



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BUREAU OF STANDARDS
(TTBS)

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FEATURE ADDRESS

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Good morning to all

I am pleased to be here at this workshop, which is the first in a series of Stakeholder Engagements on the Development of a National Quality Policy for Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to diversify the economy and expand Trinidad and Tobago's business, investment and export-led trade in the non-energy sector, to achieve sustainable economic growth and development. The Government Policy Framework Agreement 2016, indicates that the Government will "ensure that appropriate strategies are developed in partnership with local manufacturers to create and sustain a more enabling environment to facilitate increased global competitiveness of local businesses in national, regional and international markets."

Trinidad and Tobago through CARICOM, CARIFORUM and on its own, has negotiated a number of trade agreements for our manufacturers and service providers to expand their market access. This is critical in light of our declining oil and gas revenues and decreased foreign exchange earnings. But as many of us would be aware, increased market access is just half the battle. The hurdle is actually accessing those markets and establishing market presence. Our private sector stakeholders have identified quality related issues as a major challenge in expanding trade. The challenges identified point to matters such as poor public laboratory infrastructure, outdated legislation inadequate enforcement, lack of awareness of standards and high costs of certification and accreditation. Furthermore, our manufacturers continue to face challenges in meeting stringent quality standards abroad while having to compete with poor quality imported products on the local market.

International trade relations are increasingly driven by compliance with technical regulations, trade-related standards and conformity assessment procedures. There are many non-tariff barriers linked to the quality infrastructure and requirements of the target destination.

At the regional level, a Regional Quality Policy for CARICOM and the Dominican Republic (DR) is being finalized. This Policy is meant to assist in nurturing a quality culture in the CARIFORUM region by guiding the development and facilitating the use of an accessible, affordable, and internationally recognized, regional quality infrastructure. To ensure this change in culture, it is expected that member states also develop and implement National Quality Policies.

Additionally, some manufactures have expressed difficulty in competing with the price of goods and services from other markets. According to Italian Designer Gucci, "Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten." It is important for us to note that Quality, as both a strategic and enabling business approach, is critical to productivity, innovation, competitiveness and trade facilitation. Trinidad and Tobago's reputation and brand as a provider of quality products and services in the national and international markets must be assured.

An effective National Quality System supports the continual improvement of the quality of products and services, both locally produced and imported. Improving the quality of our goods and services will result in amplified competitiveness in the market place, as producers would have been caused to innovate and produce at optimal levels.

The National Quality System comprises the National Quality Policy which is intended to create the enabling policy environment and guide the strengthening and reform of a National Quality Infrastructure (NQI). The NQI is considered as the totality of the institutional framework (public or private) required to establish and implement standardization, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessment services. All of these are necessary to provide acceptable evidence that products and services meet defined requirements demanded by authorities or the market place.

In this regard, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) signed a Grant Agreement on May 9, 2017, in the amount of Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand US Dollars (US\$250, 950) for the financing of the Development of a National Quality Policy. The funding resources are provided by the European Union under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy Standby Facility for Capacity Building, 10th Economic Development Fund (EDF). This facility is being administered by the Caribbean Development Bank. The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) under the aegis of the Ministry of Trade and Industry will be responsible for implementation of the project. A Project Steering Committee consisting of key stakeholders, was established to provide policy advice during the development of the National Quality Policy and monitor the implementation of the Policy. This project is expected to be completed by August 2017.

The National Quality Policy articulates the government's intentions with regard to the development of the Quality Infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago. This may involve changes to legislation, regulations and standards. Accreditation ensures confidence and trust in the competence of certification and testing agencies and the procedures utilized. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is currently preparing a note for Cabinet for the establishment of the National Accreditation Agency of Trinidad and Tobago (Accredi-TT). This will be an independent national accreditation body, to accredit companies and organisations that provide conformity assessment services according to International Standards.

Furthermore, Trinidad and Tobago is currently implementing its Metrology Act. The Act seeks to re-enact and revise the laws respecting Weights and Measures and to give effect to the International System of Units. It is applicable to industrial, scientific and commercial activities across various sectors. The development of a national measurement system for Trinidad and Tobago will guarantee accurate measurements to allow for greater trust and confidence in the results.

Developing and disseminating a Quality Policy is indeed a long-term endeavour. Moreover, consolidating the whole system through a National Quality Policy brings the promise of greater clarification and rationalization, which can promote the effectiveness and efficiency of the national quality machinery.

Trinidad and Tobago never had a National Quality Policy. As such there has been sporadic growth of quality entities, laboratories, equipment and legislation, but with obvious attendant gaps in the quality infrastructure. Furthermore expansion of existing facilities are not guided by strategic and sustainable plans. Therefore, a well-developed National Quality Policy will guide and foster these institutions to function in a more aligned and rational manner. In this way the Quality Policy can positively influence industrial development and have a marked effect on trade. Quality goods and services will attract and retain customers, open new markets and expand product offerings. It is incumbent on any government therefore to develop a Quality Policy carefully, endeavouring to align it with country realities, market demands, international best practices and formal agreements; and this is indeed this government's approach.

The Policy should also clearly express the role and responsibilities of all the agencies and bodies involved, including the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, regulatory bodies and the private sector. The Quality Policy as such does not exist in a vacuum; it has to be developed within the context of national development, industrial development, export promotion, trade promotion or similar government policies and strategies.

The National Development Strategy, now referred to as Vision 2030 articulates the following: Building a more competitive economy requires that: our citizens have the right skills and capabilities to perform higher-value jobs; our environment attracts the right investors and entrepreneurs; and our businesses and people are agile and creative enough to seize on new opportunities. It requires: being internationally competitive within the domestic market; assisting locally-based firms to become global; and attracting international firms that can build domestic capacity, know-how and exports. The National Quality System with its Policy and Infrastructure would certainly support those aspirations.

I would like to emphasize that National Quality is also about maintaining a satisfactory level of health and safety for consumers in Trinidad and Tobago. Quality is a key element of commercial life. It impinges on provision of services, culture and institutions. It encourages environmental protection, social responsibility and sustainable development. In this regard the TTBS has already been working in collaboration with several Ministries to support Government Policy through National Standards and related conformity assessment services.

This Government is committed to improving the levels of competitiveness and innovation in Trinidad and Tobago. The draft National Innovation Policy is before Cabinet for consideration. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has led several initiatives towards improving the ease for companies to do business with Trinidad and Tobago, such as TTBizLink.

The National Quality Policy will not be useful if it is not implemented. Hence, as is best practice, a high-level implementation plan, including allocated implementation and oversight responsibilities and budgets, will be developed simultaneously with the Quality Policy. As part of this project, the Implementation Plan will be submitted together with the draft Quality Policy. The plan will form a basis for identification and prioritization of projects going forward. The Quality Infrastructure is a cross-cutting issue therefore, many Ministries and their agencies will eventually be involved in its implementation.

In closing, I would like to thank the Consultants at mesopartner and the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for executing this project. I would also like to thank the European Union for financing this project under the 10th European Development Fund. I urge participants to utilise every opportunity to identify a way forward considering their own interests and that of the country as a whole. Quality is everyone's responsibility. Developing National Quality requires cooperation and collaboration, between and among agencies and sectors, Ministries and Institutions in order to successfully improve the productivity and competitiveness of our country in order to increase trade and protect consumers and the environment.

I thank you and wish you success in your discussions today.