

OPENING THE DOORS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Remarks by CXC Registrar & CEO Dr. Didacus Jules at the launch of the USAID-CXC
2nd Chance Education programme

For several decades, the Caribbean has received funding from donor and other sources for the provision of training in remedial education, skills development, adult and continuing education. This training has been directed at persons at risk, school dropouts, teenage mothers, and persons in a variety of circumstances of disadvantage. The persistent deficiency of several of these programs was that although they provided useful knowledge and skills, their certification was not widely recognized and did not enjoy any wide currency.

In our early discussions with USAID we pointed out that a partnership of the type that we are launching today would help to change this situation by providing access to a suite of certification from a body that was internationally recognized and regionally accepted.

The program that we are launching today is a win-win proposition for all stakeholders. It provides CXC with an opportunity to tweak and improve foundational certification that will open the door to continuing education and self development for many who by virtue of disadvantage would otherwise have not had such opportunity. It provides the means by which we can reach out to employers and educational institutions to utilize a more sophisticated application of different levels and modes of certification in satisfying their labour market needs. For USAID, it provides the assurance that the certification associated with

the training that they support in that demographic will be portable and its currency will facilitate a seamless process of self development and improvement. For second chance institutions, the program will assist in strengthening standards of delivery and help to dispel the myth that second chance learning is second class education.

The programme will target 15,000 youth and focus on the provision of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs) and the Caribbean Certificate of Secondary Level Competence (CCSLC) in Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago.

This programme is much more than an educational program. To provide a second chance is to provide an opportunity to change your life. It is chance to reshape your future and circumstance – it was Nelson Mandela who reminded us that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. To provide a second chance at education is to restore hope and possibility; it is to create the capacity to overcome the odds, and dream of a different way of being and doing.

There are many institutions in our Caribbean that have persistently struggled to keep hope alive and affirm the redemptive potential of those who have been marginalized and ostracised. Second chance institutions have – in the face of great limitations – provided that slender lifeline by which many broken dreams have been reassembled and today we must express our optimism in their

response to this initiative. The national and regional SCIs with whom we have interacted in the explorations leading to the program design have been excited at the pathways that CXC's involvement will provide. Access to the CVQs and to the CCSLC will provide a solid foundation of competencies to enable young people to move from wherever they are to wherever they dream to go.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those persons in CXC and in USAID who understood the necessity of this intervention and worked so hard for its realization. Particular thanks to Mansfield Backwood and James Grogan of USAID and to Miranda Sealy and Michelle Stephens of CXC.

In this 21st Century no society can succeed if it leaves behind a significant proportion of its population. Social regeneration is only possible if the most disadvantaged can find the road that leads beyond the grinding circumstance of poverty and disadvantage. National competitiveness is no longer assured not by the accomplishments of an exemplary few but by the extraordinary odds overcome by the disadvantaged other. Our jails can only hold so many young people but there will never be a capacity to contain the anger and the frustration of a youthful population that has lost hope of a better and different tomorrow. And this is what this programme is ultimately about. It is time to shatter the barriers of complacency and create the educational architecture that allows them to take the chance and change their lives.