

Opening address by Nikhil Treebhohun, Commonwealth Secretariat, at the Pan Commonwealth Conference on ITES, Four Points, Ebene Cyber city, 20 April 2010

A warm welcome to all of you who have made it to this second pan commonwealth conference on services trade. Indeed, the “butterfly effect” has not spared us! The Icelandic volcano has managed to disrupt -slightly – our conference. Some participants from the Caribbean and some staff of the World Bank and the Commonwealth cannot be with us. Others are joining us later in the day. I know that a resource person from Mauritius is stranded in Paris! Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, we will have to make adjustments to our programme – especially the timing of some presentations.

With these preliminary remarks, let me now thank the RMCE, for accepting to be our co-host. Thanks are also due to the World Bank Institute, especially Mr. Gianni Zanini, who has devoted a lot of time and energy to round up the relevant experts from the World Bank for this conference, the WTO and UNCTAD. The COMESA secretariat, in particular Mr. Marc Kwai Pun, must also be thanked for their collaboration in bringing speakers and some participants.

The Services sector, even excluding tourism, has been growing rapidly in the last decade. The key questions are well summed up in a book entitled The Service Revolution:

“The growth experience of India and other South Asian countries suggests that a Service Revolution—rapid income growth, job creation, gender equality, and poverty reduction led by services—is now possible. What is Service Revolution? Can service be as dynamic as manufacturing? Can latecomers to development take advantage of the globalization of service? Can service be a driver of sustained growth, job creation, and poverty reduction? What kind of policies and institutions do developing countries need to benefit from a service-led growth? “

This conference will not attempt to answer these questions; but it aims, more modestly, at providing participants with an insight in the dynamics of services development , in particular the IT enabled services sector. It gives an opportunity to listen to experts on the issue; it offers a platform for the exchange of experience, for benchmarking, and for networking. For some of you it may mark the beginning of a journey, for others it may give some pointers that may assist them to move more quickly and confidently on the road to service-led growth.

Why did we choose this topic? During the last six years the Commonwealth Secretariat has received requests from some 14 countries for assistance to develop their services sector. We found that the level of awareness about the sector varied from one country to another, especially among policymakers who have been dealing with commodities and manufacturing. It is true that services are embedded in both these sectors; but they have usually been treated as ancillary activities. So, our first pan commonwealth conference held in Malaysia in 2008 was meant to raise awareness about the potential of services to stimulate growth, to situate trade in services in the context of GATS and the talks going on in the Doha Round. The positive feedback obtained from the conference and from our country interventions motivated the holding of this second conference. However, it was felt that this conference had to address a specific sector where many of our member countries may develop a competitive advantage.

And Mauritius was chosen as the venue when the newly established RMCE approached us to partner with them. Since Mauritius had already embarked on the ICT road a long time back, we felt it would be appropriate to hold the conference in the Cyber city itself so that participants could obtain a firsthand account of what should be done and what should be avoided. This is why we have a session devoted to Mauritius and we have included site visits where you will have the opportunity to interact with those who are already exporting ITES. Here I must thank Mr. Mooneegan , President of OTAM, for having facilitated

this component of the programme. And you will also note that there are some video conferences planned. These were not included because of the chaotic travel situation. We believed it would be appropriate in a conference on ITES to use the technology to tap the expertise available worldwide. We can only hope the technology does not let us down!

We have tried to prepare a programme which touches on the key issues which make up the enabling environment, namely the policies, the regulatory framework, the infrastructure as well as the human capital. But we do not wish this conference to be a one-way traffic. You will have the chance to share your experience and to learn from others. We want to hear from you what you consider to be the major challenges you are facing at country and at regional level. The breakout sessions on the last day are intended for more in-depth discussions of these questions.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to share with you a message that the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Kamalesh Sharma, has sent for the conference:

Message from Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary General, Commonwealth Secretariat

“The Information and Communication Technology revolution is one of the defining developments of our time. The internet has transformed not just the way we go about our day to day activities, but also the way business is done. Businesses and non-profit organisations are constantly looking for ways to improve efficiency and achieve their goals more effectively through the use of ICT.

The Commonwealth is no different in this regard. Our family of 54 nations comprises some of the trailblazers in the ICT revolution. But, we believe that many of our Member States could play a more active role in the development, use, and trade in ICT related services. Here are just a selection of the ways in which we are utilising ICT in our work.

First, at the corporate level, the Commonwealth Secretariat is developing a Commonwealth Partnership Platform Portal, or ‘CP3’. Our vision is that through the CP3, members will be able to access and share the wealth of knowledge in the Commonwealth family through a single window. It will be an interactive tool where members will be able to tap into Commonwealth networks and know how.

Second, through the Commonwealth Connects programme, we are supporting a wide range of activities aimed at improving ICT capacity in the public service, education and learning, as well as promoting local access and connectivity.

Third, we are supporting Member countries to increase their exports in both goods and services through the provision of technical advice as well as fora - such as this conference - to share knowledge and experience in this rapidly changing area.

It is my hope that this conference will inspire you to develop and implement ICT strategies to enable your organisations and businesses not only take advantage of the exciting opportunities ICT offers but also to share your success with the rest of the world. ”

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.