

**Mainstreaming Beauty, Skincare,
Wellness and Décor Products:
AGRIMSES Road to Exports**

Remarks from the
CARICOM PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANIZATION
Dr. Patrick Antoine, CEO and Technical Director

SALUTATIONs,

It is a great pleasure to be here today, and to bring greetings on behalf of the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO).

Certainly, for me and for the Executive Committee of the CPSO, we are pleased to be collaborating with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Republic Bank and CARIRI, and with you, the MSMEs, gathered here today. You are the movers and shakers and the doers of economic activity, growth and dynamism in all our Caribbean countries.

I am not getting into statistics this morning, but I never want you to forget the fact that more than 60% to 75% of all firms in CARICOM are micro and small. That is where the dynamism and the strength of the economy comes from, and you are at the centre of it.

Today's forum provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine the potentials, and, of course, unlock opportunities in the beauty, wellness, and skincare space as a means of diversifying economic development across our Community.

Most of the exciting developments- mergers, acquisitions, and partnerships that we are seeing globally have begun in places like this with people like you, and I never want you to forget that.

In Africa, the United States, Canada, and South America, this is a dynamic period for firms like yours that are getting together, both within their countries, within their geographic space, and across continents, and building the scale they require to penetrate markets. For us in the CPSO, this is one of the reasons we are so excited by this. We think that if we were to continue in the way that IICA is pointing and in the way that you, yourselves, with your innovations, have started some time ago, it is going to lead to something particularly dynamic for the Region.

There is another reason I am interested in this as a CPSO representative. We see in CARICOM that there has been a decline in traditional agriculture in many countries. Look at the numbers, it will shock you. As this agricultural production comes down, it forces us to recognize that there is a need for us to eke out more value from the products that we produce.

We have been at the lower rung of the production and value chain for a long time, but what you are demonstrating here today is the fact that you are recognizing fresh opportunities to push the envelope. And that's the second reason why I am so enthused this morning to be speaking with you.

We have to position ourselves so that we are able to hedge against the troughs and the peaks that essentially tend to depend only on our agriculture feedstock.

One of the things that we are doing at CPSO is recognizing the importance of working with you to create value where the intrinsic value of the intellectual property (IP) of the interesting qualities in your product is not going to depend on where the raw materials came from, alone, but it will also depend on all of those noble things that you have put together, such as excellent formulas and excellent quality.

I want to, therefore, focus the discussions that you are going to have, certainly with Diana and others, on how we actually talk about integrating various aspects of the value chain. I think that it is very appropriate to talk about value chain integration- not just one component, but how we pull the pieces together.

As you will hear over the course of today, the global beauty and wellness market has experienced tremendous growth over the last several years, and unfortunately, in CARICOM, in many of the countries where we had successful firms, many of them are, in fact, constrained by scale and by not reaching out quickly enough to build out this integrated value chain. So, even some of the successful ventures that we have, we now need to recognize where there are opportunities for growth that they themselves have not tapped into and learned from, because the space is growing, and

the numbers tell us that in CARICOM, we are consuming more of these products.

Why is this important? When the CPSO was formed, the Heads of Government gave us a mandate to reduce agricultural food imports by 25% by 2025. And though there are many naysayers and people looking on, in truth, the rebound has not happened as quickly as we want, that is because there are so many things to face, going back to my point on integrated value chains.

We have discontinuities, we have missing pieces all along that chain, and this is why I think what you are doing with Republic Bank, and what CARIRI is doing in pulling those pieces together is going to be really important for us in building out these integrated value chains.

I hear the excellent things that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is doing; and I want to say that in addition to the Government of Jamaica, this government is doing extremely well in helping put the architecture in place. I think we now need to have the Government reach out into providing some other types of services, so that, for instance, the excellent technicians and the excellent testing, that institutions such as those CARIRI has can be made more affordable, not just for Trinidad and Tobago entrepreneurs, but for entrepreneurs across the Community.

Indeed, it is still the case that many of the countries still send their products to Canada and the US, and increasingly to India for testing. Here

is an excellent opportunity again, let us build out the integrated value chain.

So, overall, what we have noticed is a heightening demand for skincare oils, wellness teas, artisanal decor items. But we are also seeing, at the same time, more and more micro and small enterprise firms in other regions stepping up and they are starting through mom-and-pop operations and pop-up shops. They are participating at an artisanal level first, but they are growing very quickly, building into and taking advantage of these growing trends that we see in a dynamic market.

So, what we are engaged in today is not what we call a Sunset industry. You are engaged in an industry that is most definitely Sunrise, but the Sun is becoming brighter and brighter. It is time for this natural progression for us in the Caribbean.

We enjoy a unique advantage that links, if you wish, at a simplistic level, our natural resources with sustainable ingredients for beauty and wellness. Some of these ingredients, such as, for instance, aloe vera, or in the case of Grenada, the Country which has birthed me, nutmeg, cocoa, moringa and others- many of these ingredients are now being used increasingly in formulations across the sectors that we are engaged in. It is for that reason that we are really happy to be joining the University of the West Indies with our dear Dr. Michael Forde who is not just here by accident, but he has a passion for natural ingredients.

There is another reason why there are excellent opportunities in this space. We often do not recognize our advantages, but Trinidad and Tobago, given the multicultural mix that you have here, is an excellent testing ground for us to introduce and innovate products to solve all types of different skincare issues that our population faces. And so, linking that to the global market, if you are able to develop, with the integrated value chain, successful products here will be invaluable. Customers who look like some of us in other countries will find acceptance for them.

I will go very quickly to talk about the importance of branding and product differentiation, because we want to move away from just the issue of linking it to the agricultural products that we produce. Of course, it will be remiss of me not to say that this is where market intelligence becomes more important. And this is where I want to highlight that the CPSO works on data, statistics, and analysis. If you need any of that, the CPSO has built out a capacity; because market intelligence is going to be absolutely critical.

And so, colleagues, I want to go very quickly to say that the collaboration with IICA is not by chance. We do have a Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture, and we say that this activity, and working with so many of you on something that matters, gives us in the private sector joy. We also

want to recognize the membership of Republic Bank as a founding member and supporter of the CARICOM Private Sector Organization. And it gives us great joy that when we put on the list to Prime Ministers that financing was a challenge, that Republic Bank, for the first time in this Region, started to chore, innovate and create products that are particularly suited to our own realities in CARICOM

On behalf of the CPSO, I want to say that we are joined in this collective effort this morning, and we, as CPSO, must be considered part of the ecosystem.

I want you to be assured that this private sector Organization is yours- it is micro, small, medium, and large- and this Organization, that is yours, is committed to your successful endeavours. We wish you good success in the forum and look forward to spending the day with you.

Thank you for listening.