b) Practical applications and potential uses as efficiency drivers; (c) Risks and shortcomings in order to reframe appropriate regulations and policies; and (d) How other countries have regulated or intend to regulate the use of AI, while refraining from stifling the opportunities it creates.

AI systems are computer-driven tools that process inputs which include data, text or images to generate outputs, such as content, predictions or recommendations, with varying levels of autonomy. GenAI is a subset of AI which builds on that fundamental input-output concept, but creates entirely new content, drawing from learned patterns in large datasets, which include text, images, audio and video. Unlike traditional AI, which is deterministic and relies on past data, generative AI or GenAI is non-deterministic and responds to user prompts with the creation of original outputs.

Prominent examples of GenAI include OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini, which use large language models to generate coherent, contextually relevant content, enabling human-like responses.



By Miguel Vasquez

Partner at M. Hamel-Smith & Co.
and Aniko Sookoo

Associate at M. Hamel-Smith & Co.

These technological advancements have enabled the integration of GenAI into various everyday tasks such as writing, drafting and reviewing documents, coding, design and research and development.

GenAI has the potential to significantly boost productivity at both the individual and organisational levels. At an individual level, AI tools can be incorporated into daily workflows, facilitating automation, fostering augmentation and enhancing operational efficiencies. Further organisations with strong absorptive capacity can benefit from an even greater transformation and simplification of operations. For example, Tesla uses AI to forecast commodity price fluctuations while in



retail, Amazon's AI-driven inventory systems dynamically adjust stock levels based on consumer demand.

HalluCinations

Despite its transformative potential, generative AI has its drawbacks and overreliance on its outputs highlight the need for caution, given the risk of inaccuracies. Indeed, while LLM outputs can be perceived as well-written and tailored to specific contexts, these systems may have limited understanding or appreciation for what is generated. The outputs generated are based on statistical patterns and algorithms, which may lead to inaccuracies or fabricated information; a phenomenon known as "hallucination".

The risk that "hallucinations" pose has been exposed in one of the gravest of ways, namely the courtroom. In the U.S. case of *Mata v Avianca, Inc.*, Case No. 1:2022cv01461 (S.D.N.Y. 2023), attorneys relied on ChatGPT to draft submissions, citing and quoting legal authorities that did not exist, but rather had been "hallucinated". This issue is not confined to foreign jurisdictions, but has also been exposed in T&T. In *Nexgen Pathology Services Limited v Darceuil Duncan* Claim No. CV2023-04039, attorneys similarly cited non-existent cases, thus misleading the court and later attributing the error to a junior assistant. The judge scolded the attorneys and in doing so, cited the principle fundamental error; that the attorneys committed a breach of their

professional duty, which was realised through the submission of fictitious and unverifiable authorities, by their failure to conduct proper and independent verification of the output.

With responsible use on the other hand, the potential benefits are significant: increased efficiency, reduced errors, lower operational costs and heightened innovation. The challenge therefore lies in striking a careful balance between leveraging the transformative power of GenAI while managing its risks and limitations.

Regulatory Framework

The regulatory framework for AI remains nascent in T&T. There are no specific laws governing AI, nor a formal national AI strategy. As such, an imperfect application and interpretation of existing laws would be relied on for the purpose of governing AI and its use. These include the Electronic Transactions Act, Data Protection Act, consumer protection and cybersecurity provisions. The lapsed Cybercrime Bill, 2015 would, in any event, be inept at regulating GenAI, a technology that has emerged for public use only three years ago.

As the integration of AI into systems and workflows accelerate, be it in financial services, energy, healthcare or

In T&T, there are no specific laws governing AI, nor a formal national AI strategy. The lapsed Cybercrime Bill, 2015 would be inept at regulating GenAI.

even within the government, there will be increased pressure to enact specific rules to mandate compliance with international recommended standards such as the OECD AI Principles and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

Preliminary steps have been taken to develop AI-related policies and oversight. The Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence has been established to spearhead AI initiatives and guide national efforts. T&T is also part of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union, which has launched the CTU Caribbean AI Task Force, a strategic initiative designed to coordinate the development and governance of AI across the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Court of Justice has also taken steps to regulate the use of GenAI in legal practice by issuing practice directions providing guidance on the permissible use of GenAI tools. The practice direction seeks to strike a careful balance by allowing its use to draft submissions, summarise legal arguments or conduct basic research, but all outputs must be thoroughly fact-checked, reviewed for accuracy and adapted to meet legal standards. The practice direction further imposes safeguards on confidential and privileged information to prevent unintentional disclosure.

Indeed, disclosure of confidential, privileged or sensitive information, remains a significant inherent risk in the use of AI and GenAI, given its reliance on data (whether inputs or outputs).

The European Union has purported to set global benchmarks for consent, data minimisation and cross-border transfers through the existing General Data Protection Regulation, which the EU has reasoned are relevant to AI even though not specifically mentioned—albeit with the intention for the EU AI Act to bridge any gaps. T&T's Data Protection Act, though not fully proclaimed, reflects many of the general privacy principles but is likely to require significant amendment to properly encompass the regulation of AI, consent and data protection.

ConSent

Consent for users of AI tools, from the perspective of the user and if relevant, the owner of the data inputs, is also a critical consideration. Consent obtained for the purposes of a particular use or transaction may not extend to a separate use or transaction. Accordingly, robust contractual safeguards and risk assessments should be undertaken to ensure parties are optimally protected, both in terms of the inputs and the outputs.

This is critical not just from the perspective of data protection, but also liability for harm caused through the use of GenAI. Whether that be in the form of a misdiagnosis in healthcare or an autonomous vehicle accident. Traditional tortious causes of action such as negligence and product liability will be stretched to encompass these losses, in the absence of specific legislation. Insurance markets will be required to respond, with the creation of AI liability and data protection policies and products, as well as cyber-risk coverage.

The ownership and control of the AI, GenAI and output, is likely to also be tested. In the case of training an AI diagnostic tool, the question will arise as to who owns the resulting model and the derivative insights produced. Indeed, when an AI system generates a novel design, piece of music or chemical formula, the natural question that

Individuals negatively affected by an algorithmic decision should understand how and why the decision was made.

arises is, who owns that work of art or product. Copyright laws, including T&T's Copyright Act, presupposes a natural person or human as the author. Jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom provide for “computer-generated works”, but many doubts remain as to its use and functionality. Patent law presents similar dilemmas – the UK Supreme Court dismissed an appeal to allow an AI, DABUS, to be named as a patent inventor. Businesses must therefore adopt clear contractual terms to allocate IP rights over training data, outputs and derivative works. Trade-secret protection and technical safeguards, such as encrypted model weights and restricted access, are becoming equally important. Beyond the law, however, lies the question of values. Transparency and accountability are key to public trust. Individuals negatively affected by an algorithmic decision should understand how and why the decision was made; this “human oversight” or “meaningful human control” to prevent over-automation.



Image generated with AI/Freekpic

AI and GenAI create risks and issues across a diverse range of sectors, but its potential as not merely a tool but a catalyst for more intelligent, effective and efficient operations, cannot be underscored. Companies and businesses will augur well to take the first step toward maximising its benefits, particularly in T&T. Measures to safeguard against the risks and ethical concerns of AI should be adopted however, as measured caution must proceed parallel along the path to digital transformation and progression. ■

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Disclaimer: This article contains general information on legal topics and does not constitute legal advice.

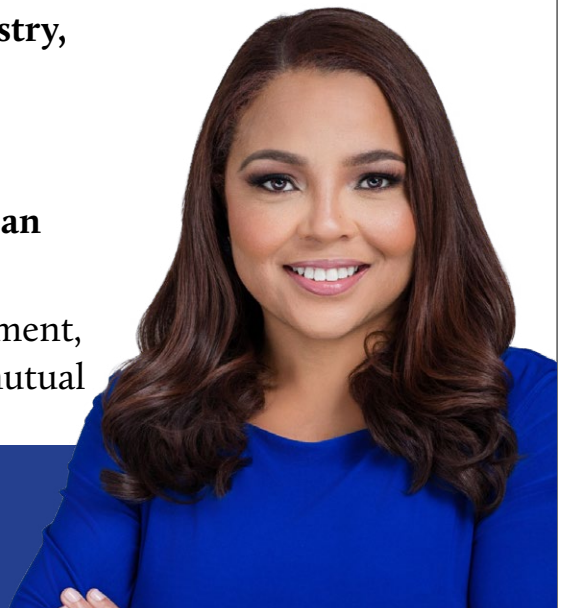
THE ROAD

TO MUTUALITY

Collective Investment Scheme (“CIS”) Bye-Laws

As the guardian of the securities industry, the Trinidad and Tobago Securities Exchange Commission (TTSEC) is responsible for balancing investor protection with the development of an efficient capital market.

In curating the environment for market development, the TTSEC is reinforcing the regulation of the mutual



By Camille Granger-Julien
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funds industry by issuing the Securities (Collective Investment Schemes) Bye-Laws, 2023, which became legislation on May 8th, 2023.

A Collective Investment Scheme (CIS) is an investment product in which investors contribute toward a pool of investments managed by a professional fund manager on their behalf. A CIS is also commonly referred to as an “investment fund” or a “mutual fund.”

In Trinidad and Tobago, mutual funds are popular, as they relieve investors of the burden of selecting individual stocks and continuously adjusting their portfolios to achieve diversification and returns. It is, therefore, essential that this industry is effectively regulated.

KEY CHANGES TOWARD MUTUALITY:

Authorisation of Mutual Funds

Under the Bye-Laws, all mutual funds are required to be authorised by the TTSEC before being distributed in Trinidad and Tobago, which ensures that CIS offerings undergo rigorous scrutiny by the Commission to confirm their legitimacy, transparency and accuracy before being offered to the public. Moreover, there is a new requirement that every

CIS authorisation application is to be accompanied by documentary evidence of the appointment of the following persons (among others) for TTSEC approval:

- **CIS Manager** – The CIS Manager oversees and manages the fund’s assets in accordance with its investment objectives and restrictions as outlined in its constituent documents. Under Bye-Law (22), a CIS Manager must be registered with the TTSEC as a Broker-Dealer or as a Restricted Broker-Dealer conducting business as a CIS Manager. While under the previous legal framework CIS Managers needed regulatory approval, the Bye-Laws has created a new Broker-Dealer category specific to CIS Managers. This enhances regulatory oversight and market integrity, ensuring that the CIS assets are managed in the best interests of investors and in accordance with the objectives of the CIS.
- **Responsible Person** is accountable for the oversight and governance of the CIS’s operations and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. The Responsible Person must be authorised by the TTSEC in accordance with Bye-Law (22). Previously, where a CIS was structured as a trust, the trustee supervised all the parties involved in the management and administration of the scheme. Moreover, the duties and responsibilities of the trustee were governed by trust law and the

trust documents. With the Bye-Laws, investor confidence is strengthened as registration of the Responsible Person ensures proper oversight and verifies that parties in this role meet regulatory standards.

- **Custodian** is responsible for maintaining a clear separation of CIS assets, both physically and legally and must be authorised by the TTSEC. Additionally, the Bye-Laws introduces a new requirement that the Custodian must be independent of the CIS Manager and Responsible Person unless the CIS is constituted as a trust, in which case the Responsible Person may act as Custodian with the Commission's approval. This independence mitigates against conflicts of interest and enables independent oversight to protect investors. The Bye-Laws have also strengthened the requirement for segregation of CIS assets which is fundamental for clarity of asset ownership and protection from seizure by the Custodian's creditors.

- **Other Parties Related to a CIS** – The Bye-Laws define and establish the roles, responsibilities and eligibility criteria for other related parties to a CIS such as Registrar, Distributor and Auditors.

Subscriptions and Redemptions

Provisions governing how parties related to a CIS should manage subscriptions and redemptions are included in the

With the Bye-Laws, investor confidence is strengthened as registration of the Responsible Person ensures proper oversight and verifies that parties in this role meet regulatory standards.

Bye-Laws. They entail the development of policies and procedures to ensure that subscriptions and redemptions are executed fairly and without discrimination, with a strong focus on investor protection and equitable treatment. The Bye-Laws clarify when and how investors can buy or sell units—usually based on the daily Net Asset Value (NAV), including provisions for the suspension of sales and redemption to support effective liquidity management.

Outsourcing

In line with IOSCO's principles and objectives of securities regulation, the Bye-Laws establish criteria for outsourcing any function relating to a CIS. Key requirements include the development of minimum service agreements standards with third parties,

due diligence and a specified standard of care in appointing third parties, restrictions on outsourcing key roles and functions and mandatory annual performance assessments on the third-party service providers. As markets and the wider trading landscape have become more complex and competitive, outsourcing has become increasingly necessary to reduce costs and improve efficiency. This cost savings benefits investors and contribute to a more efficient and innovative market.

Disclosure Requirements for Parties related to the CIS

Prior to the issuance of the Bye-Laws there were no requirements for senior officers of a CIS Manager to disclose their interest in investments. Bye-Law (87) addresses this by requiring CIS Managers to establish, implement and maintain policies and procedures for the CIS Manager, its senior officers and investment committee members to disclose all direct and indirect interest or holdings in securities. The aim is to provide transparency and accountability, preventing any real or perceived conflicts of interest that could undermine investor trust and market performance.

EFFECT OF TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

All CIS deemed to be authorised prior to the coming into effect of the Bye-Laws were permitted to continue their operations and the distribution of units for a period of two years after the Bye-Laws came into force. During this two-year transitional period, the Responsible Person was required to comply with the authorisation requirements outlined in Bye-Law 10. This arrangement provided a grace period to allow existing authorised funds and market participants to adapt to the new provisions before they became fully effective thereby ensuring a smoother implementation and preventing undue disruption to operations or existing investments.

CONCLUSION

Achieving a balance between investor protection and market efficiency within the CIS industry demands a regulatory framework that supports innovation while ensuring strong safeguards for investors. By introducing the CIS Bye-Laws, the TTSEC has made a significant step forward in fulfilling this objective. ■



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CHOOSE RESILIENCE EVERY DAY



AMCHAM T&T and IDB Celebrate Another Successful Year of the Women in Leadership Mentorship Programme

AMCHAM T&T and the IDB's Women in Leadership Mentorship Programme 2024–2025 brought together 71 female professionals from diverse sectors. Since its inception, the programme has supported nearly 300 women across industries, empowering participants to step into leadership roles with greater confidence and purpose.

Delivering opening remarks, AMCHAM T&T President Anna Henderson praised both mentees and mentors for their dedication to the programme and highlighted the broader impact of mentorship on organisations and communities. “Today, every



organisation should build a culture of mentorship, not just as a programme, but as a principle—a core value that says: we rise by lifting others,” she said. “Mentorship is a career asset that nurtures the next generation of leaders.”

She reaffirmed AMCHAM T&T’s commitment to equity and inclusion, stressing that leadership development initiatives for women are not just about fairness but about creating workplaces where all employees can thrive.

The long-standing collaboration between AMCHAM T&T and the IDB has been central to the success of the mentorship programme. Julian Belgrave, IDB

Country Representative, underscored the importance of this partnership. “Purposeful mentorship serves as a catalyst for professional advancement and leadership as it continues to embody the values of mutual support, lifelong learning and empowerment for females in the workplace. So, efforts like these must be supported,” he said.

Special acknowledgment was given to Ms. Carina Cockburn, former IDB Country Representative, for her vision and personal support in helping to shape and grow the initiative.

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

The feature address was delivered by Jenifer Neidhart de Ortiz, Chargé d’Affaires at the U.S. Embassy. She reminded mentees that leadership is not only about skills but also about daily choices that reflect resilience and a commitment to equity.

“I know that the world is not a fair place. I know there’s not always justice. I know it’s not free of discrimination. And bad things happen. But I choose every day to act as though it were. To act as if it were that world that I want to live in. And I act as if I’m part of that world. And I represent that,” she said. “So, we are imperfect. I am imperfect. But I do strive to always represent that. And bring that every day. And that’s my last choice.”

Her words resonated as a call to action for the mentees: to lead with purpose, authenticity and courage in the face of challenges.

AMCHAM T&T also took the opportunity to recognise the mentors, acknowledging that their contributions



(l-r) Kennedy Everett Maraj – Communications and Events Officer (AMCHAM T&T), Jenifer Neidhart de Ortiz – Chargé d’Affaires (U.S. Embassy) and Anna Henderson – President (AMCHAM T&T)

extend beyond individual growth to organisational transformation and community impact.

As the curtain falls on the seventh cycle of the Women in Leadership Mentorship Programme, AMCHAM T&T reaffirmed its commitment to expanding opportunities for women leaders. By equipping women with the mentorship and tools needed to thrive, AMCHAM T&T and IDB continue to shape a future where leadership reflects the full potential of our people and where equity is not an aspiration, but a reality. ■

WILMP BY THE NUMBERS

- **7 cycles completed since launch (2017)**
- **300+ women mentored across industries**
- **71 participants in the 2024–2025 cohort**
- **Representation from diverse sectors: energy, finance, ICT, manufacturing, health and more**
- **Over 150 mentors engaged to date, sharing expertise and leadership guidance**



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