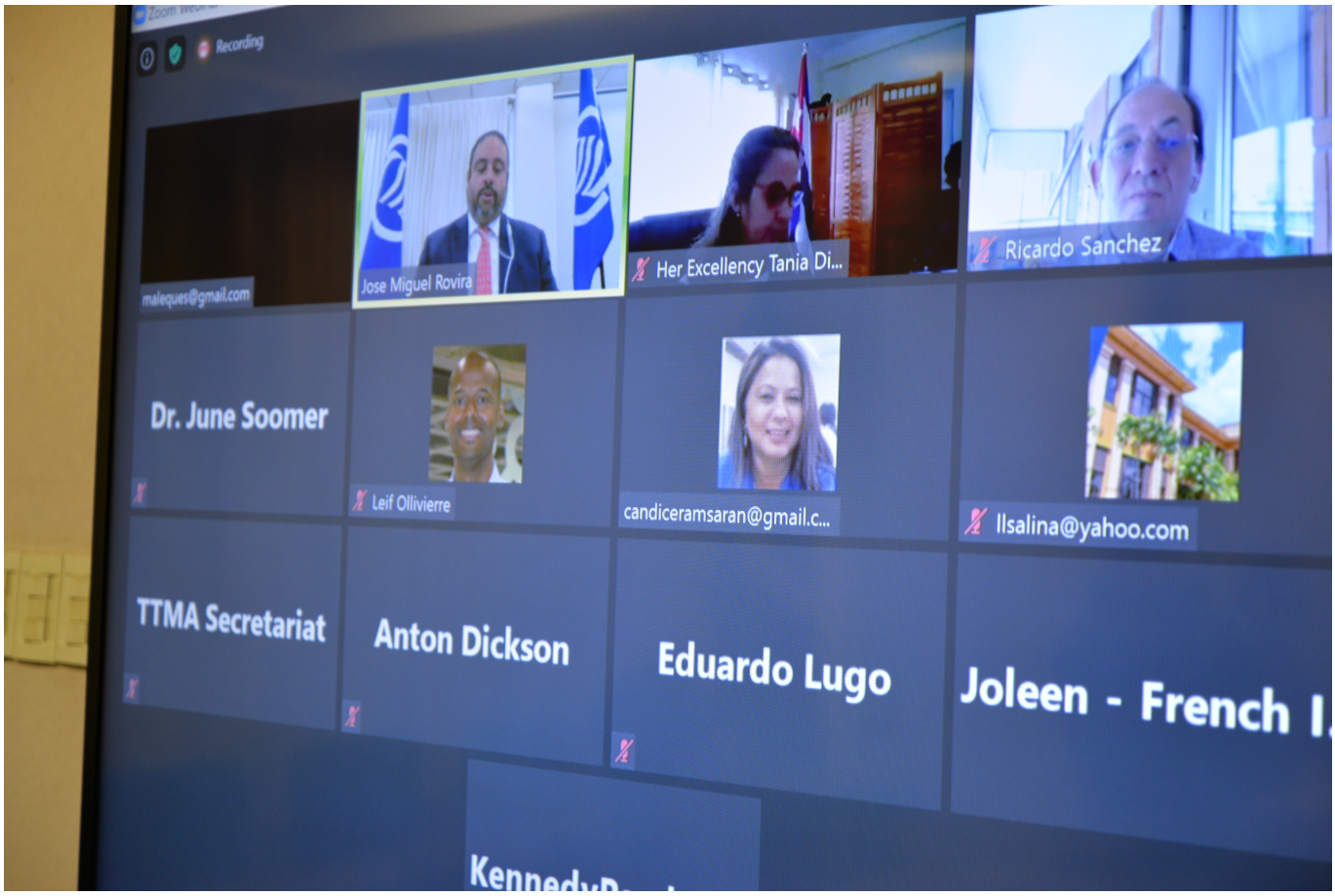
An ACS First: the 13th Business Forum Is Held Virtually



The ongoing viral pandemic presented an opportunity for the 13th ACS Business Forum to be convened with a wider audience from the Greater Caribbean. It was held under the auspices of the outgoing and the incoming Secretaries General of the Association, and provided yet another opportunity for trade and investment to the region's MSMEs in a year marked with economic downturns and loss of business.

An ACS first, hosting the Business Forum on a virtual platform optimized marketing opportunities for businesses throughout the Greater Caribbean region while virtually eliminating any health and safety risks for our region's entrepreneurs and their families. The use of this format also provided the Greater Caribbean MSMEs a glimpse into the future of trade and investment. Given the expanded use of digital technologies in businesses and the impact COVID-19 has had on international trade and services, the ACS understood this changing tide and conceptualised a number of activities which traditionally took place in person to take place via digital technology.

Instead of in person conferences, the ACS hosted four webinars under the general theme of "Integrating the Greater Caribbean - Building Partnerships towards a Common Future", and addressed questions affecting sustainable tourism, trade, transport and trade promotion organisations in the Greater Caribbean. Increased connectivity, cooperation, sustainability and digitalization were amongst the recurrent observations made by both presenters and participants alike for the viable development of the region. The webinars piqued the interest of an unprecedented six hundred plus participants across five continents including from the Greater Caribbean and the ACS Observers and partners.

The virtual platform also showcased fourteen (14) MSMEs hosted within the ACS Pavilion that allowed for the expansion of business relationships and afforded more market exposure to these

Greater Caribbean MSMEs. Businesses specializing in construction, food and beverage, textile, and crafts and jewellery from across the region were featured and were able to successfully network and generate business. A number of businesses reported fruitful Business to Business (B2B) meetings and were eager to follow up on these initial encounters. International business networking was evidenced, as companies from the Netherlands Antilles, St. Lucia, Panama, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago concluded productive discussions in the ACS B2B Meeting area.

Over the years, the ACS has partnered with Member States and their agencies to host the forum. This year the ACS partnered with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) to host the Business Forum in conjunction with their annual Trade