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Compete Caribbean host regional dialogue on competitiveness

November 22, 2016 -The Compete Caribbean Regional Dialogue held at Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre on Tuesday November 22, provided an opportunity for donors and beneficiaries of the Program to reflect on its execution over the past six year, network and build a case for or against a phase two of the program.

The Dialogue featured a number of presentations by high-ranking IDB, UK and Canadian officials, panel discussions by beneficiaries where they got to tell their stories, and discussions from academics who intellectualized about the program's benefits. Sylvia Dohnert, Executive Director of Compete Caribbean and Claudia Stevenson, Specialist, Competitiveness and Innovation Division, IDB also discussed Compete Caribbean II and the expected results and framework for its implementation.

In the first panel discussion led by Juan Carlos Navarro, Principal Specialist, Competitiveness and Innovation Division, IDB, panelists, Kapil Mohabir of Plympton Farms Guyana, Ronald Hinds, Teleios, Trinidad and Tobago and Duquesne Fednard, D&E Green Enterprises, Haiti told of their experiences working with Compete as private sector actors. Under the theme "*New Ideas that Change the Region: Innovation in the Caribbean*", they all spoke of the barriers they faced regarding funding and credited the creativity, structure and robustness of the Compete Caribbean Program as being responsible for their business accomplishments thus far.

The next panel discussion looked at the role of Compete Caribbean as it relates to the public sector. Entitled, “*The Business Climate as a Launching Pad for Enhanced Growth: Progress and Lessons Learned from Compete Caribbean Projects*,” it was moderated by Tara Lisa Persaud, Compete Caribbean Business Climate Coordinator. Speaking on their governments’ experience panelists Majorie Straw, Manager of Special Projects, Jamaica Investment Promotion Agency (JAMPRO), Melanie Gideon, GM, Enterprise and Innovation, Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE), Fiona Hinkson, Executive Director, St. Lucia National Competitiveness and Productivity Council and Merina Jessamy, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Grenada, all spoke of the technical assistance and critical professional resources Compete Caribbean brought to their organizations to help draft and shape legislation to make their islands more competitive.

During the luncheon interval, José Miguel Benavente, Division Chief, Competitiveness Technology and Innovation, IDB speaking on the topic: *The imperative of Innovation*, said that countries sometimes adopted the position that they will invest in innovation once they have grown, but research indicates that the reverse is true: those countries that have invested in innovation are the ones that have made huge leaps in all aspects of economic development over the past century. For the Caribbean, he highlighted the importance of inter-firm collaboration to reach economies of scale, particularly given the small domestic economies.

The value of Compete Caribbean as a data driven and gathering organization was touted in the after lunch panel discussion on the “*New Finding on the Factors Affecting Innovation and productivity in the Caribbean*.” Moderated by Matteo Grazzi, Specialist, Competitiveness and Innovation IDB, it featured panelists Winston Moore, Head Department of Economics, UWI Cave Hill and Preeya Mohan, Post-doctoral Fellow, SALISES.

Compete's ability to build networks and forge partnerships was the highlight of the final panel discussion on *Overcoming Fragmentation: Clustering in the Caribbean-Opportunities and Challenges*. It was moderated by Celene Cleland-Gomez, Compete Caribbean's Enterprise Innovation Challenge Fund Coordinator and featured panelists Roberta Rabellotti, Professor of Economics, University of Pavia, Italy, Mauricio Mejia, Cluster Facilitator, Belize Shrimp, Beverley Morgan, Ornamental Fish Cluster, Jamaica and Rebecca Wiersma, Treasure Beach Cluster, Jamaica. The panel discussed how collaboration between firms helped their sectors compete in global markets, and how to build trust among firms.

The consensus of the Regional Dialogue was that Compete Caribbean had been an unsung champion of the region in the area of competitiveness and its expertise and funding are necessary interventions to help effectively shape and prepare both the public and private sector in the region to take on the complex challenges of global competition.

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