

AGRICULTURAL RENEWAL

by

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Here are success stories. Bangladesh, once extremely dependent on food imports, has transformed its devastated agricultural sector into one of the most productive farm economies in all of South Asia". [Economic Perspectives](#)

Monday, Nov. 10/2003 - The concept 'sunrise industry' has a glamorous ring about it as well as a meaningful connotation in the context of innovative solutions to replace the 'sunset industries'. These sunset industries include commodity sugar and fresh bananas which are the victims of the removal of long standing trade preferences in the global market place. Other industries have succumbed or are likely to succumb to the competitiveness challenge created by the changing environment stimulated by trade liberalisation. The immediate response, motivated by the need to change the economic mix, wherever CBET has presented this sunrise concept, is very gratifying.

Two weeks ago in Trinidad was no exception. I made two presentations. One was to the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT) at the Sugar Cane Feed Centre (SCFC) at Longdenville, Central Trinidad, where my topic was 'CBET as an innovative strategy for sustainable development - an agricultural perspective'. The other was to the South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce where my topic was 'Agriculture - Dead or Alive?' Whereas the ASTT occasion coincided with their regular monthly meeting and attracted over 50 persons, the attendance at the Chamber meeting was more modest. On both occasions, however, I was kept on my feet for an hour and a half presenting and fielding questions in the discussion period.

The ASTT meeting attracted a wide range of its membership, whereas the attendance at the South Chamber meeting included a very enquiring media presence as well as Mr Floyd Neckles, CEO of the SCFC, who arranged my visit to T&T, Dr. Dax Driver, CEO of the South Chamber, our host at the meeting, as well as representatives of the Agricultural Development Bank and the Venture Capital Incentive Programme. Most of these persons journeyed to San Fernando from Port of Spain and Arima.

The ASTT members were obviously very concerned that there was apparently no interest in the agricultural sector as a sunshine industry in T&T even though there was significant justification for its restructuring and renewal for reasons of food security, utilisation of natural resources, exploitation of exotic export markets, net foreign exchange earnings and employment. The ripple effect from the decision by Caroni Ltd. to distribute sugar cane lands is expected to have a major impact on the economy in Central Trinidad. This situation may be currently described as chaotic if only

because it is shrouded in uncertainty as far as the process to be adopted is concerned. As was pointed out, the harvesting of the next crop is nearly upon us and there is no clear path enunciated as to the way forward. This is currently a very 'hot' debating topic in the twin island republic.

Dr. Driver thought that the title of my topic was very interesting because it could have two interpretations. On the one hand 'Dead or Alive' with a question mark, which was my intention. My focus was on exploding the myth that agriculture was dead hence the promotion of a sunrise industry. On the other hand he thought that if we replaced the question mark by a full stop that this could be interpreted that we needed agriculture whether it was dead or alive. Presumably if we determine that it is dead, then there would have to be a 'resurrection' and if it were alive we would have to nurture it to optimal health.

In both presentations CBET promoted its seven drivers as necessary and sufficient for business success and showed how the social partners in Barbados had adopted the CBET approach in the context of Agriculture - a sunrise industry. Barbados, through an initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture, both in the WI Sea Island Cotton and the Sugar Cane industries, had convened strategic visioning retreats for the stakeholders in each sub-sector and had garnered rich information from the process which was fed into the business plan development process. The element of initial 'buy-in' from the stakeholders was also an important part of the process.

Business Plans for the cotton and sugar cane industries have been accepted by the stakeholders and the cotton project has now obtained the endorsement of the Cabinet of Barbados and the green light has been given for implementation. The sugar cane project is not far behind in the Cabinet endorsement process.

CBET has been engaged to coordinate the implementation of the cotton project and has already convened a meeting of interested initial investors. The response to an invitation to provide seed capital support at pre-incorporation and initial implementation phases was extremely positive. Later this week we expect to herald another phase of success in the CBET process, that is, the initial financial commitment from potential private sector investors. CBET will then facilitate the preparation of a prospectus, promotion of the cotton project, incorporation of the company and management in the initial stages of implementation.

The feedback in Trinidad would suggest that my mission, to introduce CBET as an innovative approach for revival of their agricultural sector, was successful.

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[Back to Agriculture & Environs](#)

