



MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN THE DECENT WORK AGENDA
AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

MAY 3, 2019

The Decent Work Agenda and Government's Policy

The adoption of the Decent Work Agenda is at the forefront of Government's strategic path. Evidently outlined in its **National Development Strategy: Vision 2030, Theme I – Putting People First**: Nurturing our Greatest Asset and **Theme IV - Building Globally Competitive Business**, but it can also be applied across the other Themes as it also encapsulates employment creation, reduction of youth unemployment, promotion of safety and health at work, as well as the abolition of forced labour and child labour.

Government's Official Policy Framework has also identified job creation, social justice and tripartism as critical areas of focus for restoring sustainable growth, diversity and confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

The work of the **Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (MLSED)** is key to the achievement of these objectives, which have been enshrined in its Strategic Plan 2017-2020. Creating decent work opportunities, and strengthening the industrial climate is part of the core mandate of the Ministry, in that our **Vision** currently reads "*Decent Work. Industrial Peace. Opportunity for all*"

What is Decent Work?

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO),

“ Decent work is defined as productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work in the sense that all should have access to income earning opportunities. It marks the high road to economic and social development, a road in which employment, income and social protection can be achieved without compromising workers’ rights and sound standards.”

Four (4) Pillars of the Decent Work Agenda

The Decent Work Agenda is based on four (4) pillars:

1. Guaranteeing **rights** at work (labour standards, etc.);
2. Creating opportunities to secure decent **employment**;
3. Enhancing social **protection**; and
4. Promoting tripartism and social **dialogue**.

Pillar 1 - Rights

- People need representation
 - They need opportunities to participate
 - They must be able to voice their views
 - They must be able to have their rights in the workplace respected
 - International Labour Standards and national legislation
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Pillar 2 – Employment

- The principal route out of poverty is work
 - Work must provide a fair income
 - Sustainable enterprises help to create/maintain jobs
 - Training and skills development for employment
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Pillar 3 – Protection

- Work and workplaces must be safe
- Social safety nets include:
 - Unemployment benefits and back-to-work schemes
 - Health insurance
 - Retirement security – pension schemes
 - Old age benefits

Pillar 4 - Dialogue

- Social Dialogue among governments, workers' and employers' organizations can:
 - Resolve important economic and social issues
 - Encourage good governance
 - Advance industrial and social peace and stability
 - Boost economic progress and productivity

The Future of Work

The “Future of Work Initiative”

The Director-General of the ILO, Mr. Guy Ryder, addressed the “Future of Work Initiative” in his Report to the 104th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2015. The Initiative is structured around four centenary conversations namely:

- work and society;
- decent work for all;
- the organisation of work and production; and
- the governance of work.

The Future of Work Initiative - Work and Society

The purpose of work has always been to meet basic human needs, and meeting these needs is dependent on ongoing economic growth. There is a call therefore to focus on the relationship between work and society, particularly where growing segregation and inequality at work could lead to divided and unjust societies.

The Future of Work Initiative – Decent Work for All

The issue of future global employment and the importance of targeted policies that respond to the needs of vulnerable groups who are disadvantaged in labour markets, such as young people, women and the disabled, is of significance.

The Future of Work Initiative – the Organisation of Work and Production

Attention is given to small and medium-sized enterprises which are continuously evolving with changes in society, allowing for the creation of new jobs. The globalised economy experiences rapid and profound changes under the impetus of technological transformations, increased competitiveness and is conditioned by an evolving policy agenda. What will the enterprise look like in the future and how it will operate?

The Future of Work Initiative – the Governance of Work

The governance of work speaks to those norms and institutions that are responsible for the regulation of work. That includes, but is not limited to, International Labour Conventions, institutional and legal frameworks and inspection systems. As the world of work continues to evolve and modes of employment and work itself are transformed, what frameworks and labour codes should we be anticipating in Trinidad and Tobago?

Role of Government

Some Thoughts...

Globally, the portfolios of ministries of labour are changing dramatically. Traditional issues as minimum wages, employment particularly youth employment, workers' rights and retirement benefits remain and still require our attention, however, we find ourselves changing to suit contemporary times, as well.

Areas such as self-employment and the gig economy, the green and blue economy, migration, climate change, environmental sustainability and responses to natural disasters are challenging the traditional boundaries of labour administration. In addition, technological forces such as the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence have without a doubt already added more colours to the landscape.

These nonetheless form new opportunities for labour and small enterprise development and for the way in which the Government serves the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Some Thoughts...

These changes are forcing ministries of labour to re-examine their roles in developing policy and establishing new and multipartite alliances. In this regard, the MLSED will be faced with the following questions:

How can we ensure decent working conditions as our employment relationships and environments change?

How will technology change the workplace culture?

What new (types of) regulations will the government need to develop?

Are there any international labour standards / legislation we should be considering for the future that we are not at present?

The Role of the Government

- The Government, now and in the future, not only has the responsibility for setting national policy and amending legislation, but it is required to organise spaces within which consultation with our tripartite partners can safely take place;
- Our priorities in establishing these platforms of key relationships originate out of the need to be engaged in a multipartite approach to preserving and enhancing the enabling environment to provide the widest range of opportunities to all our citizens;
- Overall, establishing multipartite synergies is required in order to develop a more holistic approach for the future of work- parties must build confidence and trust between and among each other;
- Approaching a Decent Future of Work will also mean addressing cultural as well as human rights issues – the protection of those vulnerable groups i.e. migrants, women, persons with disabilities, must be pursued.

Initiatives of MLSED – Guaranteeing Rights at Work

Ratification of Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

To date, Trinidad and Tobago has ratified twenty-two (22) ILO Conventions, including the eight (8) core or fundamental Conventions which include:

- ❖ Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- ❖ Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- ❖ Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
- ❖ Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- ❖ Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- ❖ Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- ❖ Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- ❖ Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

Initiatives of MLSED – Guaranteeing Rights at Work

Reform of Labour Legislation

The MLSED has recognised twenty-two (22) pieces of legislation for review. To date stakeholder consultations have been held for review and amendments to:

- the Industrial Relations Act;
- the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act;
- the Employment Standards Bill;
- the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies Act;
- the Occupational Safety and Health Act;
- the Workmen's Compensation Act
- Trade Unions Act; and
- Foreign Labour Contracts Act

Initiatives of MLSED – Guaranteeing Rights at Work

Public Outreach

The MLSED regularly hosts sensitisation and education campaigns highlighting the services and programmes of the MLSED. Just to name a few campaigns:

- “The Chronicles of Labourville”, 2,000 posters on the Rights and Responsibilities of Workers and Employers to all Public Offices nationwide
- The launch of the National Workplace Rights and Responsibilities television campaign entitled “The Labour Ville Show”
- The Domestic Workers’ Campaign;

And many other initiatives. More on the Ministry’s work may be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/minoflabour>.

Initiatives of MLSED – Creating Decent Work

■ **The Ten Point Plan – Adversity to Opportunity Programme**

Provide assistance to unemployed persons to mitigate against the negative financial, social, physical and psychological effects of unemployment/retrenchment, and empower them towards re-integration into decent work in the shortest possible time, either through job placements or support in establishing their own businesses or Co-operatives.

■ **The National Employment Service**

Assisting thousands of job seekers in finding jobs, preparing for the world of work and improving their marketability through its one stop career resource centres located throughout Trinidad and in Tobago, the NES has also continued to assist persons in obtaining decent work opportunities through the Commonwealth Caribbean Agricultural Workers' Programme (CCSAWP) commonly referred to as the Farm Programme.

Initiatives of MLSED – Creating Decent Work

■ **The On-The-Job Training Programme**

A two (2) year training programme, where nationals of Trinidad and Tobago between the ages of 16 to 35 are afforded an induction into the world of work and thereby gain invaluable work experience that can open doors into the labour market, through quality, structured, work based training.

Initiatives of MLSED – Creating Decent Work

■ **Entrepreneurship**

MLSED is re-visioning its programmes aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship and providing support to small businesses, to ensure value for money. The National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited has undergone a restructuring exercise and has been implementing new initiatives for improving their efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Increasing its loan portfolio and capacity for training would foster entrepreneurial growth and also generate employment opportunities.

■ **Co-operative Development**

The National Policy on Co-operatives was approved by Cabinet in May 2017. The implementation of this Policy and its Action Plan, giving effect to the development of Co-operatives will play a leading role in economic diversification, social empowerment and social inclusion, employment creation and entrepreneurial development.

Initiatives of MLSED – Social Protection

■ **Occupational Safety and Health**

The OSH Agency is currently finalising its Strategic Plan which will guide the work of the Agency for the medium to long-term. The Agency is also engaged in ongoing capacity building for Inspectors and review of legislation and OSH Regulations to provide the necessary legislative support in ensuring safe and healthy workspaces.

■ **The Labour Inspectorate**

The MLSED continues to strengthen the capacity of the Labour Inspectorate to ensure compliance with labour laws especially the Minimum Wages Act, with a focus on building a preventative culture.

Initiatives of MLSED – Social Protection

■ **The Conciliation Unit**

MLSED is undergoing a restructuring of the Conciliation Unit to the **Conciliation, Advisory and Advocacy Division** with the necessary competencies to effectively advocate against and manage labour conflicts and disputes that may arise in society in general, and in particular the private sector, the state enterprises sector and in certain areas of the public sector.

Initiatives of MLSED – Social Protection

■ **National Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS**

The HIV/AIDS Workplace Advocacy Unit continues to implement the National Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS, which was launched in 2017, through on-going outreach and advocacy throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Unit has collaborated with a number of public and private entities to assist in developing internal policies within their workspaces.

■ **National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment**

On March 8 – International Women's Day – the Government launched a National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment. The MLSED is currently finalising an implementation plan for the National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment to be submitted for the consideration of Cabinet. This Policy looks at educating the public on, as well as instituting measures for the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Initiatives of MLSED – Promoting Tripartite Dialogue

■ **Social Dialogue**

Government has established the National Tripartite Advisory Council, that comprises representatives of the tripartite partners (government, employers and workers). This Council, Chaired by the Honourable Minister of Planning and Development, encourages dialogue among the partners and is consulted on all matters of national development, inclusive of governance, social protection, competitiveness, socio-economic progress and productivity.

Initiatives of MLSED

■ **Commemoration of ILO Centenary**

The MLSED has established a Committee, comprising of its tripartite partners, to develop and implement activities to commemorate the International Labour Organisation's (ILOs) Centenary Celebrations. The Committee has made recommendations to the Honourable Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, who will approach Cabinet shortly with a proposal for consideration.

THANK YOU!

