

METI Workshop: The Economic Impact of Higher Education in Barbados | Accra Beach Hotel and Spa | 14 May, 2015

Opening Remarks: First Steps towards a Higher Education Strategy

Delivery: Senator Harcourt Husbands, Parliamentary Secretary, METI



Chief Education Officer, Officers of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, our key stakeholders in education, ladies and gentlemen- Good morning

It is indeed a pleasure to deliver brief remarks on the behalf of the Minister at this important workshop. As you already know education has been a dominant driver in the development of the modern Barbados and the Barbadian. Some may argue that along with adult suffrage,

education has been a significant determinant of change in the Barbadian society for over the past 50 years. It provided an opportunity for self-determination to take on a fuller meaning not just in our political life but in our social and economic landscape. Education thus became that vehicle which allowed the masses to excel, to become upwardly mobile as they found a route out of poverty to realise their dreams, meet aspirations and to participate more fully in the development of our country.

The Barbados of 2014, though small in size, was categorised by the world as a middle-income economy, with a relatively high per capita income; ranking quite high on the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) human development index. It is therefore fair to say that education served us well during the post-independence period as we set about the task of building a nation.

A few years ago we marked the anniversary of the 50 years of free access to secondary education and as we prepare next year to mark a that golden anniversary of independence, it is fitting that we look at education beyond the social tool. During this time we were doing more than the delivery of pedagogy or making sure that every child was in school, we were developing the expertise in the delivery of education, an expertise in a sector with the potential to generate income for our country. In addition to universal access to primary and secondary education, Barbados has in recent years has enjoyed high enrolment levels in tertiary education.

In order, to keep fuelling the vehicle that has been the means to our social cohesion and development we must now look at developing a new pathway for higher education in Barbados. At the post-secondary/tertiary level, public institutions dominate in the provision of tertiary education. There are three government-owned institutions - the Barbados Community College, the Erdiston Teachers' Training College and the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic. The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, though it is a regional entity, receives a substantial amount of finance from the Government of Barbados through the payment of 80% of the economic costs for Barbadian students. The Ministry is mindful that there are also private institutions that contribute to the education landscape as they offer a range of courses of study at the post-secondary/tertiary level including the Barbados Institute for Management and Productivity, the American University of Barbados and the Barbados Workers' Union Labour College.

While we have just spoken of the formal education system, let us not forget the significant contribution being made by the informal sector which normally takes the form of the Adult and Continuing Education in areas related to literacy, life skills and vocational skills. Traditionally, non-governmental organisations have been the major providers of non-formal education. In addition, public and private post-secondary institutions provide opportunities for continuing education.

The Government of Barbados, being mindful of the changing global environment, thought it prudent to place an increased emphasis on the development of Barbados' greatest resource, its people. In 2010, the Government of Barbados approved the Human Resource Development Strategy that places emphasis on promoting lifelong and life-wide learning; bridging the gap between academic and technical skills; expanding the provision and quality of technical and vocational education and training; and improvement of participation in adult and continuing education. This was done as the Government continues to recognise the pivotal role that investment in education and its related services has in supporting national efforts to achieve sustainable growth and economic development. Education, it is acknowledged, does not simply provide the workforce to fuel economic development but, particularly at the tertiary level, can become a significant driver of economic growth through the sale of education services in the international market.

To reposition the provision of education in the Higher Education Sector as a piston in the engine of economic growth, the Government has embarked on an assessment of the impact of educational services in the economy. We know from the example of our own Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies that there is potential for the revenue generation through attracting international students to our shores. Interestingly, a study conducted on behalf of the Barbados Coalition of Service Industries Inc. has shown that there is great potential for Barbados to move in the direction of providing higher education services internationally.

Clearly, the contribution of education services to the economy has implications for the provision of education services to international students and the ability of the sector to generate economic activity and revenues for the Government of Barbados. It is necessary that appropriate systems and tools are established to obtain, analyse and report on key financial, human resource and other inputs from key data sources such as the Barbados Accreditation Council's database, the National Qualifications Register, the Labour Market Information System, the Education Management Information System and Smart Stream. It is vital to maintain accurate information on the number of post-secondary education providers, number of students accessing and completing courses and programmes and the financing of this level of education is pivotal to policy decision making.

The results of this study will serve to assist the Government in determining an international education initiative and to explore the economic potential of providing education services. The consultancy is to conduct a comprehensive economic assessment of the real and potential impact of education services on the economy of Barbados. Among its outputs it will be: -

- An Economic Assessment Report on the real and potential impact of education services in Barbados.
- An education sector monitoring and evaluation tool; and
A financial/education simulation model, and
- A Five-Year Strategy that sets out recommendations to guide Barbados' efforts to realise the economic potential of providing higher education services to the diaspora and international students as well as to guide Barbados' improvement in its competitiveness in the provision of higher education services.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government of Barbados is therefore seeking to better understand the return on the investment in education at various levels and to identify the economic opportunities within the sector. This workshop is seeking embrace the perspectives of key stakeholders on this new path for Higher Education in Barbados.

Ladies and gentleman, I thank you.