Summary of working paper entitled:

Reforming education and skills training systems:
Responding to the demands for increased employability and productivity of labour in the Caribbean

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Education and training — Is it in line with employment demand?

The numerous changes taking place both globally and regionally demand a differently educated and trained workforce. The new, highly competitive global economy depends critically on knowledge, learning and innovation; and regionally, the development strategies being enunciated by Caribbean countries for the 21st century will require different skill sets. These development strategies represent a radical shift from primary agriculture and assembly-type industries, which generated a demand for low-value, low-skilled jobs. The ‘new’ strategies are based largely on the development of service sector niches in areas such as tourism, personal care, information and communication technologies, shipping and transport. Given this shift, the challenge is to educate and train workers to assume highly-skilled jobs in high-value niche markets. The key question is: are our education and training systems in line with this new demand?

At present, all CARICOM Member States are in the process of reforming their educational systems, addressing issues of access, equity, quality and relevance in relation to changing demands. However, while the region has accepted the desirability of universal secondary education, it has not yet ‘adopted the appropriate ideology nor implemented the technology to create workforce transformation through education and training.’ The Caribbean secondary education syllabus appears to focus on the requirements for matriculation in higher education rather than on employability of graduates and productivity.

The inadequacy of existing education and training systems has resulted in a situation whereby many students exit the school system and enter the workforce without general secondary school qualifications and few have national vocational qualifications (NVQs). But even among those who have managed to reach Sixth-Form level, a large proportion leave school without any work-related qualifications and do not believe they have competencies to seek employment. (See Box 1 below). Most students, however, would welcome opportunities to obtain occupational training, if it were available.

TVET, CANTA and the CSME

As far back as 1990, CARICOM Governments recognized the need to train and certify their national workforce to global standards and signed a CARICOM Technical and Vocational
Education and Training (TVET) Strategy in support of this. The Strategy provided *inter alia* for the establishment of National Training Agencies (NTAs), which many countries in the region have since set up (See Box 2). Thirteen years later, CARICOM established the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) as the implementing arm of the Regional Co-ordinating Mechanism for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (RCMVET).

CANTA has established a regional certification system -- the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs) -- to accredit a standard and uniform delivery of competency-based TVET and certification within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). It is based on approved occupational standards for over 120 occupations from entry level 1 to professional level 5, as follows:

- Level 1 - Directly Supervised Worker
- Level 2 - Supervised Skilled Worker
- Level 3 - Skilled Independent Worker
- Level 4 - Specialist Worker (Supervisor)
- Level 5 – Managerial/Professional Worker

The regional certification framework provides a basis for standardized curriculum development, assessment, accreditation and certification throughout the Caribbean. More generally, it provides the framework for the free movement of skilled, certified workers within the CSME.

Member Agencies of CANTA have been vigorously promoting career guidance, counselling and NVQs in the senior years of secondary school to complement the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) qualification. These initiatives serve to enhance the employability and productivity of certified school leavers.

In view of the establishment of the CVQs and regional occupational standards, workers are now aware of the need for certification. However, many are handicapped by their low levels of educational attainment and consequent inability to benefit from higher level, more technology-intensive training. This is one area that will need to be addressed regionally.

Despite national and regional initiatives to promote TVET, however, traditional education communities are still reluctant to embrace the new paradigm ‘*education makes you trainable and training makes you employable.*’ The dichotomy between academic and vocational education still exists and many view these as appropriate for different groups of students. To a large extent, TVET is still treated as ‘remedial activity for the educationally challenged,’ with its role fluctuating between Ministries of Education and Labour.

By 2008, the CVQs will become the new ‘visa’ for the free movement of skilled persons across the region. Any reform of education and training systems, therefore, will have to take into account the urgent need to promote TVET and the CVQs.
Box 2: National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NTVET) in the Caribbean*

Co-ordination of NTVET Programs
Several countries have set up National Training Agencies (NTAs) to co-ordinate and regulate TVET programs with the aim of producing skilled, certified workers to meet the needs of their labour markets. Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have set up NTAs. Others, such as St. Lucia, are also in the process of establishing these agencies.

Demand Analyses/ Targeting of Specific Labour Groups
In general, countries structure TVET programmes according to their specific labour market needs. Some rely on comprehensive demand analyses that take into account changes in employment patterns, results of tracer studies, sectoral training needs assessments, and results of sectoral consultations.

The demand analyses allow countries to target specific labour groups for training. For example, Jamaica targets the unemployed and untrained as a priority; emphasizes certification in child care; and is engaged in upgrading construction skills to service the tourism sector. It also expects to reduce a traditional female bias in its enrolment. Guyana, on the other hand, focuses on training for artisans while Trinidad and Tobago places emphasis on the training of workers to meet a growing demand for personnel to service the construction and tourism sectors.

Quality Assurance Strategies
Many Caribbean countries have established specific institutions and systems to assure the quality of TVET programmes. Trinidad and Tobago recently set up an Accreditation Council for this purpose. Barbados intends to adopt a formal and explicit quality assurance strategy in its TVET Council. This strategy will involve five elements:

- formal approval of NVQs
- formal approval of Centres
- assessment by local assessors subject to internal verification
- external verification of assessment; and
- formal audit of the system to monitor its effectiveness.

Harmonization of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) with the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs)

There are some differences between NVQs and the CVQs in a few countries. However, most have expressed their willingness to work towards harmonizing and adopting the CVQs. St. Lucia, where TVET is “in transition,” expects to move directly towards implementing the CVQs and may not even establish a NVQ.

Recommendations: Reforming education and skills training systems

In order to meet future employment demand, Caribbean countries will have to reform their education and training systems. Four sets of recommendations are put forward in this regard, each of which is briefly discussed.
(a) **Align education with development strategies, employment and productivity**

In 1997, CARICOM Heads of Government endorsed the profile of an “Ideal Citizen Worker” for the 21st century. Such a worker is expected *inter alia* to demonstrate multiple literacies, including critical thinking; be capable of seizing economic opportunities globally; and be able to contribute to the health and welfare of the community and country. Creation of the Ideal Citizen Worker will require education systems to engage all three domains of learning - cognitive, psychomotor and affective – where teacher education is geared to the production of competent learning facilitators. It would also be necessary to develop scientifically system-wide communities of teaching and learning practice.

(b) **Prepare students for the transition to productive employment**

Full career guidance programmes should be introduced in three phases throughout the school system as follows:

- Career awareness: this first phase (during the last year of primary education) should expose children to different types of jobs and their importance.
- Career exploration: this second phase (during the first three years of secondary education) should allow children to research different careers and understand their own aptitude, talents and interests.
- Career preparation: this final phase (in the last two years of secondary education) should allow students to acquire their chosen occupational training and certification (TVET) as a complement to their general secondary education.

(c) **Transform skill sets to high-skill, high-value ones**

The promise of the CSME - full freedom of movement for skilled persons in 2008 - is motivating workers, both young and old, to become trained and certified. Member States will therefore need to plan for an increased demand for training, both in the formal and informal economy. Specific suggestions are for:

- more open access to learning via implementation of the high school equivalency education programme for adults in the workforce;
- full support to NTAs as they employ the CARICOM-approved qualifications framework and occupational standards as a basis for assessing workers; and
- prior learning assessment as a means of recognizing competencies of workers and identifying those which they need to acquire to qualify for certification.

(d) **Expand access to secondary education and lifelong learning**

Regional education authorities should promote secondary education as basic education for a 21st century Caribbean. A curriculum-driven (rather than syllabus-driven) teaching/learning system should be adopted, particularly since this would be in line with a more open approach to access learning and one that embraces a wider community.