I bring you greetings from the Secretary-General and staff of the Caribbean Community Secretariat and wish to acknowledge the continuing collaboration between the ILO and the Caribbean Community Secretariat in trying to establish and sustain a viable agenda for labour in the context of regional and international development. In fact the Directorate of Human and Social Development under which regional labour issues fall will be hosting its Fifteenth Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development in another two weeks. The theme of this COHSOD is “Investing in Human Development with special reference to education and labour”. As usual, the Council will be dependent on the ILO delegation to provide leadership and guidance on the global initiatives in labour and their implications for CARICOM. We therefore anticipate that the deliberations and the recommendations resulting from this Conference will inform the discussions and decisions of COHSOD XV.

In addressing the issues, I will cast my views essentially on the challenges and opportunities for labour in the Caribbean in response to the imperatives of globalization and regional integration; in responding to the main economic and social objectives arising from globalization and regionalism; and its engagement in people-centred development.

Globalization and Regionalism

Responding to the economic and social challenges, especially at this time of globalization and change, require labour working with other sectors to pay attention to the creation of an environment that is simultaneously conducive to growth, full and productive employment and decent work. In this regard, the ILO Background document for this Conference highlights the employment imperatives as:

- bringing more job seekers into employment and rising income levels for existing workers;
- upgrading conditions of work and social security and ensuring the application of rights at work;
- bringing the unemployed, whether first-time job seekers or displaced workers or discouraged workers into satisfactory jobs;
- assisting intra-regional migration and exploiting the opportunities offered in the CSME;
- preparing for increased harmonization in the social and employment fields.

The extent to which these employment objectives can be realized is dependent on how well positioned the labour sector is to meaningfully respond to the challenges of globalization and to take advantage of the available opportunities.

There is no need to recount the benefits of the CSME to a viable collective response to globalization. [This was so clearly spelled out in the keynote address by Prime Minister Arthur earlier].

Individual Caribbean countries have been able to achieve some degree of competitiveness in the service sector, notably tourism; off shore financial services; and in specific areas of manufacturing. However, many of the traditional products, especially sugar and bananas, have relied on preferential access to markets in Europe, the USA and Canada, facilitated by various trade and cooperative agreements such as ACP-EU Cotonou, the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), the Caribbean Economic Recovery Act (CBERA) and the Caribbean/Canada Trade Agreement (CARIBCAN). More recently with the conclusion of the Uruguay Round Agreements on the TRIMS, TRIPS and GATS and the ongoing negotiations within WTO, Caribbean countries are under pressure to abandon their traditional preferential arrangements and compete in the global market on the basis of reciprocal international agreements.
Denis Benn, one of the region’s experts in the politics of global trade and development is of the view that “while the Caribbean will need to continue to defend, for the time being, the principle of special and differential treatment (SDT) in the various negotiations taking place within the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement which is intended to lead to a Regional Economic Partnership Agreement in the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) and in the WTO itself, it is clear that measures will have to be put in place to diversify the production structure of the economies of the Region away from its historical reliance on traditional primary commodity exports while at the same time seeking to ensure increased productivity and competitiveness in some of the existing and new areas of economic activity which demonstrates the promise for growth and expansion” [Benn 2005 p37].

More recently, a CARICOM Forum held in Barbados in June 2006, reinforced the need for an accelerated approach toward the adoption of a strategy on production integration based on complementarity of factors of production as envisaged in Article 52 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramus. It was argued, as it has been in the past, that with significant resources, including petroleum, natural gas, bauxite/aluminum, agriculture and forestry, gold, diamond and tourism infrastructure, integrated development is a primary route toward maximizing the opportunities within the CSME to generate higher levels of productivity, thereby increasing competitiveness in the global economy.

There was however a novel notion of creating growth triangles within the CSME introduced by Denis Benn and modeled after the India-Malaysia-Singapore (IMS) triangle. The idea postulates Trinidad and Tobago with its petroleum/natural gas resources and financial surpluses as being "pivot" or "growth zone catalyst" for the elaboration of a strategy of integrated development in the Caribbean. In this context, two triangles have been identified with Trinidad as the axis with firstly, the more natural resource endowed countries, namely, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica and, secondly, the service-oriented countries of Barbados and the OECS. The proposed scheme is extended to the notion of CARICOM establishing market niches in emerging economic powers such as China and India and cooperation agreements with MERCUSUR utilizing the bridge provided by Guyana and Suriname and with SIECA through the bridge provided by Belize.

Such are the opportunities of globalization for CARICOM. What role does labour play in this global economy?

**Balancing Economic and Social Objectives**

At the top of the agenda of Macro economic policies are:

- Employment objectives and targets in keeping with ILO priorities;
- Enterprise development especially the promotion of small and medium enterprises;
- Training to build up productive investment and enhancing skills competitiveness;
- Special programmes that prepare the youth for the world of work and remove the obstacles - especially for women - to their attainment of jobs;
- Harmonization of labour legislation within the CSME;
- The implementation of the social dialogue process.

To successfully implement these policies in the logic of a globalized economy means adopting an integrated approach to development. And in today’s world, with rapid technological change and shifting patterns of specialization, a quickened pace of human resource development is necessary. The Futures Policy Group established by the Council for Human and Social Development to elaborate a strategy in this area has so far identified core, complementary and cross-cutting elements of human and social development and the need to document best practices with special reference to the construction of a knowledge-based economy.

The Caribbean Trade and Adjustment Group (CTAG) identified a number of strategic areas for promoting human resource development. These required firms utilizing labour to make vital inputs into the production process with emphasis on the enhancement of productivity. This includes...
strengthening the management process and worker capability and utilizing new and more efficient technology and organizational arrangements to increase operational efficiency. Many firms in the region have already embarked on these strategies through training schemes for both management and workers. Yet, the information available to CTAG shows that many countries in the Caribbean have experienced declining levels of productivity since 1990.

The UWI Mona Academic Conference on Education (2004) called for 30 percent of tertiary enrollment by 2015. The reasoning is that this is the minimum level required if the region is to be able to sustain productivity in a knowledge-based economy and compete in the Global arena for skills. Current enrollment stands at 15 percent compared with Latin America at 25 percent and in East Asia where the rate is as high as 60 percent.

The Mona Conference (2004) while recognizing the role of off-shore tertiary institutions in providing increased opportunities for the population of the Region, called for policies to regularize the proliferation of these institutions and the harmonization of their programmes with those of the indigenous tertiary institutions.

Migration of skills is yet another drain of resources that has received attention recently with a report on Migration and Development to the CARICOM Conference of Heads of Government, July 2006. Of particular concern is the drain of skilled workers, especially teachers, nurses and other medical professionals. COHSOD IX in 2002 called for a policy of managed migration but this is easier said than done. A Task Force on Migration and Development recommended by the Conference of Heads of Government (2006) is expected to further examine the relevant issues and report back to COHSOD within a year.

On the flip side is the proposal that besides benefiting from remittances from the Caribbean Diaspora, the Region could draw on their skills with special arrangement schemes such as the UNDP sponsored Transfer of knowledge and Technology through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) which provides funding to support nationals who wish to return and contribute their skills pro bono.

Yet another issue revolves around the liberalization of educational services which was brought to the attention of COHSOD (2004) and subsequently to Heads of Government in 2005. A number of Caribbean countries have submitted offers under the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS). The offers reflect widely differing terms by respective countries and fail to stipulate the levels of educational requirements which are designed to protect publicly funded educational institutions like UWI. Consequently, a CARICOM Task Force has been established and has advised that CARICOM states need to enter a reservation and qualification with respect to their offers and should seek to present a common position on the matter.

It is reasonable to say that the developments within Caribbean Community provide for both upgrading and harmonization of the skills training programmes that provide a useful basis for guaranteeing labour competitiveness. The challenge is to increase the number of persons trained at the tertiary level and to retain the required skills for driving the Region’s integrated development agenda.

**Focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

As already noted, one of the main pillars of the CSME is the free movement of skilled persons throughout the region. The issues of skill development through Technical and Vocational Education and Training and the portability of qualifications have assumed renewed importance in positioning the region for competitive participation in the New Economy. In order to achieve this, there must be a common system and understanding of quality assurance issues at all levels of Education and Training, including TVET.
Major Challenges for the TVET System

Among the major challenges for TVET are:

- Need to provide potential and existing workforce participants with opportunities to acquire skills appropriate for the modern workplace and to adjust to changes in technology and structural changes;
- The establishment of a coherent and flexible system of competency-based qualifications in order to promote high standards of achievement throughout the TVET system;
- Achieving increases in the number of persons pursuing vocational education and training as a career;
- Teacher Education for TVET;
- The alignment of training with emerging opportunities in the regional labour market;
- Improving progression routes for vocational education and training in further education and in higher education;
- Ensuring parity of standing between vocational and academic routes, dual purpose qualifications;
- Promoting transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of skills and qualifications;
- The creation of frameworks which facilitate lifelong learning and continuous re-tooling of the workforce.

Thrust of TVET Reform

One of the major thrusts of TVET Reform in the region has been the re-orientation of systems to the demand driven, competency-based approach based on occupational standards derived in collaboration with industry. The standards developed are then incorporated into Vocational Qualifications, and inform the programmes of learning which deliver the standards. Assessment processes are used to match the performance of individuals to the standards. The main drivers of such a system are therefore competencies and standards relevant to employment.

Development and Adoption of Occupational Standards

The basis of harmonization of the systems for training and certification is the adoption of occupational standards at the regional level. Agreement has been reached among the Training Agencies and other TVET coordinating bodies in the region with regard to systems for the derivation of occupational standards. Several standards developed by the Training Agencies in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados have been adopted by COHSOD as regional standards. The Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) is expected to play a critical role in advancing the accreditation of technical and vocational training. The obvious advantage of this system is that agreements can be reached among Training agencies with regard to the set of standards that each will develop and so avoid duplication of effort. In addition, other member states which do not as yet have the capacity to develop their own standards from first principles are free to use the regional standards for training and certification.
People-Centred Development

The ILO Director-General Juan Samavia at the IMF World Bank Meeting in Singapore is September, put the issue of people-centred development in context when he said that one major imbalance confronting the world was “the imbalance between economic growth and the opportunity for decent work. The agenda for Decent Work encompasses the integration of the rights at work, employment promotion, social development and social dialogue. While a series of regulations have been established to encompass decent work, its effective operationalization depends on mutual respect between the relevant stakeholders and tacit agreements on the principles of inclusiveness in decisions about people’s rights to decent work. In this regard, special attention has to be given to Gender and employment and in particular the reduction of high unemployment rates among women, an increasing number of whom are among the increasing female-headed households; the high rates of unemployment among the youth; and putting in place programmes to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination in the workplace. In addition, occupational health; social protection and social security; and special schemes to support small- and medium-sized enterprises must be among the priorities in the development equation of decent work. Each of these elements has received attention in the background paper so I wish to highlight and elaborate on only two dimensions of people-centred development.

- Charter of Civil Society

The Caribbean Community in mid-1990s, after widespread consultation, developed a Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community which was approved by the Conference of Heads of Government in 1997. The Charter includes a framework for people-centred development which is no doubt an international best practice. It includes proposals for involving youth, women and local communities in the governance of the Community. Subsequently, in 2002, Heads of Government, responding to one of the proposals, held dialogue with Civil Society on the theme Forward Together in Guyana, July 2002. Since that time, a Council on Civil Society has been proposed and COHSOD XV will discuss the strategies for taking this initiative forward. The Region’s Labour organizations, in particular the CLC, are expected to play a critical role in structuring this Council and paving the way for it to play a critical role in the regional governance process.

- CARICOM Youth Ambassadors’ Programme

More recently, the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Programme has developed a Strategic plan for Youth Development which places emphasis on proposals for the reduction of youth unemployment and for youth empowerment. Heads of Government in receiving the Report on youth has recommended the establishment of a Commission on Youth Development to identify specific action required to improve the well-being of the region’s youth.

Conclusion

The Global configuration demands new responses in the economic arrangements of states with implications for Labour. The CSME provides the scope for the members of the Caribbean Community to minimize the challenges and maximize the opportunities. In addition to the present developments focusing on the free movement of goods, services and people within the CSM and the preparation being made for the eventual operation of the CSME, attention is being given to implementing a more in-depth level of regionalism through production integration.

An even bolder step is being suggested for deepening the integration arrangements through the mechanism of economic triangles. These responses to Globalization will mean that the patterns of labour organization will change. Emphasis will have to be placed on:

- Creating a work force more capable of functioning in a knowledge-based environment;
- Increasing the number of persons trained at the tertiary level;
- Enhancing and standardizing technical and vocational education and commitment to life-long learning processes;
• Establishing a skills register and the labour Management Information system;
• Dealing with the issue of managed migration and the retention of skilled labour;
• Making provision for social protection and in this regard pay attention to regional social and regional health insurance schemes to facilitate the retention of worker benefits in the CSME;
• Ensuring that the accreditation and standardization mechanisms are in place to guarantee that the practice of good governance in decisions about the allocation of jobs;
• Involving labour in the decision making arrangements of the Community, beyond the social dialogue;
• Identifying the Trade Union Movement as the focal point for shaping the perceptions of the workers and their understanding of the benefits of the CSME
• Applying the international commitments to decent work.

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