

ABSTRACT

The Sheet Metal Working Industry has always played a very significant role in all Engineering development over the last 5 centuries. It is expected that its position as a prime mover in all developmental spheres will remain unaltered for as long as mankind continues to develop. In Trinidad and Tobago, by far the major segment of the Metal Working Industry consists of firms involved in Sheet Metal Working. The historical development of this sector has been examined, especially to study the reasons why development has progressed along the lines experienced in the local situation. Comparison has been made with similar industrial sectors in larger and more industrialised countries.

The format of the study involved firstly the compilation of a complete list of Sheet Metal Working firms in Trinidad and Tobago, followed by personal visits to 40 of these companies who are more or less representative of this sector. Discussions were also held with several agencies involved in Industrial Development. A review of statistics and documental material provided very little data on this industry sector.

In a traditionally Petroleum dominated economy, the Sheet Metal Working industries of Trinidad and Tobago have recorded consistent real growth varying between 6% to 10% annually. Contribution of this sector to the GDP is however small; being approximately 3% to 4% at the present time. This represents less than 15% of the output of all light and medium-scale local manufacturing industries, but, however, a quite broad range of products.

The historical development of the Sheet Metal Working Industry, and the entire local manufacturing sector, is largely a result of the influences of two factors - the colonial past, with policy making dominated by a foreign power, and the influence of the Petroleum Industry. A typical pattern of evolution from pre-Independence years through the last 2 decades, to the present time can be clearly seen. The influence of Government industrial incentives, training programmes and aid packages to the manufacturing industry are also evident.

At present of 900 manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago, 100 are involved in Sheet Metal Working. These have been classified on the basis of product output with the various factors influencing their existing operations being examined. The potentials for the future development of this sector have also been studied with future prospects being broadly outlined.

(1) The local contribution to the products of this sector in the form of skilled labour and technical know-how are large enough to be of national benefit. It is from this area that a Capital Goods Sector could spring, and develop within the Caribbean Region. It is also from this sector that maximum local capability, in terms of being able to design, develop and produce indigenous products will be first developed.

For these reasons the growth of the local Sheet Metal Working Sector can be seen as a very important link in the overall industrial development of Trinidad and Tobago and the following recommendations can be made for special priority and emphasis in future development:

- (1) A practical and workable development plan must be prepared for this sector, in consultation with