

**“INNOVATIONS IN YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION
PROGRAMMES IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO”:
THE SERVOL EXPERIENCE**

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ADULT EDUCATION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Background

Adult Education was introduced in Trinidad and Tobago in 1945, approximately fifty-seven (57) years ago. The principal objective at the time was the preparation of the populace for the exercise of those responsibilities concomitant with the granting of Adult Franchise. Ten Adult Education Centres were opened and offered classes in literacy, numeracy, civics, music and art.

Today, adult education programmes are conducted in parallel to the formal education system and provide opportunities for the enhancement of general education and/or training in technical/vocational skills and social competencies.

The Educational Policy Paper (1993 –2003) of Trinidad and Tobago proposed that further education should be viewed as one in which there are two sub-sectors, each defined by the nature and purpose of its programming:

- One sub-sector encompasses all those courses and programmes through which opportunities for training and education are provided for out-of-school youth and more mature individuals who do not have to possess secondary education qualifications in order to take advantage of those opportunities.
- The other sub-sector consists of those courses and programmes which provide education and training through academic, technical/vocational and other disciplines for young secondary school leavers and adults

who must possess secondary school leaving qualifications in order to access these course of study.

This paper will present information on the sub-sector that encompasses adult education programmes and courses that do not require the enrollee to possess previous academic qualifications.

Youth and Adult Education Programmes included in this sub-sector are offered by the following organizations:

1. The Ministry of Education through its Adult Education Programme;
2. SERVOL, a Civil Society Organisation / Non-governmental Organisation
3. The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs through the operation of trade centers, youth development and apprenticeship centers and the Youth Training, Partnership and Employment Programme (YTEPP)
4. The Ministry of National Security through its operation of the Youth Training Centre and Adult Education courses at the Prisons/Penal institutions

Moreover, it should be noted that while some background information will be provided on the Adult Education programme offered by the Ministry of Education, the primary focus will be the innovative Youth and Adult education programmes offered by the Service volunteered for All (SERVOL) organisation.

ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME(16 years and over)

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education through its Adult Education Division administers Adult Education programmes that provide learning opportunities for persons who may/may not have benefited from the formal school system.

At present, there are forty-six Life Long Learning Centres (based at schools and communities) throughout Trinidad and Tobago with an enrolment of approximately eight thousand and forty-five (8,045) participants, forty-six (46) supervisors and over three hundred (300) tutors. Total female enrolment is six thousand four hundred and seventy-one (6,471 or 80.4%) while male enrolment is two thousand two hundred and five (2,205 or 19.6%).

The following adult education programmes are offered:

- Remedial education for primary school leaving, G.C.E. or CXC Examinations.
- Introductory occupational courses. These courses are structured principally around the “felt needs” of the clientele to be served with focus on the following objectives:
 - To offer basic practical training for young unemployed adults who are out-of-school and who desire training for gainful employment (16-25 years)
 - To assist the unemployed to discover his/her potential.
 - To provide leisure time programmes/Family Life Education/Literacy Programme

Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL)

Brief History of Servol

Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL) is a Civil Society Organisation/Non-governmental Organisation that emerged during the social upheavals of the 1970's in Trinidad and Tobago. The deplorable living conditions and the desperate actions of the black youths in eastern Port of Spain, particularly Laventille caught the attention of Fr. Gerard Pantin, a Roman Catholic priest and Mr. Wes Hall, a Barbadian cricketer. They went into the Laventille –with no money, no plan – but with this simple question “ How can I help you?”

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of SERVOL are simply:

- To mobilise the underprivileged and get them to work for themselves;
- To get them out of their stagnation;
- And to help them formulate goals that are achievable.

Principles

The founders of SERVOL were primarily interested in self-development and adopted these two main principles:

- In helping a community towards self-development, always begin with what the people say they want.
- Help the people to achieve and accomplish what they can afford to pay for and maintain

Servol's Philosophical Approach

This organisation has invented its own jargon to describe its basic philosophy and method of approach:

- ***A philosophy of ignorance*** – that is never presume to know the needs of people, rather ask them what these needs are and what type of help they want;
- ***Attentive listening*** – listen carefully to the voice of the people, since it is the most important element in their own development;
- ***The attitude of cultural arrogance*** – When offering genuine help never presume to know or make value judgment based on your own cultural background or educational attainment;
- ***A process of respectful intervention*** – help to another should be proffered respectfully, conscious that we both have a lesson to learn and can each benefit from the interaction.

The Human Development and Technical Training of Adolescents

(16-19 year olds)

This programme emerged from dialogue with the community. It targeted primarily the 16 – 19 year old youths who were unsuccessful at being placed at secondary schools, dropouts from the secondary school system or persons who have completed secondary education but were unable to gain employment.

The Skills Training Programme was developed and a number of facilities were opened to address these needs. The facilities comprised the following: A welding shop in 1971, a plumbing facility in 1972, a woodwork shop in 1973, an electrical training centre in 1974, food preparation and garment construction in 1975 and an auto mechanic's garage in 1976. An on-going process-oriented evaluation of these vocational skills training programme revealed that there was a

35% dropout rate and that quite a number of the graduates were not successful at looking or finding employment.

A further study of the profile of the adolescents revealed that a high percentage of the apprentices had very negative self-image and low self-esteem.

Human Development

The apparent failure of their graduates to gain productive employment led to the development of the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP). In the Adolescent Development programme the young people are led through an intense three-month period of self-exploration, self-actualization and spiritual growth.

They are offered training in basic knowledge of their country, public speaking, social studies, human sexuality, basic literacy, numeracy and writing. This programme is a prerequisite to further training in any marketable skill offered by the SERVOL organisation. The backbone of this programme is the use of specially trained grassroots instructors, many of them housewives selected from within the communities.

Moreover, the three month human development component to the adolescent skills training programme has proven to be one of the most innovative and successful ideas of SERVOL. This human development model has been adapted to meet the needs of Institutions/organizations offering various programmes for young people throughout Trinidad and Tobago as well as overseas.

Technical Training

In 1995, SERVOL in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank established three (3) HI-TECH centers in North, Central and South Trinidad

to offer postgraduate training in Computer Technology and Advanced Electronics to those apprentices who had the potential and desire to pursue vocations in these fields.

These HI-TECH courses are the postgraduate of the Skills Training Programme, so that SERVOL is in fact turning out carpenters, plumbers, seamstresses and nurses who are computer literate. Concomitant with the development of computer literacy programmes was the offering of functional literacy courses, since thirty-five percent (35%) of the adolescents who enter the SERVOL programme have serious literacy problems.

Today, the HI-TECH centers are turning out over four hundred (400) graduates each year with certificates in Computer Technology, Digital Electronics and Computer Control Electronics. These courses are certified by the Cambridge Information Technology Institute and the SERVOL graduates are obtaining employment in banks, offices and industrial factories.

In 2000, SERVOL commenced construction of a three-storey block on the site of the La Romaine Integrated Education Project. This building will house five (5) additional skills in the area of Compressor Mechanics, Instrumentation, PC Repairs, Computer Control Electronics and General Industrial Maintenance. The Centre will be supported by the business community in South Trinidad and will become a training facility for many industries.

In 2001, on the eve of the removal of financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank SERVOL merged the three (3) centre Hi-tech Programme with the twenty (20) centre ADP-Skills Programme.

Concomitant with the merger was the decentralizing of the national administration of the ADP-Skills Programme and Hi-tech Programmes into three zones, North, Central/East, and South.

Each Zone has a decentralized administration comprised of an Executive Coordinator, an Assistant Executive Coordinator, a Counsellor, a Job Training Officer and Secretary. Other staff members include a Traveling Counsellor and instructors. A healing team and an art analyst are shared between the three zones. Each zone is managed by a Board of Education that allows community involvement in the educational process.

SERVOL'S KEYS TO SUCCESS:

- The entire SERVOL programme from Early Childhood Care and Education to HI-tech centers is an exercise in integrated holistic development, the goal of which is to alleviate poverty through psycho-social programmes designed to improve individuals and communities;
- A large proportion of the human resource base of SERVOL, that is, coordinators, instructors, parent outreach workers and volunteers, is drawn from the communities and graduates of their programmes;
- SERVOL has maintained its *raison d'état*, that is *Service volunteered for all with people at the centre of development*;
- The general principles of helping a community towards self development always begin with what the community say they want and help is

provided to accomplish only that which can be maintained at the community level;

- Community involvement and participation is encouraged from the inception of any programmes/projects that will ultimately impact/ affect their lives;
- The programmes and projects developed by SERVOL ultimately emerge from dialogue and/or needs identified by the communities.