



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

Inaugural Stakeholder Dialogue on Trade Facilitation

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE SINGLE ELECTRONIC
WINDOW FOR TRADE AND BUSINESS FACILITATION

.....
OPENING REMARKS

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.....
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INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Inaugural Stakeholder Dialogue on Trade Facilitation in Trinidad and Tobago. This is yet another step towards public sector transformation and improved service delivery, through informed consultation and effective implementation.

Stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management are arguably the most important factors for successful project delivery, but unfortunately, oftentimes the most overlooked. This dialogue is a clear indication of the Government's commitment to accommodating the views of all stakeholders, and today's session is only one of a series of such sessions, towards Strengthening the Single Electronic Window for Trade and Business Facilitation, and with the ultimate goal of improved trade and commerce.

Ladies and gentlemen, Trinidad and Tobago's economy over the past few years has had to face various challenges. Unfortunately, this has been translated in many of the international rankings that refer to our global competitiveness and the ease of doing business. For example, in the World Bank's 2017 Doing Business Index, Trinidad and Tobago is ranked at 123 out of 190 economies in the indicator 'Trading across Borders', which refers to the time and cost required for the logistical process of exporting and importing. Our low ranking in this area is primarily due to the high cost of trade, in terms of the travel time and documentary compliance, and requires significant, sustainable changes within Ministries and public Agencies. These factors are the impetus for the Government in collaborating with the private sector and other trade stakeholders to better understand the problem and needs of business, and also seek financial and technical resources through international agencies to acquire the necessary backing and capacity needed for creating a world-class economy.

In order to expand and improve our national Single Electronic Window Programme—TTBizLink, the Government has entered into a 5-year loan agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank. This Programme will improve both Trinidad and Tobago's trade performance and enhance its business competitiveness. The project is divided into three (3) major components:

- *Component 1* - Enhancing and expanding the services of the Single Electronic Window - This component will focus on upgrading the current TTBizLink to international best practices.
- *Component 2* - Enhancing the Interoperability of TTBizLink- This component will facilitate the exchange and analysis of data between TTBizLink and the information systems of key stakeholders as well as the information systems of strategic trading partners of Trinidad and Tobago, and,
- *Component 3* - Modernising the Legislative, Institutional Framework for International Trade and Institutional Governance of the Single Electronic Window. This component will address the deficiencies in the legislative framework and strengthen the institutional governance of the Single Electronic Window.

TTBizLink is a secure, user-friendly, twenty four (24) -hour, online I.T. platform offering over forty seven (47) trade and business related services from across twenty four (24) unique Agencies and seven (7) Ministries. The TTBizLink platform:

- Eliminates lines for collection and completion of manual forms
- Prevents duplication of information required by various Agencies
- Ensures completeness of all applications

- Avoids human intervention and the strict application of existing guidelines and procedures while minimising manual inconsistencies, and
- Reducing overall processing time

Ladies and gentlemen, TTBizLink is already an established world-class solution meeting international standards. Its expansion through this project will enhance its capabilities by further reducing the time and costs associated with business transactions and positively impact our overall business competitiveness. We are intent on surpassing its recorded one million transactions (which it achieved last month), expanding its 8,000-strong client base and extending the already wide range of available e-services. Your input today will undoubtedly play a crucial role in TTBizlink's successful expansion and also presents an opportunity for you to directly and meaningfully contribute and provide feedback on the way forward.

I wish now, to address two (2) core areas being impacted through this project's implementation.

TRADE LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

In the current environment, it is necessary to comprehensively review existing legislation to ensure consistency and conformity with international and regional trade developments. Although it is often overlooked, a robust legislative framework provides investors and traders with confidence and peace of mind, and is a necessity to creating an open and vibrant economy. Such reforms will significantly enhance the legal landscape and also encourage more competitive and sustainable business operations and practices in alignment with international best practices. Through this project we intend to introduce harmonised and coherent trade, business, safeguard and anti-dumping laws and other trade related legislation. Through process re-engineering we will also simplify and modernize major regulatory processes for import, export, transit and business operations in Trinidad and Tobago.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Ladies and gentlemen, if we want more trade, we also need to develop systems to efficiently deal with increased trade. And with increased legitimate trade comes increased illegitimate trade. We therefore need to ensure that we can manage the increased risk, without sacrificing efficiency and commerce. An integrated electronic risk management system will ensure this is actualized with the support of the following Agencies:

- the Customs and Excise Division of the Ministry of Finance;
- the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division of the Ministry of Health;
- Plant Quarantine Services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; and
- the Bureau of Standards and Trade License Unit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry

VISION 2030

The Government's Vision 2030 National Development Strategy refers to creating a 'strong competitive economy' through 'an improved environment that fosters entrepreneurship' and 'an enhanced environment for investment and trade'. This project's approach reinforces these efforts through more efficient processing of goods and services, and also advances the country's obligations with respect to

the WTO Bali Agreement on Trade Facilitation, such as rules for the movement, release and clearance of goods, electronic payments, risk management and modern trade legislation.

CONCLUSION

The Government recognizes the importance of trade to the economy and believes that one of the guiding principles of trade is that it must benefit our people. While our role is to facilitate trade, the successful implementation of any policy, legislation or strategy, rests with the commitment by and co-ordination of all stakeholders—both public and private. It is in this spirit we are gathered here today.

We must see this exercise not as a Ministry of Trade and Industry initiative but as a national project meant to benefit the business community and wider citizenry. As the dialogue continues, you are encouraged to share your views, expertise and experience that will altogether create a more robust, more effective platform through which we can trade, work and share.

The good news is that our efforts have achieved results. Only yesterday in the 2017-18 *Global Competitiveness Index*, Trinidad and Tobago moved up by 11 places from 94th to 83rd out of 138 economies. The most problematic issues, however, still remain: poor work ethic, inefficient government bureaucracy and corruption. Increased technology and automation, retraining of workers and an overall transformation in the way we do things will ensure that we not only improve our international standing, but also create an environment for Trinidad and Tobago to become the Gateway to the Americas and a regional prototype of efficiency and good governance.

In yesterday's Spotlight hosted by the Prime Minister, someone spoke to the need for Transformation. This project, among others, is a major and significant step in that transformation, but it is only one of several steps that we all have to make together.

Ladies and gentlemen I thank you for your time and I hope you are looking forward to a productive and highly interactive session. Let's go beyond ordinary; let us strive for excellence.

Thank you.