



Remarks
To be delivered by
Mr. Moonilal Lalchan
President,
Trinidad and Tobago Chamber
of Industry and Commerce

**YOUTH AT RISK CONFERENCE
V.I.P. LUNCHEON**

**“DECREASING PRODUCTIVITY AT SCHOOL
AND ITS EFFECTS ON BUSINESS ACTIVITY”**

**TO BE DELIVERED ON:
MONDAY 17 JUNE, 2013
CAPITAL PLAZA
12:45PM – 12:55PM**

**Dr. Sandra Celestine - Principal
Investigator and Head of UWI at Risk
Youth Project**

**Dr Derek Chadee – Head of Behavioural
Sciences Department at UWI**

**Dr. Shelton Jefferson – Co-investigator,
Trinidad & Tobago Youth at Risk Project**

Mr. Keith Renaud - Master of Ceremonies

Fellow presenters, Guests, Members of the Media

All other protocols observed

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to address you here today on behalf of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, on a topic that is of utmost concern to the business community: that is – Decreasing Productivity at Schools and its Effect on Business Activity.

I will speak on this situation from two perspectives: the first being the effect on the labour market, and the second, the cost to business, particularly in terms of protection from rogue elements in the society.

Every year approximately 17,000 students write the Secondary entrance assessment (SEA) Examinations. This does not mean that 17,000 are successful at gaining full

certificates at the CXC level. Less than half of these students go on to the CAPE or Advanced Level, and approximately two thirds of these go on to tertiary education. This translates into a potential labour market that does not fully meet the requirements of existing businesses. The problem is further compounded by the choice and combination of subjects accessible to students - for example while in more academically successful schools, students are streamed according to interest

and potential, in many of the Government Secondary Schools, the combination selected often resembles a “*hodge podge*” of subject areas thrown together simply because the student has to write a minimum of six subjects.

It is the Chamber’s understanding that this “hodge podge” approach presents a challenge to business because there may be no clear indication of the student’s ability based on the subjects being written. There

may also be no correlation between the choice of career path and the subjects being pursued at school. Just imagine, even at this stage of development, where an apprenticeship is being offered at the age of 17 or 18, there are fundamental challenges because there are many individuals who are not being prepared adequately for life outside of the school environment!

This is a challenge that we at the Chamber often face in our own Jumpstart

Programme. This programme is spearheaded by our NOVA Committee and aims at facilitating opportunities for the development and exposure of our youth. For our programme, our Committee chooses those students who would not usually have the opportunity for internship and professional training, and helps develop them holistically through educational orientation sessions and mentoring. The spin-off effect, we hope, would be the development of young people leaving

school and entering the workplace with a more positive self-image and greater self-confidence. Also of importance is the students' ability to see for themselves the job opportunities that exist and possibly pursue those jobs that align with their own academic interests.

Now in its 16th year, we have had the experience of seeing for ourselves how sometimes our school system in its current form, often misses the opportunity to truly

develop the potential and minds of our young people.

Over the course of the training component of the Jumpstart programme, we get a sense of what the students would like to do and accomplish with their lives. We also get a sense of the frustrations that come with attitude not always matching aptitude. What do we, as business people, do when faced with such individuals?

This is where the challenge really begins. Productivity at school begins with discipline. This relates to punctuality, dress code, behavior patterns and performance. So many times you hear stories from human resource officers who have encountered poorly attired, ill prepared individuals who present themselves for interviews. Clearly, they will not make the first cut, so who knows what becomes of many of them.

This is where the term “At Risk Youth” comes into play. This is something we at the Chamber have been very familiar with over the years. As I mentioned, our Jumpstart Programme has given us the opportunity to come into contact with those students who would not readily have training and employment opportunities once they left the school system. Students have continued to be selected from several of the schools where traditionally there is a reputation of misbehavior and even violence, hence the

majority of our Jumpstart students are those who would be placed in the “At Risk” category.

As business leaders we have listened to the feedback from school officials who have stated that the situation I described earlier with “At Risk” students will only get worse, and that we should prepare accordingly. Our response has been, and will continue to be, that the Chamber will assist those

youths who face the greatest difficulty because of their circumstances.

At the beginning of this address, I stated that the second perspective would be the cost to business as protection measures had to be put in place to counter theft and robbery.

Doing business in our present environment now requires a percentage of one's budget

to be allocated to the installation of CCTV Cameras, armed or unarmed security personnel, cash in transit protection, and in some industries providing transportation to shift workers who are on duty at night.

In some instances, such as in the retail trade, the additional costs cannot be transferred to the customer, as the end price would be unfeasible to the purchaser. But, as business owners, we remain responsible for the protection of our employees, our

customers and ourselves, as no one is immune to crime, so these additional costs have become mandatory versus optional.

Recent shootings of security guards by young perpetrators has only added to the perception that there is a significant percentage of young people who have no interest in leading productive lives..

The unfortunate trend seems to be more young people willing to drop out of the school system as the perception of an easier life through nefarious means beckons. We are in danger of losing an entire generation who are instrumental in helping to build and develop our private sector, as a result of criminal activity infiltrating the school system. If this is the population from which we will find our future employees, then we are in more trouble than we thought. So we see the

costs to the business sector due to more youths at risk not just hurt our bottom line, but also have a wider cost to the achievement of wider national goals to diversify and develop our economy.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that the business community thinks that the only measure at its disposal is to arm itself; many companies do acknowledge the power that corporate social responsibility plays in creating a

more positive, enabling environment where young people would have more opportunities and importantly recognize that there are better choices available if they are willing to do the work that is necessary.

Across the country one will find community based projects which are funded and/or assisted by corporate entities. Some of these are home work centers, Government training sessions and social programmes. This is all in an effort to catch some who

may have fallen through the cracks and have been left behind.

There is still much work to be done, and it must be a collective effort involving the public and private sectors, non- government and community based organizations.

Those of us who comprise the business sector will do our part in providing employment and meaningful opportunities.

In fact, the Chamber has committed ourselves to assist in building bridges to help build Trinidad and Tobago, and we will continue to do this through partnering with various stakeholders and continuing to encourage our Membership and wider private sector community to be a part of the efforts to save our youth. Whether through mentoring programmes, offering internships or an “adopt-a-school” initiative, there are many, many ways that the business sector can be involved. However, we cannot be the

only ones being asked to provide the solutions to the challenges identified by the speakers before me.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion I wish to congratulate the University of the West Indies on the work being done through this project and to assure you that the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce will continue to lend its support in any way that we can.

**Thank you and do enjoy the rest of the
Conference.**