

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY

AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEMINAR ON ‘RESEARCH AND HIGHER

EDUCATION POLICIES FOR TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES:

PERSPECTIVES FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN’

AT THE TRINIDAD HILTON & CONFERENCE CENTRE

ON FRIDAY JULY 20, 2007

AT

8:30 AM

- Organizers, Presenters, Participants and Specially-Invited Guests

- Ladies and Gentlemen-All

COMMENCEMENT

1. The World Conference on Higher Education which was held in October 1998 pointed to a number of recommendations in the form of a covenant amongst UNESCO member states. This agreement endorsed education as a pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace and supported coordination and cooperation that builds post secondary education as well as higher education through universities, colleges and technical institutions. The Conference enabled the establishment of a 21st century vision and action and framework for priority action for change and development in higher education. There are many elements of this World Declaration which we must be cognizant of, all well articulated in the 17 articles for action. Amongst these articles Article 13 admonishes the effective use of resources in strengthening higher education management and in the application of national finances. It says:

Article 13: Strengthening Higher Education Management and Financing

“the management and financing of higher education require the development of appropriate planning and policy analysis capacities and

strategies, based on partnerships established between higher education institutions and the state and national planning and co-ordination bodies, so as to secure appropriately streamlined management and the cost-effective use of resources.”

By reflecting upon such international policy guidelines, small states like those of the Caribbean, would auger well when they effectively govern their financial investment in their growing tertiary education sectors. In today’s era of globalization, tertiary education is characterised by convergence, divergence and duplication of policy agendas along with imprudent commissioning of country’s resources such as finance. To us at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education this ideology represents our framework for action and we are careful to apply it through a strategic and thoughtful research agenda and process. Ladies and gentlemen, it is on this occasion of this UNESCO Seminar that we have every opportunity to share our various policy initiatives in higher or tertiary education with our peers in the Americas to facilitate this framework for action through a community of higher education practitioners by policy dialogue, policy sharing, policy benchmarking, policy impact and policy influence.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

2. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been pioneering its policy development work in tertiary education for the past 5 years. During this period the Government established its policies by engaging in critical stakeholder consultation on various topical issues in tertiary education and skills development and by examining policies from other jurisdictions within the Caribbean and international community. It must be noted that in today's environment policy processes involved tertiary education development are being established by a country tertiary education sector research programme. This means that we are steadily moving towards a data-driven policy formulation and implementation agenda which requires that the Government functions as a robust central intelligence agency always gathering critical quantitative and qualitative data through well thought out research studies.

VISION 2020

4. To get there, though, the country needed a national plan for action. The Government went about formulating its Vision 2020 Strategic Plan which really is at the heart of societal transformation. The Vision 2020 Policy is intended to cement long term planning and create a framework for medium and short term planning. Its five development priorities are:

- Developing Innovative People
- Nurturing a Caring Society
- Governing Effectively
- Enabling Competitive Businesses
- Investing in Sound Infrastructure and Environment

Our Vision 2020 Strategy has served as the basis for the establishment of an operational plan. The Operational Plan will take us through from the years 2007 to 2010. Taking its cues from the National plan, it affirms that the fundamental development challenge confronting Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed all Caribbean countries, is the need to transform. The ultimate goals of this transformation are improved quality of life of all citizens and the positioning of our economies to compete effectively in the global marketplace. This evolutionary transition, must take place both at the societal and the economic level. The Operational Plan's

focus in terms of the development of an innovative people has been expressed as four goals. These goals are:

- That The People of Trinidad and Tobago will be well known for excellence in innovation.
- That Trinidad and Tobago will have a seamless, self-renewing, high quality education system.
- That a highly-skilled, talented and knowledgeable workforce will stimulate innovation-driven growth and development.
- That the richness of our diverse culture will serve as a powerful engine to inspire innovation and creativity.

As already stated, it is a clearly established research agenda for the tertiary education sector that will facilitate this development plan. Our Ministry has been working with attaining a tertiary education enrolment target of 60% participation by 2015. We believe that we must develop the country's human resources well ahead of time for other sectors to reach their maximum capacity by 2020. We also believe we must be committed to development of the capacity of our public and private tertiary education institutions at a sufficiently high level of quality whilst maintaining our enrolment targets. In other words, we do not intend to sacrifice

quality for quantity. Not wanting to appear repetitive, ladies and gentlemen, it is research data that will determine whether our projections are being met for the sector whilst increasing current capacity. This increased institutional capacity will produce higher quality graduates normally expected for a developed society.

NATIONAL POLICY (The Green Paper)

5. These objectives go hand in hand with the National Policy on Tertiary Education, Training, Distance and Lifelong Learning. Our intention is to establish a sound, relevant national tertiary education system tailored to meet the human resource needs of a modern, progressive, technologically advancing nation. This policy was not developed overnight. The process started with the review of a task force report prepared some sixteen years ago. Since then new and emerging papers and reports from local and international sources which examine this country's demands for tertiary education and training were also generated, submitted and reviewed. Consequently, in December 2003 our Ministry presented five (5) draft policies to Cabinet regarding the development of a tertiary education and training system for the country. Given the enormity, complexity and likely duplication of these tasks and the policy documents

themselves, our Prime Minister - the Honourable Patrick Manning, sought to harmonize all of these policy initiatives to avoid any complications which may arise from this process. The Cabinet then established a Steering Committee in January 2004 to review policies that were presented. What they finalized was the Green Paper on Development of National Tertiary Education, Training, Distance and Lifelong Learning. This Green Paper is now on the way of receiving attention by the Ministry's research and policy analysis technicians through focus group and quantitative studies. The Ministry is currently working on getting the research process completed to begin to draft the White Paper for Tertiary Education Development by early next year and then produce our appropriate legislation which will guide the development of the sector in Trinidad and Tobago. What you may not realise, ladies and gentlemen, this present Seminar represents one leg of our national and international stakeholder consultations and you may find some research officers from the Ministry's Higher Education Services Division coming to you to seek to obtain a brief interview with you to get your views on our national policy for tertiary education. They will appreciate your time and comments as it will help them in their quest. As you would realise we take our business of research seriously so our participation and co-sponsorship of this event is not only one to enable

dialogue about papers being presented but a working session to get perspectives from policy analysts, researchers and practitioners in the field of higher education. We are indeed at work today!

6. Ladies and gentlemen, the Green Paper allows this Government to address three broad aims:

- Improving Access through increased participation
- Ensuring Relevance and
- Enhancing Quality

In furtherance of these broad aims, the following goals have been identified as priority areas for policy development and implementation:

FIVE (5) POLICY AREAS OF FOCUS

7. Government's five areas of focus represent an intention to revolutionise tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago.

I. The first priority area involves Re-structuring the System. It entails the development of a coherent and seamless tertiary education and training

system that comprises both public and private institutions. The system must be diverse and responsive to socio-economic development needs and goals of the nation. This initiative mandates a holistic approach to government education policy from early childhood care to tertiary education. It will facilitate individual movement through all levels of the system in a very fluid manner. An individual who dropped out of the system will be able to re-enter and continue through to tertiary education, if he so desires, in a seamless manner. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, this will also incorporate an individual to move between tertiary level institutions and have their credits carried forward to the programme they may wish to pursue as an alternative.

II. Widening Access, our second priority area, is about the adoption of an inclusive approach to education and training provision, in order to widen access to high quality, affordable education that will support economic development goals, and address the imperative for social reconstruction and equity. Widening access to quality education is as inextricably linked to economic and social progress as it is to greater self-actualization for citizens. This country is often described as a middle-level developing country. At the time this policy was being developed, however, Trinidad

and Tobago when compared with similar countries in the region and the hemisphere, such as Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica, had a rate of tertiary education participation that was much lower and would actually warrant the country being classified as a Third World country. It was reasoned that Sustainability of developed country status depended on a country's resolve to raise the level of educational attainment of all its citizens. Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford to allow groups to be left out of full participation in tertiary education. Socially and economically, the country must continue to address these issues. Indeed, Government has worked vigorously towards this end. Subsequently, the period 2002-2005 saw an unprecedented increase in tertiary student participation of approximately 14% per annum, leading to an estimated total sector enrolment increase from 25,071 to well over 46,000 students enrolled. This 2007 figure reflects a participation rate of roughly 32% of the eligible 16-55 age cohort in Trinidad and Tobago at both public and private institutions. This increase was due to the government's policy commitment to diversify the tertiary education sector to cater to non-state institutions that enrolled approximately 33% of the total sector. Many of the initiatives used for this process were

tabled in our national policy. These included offering of diversified training opportunities in areas of interest for economic development, increase of places for tertiary education, and funding to facilitate institutional development and student entry. We intend to continue to reach the unreachable in the national population by exploring useful educational technologies and training programmes that are all ensuring quality outputs. Those with learning and physical disabilities and others who are high achievers will also be afforded opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.

III. Reforming the Curriculum is yet another priority area. It requires an intensified focus on basic education, with emphasis on Science, Technology, Mathematics, English Language, Social Studies and Spanish, innovation and entrepreneurship, and overall a more holistic approach to the development of the country's human resource with a heightened emphasis on preparation for effective citizenship through life skills development. The thrust towards developed country status means that the workplace of today and tomorrow requires increasingly complex skills. Many of the new jobs available to our citizens will call for some level of tertiary education, not necessarily at the baccalaureate level. In

the national context, while government may not want to be prescriptive with respect to regulating the programmes of study offered by publicly-funded institutions, as is the norm in some developed countries, consideration should be given to implementing policies and funding strategies that would steer students towards specific careers and professions that are identified as national priorities. Also, as the country continues to position itself within the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and other international markets, such policies and funding strategies should consider the regional and, to some extent, international labour requirements and needs for development of the national human resource base. Consequently, our strategies include the Establishment of mechanisms to ensure a coordinated approach to national decision-making about curricula and the development, a research agenda to monitor work-place competencies and skills to facilitate on-going curricular review and reform within the context of both national and international demands for human resource development. The Creation of partnerships between the public and private sectors that facilitates a clear understanding of workplace competencies in an ever-changing economic environment, and that facilitates a more responsive approach to curricular

planning is an integral element for success here.

- IV.* Plans for the Financing the System, the fourth priority area, necessitate a Commitment to the design and implementation of funding and resource allocation mechanisms that promote greater equity of access, efficiency in operations, and improved quality of programmes and services in order to better harness the outputs of both public and private tertiary education providers in support of national development goals. Financing measures are critical to the survival of an efficient tertiary education system. State financing of local students must be a major priority. Inability to pay will no longer be a barrier to participation in quality tertiary education and it is this government's intention to use every means available to alleviate poverty due to lack of education. Financial incentives will be explored to encourage sustainable development of tertiary institutions, that is, for both public and private alike.
- V.* Managing the System, the final priority area, entails the Strengthening of leadership and managerial capacity at both the sector and institutional level to ensure sustainable growth and development of the tertiary system; and enhancement of tertiary education research capacity to enable data-driven strategic planning, policy formulation and impact

evaluation. Tertiary education governance and management is a specialized area in its own right. Policy formulation in tertiary education is usually the responsibility of professionally trained and experienced personnel and administrators at the system level who bring their technical expertise to bear on strategic planning, policy research and evaluation. In the absence of such management capacity, policy formulation in areas such as enrolment, access, equity, quality and funding can have unforeseen and negative outcomes on system outputs and can result in a waste of public funds. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education needs to be situated within a larger tertiary education context based on legal, policy and operational frameworks that provide the legitimacy and the coherence of action for the various institutions and agencies within the sector. It is to this end that the Ministry has been avidly pursuing the goal of institutional strengthening via its new strategic plan. More will be said on this in a minute.

These five goals are equally important to achieving the overall objectives and are all inter-related, therefore, an integrated approach to policy implementation is required to ensure the most effective outcome is achieved.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

8. In the interest of positioning itself to better implement its role as development facilitator for the tertiary education sector, the Ministry has been actively engaged in a plan of institutional strengthening. The Ministry worked with a consultant in this task. The process involved in house consultation with staff at all levels, review of critical policy instruments and discourse with Ministry partners and stakeholders. What emerged was a strategic plan that seeks to reorganize the ministry, marrying its internal structure to our national development goals and their unique mandate they generate for us as a government organization. The new plan reinforces the Ministry's role as a "Policy Making" agency, responsible for setting policy, facilitating its implementation, and for monitoring and evaluating such implementation. While, at present, the Ministry implements technical and vocational training programmes, it is the clear intent that this implementation will be transferred on a transition basis to the relevant implementation related agency/agencies. The challenges the new structure tries to meet include policy development and analysis, strategic guidance, stakeholder consultation, programme and project execution and monitoring

and evaluation. The Ministry while staying true to established public procedure and political organisation by remaining under the guidance of a Minister and a Permanent Secretary will now be transitioned to lead policy development, through research, of the tertiary education and lifelong learning sectors, all being necessary for sustainable development of the country's human capital.

COOPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

16. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government has also been working towards the facilitation of national development with many international stakeholders. The single largest initiative in this regard is the Ninth European Development Fund Sector Policy Support Programme. This programme is to focus on Non-University Tertiary Education Development. It will take the form of a grant amounting to 27.3 million Euro dollars. This courageous enterprise represents four (4) years in research, negotiation and strategy identification. Just last evening, we had the pleasure of officially launching this enterprise in the company of our local and international stakeholders in tertiary education development. This Programme was designed by Ministry's resident policy

advisers concurrently with the Green Paper on Tertiary Education and essentially reflects both in a dynamic, connected policy arrangement. It is primarily meant to work as a vehicle for implementation of the Government's approved tertiary education policy. A very key component is research on the tertiary education sector which includes a national baseline survey, other national surveys, tracer studies and needs analyses. As you have heard yesterday, all of these research projects have been designed and to date there are 13 sector research projects being rolled out for 2007-2008.

18. In general terms, the use of EDF resources in this sector stemmed from harmony between government's national development strategy summarised by the 'Vision 2020' objectives of reaching developed country status by the year 2020 and the overall European Commission co-operation policy objectives. A more effective tertiary level system and better science and technology teaching will address the severe shortage of skilled manpower a precondition for the creation of a competitive, diversified and knowledge-based economy. Better access to tertiary education will make a significant contribution to employment creation and social equity.

CONCLUSION

19. In closing, Ladies in gentlemen, this Seminar gives us the opportunity to present our tertiary education policy research work within the Latin American and Caribbean Region. Our Ministry's presenter yesterday together with this paper today presents the Ministry with the real opportunity to obtain your views and determine from you where we stand on the international arena with our national policy. We indeed look forward to your comments and opinions for we see these as an important part of our public consultation process. Please consult with any of the staff members of the Higher Education Services Division if you will like to know more about the Ministry's research and policy analysis work or the Government's policies for tertiary education. It was a pleasure to address such an esteemed group of professionals. I thank for your time and hope that you enjoy your stay in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.