

ADDRESS BY  
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AT THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF FEMALE EXECUTIVES OF TRINIDAD  
AND TOBAGO

*'ASPIRATION, ADVANCEMENT, ACHIEVEMENT  
THROUGH SERVICE'*

TTCSI CONFERENCE FACILITY  
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## Salutations

Good evening,

Firstly, I would like to thank you for inviting me here today. I must say that I was impressed by the professional manner in which the election was held and I wish the new Executive all the best as you continue in your mission to support and develop female executives in Trinidad and Tobago.

As you may remember, in 2014 AFETT honoured me with an Award for Social Entrepreneurship. This award highlighted my work at the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) in promoting social integration of persons with disabilities. You may also recall that I was unable to attend the award ceremony, and so, it would be remiss of me if I did not take this opportunity to sincerely thank AFETT for your recognition. I was deeply honoured by this. Thank you.

AFETT is an organization of professional women in many different fields. One of the things that I think you have done, and continue to do well, is to collectively work together to build and strengthen your capabilities and support each other. I think this is a prerequisite for any NGO or voluntary organization, and so I congratulate you.

AFETT has chosen as the theme for this evening's message - *Aspiration, Advancement, Achievement Through Service*. I must admit that I found it to be a very interesting and timely

topic for discussion, given the situation that our nation finds itself in. Today, I am going to focus my message on one word in that theme....Service.

What is service? Service as found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary has a number of meanings, but one of its definitions is ‘contribution to the welfare of others’. This evening however, when I speak of service, I want to go a bit deeper.

I want us to think of it in the same vein of volunteerism. Merriam-Webster defines volunteerism as ‘the **principle** or system of doing something by or relying on [voluntary](#) action’, meaning that it is ‘done or given because you **want** to and not because you are forced to’.

So when we think of service in the same vein of volunteerism, it takes it a bit further because it speaks to a **principle**, a **belief** that a person does something because they are **committed** and genuinely **want** to see a particular outcome. In the past, when someone spoke of service, that is what they meant.

Service is about how we use our skill sets to empower, mentor and improve lives by giving of self. This is the sort of service that is the life blood of any NGO. This is the sort of service that we must encourage your young people to undertake. If you can only commit one hour, then give the best service you can give in that one hour. This is the sort of service that is **integral** to the social fabric of our society and in dealing with our social ills.

Many of us here, I am sure would agree that reading the daily newspaper has become a truly distressing experience. Domestic violence, violence against children, violence against women,

violence against the aged, our economic situation, suicide pacts and many other such stories have become the norm. It is difficult to keep up with it!

Former US President Bill Clinton said: *'Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly. It does more than help people beat the odds; it changes the odds.'* I think we agree that we need to change the odds.

This is why, it is important that when we give service, we give quality service. Today, I don't know how many of you will agree with this, but I find that while many persons engage in service, the reason they engage in service is to gain something rather than to give something. However, it is important that we come together and give quality service, because when we serve our communities, we build strong communities, when we build strong communities we can build a strong society and when we build a strong society, we build a strong nation.

Knowing that my audience today is comprised of vibrant women who have bonded in their desire to provide service, I would like to share this quote from Mahatma Gandhi *'Man can never be a woman's equal in the spirit of selfless service with which nature has endowed her.'* Think about that. I am sure many of us here agree with this.

So now that I have explained what I mean when I say the word service, I would like to share a few thoughts on today's theme.

### **Aspiration through service**

An aspiration is an aim, an objective, or a dream. Many of us here have aspirations. I aspire to one day retire and write the history of NCPD (laugh). AFETT has aspirations; you aspire to be the leading network for professional women in Trinidad & Tobago. NCPD has aspirations; we aspire to be a World Class Social Enterprise promoting social inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Each one of you here are a member of AFETT and an executive in your work sphere, and you all have aspirations and our pathway to making these aspirations a reality is service. But have you ever experienced that while you are engaged in service to making one dream a reality, you start to dream and aspire to achieve other goals and objectives?

Yes ...women, always the multi-taskers, always thinking about what can be done and what should be done. And this is important because although you are an organization of professional women, you would also be looking to advance other issues that women face. Domestic violence has been very much on our radar and is something that we need to pay attention to. So although these are not current issues that you currently aspire to address, perhaps you may aspire to serve in these issues in the future.

### **Advancement through service**

I mentioned it before but I'll repeat it. When we talk here about advancement through service, we are not saying to go and serve in order to get something out of it, or to get ahead. I believe advancement through service is about us using our skill sets to better our communities.

AFETT's target audience is women - female executives and future female executives. NCPD's target audience is persons with disabilities, ages 14 and up. AFETT as an organization focusing on women's advancement doesn't mean that it does not care about the males in society. In the same way that NCPD being an organization focusing on persons with disabilities, does not mean that it does not care about persons without disabilities.

Emma Watson, UN Ambassador for Women, during her address to the UN Assembly in 2014 highlighted that fighting for women's rights has become synonymous with man-hating. For this reason, I think it is also very important to make the connection that when we serve our target audiences, AFETT is not just serving women and NCPD is not just serving persons with disabilities. We are serving those persons, their families, their communities and advancing men and women in our society.

### **Achievement through service**

Sai Baba said, and I quote *'No joy can equal the joy of serving others'*. Achievement through service, this may be the most fulfilling feeling that one can experience. We had a dream, we advanced our organisation's and society's capability. We've truly achieved our goal.

But while we were trying our best to serve, and to advance our causes and to advance those persons in our target audience, we face many struggles. Struggles for funding, struggles to find committed persons to work with, struggles to even validate the need for your organization! There will always be some sort of struggle, but do not give up.

There are many examples of women who overcame struggles. Look at Malala Yousafzai, the struggles and events she went through just trying to get an education.

The Executive here today knows how much work and time it took to get AFETT this far. Do not give up. Persevere. You will have to persevere now **more** than before. Things are going to get a bit more difficult. Trinidad and Tobago is in the grips of a recession. We have been reading about the recent job losses. Companies and individuals are trying to reduce their expenditure. We saw the impact of this during carnival when a number of big events were cancelled.

During these difficult times, financially constrained NGOs have an even greater role to play as persons turn to them for help and support. As a result, we will find more volunteer groups emerging, and with limited funding – we all know funding was difficult to secure before and it will be even more difficult now – we are going to have to find creative ways to be able to serve our target audiences and society effectively. This may entail, for example, greater collaboration among the NGO sector; working together and maybe even sharing our resources. This is why it is important that whatever level of service we are giving, that we give quality service

This is why I believe your theme of *Aspiration, Advancement, Achievement Through Service* was timely, since Service will have an even greater impact on national development in the months to come.

As I close, I would like you to consider this quote from Malala Yousafzai, *‘Once I had asked God for one or two extra inches in height, but instead, he made me as tall as the sky, so high that*

*I could not measure myself. By giving me this height to reach people, he has also given me great responsibilities.'*

Everyone in this room today, the new Executive Board and all members of AFETT, you have a great responsibility to Aspire, Advance and Achieve through Service. I encourage you to continue the work that you have started. I also hope that you may aspire to expand your service to advance other women's issues in the future.

In closing, I challenge everyone in this room to go out there and try to encourage one other person to serve. They do not have to serve with AFETT but can choose another NGO to give of their skill and time. Let us work together with our fellow NGOs as we collaborate and use our collective strengths as we Aspire, Advance and Achieve through Service.

Ladies, I wish to leave you with one last thought. At NCPD's 2015 AGM Mr. Gervase Warner, President and Group CEO of the Massy Group shared this quote, which I think is most fitting:

*"volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless."*

My Priceless ladies here this evening, I thank you.