

Distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Feliz dia, Good morning,

It is with great pleasure that I, on behalf of the minister of economic development, Mr. Kenneth Gijssbertha, welcome you to this conference.

This conference will be concluded with the signing of a MOU regarding the Establishment of the Platform for Social Entrepreneurs in Curaçao.

Our journey towards that moment will consist of the contribution of amongst others:

1. dr. Ulla Engelmann; our keynote speaker for today
2. Mrs. Taiana Mora-Ramis and
3. Mr. Maikel Walker and
4. Mrs. Regonda Bierens;

They will present us the international context of social economy and social entrepreneurs.

Of course next to my colleague, Mr. Hensley Koeiman, the Minister of Social Development, Labor and Welfare, Mr. Hensley Koeiman our program will also consist of presentations of our own local social entrepreneurs:

5. mr. Boudinho de Jong;

6. mr. Andrew Kirchner;

7. mrs. Kristy Niessen;

8. mr. Alton Paas;

9. mrs. Sabine Berendse

My gratitude goes to the speakers today for adding maximum value to this conference.

Also I would like to congratulate the European Commission and the Ministry of Economic Development with this unique event on social entrepreneurship as part of the National Export Awareness Week.

I must also congratulate Curacao with the status as official EUROPEAN SOCIAL ECONOMY REGION (ESER) - partner for 2019.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our way of living on Curacao has always been characterized by our willingness to help out our relatives, to help out our neighbors and to help out our friends.

And it is on that basis that many of us engage in the economy.

We all know the a carpenter, an electrician, a plumber, a mechanic that conduct their activities, not primarily to make profit, but to help others out of trouble and to give vulnerable youngsters a job and the opportunity to develop their skills.

These are examples of entrepreneurs, who by definition are innovative, highly-motivated and critical thinkers aiming at making social impact.

It is their drive to solve social problems that makes us to consider them 'social entrepreneur'.

We have been noticing this trend throughout history with an accelerating tendency the past 5 years.

Social entrepreneurs are driven by **people and values, not primarily by making profit!**

Social enterprises are community driven and in Curacao with the government gradually playing a facilitating role. In this regard the Social-Economic market (BETH) is held on a monthly basis and is an incentive to create employment.

It is a low-threshold platform where social start ups can offer their product or service and where we also get the opportunity to offer them training and courses to grow. Another example of the facilitating and encouraging role of the Government is the 'innovation- social entrepreneurship award'.

These social entrepreneurs are to date self- declared social enterprises in Curacao.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The ministry of Economic Development embarked last year on the implementation of the “Entrepreneurship and Small and medium-sized enterprises Policy for Curaçao”.

This policy also takes into account the passionate entrepreneurs with an impact driven mission and willing to grow their businesses.

A recent survey conducted by MEO among social entrepreneurs on Curacao, shows that:

- 85% is addressing social exclusion
- 77% is creating employment opportunities and
- 62% is supporting vulnerable people
- 59% is protecting the environment

- 50% is supporting other social enterprises

Moreover:

- 77% is trading goods and services while

- 42% is currently involved in export.

These are very interesting figures!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite their impact on our society on various levels, the actors in the social economy do not get the much needed support.

And that is what we are here for today: To try to generate understanding and support for our social entrepreneurs.

One of the remarkable needs of our social entrepreneurs was described in the survey as follows:

“A big challenge is that partners/funds/banks don't know about this type of business and don't support it as should be.

Understanding and support are needed for the creating/developing the social enterprises business model.”

This is not the only challenge our social entrepreneurs face.

Our social entrepreneurs are in need of:

- access to low rate investment capital
- access to juridical & fiscal services
- import & export services
- Services for marketing and product development.

Our social entrepreneurs face the same challenges social entrepreneurs in the region face.

It would be interesting to hear more about that during this conference. And I really would encourage our distinguished panel today consisting also of some finance entities, represented by Mr. Daniel Hodge, Mrs. Raiska Herrera, Mrs. Charan Bhattal to shed some light with their thoughts on social entrepreneur's development in Curaçao.

Now, Ladies and Gentlemen

The objective of this National Export Awareness Week is to strengthen our export basis.

We want the growth of our export to be driven by thriving social enterprises as well.

Our social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to Curacao's most pressing and daunting social problems.

I see in the program for today excellent examples of activities by exporting social entrepreneurs and a platform to be created by them.

I see this initiative as the making of an all- inclusive entrepreneurial export nation!

Therefore I am pleased to open this very promising conference and will leave your thoughts with the next question:

What needs to be done so social entrepreneurship can grow into another pillar of export? Which small actions with great impact should we take?

I wish you a satisfying conference!

Thank you.