

Delegation Led by Commerce Minister Attends American Competitiveness Exchange (ACE) on Innovation and Entrepreneurship

On Saturday April 9th, Minister for Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs, Honorable Emma Hippolyte led a delegation of Senior Officials to the Fifth American Competitiveness Exchange (ACE) on Innovation and Entrepreneurship to Arizona and California. The Delegation included Mrs. Fiona Hinkson, Executive Director of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) Technical Secretariat and Mrs. Barbara Innocent- Charles, Director of the Small Business Development Centre (SBDC).



Saint Lucian Delegation at Ace Exchange Led by Hon. Emma Hippolyte

ACE which is organized by the US Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA) and Economic Development Administration (EDA) in collaboration with the Organization for American States (OAS) and the US Department of State is currently in its fifth year. The annual event which is included in the Inter-American Competitiveness Network (RIAC) Work Plan for 2016-2018 facilitates collaboration on the more than 200 successful experiences that OAS Member States shared in the 2012-2015 Signs of Competitiveness Americas Reports. This year, fifty-one (51) high-level representatives from twenty-four (24) countries around the world including Ministers, key decision makers, Presidents of Competiveness' Council and key public and private sector officials are among the delegates in attendance.

Speaking on this exchange, Hon. Emma Hippolyte stated: *“This was a very important tour. It has been particularly interesting to see how innovation can be used to solve the everyday problems and then translated into economic activities. This was a truly rewarding as we have been able to share experiences and lessons learnt with our colleagues, from the OECS and North and South America as well as those in the global community. I am looking forward to explore the opportunities that will allow us to capitalize on the knowledge and insight gained during the tour. I am very excited about innovation, particularly where our young entrepreneurs are concerned, as this presents a myriad of opportunities for them.”*

“Arizona and California could not be a better place to see innovation and entrepreneurship in action,” says Saint Lucia's SBDC Director, Barbara Innocent-Charles. *“Entrepreneurs,”* she continues *“are vital to the nation's growth, but the challenges they face often impact on their competitiveness. Creating an entrepreneurial development ecosystem where they can thrive is therefore a priority. The 5th ACE presents a unique opportunity for the Caribbean Small Business Development Centre (SBDC) participating countries to form partnerships with other SBDCs and agencies around the globe which will be critical to business development and the promotion of a culture of innovative thinking”.*

Mrs. Fiona Hinkson, Executive Director of the NCPC who was also in attendance stressed on the importance of dialogue and partnerships in the journey towards a more productive and competitive Saint Lucia: *“The Americas Competitiveness Exchange (ACE) on Innovation and Entrepreneurship is one of the premier important global forums on competitiveness. As a small island nation, competing in an increasingly globalized environment, exchanges like the ACE are of critical importance. Part of our work at the NCPC is to identify issues related to competitiveness and productivity in St. Lucia as well as to provide recommendations to policy makers, the private sector and other stakeholders. While this visit allowed us to explore global and regional partnerships and economic development opportunities, what is even more critical is that we had a first-hand look at global best practices. In order for us to make improvements, dialogue is essential. The lessons learned from our regional and international counterparts will offer some great insight on what may work in a Saint Lucian context.”*

Together with the other global senior officials, the Saint Lucian delegation toured advanced technology centers, innovation hubs, public-private partnership ventures, and strategic investments in Arizona and California. This exchange was particularly timely in light of the work being done on a national level by the Government of Saint Lucia through the Ministry of Commerce, Small Business Development Centre, the

National Competitiveness and Productivity Council in the improvement of the business environment and enhancement of competitiveness. Some of these initiatives include the establishment of the Commercial Division of the High Court, development of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Policy Framework and the ongoing work to improve business relations through the Ease of Doing Business Task Force.

About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit www.stlucianpc.org; www.facebook.com/stlucianpc, call 468-55718/5576 or send an e-mail to stlucianpc@gmail.com