



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade and Industry

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***SheTrades International Women's Day
Seminar and Trade Show:
For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality.
Empowerment***

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REMARKS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

MARCH 8TH, 2025

SALUTATIONS

The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, Minister of Housing and Urban Development;
Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, Minister of Social Development and Family Services;
Senator the Honourable Allyson West, Minister of Public Administration;
Mr. Randall Karim, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry;
Mrs. Ava Mahabir- Dass, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry;
Mrs. Camille Chatoor, General Manager, Caribbean Bottlers Limited;
Mrs. Franka Costelloe, Chairman, Trinidad and Tobago, Trade and Investment Promotion Agency
Panelists;
Specially Invited Guests;
Women of the Trinidad and Tobago SheTrades Hub;
Members of the media;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. It is indeed a pleasure to be here to commemorate International Women's Day with this event - **SheTrades Business Seminar and Trade Show**, themed - *For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.*

Today, we once again celebrate the resilience, innovation, and achievements of women and girls, and take the opportunity to reaffirm our dedication to advocating for their **rights, equality, and empowerment** in every sphere, **particularly in business.**

In Trinidad and Tobago, women entrepreneurs play an instrumental role in driving **innovation, diversification, and the expansion of our non-energy sector.** Yet, we recognize that many women-owned businesses continue to face barriers. It is through initiatives like **SheTrades** that we can work to dismantle these barriers and create an ecosystem where women-led businesses can flourish.

The **SheTrades Initiative**, launched by the **International Trade Centre (ITC) in 2015**, is a transformational global movement designed to **connect, empower, and elevate women entrepreneurs**, by addressing the constraints they encounter in accessing economic opportunities. The initiative aims to integrate women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) into **local, regional, and international trade**, by enhancing their competitiveness, linking them to buyers, and advocating for policies that foster gender-inclusive trade environments.

Equality of women in business

Women's equality is likewise very important as the International Labour Organization (ILO) views gender equality as a key factor for economic growth and sustainable development¹. The World Bank² estimates that there could be at least a 20% increase in global gross domestic product (GDP) if the gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship are closed.

Today, I am especially excited to hear from **Ms. Camille Chatoor, our esteemed keynote speaker**, and I extend my sincere gratitude to her for taking the time to inspire, share her insights, and motivate us all. I also eagerly anticipate the discussions with **our distinguished panel of experts**, whose experience, knowledge, and perspectives will undoubtedly enrich our conversations.

Empowerment of women in business

Together, we can drive a **more inclusive, innovative, and prosperous economy** — one where every woman and girl has the tools and opportunities to build a brighter future.

We will continue to encourage women empowerment so that they are provided with the appropriate resources and opportunities including funding, information, leadership training and mentorship.

We are proud and we celebrate the work that you, the women of the SheTrades Hub are doing in the various sectors towards building your businesses including engaging with the relevant stakeholders in the private and public sectors and improving your products and services. I admire all the goods and services that are on display at today's event and I thank you for your dedication and hard work.

To date, tremendous progress has been made under the SheTrades Hub since its launch in Trinidad and Tobago in 2020. Achievements include specific capacity building conducted in person by the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency; attendance to trade shows/missions; conferences and networking events, and continued promotion of the Hub. More specifically during 2024:

- 20 female graduates from the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited's (NEDCO's) Business Accelerator Programme were trained in export readiness under the SheTrades Hub.
- Sponsorship was provided for 55 women to participate in the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) in July 2024.

¹ <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>; accessed 14/02/2025

² https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf; 2024

Women attended business meetings, showcased their goods and services, and networked with stakeholders.

- In August 2024, 29 women participated in the Trinidad and Tobago Agri Expo 2024, hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. These women were given the opportunity to promote and sell their products.
- Several webinars were conducted by the International Trade Centre and the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency introducing the International Trade Centre's Research Tools in March and September 2024.

The SheTrades Platform ties in very closely with a whole range of other initiatives offered by the Government that support small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) including businesses that are owned and led by women. These initiatives include:

- Scale Up Trinidad and Tobago business accelerator programme focused on promoting empowerment, innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth;
- the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Grant Fund Facility which to date has benefited over 13 women led businesses; and
- the Export Booster Initiative with more than 35 women led businesses approved and funded.

These initiatives, programmes and grants continue to benefit numerous female-owned businesses in Trinidad and Tobago, many of them present here today:

- Ms. Hesma Tyson - Caribbean Specialty Foods Limited;
- Mrs. Claudette Daniel - D' Master Cobbler;
- Ms. Gale Charles - Charlo Farm Limited; and
- Ms. Rachel Rennie - Farm and Function.

Conclusion

I encourage you to continue to demonstrate leadership as you shape your future. Take the leap to create and build your distinctive products and services. Strengthen your networks and work together as collaboration is key. It is important to invest in yourself and elevate and expand your knowledge optimizing the use of information and communication technology including artificial intelligence.

Let us become or continue to be champions for women's rights. Let us be ambassadors for gender equality. Let us push for empowerment.

As I close, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Government's support of girls' and women's rights, equality and empowerment as these are critical for generating innovative solutions, diversification,

business development and the economic prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago, thereby improving the lives of all of our people. I thank you.