



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade and Industry

***Promoting Dialogue
between the National
Quality Infrastructure and
the Agriculture Sector in
Trinidad and Tobago***

FEATURE ADDRESS

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MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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SALUTATIONS:

- Ms. Susan Shurland – Permanent Secretary Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries
- Mr. Lawford Dupres – Chairman, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) and Members of the TTBS Board of Directors
- Mr Derek Luk Pat - Executive Director, TTBS
- Mr. Deryck Omar - CEO of CROSQ
- Ms. Sabine Grenier - PTB
- Management and Staff of the TTBS
- Distinguished Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is a pleasure to take part in this National Dialogue that seeks to strengthen partnerships among the agriculture stakeholders, National and Regional Quality Infrastructure Institutions and Government Ministries and Agencies. The Bureau of Standards must be commended for this initiative which is timely as the Government seeks to develop and expand opportunities within the agriculture sector which is at the forefront of the country's diversification efforts.

It is noteworthy that the focus of the week's sessions is on the importance of National Quality Infrastructure (NQI) and how it can enhance the development of the agriculture sector. The Action Plan that will be developed at the conclusion of the workshop can be useful in ensuring the sustainable development of the sector going forward.

The objectives of this National Dialogue, are strategically aligned with Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Strategy, Vision 2030 and the recently developed Roadmap to (i) transition the country towards a more diversified economy, that produces a broad spectrum of export competitive, high-value goods and services. In this regard, the GORTT has identified agriculture and agro-processing, as well as, fish and fish processing among seven (7) economic areas for the establishment of new business clustering. (ii) to also protect the country's food supply through expansion of the agricultural sector. Food security must be embraced at all costs, and the Government has mandated that the expansion of the agricultural sector must go hand in hand with the necessary food support programmes that targets the most vulnerable in society. Fortunately, we are in a position to link the NQP with the Roadmap seamlessly and this will certainly be beneficial to all involved.

The specific focus of the Dialogue on the overarching necessity for developing the country's National can be found in both our National Quality Policy and Trade Policy which identify that a robust National Quality Infrastructure system is integral to (i) industrial development,(ii) trade competitiveness in global markets, the efficient use of natural and human resources, food safety, health and the environment. More specifically, agriculture, agro-processing, fish and fish-processing have been identified as key sectors that require significant NQI support.

When we speak of the Quality Infrastructure or NQI, we are referring to the entire ecosystem of public and private institutions as well as the legal and regulatory frameworks and practices that establish and implement standards, accreditation, metrology (referring to measurements and calibration), and conformity assessment (referring to testing, inspection and certification).

It has been identified that despite the large local demand for agricultural produce from crops and livestock, suppliers are not able to take advantage of the demands in US, Canada, Latin American and UK markets.

Also with the globalization of production, and supply and retailer chains, ensuring the safety and quality of products is paramount. In recent times there have been increased health concerns due to the incidence of various types of diseases and various toxins entering the food chain that would have led to the introduction of stringent standards and conformity procedures, particularly in the area of agro-food exports. Exporting countries must therefore be able to acquire the capability to conform to requirements in terms of quality, safety, health and the environment if they are to participate fully in global markets.

Accordingly, in our national context, gaps and challenges must be addressed in terms of enforcement or updating of existing laws, standards, and availability of testing and certification facilities, to enhance compliance with technical standards to promote international consumer confidence and gain access to regional and global value chains.

But in order to increase exports of primary agricultural products there needs to be systemic upgrading, moving from low value-added segments/ activities to higher value - added activities. This would create avenues for tapping into regional and global value chains and accessing new export markets within the wider Caribbean, Central and South America and Asia. Private sector interests have also identified several significant niches in agriculture and fishing that could also viably support emerging agro-processing and fish processing activities. In agriculture, these include high-flavour cocoa and peppers just to mention a few.

Research has shown that in the inputs segment of the global value chain for agriculture, Trinidad and Tobago's endowment of natural gas has allowed it to be a strong producer of ammonia urea, and some macronutrients of fertilizer. However, apart from the ammonia and urea inputs, Trinidad and Tobago has weak participation in the agriculture inputs segment. Trinidad and Tobago also possesses a comparative advantage in the processing segment.

Notwithstanding this, there exists room to expand productive capacity and diversify exports in the agro-processing industry to improve foreign exchange earnings. This would undoubtedly require transforming the country's export specialization (through vertical integration). In this way, upgrading the attendant gaps in the National Quality Infrastructure is viewed as crucial for inducing this structural shift.

Several initiatives to expand and diversify production are in train and include:

The Moruga Agro-processing and Light-manufacturing Industrial Park is one of the early interventions by the Government to bring rural areas into the productive sector while expanding exports in the Food, Beverage and Manufacturing sectors.

Further the recently launched **Export Booster Initiative** includes key programmes such as the Certification Programme for Food and Beverage Standards and Product Compliance (CPFSPC) and labelling and product testing support.

In order to address the challenges brought on by the global pandemic, the Government has introduced several policy measures with the following expected outcomes:

- Increased production to reduce dependence on imported food and inputs;
- Development of a more technologically advanced agriculture system to increase the availability of domestic food supply;
- Strengthened linkages along the food value and distribution chains to make more locally produced food available within the country.

This National Dialogue is indeed a timely intervention that seeks to address the vital areas outlined in the Roadmap.

As we speak of the development of the entire ecosystem, TTBS's partnership with the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) is critical for the development of the agriculture sector. And it very heartening to see CROSQ is actively involved in this dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen many of you may be aware that two weeks ago, on October 01, 2021, Trinidad and Tobago secured funding through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) Standby Facility for Capacity Building under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), for three projects and will be implemented by the Caribbean Development Bank. One of the approved projects is building a National Quality Policy in the amount of the One Hundred and Ninety Eight Thousand Euros (€\$198,000), of which, One Hundred and Forty Three Thousand Euros (€\$143,000) will be provided by the European Union through the Caribbean Development Bank and Fifty Five Thousand Euros (€\$55,000) via "in kind" contribution of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and will be effected through the TTBS.

This Project will be implemented through a three-pronged approach:

The first component entails the development and implementation of a public awareness and sensitization programme which is expected to create a more quality conscious population and business sector that supports a diversified and competitive economy.

The second component focuses on the development and implementation of a quality intelligence programme. This component seeks to upgrade the value chains of organizations through the adoption of quality management principles and practices and good regulatory practices in operations. It is expected that this programme will assist small and medium sized enterprises, micro-entrepreneurs and female run business to reach a state of export readiness.

The third and final component looks at the sustainability of the project and will seek to develop and implement a continuous learning and improvement programme. This component will include training of the TTBS, the National Quality Council and the staff of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the development and implementation of public awareness and sensitization programmes. This is imperative to ensure continuity of successful quality awareness building beyond the life of the project.

Since the launch of the National Quality Policy, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been implementing several programmes and initiatives. With the National Quality Policy at the core, the support of an efficient and effective National Quality Infrastructure is necessary to ensure the production of quality goods and services. Therefore, it is important that Institutions with responsibility for Accreditation, Standardization and Metrology and Quality Services for Conformity assessment meet international standards.

As I close, I would like to thank the TTBS once again for facilitating this extremely essential workshop. The level of participation thus far demonstrates the agriculture sector's commitment to playing an essential role in the nation's path to economic recovery. The partnership with the CROSQ and other Ministries and Agencies can only bear fruit, and we wish to encourage such synergies toward sustainable development.

What we must also bear in mind is that the feedback and lessons learnt in this workshop will not end at this event, as we have time and time again fallen into the trap of organizing "talk shops," but rather put into much needed action in the form of a robust Action Plan. I trust that any actions that are set out in meaningful ways will result in measurable and sustainable outcomes in the medium to long term to ensure growth and sustainability in the agriculture sector.

To our participants here today and in the next few days, I encourage you all to take advantage of this transformational opportunity, and apply the knowledge gained today and throughout the week to your work and livelihoods. It will be well worth the effort.

I thank you.