

**TOPIC: IMPERATIVES FOR WORKFORCE CERTIFICATION AND THE  
ROLE OF NVQS/CVS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE  
CARIBBEAN**

**Launch of the NVQ/CVQ - Barbados, February 10, 2009**

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Salutations:

On behalf of HEART Trust/NTA and the National Council on TVET Jamaica, let me sincerely thank The Board and Executive Director of the TVET Council Barbados for inviting me to be a part of this very special occasion on this the launch of their NVQ/CVQ. There is an excellent relationship among the NTA's of the Region and I would like to think that aside from the W.I. Cricket team, CANTA is one of the few examples of regional integration in the region. So thank you for the warm hospitality extended to me.

In these remarks, I would like to turn our attention to the area of Caribbean workforce development and the imperatives of workforce certification.

Nearly six years ago, in 2003, right here in Barbados, the former Executive Director of HEART Trust NTA, Jamaica Mr Robert Gregory, speaking on the topic "*NVQ's – The Keys To Competitiveness In The Global Economy*", said then that (quote) "A highly qualified workforce is indispensable in the quest for global competitiveness; the National Vocational Qualifications is a guarantee of the holder's competence (knowledge, skill and attitude) which is in turn indispensable in our quest to create that high quality workforce".

**Workforce Development**

It is against this background that I would like to speak on developing all levels of the Caribbean Workforce through training and certification. When we speak of workforce development exactly what do we mean? Workforce development is about enhancing the productive capability of the individuals who work - developing the human capital of the workers in the economy. This is executed primarily through education and

training, and access to health facilities. The development of the workforce should lead to an efficient utilization of human resources, and participation of the citizens in the benefits of increased output through an enhanced quality of life.

Workforce development cannot occur without the combined effort of key players; Ministries of Labour, Education, Industry and Commerce, Youth Affairs, National Training Agencies and TVET Councils, National and Regional Training Institutions, Employers, Trade Unions, professional and Community-based Organisations and of course the individual. Given the context in which I speak, I will focus on the education and training system and the linkages with workforce development.

Within the education and training system there are a number of factors which impact on workforce development. First there is the need for a sound basic and secondary education as an important enabler. In the Caribbean 65% of secondary school graduates leave school with 3 or fewer CSEC subjects. In fact 90% of the fastest – growing jobs will require an education beyond high school.

Secondly, there has to be a reorientation to competency based approaches based on occupational standards – beginning with the formal school system. The approach guarantees a competent school leaver. In Jamaica the Ministry of Education has endorsed the approach from Early Childhood Education through to the tertiary level. The 2030 Plan sees all educational institutions using this approach to education and training.

Thirdly, there needs to be benchmarking to international standards in all aspects of the system, so that workers who are trained to these standards can compete on a global scale. In a survey of US manufacturers, 90% of employers reported moderate to severe shortages of skilled workers. In one Eastern Caribbean country, the unavailability of skills was cited by the World Bank as the largest hindrance to investment in that country, and 41% of the CEOs rated this obstacle as either major or severe to their productivity.

A seamless certification system is the fourth factor which impacts workforce development. Such a system allows for articulation from one level to the next so that

workers can see a progression to the highest levels of their occupation. A nationally-endorsed qualifications framework allows for such articulation, so individuals can plan their career paths knowing that they can access training if and when they desire it.

The fifth factor speaks to coordination of training at all levels, nationally and regionally, so that there is harmony between and among the countries. This will enable and facilitate a shared understanding of the training and certification system facilitating easier movement of people throughout the Region.

The sixth and final factor is that training has to be seen as a joint responsibility of the providers, the end users and also a strategic component of labour relations system. Economic development entities and employers are partners in this process, which helps to ensure that the workforce development and economic development systems are converging to address key economic challenges.

Globally we have observed a number of challenges for workforce development. The labour market is more integrated and competitive for high level skills. The top 10 –in demand jobs predicted in North America for example did not exist in 2004. 90% of the fastest-growing jobs (notwithstanding the economic meltdown) require education beyond high school. There is an emphasis on ‘weightless goods’ with high knowledge content. New technical competencies are required: a foreign language, logical reasoning, capacity for analysis and interpretation of different codes. Over the past 10 years for example, jobs requiring science and engineering skills increased 51%.

Job requirements, job content and occupational profiles are constantly changing. An individual’s security, especially in this period of economic challenges, job losses and redundancies, is derived from employability (varied competencies of the worker) rather than employment.

We have also seen the global and hemispheric liberalization of economies. Outsourcing of jobs – what used to be done in the United States is now being done in elsewhere (example of American Airlines and its call centre operations in India).

Knowledge has become the big ticket item. It has an increasingly important role as a factor of production. We have seen the emergence of new economic activities based on information and knowledge and the demand for higher quality of goods and services to enable competition in the global market. New jobs being created are associated with higher technology occupations requiring higher entry-level skills. So the skill sets for jobs are changing rapidly and so is the nature of organisations. The means by which the workforce is transformed to meet the requirements of the new age is by training and certification, **not** the traditional notion of training, but education and training which facilitates the rapid re-conversion of skills. Already we have seen where research on the Return on investment for vocational training in Jamaica shows that training has a positive social and personal rate of return. This was the vision of CARICOM when it advocated a paradigm shift in workforce development and certification.

### **Regional Certification**

Two major developments which occurred in quick succession heralded the move towards the regional certification scheme. In 1989, the Conference of Heads of Government at its tenth meeting in Grande Anse, Grenada 1989, decided to deepen the integration movement through the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). A year later, in 1990, Ministers of Education across the Region adopted what is now known as “The Regional TVET Strategy which provided the cohesive framework for the developing, improving and coordinating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) across the CARICOM Region.

In deciding to establish the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), The Conference of Heads of Government noted the:

*‘need to work expeditiously together to deepen the integration process and strengthen the Caribbean Community in all of its dimensions to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the global economy.’*

The CSME was intended to provide greater opportunities for employment, investment, production and trade, greater opportunity for travel for nationals to study and work in CARICOM countries, increased employment and improved standards of living and a key element, the free movement of labour in the Region.

As a corollary, the TVET Strategy identified the processes and systems to improve TVET throughout the Region by facilitating new programmes for TVET by forging closer linkages between education and training, developing a highly skilled workforce using international standards and by using a modular approach to training, assessment and certification.

Both developments had implications for Workforce Development in the Region. There was the need to provide potential and existing workforce participants with opportunities to acquire skills appropriate for modern workplace and to adjust to changes in technology and structural changes. There was also the need for assuring the relevance and portability of Qualifications, and the facilitation of continuous improvement and upgrading of the workforce.

With specific reference to TVET, there was a need for a focused preparation for the job market, nationally, regionally and internationally. There was a need to bridge the skill gaps through demand-driven TVET and through the development and use of internationally-benchmarked occupational standards. Arising from this would be occupational certification with additional emphasis on internal and external quality and operating efficiencies.

In order to achieve the overall objectives, there were a number of imperatives which had to be considered in planning the way forward. One such imperative was improving progression routes for vocational education and training in further education and in higher education. A second was the need for modernised qualifications. A third needed to consider parity of standing between vocational and academic routes and dual purpose qualifications. Finally, there was dire need to promote transparency comparability, transferability and recognition of skills and qualifications. All this could only be accomplished if a Qualifications Framework were in place which covered the whole range of education and training systems in the Region.

The Caribbean TVET community in its effort to prepare and certify our workforces for the growing variety of careers and job opportunities emerging from the rapidly evolving Caribbean services economy (which now employs the bulk of the workforce

and provides the largest sector contribution to GDP with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana) confronts the inappropriateness of many of the educational systems in the Caribbean. We have seen the statistics, it takes a quality trained and trainable workforce to attract and sustain decent job creating investments.

There is a direct relationship between training and productivity and in a world characterised by constant changes, where information circulates with increasing ease and fluency, requiring us to build and refashion new environments, it is important that there is an avenue for individuals to be trained, retrained and certified to meet the demands of the changing conditions. The objective of workforce certification therefore is to enable individuals to achieve or attain a work-based qualifications that are locally and nationally recognized. This was the undergirding philosophy which CARICOM envisaged. The qualifications would promote work readiness (soft skills) and would be based on occupational standards with appropriately aligned courses of study, curricula and training activities. The certification would be recognized and accepted local and regionally by employers.

The NVQ/CVQ that has been developed and is being launched in Barbados today is a work-based qualification. By definition it comprises the knowledge, skills and attitude required by workers in the particular occupational area and is developed with the input of industry practitioners who define the job. I know that the Barbados TVET Council has done some exceptional work in this regard. The competencies in the qualifications allow for changes as the job itself evolves or changes. The CVQ defines the core competencies of the job that the individual should have i.e. the knowledge the skills and the attitudinal competencies. It also includes key employability skills or the soft skills which in many instances employers identify as lacking in several workers and recruits. The structure of eh CVQ allows the individual to transfer skills across occupations health and safety requirements, communication on the job and so on. This gives the certified individual the flexibility required to be able to adapt in the job when faced with new situations and conditions. It ideally prepares one for the world of work.

A Barbadian and by extension a Caribbean workforce certified with the NVQ/CVQ is an investment in the future productivity of the Region. Each country benefits as the approach to training guarantees a trained competent individual who can compete locally regionally and internationally. Already we see the competitive advantages that qualified skilled workers and technicians have over other workers all over the world as the employers are demanding skilled workers who will impact on their productivity. That is the power of the NVQ/CVQ – the certified individual has that edge over and therefore remains employable.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding, we have seen that the quality of education and training of a country's workforce has a direct impact on the economic growth of that country. In order to compete effectively in a continually-changing environment, workers therefore need to be able to upgrade their skills. The CVQ enables workforce development through the training and certification requirements. It will create that skilled knowledge-based worker who is educated, can use the knowledge to create wealth to enhance business, a worker who is flexible, creative, problem-oriented, can work independently as well as collaboratively, and can demonstrate the competencies required of the job. It creates a life-long learner who will remain relevant regardless of changes in the economic landscape.

I therefore close with a Chinese proverb:

When planning for a year, plant corn  
When planning for a decade, plant trees  
When planning for life, train and educate people

Guanzi C. 645 BC

I congratulate the Barbados TVET Council for this historic initiative and wish you all the very best as we work together to train assess and certify for prosperity of the individual and greater productivity of the countries of the Region.

Thank you.