



**Graduation Ceremony for YTEPP Vocational Skills Programme
for NGC-supported PYCs**

Remarks by Lisa Burkett | NGC Manager, Corporate Communications

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Good morning.

It is my singular honour to share some words today on behalf of NGC as we bring to a close, a very significant initiative with our partners in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and The Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, YTEPP. In capitalist societies, the law of supply and demand is what drives markets and makes people money. Very simply, if a good or a service is in high demand, but supply is limited, then the price of that good or service goes up. If a business can offer products that people need or want but cannot easily find elsewhere, then that business is bound to succeed.

The job market operates on the same principle. Skillsets that are in high demand will fetch high prices. Over the past few decades, the job market in Trinidad and Tobago has evolved. Today, the numbers entering the workforce are increasing, people are retiring at an older age, more persons are working multiple jobs. It is therefore tougher for young people to find employment. For many, the solution lies in entrepreneurship and self-made businesses – creating your own opportunities. That is where this programme comes in.

This initiative is founded on the premise that there are gaps in the job market, where demand is high, but supply is low. If our young people can find and fill those gaps, they stand to profit tremendously. Today, many students are graduating from tertiary-level institutions with degrees in a variety of fields, but fewer persons are training to become barbers, dressmakers, mechanics, carpenters, masons, plumbers. We need engineers and doctors, yes, but we also need good hairdressers and electricians; we need good barbers and tailors; we need good mechanics.

The difference is that people qualified for white-collar jobs are in high supply and must compete for limited vacancies, while the market is wide open for people with technical training. I would challenge anyone: Ask a homeowner how much it costs to wire a house, and the answer might stun you. Go to any beauty salon or barber shop and ask the price of a haircut, and the answer might stun you. Why are prices so high? Because these are services that every household in the country needs to access, and the number of **trained** professionals offering these services is still relatively low.

As a result, persons with skills and certification in such trades could launch and lead highly successful businesses. We at NGC recognised the tremendous value to be extracted from investment in vocational training for young people, which is why we spearheaded this initiative with the Police Youth Clubs and YTEPP to offer opportunities for self-employment and independence. We sat down with YTEPP and our supported PYCs - Couva, La Brea, Laventille Road, Penal and Mayaro - and we came up with this special programme of vocational training in hair braiding and weaving, barbering, electrical installation and introductory electronics.

We believe these courses can enrich the lives of the young people in the PYC communities, and ultimately redound to the benefit of our country. How so? In recent times, energy sector revenues have contracted. Now more than ever, the country needs to look at alternative industries to drive economic activity. By helping to outfit our young people with skills aligned to niches in the job market, we are playing a part in the process of diversification. Making these vocational programmes available will encourage more people to take up other professions or convert existing skillsets into income-generating assets.

Today, as we graduate the first batch of Club participants to sit the programme, I am truly happy to know that you are now better placed to become successful entrepreneurs in your communities and, with time, to contribute to society.

I want to sincerely thank the YTEPP administrators as well as our partners at the respective PYCs for delivering the programme, and for the roles they play in shaping the future of our nation through

our youth. To our young graduands, the message I want to drive home is this: Whether you choose to pursue a career in teaching, accounts, medicine or law, or you have a dream of opening your own business with the skills you have, the formula for success remains the same – you need hard work, discipline and a positive attitude.

For entrepreneurs, it is also necessary to think outside the box and be different, offer something new. The training you received in this programme is just a first step, but it opens many possibilities for future employment. Take what you can from this experience and make your best life.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.