



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

REMARKS BY
SENATOR HAZEL MANNING

ON THE OCCASION OF THE
WORKSHOP TO FACILITATE THE DESIGN OF
A
SEAMLESS EDUCATION SYSTEM
PROJECT
FOR
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad Hilton Conference Centre
Monday August 6, 2007.
8 a.m.

Last year, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago accessed a Japanese Grant to undertake studies for developing a Seamless Education System Project.

We are assembled here today in this all-important workshop, as a team of vibrant participants on a journey to provide this country with a relevant education system for the 21st century – one that has as its hallmarks:-

- Quality and
- A seamless approach.

This workshop is a significant milestone on that journey to a quality, learner-centered, seamless education system as it brings together all stakeholders working on the project design. And so I welcome the participation of:

- ✓ Ministry of Education Heads of Divisions and Technical Teams
- ✓ The Ministry of Science Technology and Tertiary Education
- ✓ Consultants
- ✓ Inter-Development Bank (IDB) Task Managers
- ✓ Inter-Ministerial Seamless Education System Advisory Oversight Team

At present, the Ministry of Education is working in collaboration with the IDB on the design of a Seamless Education System for Trinidad and Tobago.

This design is to be presented to the Board of the Bank for approval for a Project Loan by the end of this year.

Today's workshop is therefore most timely as it facilitates:-

- The sharing of information among the teams
- The crystallisation of ideas
- The jelling of structures for the project design culminating in a logical framework analysis, which then sets the stage for Project Design submission to the Inter-Development Bank as a

valid project to be jointly funded by the IDB and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in its National Strategic Development Plan - Vision 2020, places much emphasis on education for developing citizens capable of sustaining the development thrust.

The Ministry of Education has been given the mandate to provide young citizens with the opportunity to become innovative, caring, entrepreneurial, civic-minded and responsible persons who will appreciate the benefits of preserving our democratic way of life.

When we began this journey in January 2002, the implementation of the White Paper to 2003 was far from complete. Today, 99% of that Action Plan has been implemented, the major elements of which have resulted in significant changes to our educational landscape and laid the foundation for a seamless education system. Some of the key changes are in the following areas:-

- The Early Childhood Sector is now a formal part of the education system. This change is unprecedented in our history and in the region. The formalisation of the early childhood sector is supported by the following:-
 - A comprehensive White Paper on ECCE policies with standards and curriculum guides developed in collaboration with all stakeholders of the sector
 - Architect and User Briefs have been done for the construction and operations of 600 ECCE Centres due to be completed by 2010
 - 300 sites for the construction of new ECCE Centres have been identified so far. and six (6) new ECCE Centres have been opened this year, with some thirty-three (33) others at different stages of construction. On Friday of this week, we will formally open another of the ECCE Centres at La Puerta, Diego Martin.
 - In addition, an intensive programme of ECCE teacher training and development is in progress and the administrative unit for the sector has been expanded.

- At the primary level, much effort is being put into the development of strategies to improve reading and a reading policy is in the embryonic stage.
 - A key support for a seamless education system is assessment. Already in place is a system of continuous assessment and national testing. This process has begun to yield valuable data at the primary level allowing us to support students and their schools where most needed
 - This has already begun to increase equity in the system as we are seeing improvements in performance such as fewer students scoring 30% and less at the 11 plus examination.
 - These efforts are soon to be strengthened by the establishment of an Assessment and Examinations Authority
- At the Secondary level, there have been several major shifts. A major change is the shift from a centralised system to a decentralised system of governance marked by school-based management.
- School Based Management is supported by an expanded system of Heads and Deans, Student Councils and Local School Boards, which have been established in all government secondary schools, stimulating the interaction between schools and civil society.
- The system of School Boards is now being developed for the Primary and Early Childhood levels as part of the overall restructuring and decentralisation of the education system.

We have changed our approach to teacher training and professional development at **all levels** of the system through the transference of our teacher training institutions to the new University of Trinidad and Tobago, thereby setting the stage for all teachers in future to be tertiary level trained.

- Another important change in place is the new curriculum which has been modernised and includes among the compulsory core subjects:-
 - The visual and performing arts
 - Technology education and

- Physical education for all students.

We have completed curricula for Forms I-III of the Secondary Level and are now working on Forms IV-V. The curriculum at the secondary level now also provides for students to obtain Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ's) in Technical Vocational Education and Training and this is being aligned to requirements at the tertiary level.

New modalities for curriculum delivery using ICT solutions are increasingly becoming the norm and a Curriculum Council has been established.

To support these curriculum changes, the physical infrastructure of schools is being redesigned and upgraded. For the period January 2002 to December 2006, we spent \$613.2m in infrastructure works at some 70 new educational institutions, including 22 Secondary Schools, 30 Primary, and 18 Early Childhood Centres. We have spent over \$300 million on the upgrading and renovation of school stock through 1,000 projects.

Our ultimate goal now must be Quality, with universal access achieved by 2000; our concern now, is for other levels of access that ensure quality schooling for all.

We have a target 'Quality Education for All' by 2015 as outlined in our EFA Action Plan, which sets standards, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for all aspects of the education system, giving us for the first time the structures required for effective reporting on the performance of the education system.

To further strengthen the Quality initiative, we have developed two green papers on the issue of quality in the education system and standards for the operation of all schools. Regional consultations on these green papers concluded last year and feedback has been incorporated so that the national consultation for their conversion to White Papers will be held shortly

We believe that the quality initiative should be all-embracing and so we now have in place a new system of performance appraisal for teachers and administrative staff designed to bring about greater accountability and quality management in the education system.

Ladies and gentlemen these changes together with the changes being made by our sister Ministry responsible for tertiary level education have certainly given us possibilities for and opportunities to create the foundation of a seamless system from Early Childhood Care and Education through Primary and Secondary schooling to the Tertiary level.

We do so acutely aware of two perspectives that are propelling the seamless approach in education today.

The first is an economic reality of an increasingly open global economy, which rests on the platform of:-

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Technology
- Productivity and
- Competitiveness.

This global economy poses a formidable challenge for national and individual growth and individual well-being and we recognise that the economic prosperity and social well-being of our Nation and individual citizens, hinge on our people being:-

- Well educated
- Well rounded
- Highly skilled
- Flexible
- Innovative and
- Productive.

The second perspective is the social reality that is equally important.

The involvement of civil society is vital, through the participation of families and communities, to support the transmission of morals and social values such as:-

- Respect for all people
- Equity

- Social justice
- Gender equity
- Social responsibility and
- Participation of everyone, including the challenged, in the economic and social development of the country.

However, if the education system is to withstand the pathological aspects of the social environment, a strong robust link with communities and civil society must be built as an integral part of the rationale for a Seamless Education System.

As mentioned earlier we have attempted to address both the economic and social realities through the changes we have already made in our educational system. There is still much work to be done on both sides of existing seams that mark the traditional pathways.

We believe that the self esteem of our students will improve as they experience the new pathways and opportunities for a range of transitions, especially from the secondary to tertiary and lifelong learning, which a Seamless Education System affords.

A seamless education system offers the potential to expand educational and career opportunities for all citizens while at the same time addressing human resource issues.

Of specific interest to The Ministry of Education is the opening up of a range of careers in the education sector to meet the needs of the new education system. To this end, we are developing a comprehensive scholarship programme for capacity building in this new seamless sector

In addition to creating an expanded human resource base there is need to address the requirements emerging from continuous economic and technological change.

We are therefore building institutional capacity with the use of ICT solutions to build flexibility in the education system so that it may more readily respond to our future economic prosperity and social well-being.

In this context, therefore, we contemplate a seamless education system rooted in the principles of:

1. Diversity – i.e., recognising:-

- (a) The diverse ways in which students learn; their various aptitudes, abilities and interests; and
- (b) The importance of inclusiveness to also accommodate the diversity in our beliefs and approaches to life.

It is also rooted in the principles of...

2. Collaboration and Co-operation which a seamless education system requires from all major stakeholders: –

- Parents & families,
- Educational institutions
- Schools at all levels and in all sectors
- Government ministries
- Business
- Industry
- Labour
- Communities and other work-places

Ladies and gentlemen, you no doubt recognise that the changes made so far constitute some of the significant building blocks of the Seamless Education System. For example:

- ✓ Articulation of curriculum and assessment between or among the different levels and programmes of the system. This has begun with in the areas of Reading/Literacy and Numeracy skills as well as Science and Technology Education and Innovation supported by appropriate Instructional Materials and resources.
- ✓ Continuous assessment and remediation programmes have been introduced throughout the system. Assessment procedures include:-
 - National Tests at Standards I and III
 - The National Certificate in Secondary Education (NCSE) at Form 3
 - Progress in Reading and Literary Skills (PIRLS) and
 - Progress in Student Achievement (PISA).

With new methods of assessment, issues of accreditation, equivalencies of certification and learning and alignment throughout the system arise. We must therefore ensure that every student leaves school with some form of achievement record that allows reconnection with the system later in life in a seamless manner through a clear mechanism for appraising these records.

We have also developed standards and indicators for each level of the system, as we move towards the establishment of a Quality Assurance Unit with the help of UNESCO.

We are strengthening the involvement of civil society through regular interface, dialogue and networking with partners, key stakeholders, other government ministries, Community Based Organisations's and Non-Governmental Organisations's as well as community involvement on school boards as civil society has a major role to play in a seamless education system. A key building block of a seamless education system is Teacher Education. We have placed an emphasis on:-

- Upgrading the level of teacher education to the tertiary level for all sectors of the Education System
- Pre-service Teacher Education
- Continuous professional development and
- Institutional Strengthening. More than a dozen new units have been created and many of the existing ones expanded and strengthened.

We believe that we are well on the way to a high quality education system. A system that is marked by excellence and which will therefore reflect:

- ✓ High standards of teaching resulting in high performance by students both by national and international standards
- ✓ A research driven organisation with a strong research and evaluation thrust that allows us to be relevant and respond to the needs and directions of learners, the economy and the society
- ✓ An education system that highlights equity in the provision of access and opportunity for all to participate, to learn and to excel.

Given our recognition of:-

- The need for a Seamless Education System and
- The elements of such a Seamless Education System which are in place as a result of the reform initiatives of the past 4 years,

The Ministry of Education is committed to enshrine these changes in a new legislative frame work. We have therefore captured this basic frame work in a draft document – The National Model for Education in Trinidad and Tobago, which has been approved by Cabinet for widespread consultation which begins shortly.

Ladies and gentlemen all the changes mentioned are important cogs in the wheel of Seamless Education. To further advance the process, we have procured the services of the following institutions to undertake studies with the assistance of the IDB. They are:-

- I. The Education Development Centre of the United States of America for consultancy services in **ECCE**
- II. THE Miske Witt & Associates for consultancy services in the area of **Inclusive Education**
- III. The Simon Fraser University of Canada for **Teacher Development** Studies as well as for **Curriculum Development**, Testing and Spanish as a First Foreign Language, and
- IV. The Hifab International of Sweden for **School Mapping and the Rationalization of Resources**.
- V. These studies are intended to further guide the design and development of our Seamless Education System Project.

As this workshop therefore looks to the future its output will inform the design of the Project will be submitted to the IDB for consideration for a loan to implement a Seamless Education System Project jointly funded by the IDB and the Government. I urge you to see your contribution over the next three days as building on all the changes we have already made in our education system, many of which you know at first hand. I look forward to the project design that will shape the Seamless Project Initiative. May it be such that it brings new hope, new promise, and new aspirations to our education system, our society and our lives.

2007-08-06