



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade and Industry

Virtual Launch of Trinidad and Tobago's SheTrades Hub

ADDRESS & SPEAKING NOTES

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

OCTOBER 28TH, 2020

Salutations

Good Morning,

- **The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy** - Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister-Gender and Child Affairs
- **Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton** - Executive Director, International Trade Centre (ITC)
- **Mr. Ashmeer Mohamed**-Chariman, exporTT
- **Ms. Franka Costelloe**-President, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA)
- **Ms. Joanne Salazar**-President, International Women's Forum-Trinidad and Tobago.
- Specially Invited Guests
- Female Entrepreneurs
- Members of the media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

A pleasant good morning to participants in Trinidad and Tobago, and a special good afternoon to our guests joining us from the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva. I take this opportunity to welcome each and every one of you to the official launch of the SheTrades Hub, Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, we conference under extraordinary circumstances but it is such a proud moment for Trinidad and Tobago as we have the honor of being the **first** country in the Caribbean to officially launch a SheTrades Hub. Trinidad and Tobago is now part of a community of over 25 countries working towards connecting over 3 million women entrepreneurs to global markets by 2021.

SheTrades provides a pathway for business expansion, enabling Trinidad and Tobago's female entrepreneurs to receive technical training, professional mentorship, compete in international tenders and procurement processes and attend international trade and business events. It also encourages engagement among female-owned businesses on online forums to exchange ideas, experiences and collaborate to develop solutions to overcome challenges often faced by women in business.

This transformative platform offers invaluable opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago's female-owned MSME's as it promotes their inclusion into global supply chains, facilitates Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) linkages and provides an income earning avenue for our enterprising women.

Locally, we can boast that female-owned businesses exist in almost every sector and industry. This platform will offer an international trade gateway for these entrepreneurs, granting access to a market of approximately 2.7 billion persons across 25 territories at this time.

This initiative is beneficial and unique as it aims to foster change by going beyond the traditional approach of merely improving the quality of women's products and services. Instead, it sets out to engage all actors involved in women's economic empowerment including governments, the private sector and civil society. In developing our SheTrades Work Programme, Trinidad and Tobago and the ITC will collaborate to design strategic initiatives and activities in line with four of the seven pillars of the ITC charter-

- Pillar 1. Championing quality data,
- Pillar 4. Striking business deals,
- Pillar 5. Enabling market access and
- Pillar 6. Unlocking financial services.

We believe that these specific pillars will synergize best with our Vision 2030 National Development Policy 2016-2030 and pivot our female entrepreneurs as drivers of Trinidad and Tobago's economic growth.

The implementation of SheTrades in Trinidad and Tobago falls under the remit of our National Export Promotion Agency- exporTT. ExporTT will be further supported by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and other trade-related and business development agencies such as CreativeTT, the Caribbean Industrial

Research Institute (CARIRI) and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO).

This initiative is already garnering high interest and is testimony of this Government's focus on developing and growing a digital economy. Since April 2020, we have seen the number of entrepreneurs registered on the SheTrades Platform grow daily and we are only at the launch stage. These registered female- owned businesses represent a wide cross-section of sectors, including, agro-processing, health and beauty, professional services and the creative sectors. I am particularly encouraged by the response thus far, and I anticipate that the numbers will rise exponentially in the near future.

Today's Launch is just the beginning of a series of initiatives and activities associated with the roll out of this Hub in Trinidad and Tobago. Within the next two (2) weeks, the ITC SheTrades team will conduct an interactive workshop with our registered female business owners to maximize their use of the Platform.

We are currently in the Needs Assessment phase which will identify the gaps and challenges faced by you, our local female- owned businesses. At this point I want to urge those of you who are not yet registered, to go online, register on shetrades.com and complete the needs assessment. This is an instrumental part of the process as this information will be used to develop and tailor T&T's work programme to best suit your needs.

SheTrades is not a one size fits all endeavour therefore, the projects and policies which will be implemented will be in response to the gaps and challenges identified by YOU- the female entrepreneur.

This launch comes at an opportune time for the women of the world. Today's theme "**The Role of the Female Entrepreneur in COVID-19 Recovery**" is pertinent to the Government's commitment to providing the necessary enabling environment, policy interventions and financial mechanisms to ensure your businesses' success and longevity.

I therefore look forward to participating in today's panel and anticipate a fruitful and enlightening conversation on the important role of female entrepreneurs in driving our COVID-19 economic recovery.

In closing, I wish to specially thank all who worked tirelessly on today's launch in particular the ITC's staff who have worked closely with our team. I also wish to acknowledge and congratulate all the female entrepreneurs who have registered for this Programme and are the first to be part of the SheTrades Hub in Trinidad and Tobago. I challenge others to be a part of this transformative programme that is set to reshape this country's trading and economic landscape.

I thank you.

Speaking Notes

Question:

COVID-19 has presented significant challenges in businesses globally; however, it has also provided unique opportunities for entrepreneurship through e-commerce and digitization.

What measures are being developed by your Government to support and promote female entrepreneurship as a viable avenue to contribute towards economic growth and recovery?

Answer:

The United Nations has stated that COVID-19 has widened the gender poverty gap for females, as perhaps they are employed in sectors disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis such as the creative industries, hospitality and retail food and beverage sectors.

Our concern as Government is that our female entrepreneurs are able to thrive during these difficult times and beyond the Pandemic grow, by taking advantage of traditional and new opportunities.

Our Government is therefore supporting female entrepreneurship through many tools including:

(I) ENHANCING ACCESS TO ICT AND E-COMMERCE

COVID-19 has demonstrated that inadequate access to ICT hinders entrepreneurship. In this regard, several initiatives are being executed to expand access to ICT:

Rollout of AccessTT Centres

AccessTT Centres are being established throughout the country to deliver training and provide access to e-Government services particularly in the rural and less-developed areas of our country. The specific services being offered include:

- Cyber Cafe Facilities;
- ICT Training and Conference Room Facilities;
- e-Learning through Free Online Microsoft Learning Resources;
- Access to free Printing/Faxing; and
- Access to Wi-Fi Lounges/Patios with free internet access.

National E-Commerce Strategy

Our National E-Commerce Strategy is aimed at creating an enabling environment which facilitates and promotes e-commerce to serve domestic and international consumer markets. Training sessions in areas such as **“How to take your business online”**, **“How to market your good or service online”** and the

“Benefits of trading online” have been provided for hundreds of entrepreneurs. These initiatives will continue as we move to encourage our female entrepreneurs to maximize the potential of the internet by reaching markets which ordinarily would have been inaccessible.

(II) PROVIDING FINANCING OPPORTUNITIES TO SURVIVE AND EXPAND

The Government has been deliberate in ensuring that SMEs in various sectors including manufacturing, agriculture, services and creative industries are provided with targeted financial support during the Pandemic through several facilities *including:*

- a) A Government-Guaranteed Stimulus Loan Programme via the local Banking sector which offers Zero interest loans to cover *Salaries; Operational expenses and Purchase of raw materials.*
- b) TT\$200 Mn has been made available to Credit Unions for individual and business loans;
- c) A Micro-enterprise Grant Programme (offering up to TT\$20,000) will benefit over 5,000 micro enterprises;
- d) A Grant Fund Facility that targets SMEs in various sectors including manufacturing, agriculture and agro-processing, financial services, maritime services, creative industries, fish and fish processing, aviation services and software design application;
- e) The Research and Development Facility (RDF) provides grant funding to support investment in new and advanced technology and innovation as a competitiveness enhancement tool for enterprises;
- f) TT\$500 Million Agriculture Stimulus Package which will provide opportunities in agro-processing including nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals; and
- g) ExporTT offers a myriad of co-financing arrangements to assist in getting quality goods out to traditional and non-traditional markets.

(III) ENHANCED CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Government has remained anchored by the fact that our citizens are our greatest asset and that they are to be given the tools necessary to create a prosperous future, including several capacity building opportunities for the employed and unemployed to learn, be trained and to develop skills which encourage entrepreneurship.

The Ministry of Labour has engaged the online learning platform Coursera to offer the Commonwealth of Learning – Coursera Workforce Recovery Programme to individuals 18-60 years of age who are retrenched, unemployed or underemployed. This programme gives access to over 4000 free online courses in several specialized areas. Additionally, the Ministry of Community Development, has multiple short courses available, free of charge, to educate and empower persons seeking to learn a new skill or trade.

The Government is also significantly expanding support to various programmes which will provide targeted capacity building in the Services Sector which consist of many female-owned businesses. Two new export accelerating programmes are on offer which are:

- (a) *Services Go Global*
- (b) *GATEWAY to Trade Programme*

In closing, my Mantra continues to be Monetize, Monetize, Monetize and for our female entrepreneurs, I mean commercialise anything that you do well by providing quality goods and services for the local and international market.