

■ Govt committed to...

Breaking barriers for women entrepreneurs

GOVERNMENT says it is committed to dismantling barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing economic opportunities and is continuing to advance inclusive programmes to enhance the competitiveness of women entrepreneurs at all levels of the economy.

This was the message from Minister of Trade and Industry Paula Gopee-Scoon as she spoke at the SheTrades International Women's Day Seminar and Trade Show, held at the National Racquet Sports Centre in Tacarigua, on Saturday.

The SheTrades Hub in Trinidad and Tobago is a collaboration between the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Ministry of Trade.

The global SheTrades Initiative was launched by the International Trade Centre in 2015 to connect, empower, and elevate women entrepreneurs by addressing the constraints they encounter in accessing economic opportunities, the ministry said in a media release.

In 2020, Trinidad and Tobago was the first Caribbean country to join the SheTrades movement. To date, more than 700 members have registered on the platform, it stated.

Gopee-Scoon underscored the crucial role of women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy sector, emphasising their contributions to innovation, diversification, and economic growth, the release stated.

She acknowledged some of the key challenges women entrepreneurs face such as limited access to finance, market entry barriers, and systemic gender biases and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to breaking down these barriers through initiatives like SheTrades.

The ministry said some of the achievements of the SheTrades Hub since its launch in Trinidad and Tobago include: ● Training of 20 female graduates from the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited's (NEDCO) Business Accelerator Programme in export readiness. ● Sponsorship for 55 women to participate in the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) in July 2024.

● Support for 29 women entrepreneurs at the Trinidad and Tobago Agri Expo 2024.

● Multiple webinars conducted by the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency to introduce women entrepreneurs to ITC's research tools.

Gopee-Scoon also pointed to several Government-backed initiatives that continue to support women-led businesses, including the Scale Up Trinidad and Tobago business accelerator programme, the ministry's Grant Fund Facility, which to date has benefited over 13 women-led businesses; and the Export Booster Initiative which has provided funding for more than 35 women-led businesses, the release stated.

Gopee-Scoon acknowledged the contribution of women entrepreneurs.

'I encourage you to continue to demonstrate leadership as you shape your future. Take the leap to create and build your distinctive products and services,' she told them. 'Strengthen your networks and work together, as collaboration is key. It is important to invest in yourself and elevate and expand your knowledge, optimizing the use of information and communication technology including artificial intelligence.'

Executive director of the International Trade Centre, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, also spoke at the event.

'Today, 45% of Trinidadian women are in the labour force, and for every eight women entrepreneurs, there

are ten men entrepreneurs,' she said. 'We're clearly not at a level playing field yet, but we're getting closer.'

Coke-Hamilton said it was a moral and economic imperative to ramp up efforts for women's economic empowerment and gender equality, the release stated.