

Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

Penal

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Penal Government Secondary School Hall



Rapporteurs' Full Report



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1.0 OPENING

The Consultation began with the playing of the National Anthem; followed by an opening prayer. The Master of Ceremonies, Mr. George Elias, then proceeded by welcoming all present to the Penal Government Secondary School for the tenth of the islandwide series of consultations on Local Government Reform and thanked the audience for attending. He went on to make all aware that the consultation will be broadcasted live on Radio 91.1 Talk City as well as on the internet.

Mr. Elias then introduced the key personnel for the consultation amongst who were: the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan and Minister the Honourable Stuart Young and Attorney General. This was followed by the welcome remarks which were delivered by the Chairman, Councillor Premchand Sookoo of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation who welcomed everyone on behalf of the Ministry to the 10th Local Government Reform Consultation in the Penal Government Secondary School at Penal.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan, Minister the Honourable Stuart Young

2.0 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME REMARKS

Mr. Premchand Sookoo, Chairman of Penal/Debe Corporation



The Honourable Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan; Honourable Stuart Young, Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Members of Parliament, Senators; His Worship the Mayor of San Fernando, Mr. Kazim Hosein. Officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, my colleagues and council here at the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and our very distinguished CEO Mr. Raymond Seepaul. Other administrative staff, of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation; representatives of other Municipal Corporations and wish to especially recognize Mr. Aiknath Singh, Chairman of the Princess Town Regional Corporation. Not forgetting my dear brother, Mr. Terry Rondon who has left all the way from Sangre Grande to be here; let us give him a round of applause, now he's my brother. Burgesses of the region of Penal/Debe, other members of the public, members of the media; pleasant good day or good evening.

The mission statement of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation is to provide the services to our burgesses require so that it is the best living and working environment to achieve and sustain social and economic prosperity. The vision of Penal/Debe, to become a beacon region; so unique it is the preferred place for people to live, conduct business and socialize. Of course, you have word from the Chairman; my name is Premchand Sookoo, the Chairman or the Penal/Debe Corporation. Today marks a day in history where I mark on my thirty-third (33rd) year in Local Government and has been excited and a wealth of experience at thirty-three (33) long years. Penal/Debe Regional Corporation covers a land area of approximately 246 kilometres and is a home of approximately 100 thousand persons. The Penal region comprises of three (3) health centres, three (3) police stations, thirty-nine (39) recreation grounds. Is not my intention here, ladies and gentlemen and Mr. Minister, to indicate to us how many educational institutions there are, how many community centres and etcetera and etcetera recreation grounds and so forth. If I should go into details, probably will take me from now and probably 9 o'clock; so I would not give the Minister an opportunity to make his presentation. So I try to be a brief as possible.

Now the Penal/Debe Corporation is divided into nine (9) electoral districts. Now by law, there are four (4) Aldermen; based on proportional representation are to be appointed in each municipal corporation. Today I voice my concerns and opinions towards local government reform. Firstly, I will state that I fully and fully support the Honourable Minister in implementing his new philosophies in improving the lives of the burgesses throughout this country. So Mr. Minister I want to commend you, congratulate you and accept local government reform in its

entirety. Secondly, a question was asked...If fourteen (14) municipal corporations is too much, what should be...? I am here to tell you this evening Mr. Minister and its panel, in my view, that fourteen (14) municipal corporations is not enough. I wish to propose an additional four (4) corporations which are eighteen (18) corporations throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and I'll give you some reasons why.

Why...Now if you look at the present system, of the various local government corporations, you will see where the Tunapuna/Piarco regional corporation you have sixteen (16) electoral districts, 169,066 electorates, 169,066 electorates. So each electoral districts in the Tunapuna will tell you is over 10 thousand electorates. In the Tabaquite/Talparo you have fourteen (14) electoral districts, 143,390 electorates; an average of 10,200 per electoral districts. San Juan/Laventille, 13 electoral districts, 134,917 electorates; an average of 10,200 electorates per districts. Diego Martin, you have ten (10) electoral districts, 86,922 electorates at an average of 8,500 per electoral districts. Princess Town you have ten (10) districts, 79,463 at an average of approximately 7,946 per electoral districts. Penal/Debe you have nine (9) electoral districts, 74,840 electorates at an average of 8,315 electorates per districts.

Siparia 9, 70,661 electorates at an average of 7,851 per districts. In Chaguanas, you have 8 districts, 64,218 electorates at an average of 8,027 electorates per polling division. Sangre Grande, you have eight (8) electoral districts, 55,074 electorates at an average of 6,884 per electoral district. And in the city of San Fernando, you have nine (9) districts, 50,343 electorates at an average of 5,500 per district. Port of Spain, twelve (12) electoral districts, 38,401 electorates at an average of 3,200 per electoral district. Mayaro/Rio Claro, six (6) electoral districts 28,834 electorates at an average of 4805 electorates per district. Arima, seven (7) districts, 28,137 at an average of 4000 per electoral district. And the Borough of Point Fortin, six (6) electoral districts, a total of 16,000, I repeat 16,557 electorates and per polling division and per electoral district 2762.

So Mr. Minister hence the reason I am saying we need to have some drastic change if it means having dialogue although it is said it is an independent organization. But we need to have some dialogue in the transformation in the boundaries, especially in the various regional corporations. I think, I think, it is rather unfair that a councillor in Diego Martin with his 10 thousand and 11 thousand getting the same out of pocket allowances to the persons' getting 2 thousand and 7 hundred votes or 2700 electorates that comprise his district. So, Mr. Minister, I wish to propose that out of these eighteen (18) regional corporations that I am proposing that we should have a ratio of at least 5 thousand, at least 5 thousand electorates that would form electoral districts, electoral districts, 5 thousand.

Honourable Minister, I want to propose that here it is in Penal/Debe we have several councillors, for example, Councilor Diptee Ramnath with over fifteen (15) years as a councillor; Councillor Roland Hall, three (3) terms; Councillor Shanty Boodram, two (2) terms; Marsha Jaimungal Khan, two (2) terms; Councillor Brian Julien, two (2) terms; Alderman Hyacinth

Rampersadsingh, three (3) terms and of course Permchand Sookoo should I say seven (7) terms, thirty-three (33) years. But the big question is Mr. Minister, if I or my brother Councillor Rondon should go home tomorrow morning, I would not even go home with thirty-three (33) black cents, not even thirty-three (33) black cents. However I want to tell you here, Councillor Terry Rondon has been a councillor for the last twenty-two (22) years. Mr. Anthony Roberts and I know him for a long time while I don't know if he's here but he too is a deserving local government for a number of years, maybe more than fifteen (15) years. Mayor Clyde Paul also a stand-up in local government, a number of years and Hazare Ramdeen of the Rio Claro, he has been serving at least three (3) terms as a councillor.

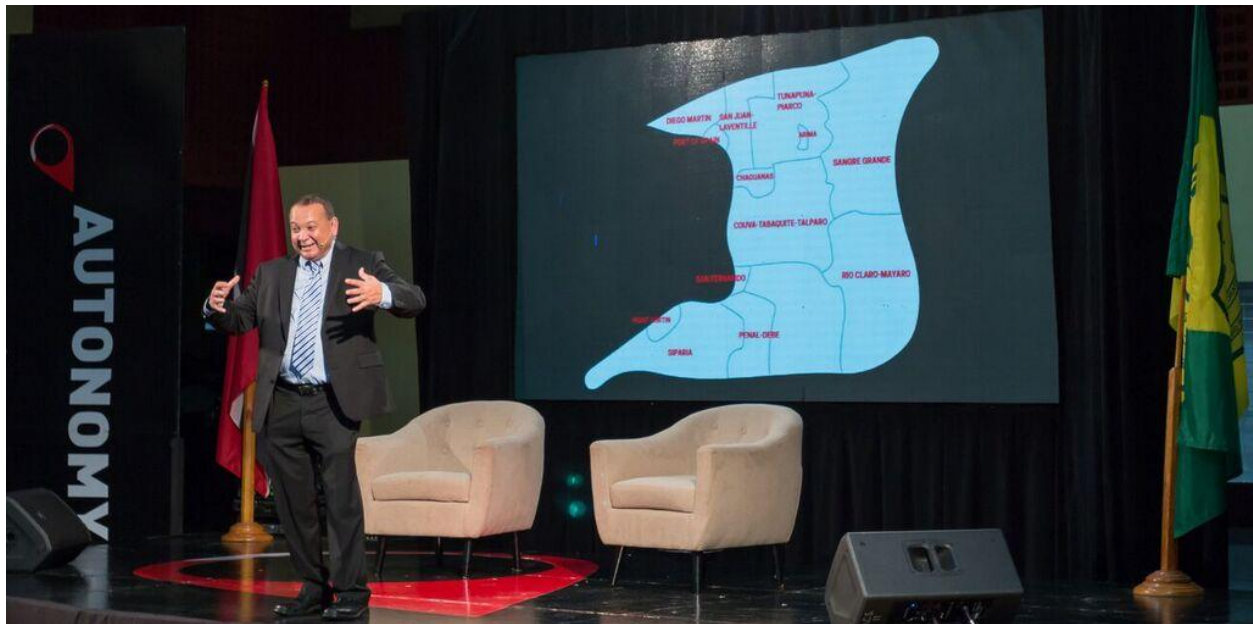
So as I've said, Mr. Minister, it is my intention to make these recommendations; three (3) terms at least, three (3) terms as a councillor should be pensionable. What you say; pensionable? Because as we all know ladies and gentlemen, if a Member of Parliament whether he full time or part time, once he or she completes two (2) terms in office, they are entitled by law, by law to get a pension. Mr. Minister, I am coming to a close very shortly. Mr. Minister, you are responsible for fourteen (14) municipal corporations in Trinidad and all the corporations are like your children, your children. And I am talking about over one (1) million electorates would form that local government; they depend on local government for survival. But I want to tell you here, one (1) of your child, one (1) of your child, the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, is in serious, serious difficulty, serious difficulty.

My CEO met with members of the council and we have decided the way forward, we have decided the way forward, and it was difficult for us as a corporation to continue operating that what you did in the past. And immediately after discussing this very important meeting we have recognized where we have a shortfall in wages and under materials and supplies, goods and services. And we have made a request on the 6th of December; requesting the additional funding or supplementing funding of 13.6 million dollars to provide the goods and services so to continue the employment of workers. Low and behold Mr. Minister, I want to commend you, you did, in fact, responded to that letter and you told us that to communicate with your PS, and myself, not me myself but the CEO has been communicating with the CEO.

And I want to tell you, it would be a very, very sad day in the lives of the employees or the workers who have been working this corporation for a number of years, approximately 160 after the end of June, I am very sorry to say that these workers may have to take the exit; it is a very, very sad situation. But however I think there is room to compromise, there room for compromise. I am saying Mr. Minister; instruction came from the Honourable Prime Minister to reduce the expenditure by 7% and in Penal/Debe that has worked up to \$6 million dollars. I am saying, Mr. Minister, if you get the authority and approval for us not to remove that 6 million dollars I believe , I believe I am positive sure we can able to ensure that we continue up to the end of the fiscal year come September 30th to retain the services of the employees.

Mr. Minister before I conclude I wish to propose that the THA model in the transformation and modernization and consultation of Local Government reform if we are proceeding to accept the Tobago House of Assembly Model then the life of a council should be four (4) years just like Tobago, 4 years. However, Mr. Minister, I am positive sure Mr. Minister, you would not forget one (1) of your child that is Penal/Debe because right now we actually renting a building and the sod was actually turn in Clarke Rd here for the administrative complex of Penal/Debe corporation. I hope and trust that consideration will be given so at least Penal/Debe can have a home of their own. Finally Mr. Minister and all those who are here, I want to extend a hearty and a cordial welcome to each and every one of you and I am positive sure all of us can be part and parcel of this very fruitful session. Thank you very much.”

3.0 MINISTER'S ADDRESS & VIDEO PRESENTATION MINISTER FRANKLYN KHAN



MINISTER KHAN

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, addressed all present and welcomed them to Penal for the consultation. He indicated when he left University in 1981 his first job was at the Clarke Rd Penal at Trintoc Exclusion Production Department as a trainee geologist. He then proceeded to deliver his address with the aid of a video presentation which was displayed at the beginning and end of his address.

The Minister gave a brief explanation of the video presentation which was shown to the audience. It was as follows “Ladies and gentlemen, the video you just saw illustrates a system, the dynamics of which are not unfamiliar to a lot of you. Whether it is a clogged river, a pothole, an empty lot that needs clearing, whether it’s a blown street light, whether it is school repairs, whether it’s a local heritage site; work in your community, the list goes on and on. Because under the current system of governance we have in Trinidad when a community and I want to focus on the word ‘community’ when a community needs to get something done, the community doesn’t make the decision, the community doesn’t put out its resources to have it done. It takes place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run through the Central Government and the issue of service delivery in Trinidad today, is a function of that; the system is too centralised. You have to go to headquarters and most of the time headquarters is in Port of Spain and then there’ll be a sub-headquarter in San Fernando and now coming quite third on the trail easily Chaguanas. But by and large, you are not empowered in your community to take the decision and have the resources allocated to you to make this thing

happen. That is the basis and that is the fundamental principle behind local government reform.

I wouldn't get political today for obvious reasons because this is the only corporation in Trinidad that the nine (9) councillors and four (4) aldermen are UNC, so at least welcome me to Penal because I hold a position in the PNM as Chairman and as a Senator but I still feel at home in Penal and I like to use Penal as a reference because when I speak in Port of Spain all the councillors in Port of Spain and all the aldermen are PNM. When I speak in Diego Martin is the same way; when I speak in Arima is the same thing; when I speak in Point Fortin is the same thing. So to add balance to the system and to show that Trinidad is a true democracy there must be places like Penal, okay. Ladies and gentlemen of Penal, I respect your political view and I think it is your right to choose the party of your choice; I have absolutely no objection to that.

But during the election campaign, the People's National Movement articulated two (2) fundamental policy shifts of this administration. One was Local Government Reform and two, the creation of new ministry called the Ministry of Rural Development. And I can kill two (2) birds with one (1) stone because Penal is rural, well Penal Central is now fast becoming urbanize but the corporation of Penal/Debe which includes San Francique, Woodland, up on the Clarke Road, Rochard, Rd Rochard Douglas, Rd Morne Diablo, you see I know all the villages up here; it is still largely rural. And the concept behind the Ministry of Rural Development is that for far too long in Trinidad everything happened in the Urban areas and if it wasn't Port of Spain and the East/West Corridor it was San Fernando, if is not San Fernando there is a new urban centre now what I call the Couva/Chaguanas Complex and all the development takes place there.

Because when you do project evaluation in classic economic terms, you evaluate a project based on returns for that project. So the larger your population it is the more it justifies something happening in your area. In your very own experience, if you have a street with thirty (30) houses and they want a box drain, and then you have another street with four (4) people living there, but they also need the box drain, you will tend to go towards the street with thirty (30) people. And by the same token if you have a town with a 100 thousand people and you have a small village with 3 thousand people when you have to allocate resources the resources will always be skewed to the high population centre. That is why there is something call rural/urban migration. Because resources cannot be spent in rural areas, rural people now have to migrate to the cities to get to job opportunities, to get education opportunities, to get housing opportunities, to get the lifestyle that they see on TV every day. The largest migration of people in the history of mankind occurred in the last ten (10) years in China, you know. A 100 million Chinese, listen to this, a 100 million rural Chinese migrated into the cities in China.

This a fundamental, global problem and what this administration is saying is unless for rural development to take place it must have direct government intervention; it must be channeled from the top. The Government must say, as a matter of policy that rural development has to

take place. That to me, I feel so in choose to be this minister because it is a brand new concept in Trinidad. And I'll say one more political thing; it has all been said, especially by the people of Penal/Debe and Oropouche East, Oropouche West, Siparia that the PNM has been an urban-based party, all they care about is the East/West Corridor. It has been said and there's some truth to that. However, there is now a paradigm shift in the party that says, 'hey man, there is probably some truth to that' and let us come back and balance back the pack. Swing the pendulum back into more spatial development across Trinidad and Tobago so that rural people for the first time could have their say. I am proud to be a son of a rural village in Mayaro, okay, and I really take this baton with a sense of pride and determination to do well.

Local government reform is what we are here tonight about and local government reform has been spoken about a lot. There have been many consultations from, twenty (20) years ago. Hazel Manning has a lot of consultation; she had a series of papers and white papers, green paper, brown paper, wax paper, every type of paper they have to develop the local government reform process. Suruj Rambachan more recently in 2013, I think he produced a lot of well-researched documents. So there is enough body of information with us to go through with this process you know, but we making one more last rounds of consultations before we make it happen. And the fundamental difference, ladies and gentlemen is this process and the process of the past, is that there is conviction from the top to make this happen. Because if you do not have the political will from the top to make this happen, it will not happen and I want to give this small audience the assurance that this local government process is being championed by the Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley.

It is his initiative that I am implementing and he has seen it fit to do this evolution of power. We were in Princess Town last week Wednesday and one of the speakers on the floor was Subash Panday, a former member of parliament for Princess Town and brother of the illustrious Basdeo Panday if I can should so myself. Subash Panday said, and to me he had captured this in a most fundamental way, he says, the last set of local government reform dealt with decentralization, this process as we articulate it now deals with evolution of power and authority; and that is the fundamental difference. I know, as you heard from you chairman, the all UNC corporation, this process has the buy of every single corporation in Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is totally PNM , totally UNC, or mixed because at this fundamental level everybody involved in local government and wants to see local government better. Because it is local government and you represent your local people; so I'm confident that this process will bear fruit for the first time and as I said I give you the commitment it is being driven from the top.

At our first, this is consultation number ten (10), at our first consultation, held in San Fernando, hosted by Mayor Hosein, the Prime Minister graced us with his presence. He was at the meeting, he took the stage with me, myself and Stuart Young he fielded questions; obviously, I don't expect him to attend the fourteen (14), he is a busy man. The fourteen (14) consultations, he opened up in San Fernando and the final consultation will be held in the last week of this

month to be held in Diego Martin, obviously, that is his area and he will also be gracing our consultation there. He will take the stage also and we will have the final consultation where he will make a wrap-up speech as to the way forward.

The local government systems, in the past, ladies and gentlemen, for several reasons; first and foremost, culturally you always see a second class government. I will quote an example in the United States that shows the inverse. You see what happen here, we formed a country formed Trinidad and Tobago; then we decided to divide up the country and put local authorities. So forget Tobago for the time being, we talk about Trinidad. So the British conquer Trinidad, they have an island, they have a colony and then Governor Woodford decided to make counties and wards. So you have the county of St Patrick, the ward of Siparia, the ward of whatever other wards you have, and he made these counties and it evolve into a county council system; but the country came before the counties.

In America the inverse happen; in America, the states were there first. So the State of Texas, the State of Georgia, the State of Oklahoma, the State of Alabama, the State of North and South Carolina, the State of New York, the State of Virginia, the State of California, the State of Oregon (I know my geography good); they existed before the United States of America. So when the United States of America was formed as a federal government, the state maintained its power and its authority. So today, the Governor of the State of Virginia runs the State of Virginia. Obama cannot tell him what to do you know, this is his state; Obama is in charge of the federal government. But at the local level, at the state level, he is the boss. While it wouldn't be identical to that, this is the principle which this local government will take place.

So Mr. Sookoo, if you left, if you make more than thirty-three (33) years you can virtually be the governor of Penal/Debe; that is the concept I want to take so have faith. Give us a little six (6) more years and all will be well. But seriously ladies and gentlemen, some of the impediments that hampered local government over the years, and I will be the first to say, was political interference. You always had this conflict between central government and local government. If you had a particular party in central government the tendency was to pressurize the local government people who did not form part of your party. So if PNM in power, Penal/Debe, Siparia, some of those areas, psychologically will be expected not to be treated fairly and vice versa. When UNC in power, Port of Spain and Point Fortin and San Fernando and San Juan/Laventille, psychologically feel they not in the thing, and it probably happens to some extent in the past. But I want to give this audience the assurance that this time around this system ain't political.

The changes we are making will be applicable equally and with an even hand to Diego Martin, to Port of Spain, to Chaguanas, to Sangre Grande to Penal/Debe, to Princess Town. The other area was inadequate funding. The more I look at it, I was the Minister of Works once you know, and I spend real money, as Minister of Works, billions of dollars. And when I looked now at the budgets of the corporations, the types of infrastructure they are in charge of, the types of

things you ask them to do; it is a pittance you receive. And what we plan to do is retool our budgetary process to allocate the resources where you have the responsibility in law; although you have the law now we will make it in such a robust way. And that is why Minister Stuart Young is here because he will be drafting the legislation. I will give you a good example; the THA Act was well drafted, okay. So, let me use the example with the sports company of Trinidad and Tobago. You have thirty-four recreation grounds, you only have 3 million dollars to service that for a whole year; that is not enough. But low and behold the sports company come into Penal/Debe and start to put up lights on grounds; they start to build pavilions. You do not know who asked them, from whence they came, who they consulted or what. They spent hundreds of millions of dollars that rightfully should be budgeted with you. But I dare the sports company to take a flight and go to Tobago and say they going to put up pavilion on a Tobago creation ground; Mr. Orville London will tell them when to take the next flight back home. So if the schedules give you the authority it is incumbent on the central government to allocate the resources to you and not to a third party. But as we speak under the current system you will be stupid to run the sports company because you want your grounds fixed; but in terms of the administration of the resources, it happens that way. The same thing happens with the ministry of works under the program called PURE. PURE paving road left right and centre, highway, bi-way, main road, track, trace, people drive way and all; but a lot of the local content of that should really be assigned to the corporation.

Lastly, your administration and your administrative structure has remained the same since 1962 or to a minimum 1990, when the Municipal Corporation Act was passed; so you don't have the skill sets and the resources. Somebody was saying today there are no quantity surveyors in the Penal/Debe Corporation; probably there is one engineer if any, good, and I will deal with that shortly. So ladies and gentlemen we inherited an antiquated system but certain things have happened in local government over the years, most importantly is the Municipal Corporation Act which formed these fourteen (14) corporations out of the old county council system. And Chairman, I want to give you the assurance that Penal/Debe will remain largely untouched, okay. You can make a case to expand your boundaries because I know you will not make a case to shrink your boundaries. But rest assured what was proposed in the last time around to disband the Penal/Debe Corporation that is not on the table now, at all, at all, you have my assurance on that.

Just to make the point that central government local government, I also make the point at every consultation, that the ministry of local government is not local government; the ministry of local government is central government. Local government is at the level of the corporation. That is why it is PNM policy, it is this Administration policy to disband the ministry of local government because we cannot say we empowering you, we devolving power to you, and then you still have to come to the minister for approval of everything. No, just like the Tobago House of Assembly, just like the Chief Secretary, when you get your allocation from the Minister of

Finance you spend it based on your council's policy and your council's decision. There will be no policy oversight in the context of some minister of government having to approve your projects; however, you will be accountable to the minister of finance for your allocation and you will be accountable to the auditor general as to how you spend your money. And finally every three years or every four years you will be accountable to your burgesses and if they feel you did not spend the money good they know what to do. So to me the accountability system is there; there must be an audit function. One of the things we will propose strongly in this new legislation is we will have strong auditing responsibilities, either within the corporation themselves or some audit unit to watch you; because ladies and gentlemen, a lot of people hand sticky, okay. And when you dealing with public funds it is not your money; it is the money of the people and you have to spend it in a particular way.

So our vision is to have a fully operationalized and network local government system; as I always say, this is imperative to people-centred development. It is really important to communities who feel empowered and they can handle the work to suit themselves. Let me deal with the next ten (10) to fifteen (15) minutes with the specific proposals we want to make. Is the last time you will hear PNM. The PNM manifesto we articulated a clear vision for local government and local government reform; to revolutionize the system, to empower local government corporations to handle greater responsibilities, with greater autonomy with greater funding and we are committed to that. The PNM policy, manifesto has now been adopted as an official government policy. So everything that was in that book has now you see, we change the balisier to an official government sign because it is a serious thing. I will go through about five (5) or six (6) specific proposals that we make.

First and foremost to **secure funding**; we going to change the taxation laws and finance and audit act to give regional corporations the power to collect and retain land and building taxes. So the Penal/Debe Corporation will have their own tax collection unit and they will go out and collect, from the rolls, all the properties within the corporation, collect the taxes and retain the taxes to spend in your community. Because your taxes are supposed to be spent in your community and there will be a greater incentive to collect the taxes. As we speak, the ministry of finance has big gaps in the tax collection system because an officer from Inland Revenue who may not even be living in Penal, will have nothing to do with Penal, he will be in charge of collecting your taxes. But let us suppose that your chairman and your councillors and your aldermen and your administration are responsible. Now you will have a greater vested interest in making sure that people pay their taxes; because that tax comes to you to spend. We think that may go a long way in building a cash flow for the Corporations obviously the Central Government will have to top up its allocation and we wouldn't deal with that much today. We have to find a formula as to how we allocate resources to the fourteen Corporations.

Executive Authority: Secondly just like the Tobago House of Assembly we want to adopt some sort of Executive Council or Executive Authority to the Regional Corporations. Those of you who

have worked in Local Government you know there is always this conflict between the Public Service and the Council, who has the power whether is the Chairman or the CEO and what the CEO could do and what the Chairman can't do and all sorts of thing. The legislation will be drafted with clarity, clearly defined functions as to who is in charge of what, who can make what decisions and who cannot make decisions. Ladies and gentlemen let me make a point here now, there will always be a role for the Public Service. The Public Service is protected by the Constitution, service commissions are protected in the Constitution. As we speak Local Government is not even protected in the Constitution so they are safer than you all. That is another area we may look at so what causes governance problem in Trinidad is people do not understand something call role clarity. If you understand role clarity half of you problem solve, it is people who try to impose themselves with authority that they don't have that causes the conflict. If you do not have authority for heaven's sake just back off and let the person who in law has that authority handle the work. There is nothing wrong with that, Ministers only have certain responsibilities in law, I have a PS here I know where to draw the line with her. She is the accounting officer, I am the policy driver in the Ministry and I can give specific directions as the law has it. If you know your role you will have less conflict and what has happened in the past is because Councillors know their role but they are not happy with their role, they try to give themselves more power than they have in law. If the law changes and give you more power then you can act and we give you the assurance that the legislation will be drafted in such a way that we will clearly define what Executive Authority Council has to its Councillors, its Aldermen, to its Chairmen and or Mayors so that is where we stand.

Accountability: I spoke about that a while ago you're getting money, you're getting power, and you're getting authority, for heaven's sake you have to be accountable. You are not spending your money if the law states that you can use the Corporation Vehicle only on official business I don't want to see a Chairman or a Mayor with the Corporation vehicle in a bar 8 o'clock in the night with two police with him that is not right. Just because you have some form of power and authority you flaunt it because people look at you and they evaluate you and they evaluate how you deal with power and authority. You know they say when you give somebody power people get to realize what type of personality they are. So we at the Central Government level and we are very particular as we empower you in the Corporation, you have to take that power and authority with a certain level of accountability and responsibility. Let me just spend some time here now.

New Responsibilities: Under the old County Council System they found the new Municipal Corporation Act for the Corporations but by and large all that changed there are the geographic boundaries and the name but the core responsibility profile of the Regional Corporation was almost identical with the County Council. They in charge of minor roads and drainage, they in charge of cemeteries, they in charge of recreation grounds, they in charge of minor water courses and some aspect of public health. That is all their in charge of, under this

new system of governance we're reassigning new responsibilities to the Corporations. School maintenance, the Chairman spoke about four secondary schools, plenty primary schools, you will be in charge of school maintenance. As we speak now, there is one company in Trinidad called the Education Facilities Company (EFC) is responsible for two hundred (247) plus secondary schools and over six hundred (600) primary schools. Obviously, that can't work. If the Penal schools fell under the Penal Corporation when you know is the Penal Children going there the Penal parents would be anxious to know that the schools open. If the contractor administered through the Corporation there is local buying to make sure especially if is local contractors. To make sure that the work is done on time because is your children that have to go there when the school reopens. So we think school maintenance is a major aspect of this reform process that would go into the hands of the Corporation.

Most significantly, ladies and gentlemen, we will be handing over Social Welfare to the Regional Corporations that is a big step. Old age pension, disability allowances, and all the other benefits Trinidad has to offer sometimes we forget. What is happening, let me just share a little information with you all, before Cabinet right now is a report on poverty and statistics is showing that after this country has spent 120 billion dollars in the last decade, spanning two administration. All administrations realize that you have to spend money on social service because you have to have a safety net. After spending twenty to twenty-five billion in the last ten (10) years the poverty level has not changed so basically you throw twenty-five billion dollars through a strainer and you didn't keep anything. The problem ladies and gentlemen is the billions of dollars Government pumps into social services is not reaching the people it is supposed to reach. The system of administrating is poor and it's flawed so that what you have now is corruption, leakage; certain families who are well connected the double dipping, triple dipping and quadruple dipping. Food card - it has people I hear who have a degree and working and masters and thing and they have five food card in the house. Who better knows who is getting the old lady around to get her pension? It has to be your Councillor. Who knows the families who are at risk who is suffering from extreme poverty, who is suffering from child abuse, who is suffering from domestic violence, who is suffering from incest? All these things happen in our community but you cannot expect an officer from Port of Spain to be engaged in your community to that extent. If you have your local social workers and you put him in charge of particular specific areas. When you meet with him or her they can tell you specifically in my community there are five families who are at risk and we have to help them. You can send your social workers and the system because ladies and gentlemen the problem in Trinidad is not money you know it is efficiency and the operation of the system to make it happen. This country could live on 45 billion dollars. Whoever said that Trinidad and Tobago with 1.3 million people must spend sixty billion dollars in expenditure every year? Madness, check the budgets of all the eastern Caribbean islands because we are not getting value for money.

Local tourism is an area we want to put in the hands of the Regional Corporations, some of your sporting programs but I don't want to fill up your plate because I don't want you to bite more than you can chew. You have your responsibilities, we will discreetly give you new responsibilities but at the end of the day we want you to build better communities and there is no better way to build communities than through the Local Government.

Local Contractors: While we cannot legislate who gets the contract and who doesn't get the contract we will try and from an administrative point of view and the local corporation where possible take contractors from the area. It doesn't feel good that you have a job in San Francique and the contractor from Chaguanas or the contractor from Sangre Grande. He may be a big contractor but if you have the local contractor working is the local workforce that will be working and is the local pay will buy local shops and drink in local bars on a Friday I hope only.

It brings in the multiplier effect into the economy. As I said we not sure how we will handle that because that is the thinking.

Municipal Policing I have talked a lot about that over the last series of Consultations, we have taken a decision that the Municipal police force would be one hundred officers per Corporation which will give us 1400 new police officers well we will make up the difference. What is Penal's strength now, about ten? About ten so you have 90 officers coming. We have to get facilities for them they would work in

Compliment with the national police, if I should say so here myself the administration of the Municipal police has to be regulated because as we speak they do not fall under the Police Service Commission. You cannot have a police officer who is a presenting officer not falling under the commissioner of command and more importantly not falling under the Police Complaints Authority. Because this fella has a weapon that he can misbehave and if he so does what is the recourse the State has because you as Chairman cannot discipline an officer, nor the PS, nor me. So the disciplinary process in law has to come from the Police Service Commission and or the Police Complaints Authority.

Developmental Control: You will have more developmental control in terms of the building especially in terms of the Town and Country Planning approvals, especially simple plans for housing for residential and probably some uncomplicated commercial businesses; but when you going five story and six-story, high-rise obviously Town and Country, the centralised Town and Country Planning would have to have a say in that. We are pleased to say on our technical committee, a member of that committee is the acting director of Town and Country Planning so we are well in tuned to that.

Infrastructure Works: I mentioned how we plan to do it, we will largely be responsible for all of that and we want to incorporate the local contracting system into the projects.

Disaster Management: I have been saying it and let me say it again, a lot of you heard me say it already; it is one aspect of Local Government that is working extremely well. The first

responders to disaster management since it has come with the Regional Corporation it is top of the line and nobody seems to complain now that when there is a flood or when there is a freak storm; hopefully there be no major disaster in Trinidad, God forbid. We have a good first responding system, we still have to channel some more resources to them, to give them warehouses to stockpile certain materials how the supply chain work in terms of giving that.

Involvement of Civil Society: The whole concept of Regional Planning would also come into play so you in charge of your Corporations. You have to have an economic and physical and spatial plan for your Corporation, once it is consistent with the national plan. As a regional plan, if somebody, if SHELL comes to the Chairman of Penal/Debe and say I want to build a big refinery in Penal obviously he can't make that decision, that has to have Central Government input. There would be a care system as to projects that you can approve and what you can't approve but at the basic level, you will have a major say in the planning process.

Boundaries: as I keep saying speak now or forever hold your peace, we are in a reform process if you want boundary changes you have to make the recommendation. I made the statement and the Chairman here seems to be holding me to that; when I said if fourteen Corporations is over government and can it be reduced to ten that was just a rhetorical question it wasn't rooted in any sinister motive. I just want address very briefly the point of proportionality that was mentioned, you cannot really compare if you want to be fair a municipality and a city is a different entity to a Regional Corporation. City status, the city of New York, Boston, Chicago, they mean something different. The thing about it is that and sometimes I want to know what it have in the city that different from the Corporation that everybody wants to become boroughs and cities, I see absolutely no difference no terms in how the legislation is drafted. As to a city or a borough getting more power than the Corporation but that is a different issue. The point about it is that borough, city are different entities and using the population statistics is half of the story because you have to deal with geography and area. So, for example, my good friend in Sangre Grande and Mayaro; Sangre Grande Corporation geographically in terms of its share space and size is massive. However the population does not justify 15 Councillors but for the six or eight Councillors they have their jurisdiction is very large. The amount of traces and roads and rivers that they would call for so even if they only have 3000 burgesses or 3500 they responsibility level may be totally different to somebody in Diego Martin and as they say, you can walk around it in five minutes. Because it's high rise and they have 5000 people living there and that is an electoral district. So we have to have a matrix as to how we deal with that but your points will be well taken.

Organization and Structure: Finally ladies and gentlemen the organization and structure. We giving you money, we giving you authority, we giving you power we must have a system to make this thing efficient. As we speak, I've been saying it all along, some people does vex with me some people does say I am talking the truth but I will say it again. As we speak, Local Government is one of the most inefficient run arms of Government. The productivity level is

low and Chairman does try and justify it after I talk but I still stick by what I say. My first job was a checker in Nariva/Mayaro County Council when I was in High School and I know what does happen, you have road officer, you have county superintendent, and you have all those fellas playing the fool. Go to a Regional Corporation office 10:30, 11:00 in the morning you will not see anybody. When I was a little boy, every morning I get up it has men cutting the road with swiper and they cutting their task, they with a thing beating pitch and they patching all the branch roads. You don't see a gang on the road anymore, when last you see a gang outside of a CEPEP and a URP gang? Somewhere along the line, the responsibility for doing things has disappeared but the structure remains the same. So what that causes is that there is a lot of unproductivity in Corporations and we has reach the stage as a country no matter you tell me about task and task you can't work two hours and get eight hours pay because we just cannot afford it. We have to pull up on our socks we have to a new organisation a new structure, we have to get new skillset in the Corporation we have to get quantity surveyors, we have to get accountants, we have to get project managers, we have to get supply chain managers, we have to get engineers, we have to get customer service representatives; something where we are lapsing in. You should not be going into a public service office where you come in as a citizen and as a burgess to request facilities and to request service from a state agency; people paid by the state and you're meeting a swell up mouth. It is just not right because you are being paid to deliver a service; go to American, go to Europe, you go to an office and you say good afternoon mam how can I help you and they and they genuinely want to help you. Here we want to show you why you can't get the form approve. You take the position as I am not going to approve this and they show the person why they cannot approve it. I have seen so many poor people, old people coming in, they leaving San Francique, they leaving Woodland to come to the Corporation office to say they have a drain to fix and they don't know who to talk to and saying Bhai help meh nah. It just is not right so what we have to do is implement a system, an organization that is user-friendly, that is people-centred, that is service delivery. Let me just tell you all one more thing err on the side of helping somebody, if you have doubt in your mind help them, if there is a clear situation where you know you can't help them because the situation is so glaringly clear that you can't help them, okay you can't help them because you don't want to break the law and make a jail. Ladies and gentlemen err on the side of assisting people, people have grown accustomed in this country to waiting years for justice, for waiting years for service. You know how happy somebody would feel when they leave and they come and before they go back and take their maxi or their taxi they have their form stamped or their approval. They will bring a pumpkin for you the next time they see you, this is how rural people operate.

Legislation: as I said Minister Young will be on the stage with me shortly, we have to make amendments to the Municipal Corporation Act, taxation laws and what we want to do is provide what we call an omnibus suit of legislation hopefully by September, early October to go

to the Parliament and very likely it will go before a Joint Select Committee so when the laws are passed we will start to roll out this implementation plan in its entirety and one final point on that Local Elections are due the 21st of October 2016 which is not very far way we have a three months grace period I want to give you the assurance on behalf of the Government and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and the Prime Minister in particular that this administration will not be postponing Local Government Election. Local Government Election will be held when it is due very likely before the end of 2016 and that basically is the plan. Then we will have a two and a half to a three-year period to roll out this thing so by 2018, 2019 when you come back to Penal/Debe it will be a totally different functioning well-oiled machine operating service of the people. Delivering efficiency and quality service to all the burgesses. I thank you and before I close I just want to show one more clip.

4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

❖ Tyrone Clarke, Penal (Male, African 30s)

Good Day all, Minister, Mr. Sookoo you should not be saying Penal/Debe Corporation, you should be saying Bangladesh Corporation. I say this with no remorse, we the people of lower Lachoos Road are denied work in the Corporation and when we are being stressed out because we get no employment and we go to the recreation ground to ease off our frustration it goes higher. We are denied all facilities if you go through all Penal you will see the grounds are properly well kept, lights, pavilion. When we go to the Councillors, look my good friend there Shanty Boodram. You know what she does tell me, we didn't vote UNC, Lower Lachoos Road is a PNM place. As you say Mr. Speaker this environment here is a UNC seat, so don't matter what Government in place when we go to these people like Shanty, Shaeed Hosein know, the treatment we get at Lower Lachoos Road because we small little on David Williams ground. Everything does be denied and Shanty look she right there, she does tell we flat all yuh don't vote for UNC. So if this is a UNC State what will happen to us why treat us so because you are entitled to vote who you want not who you vote. It is your duty to do things in the community why deny us that is all I have to say.

➤ Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development

The purpose of this Consultation is not to deal with these very volatile political matters but still I want to make a comment on it. One of the situations we looking at in the legislation also is that there are Corporations who are entirely PNM, there are Corporations that are largely and some of them entirely UNC. There are also a lot of mixed Corporations and how you structure the Executive Council, if it goes under the Tobago model it will only be forming from the ruling party. Sometimes that is not the best form of Governance for Local Governance so we might even consider a government of national unity, to use Mr. Panday's words. You have to understand that the minority interest has to be respected. In Corporations that are dominated by one Party, let's say you have eight Councillors, six dominated by one party and the other two from another Party. Under the present system, the Council will always vote in favour of the majority. We may, Mr. Young and I have not discussed this as yet but we may want to put some kind of mechanism in place to protect minority interest. The minority interest can swing either way it can be PNM in UNC areas and UNC in PNM areas so you are protecting the minority. At the end of the day, in his case it is not a minority interest in terms of a Council but public officers political people who were elected into Office; Dr. Rowley keeps saying that all the time and I know sometimes it is hard to implement. When you are elected into Office you now represent the people you do not represent your Party, you represent all the people of the burgesses, you do not only

represent who voted for you. It is something that may take the time to permeate our being but that is the principle we want to activate; Mr. Young.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

I would just like to add to what Minister Khan has said and fully endorse what he said. It doesn't depend on legislation as he said from the night of the 7th of September, The Honourable Prime Minister broadcast to the Nation that we are a Government for the People of Trinidad and Tobago and that is how we intend to govern and how we have been governing. I would like to ask all Councillors in PNM strongholds, in UNC strongholds always remember we are here to serve the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I represent Port of Spain/St Ann's West, we won by a resounding majority, we broke the record but I never ever differentiate with anybody coming to me or ever think about who they voted for. We are here to serve the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and as Minister Khan has said and as and as our Minister leads us, that is the message that needs to flow through our country.

❖ **Dindial Maraj, Siparia (Male, Indian 60's)**

The Honourable Minister Khan, Minister Young; Mr. Khan which side you on? You know when you spoke here today you level this playing field. I had a hundred question to ask and you answered 90% of it. This is my first meeting attending these Consultations and I want to commend you for the courage you have taken to put an ease on poor people who has been suffering in this country year after year. Take this thing they call the Town and Country planning I say disband that. You have to go to Port of Spain when you reach up there the officer ain't come to work that day. You said all that, structure Mr. Young, you're not firing the people from EMA, and you're not firing the people from Town and Country. Structure them in the Regional Corporations where they can go to the Councillors, where they can go to the Regional Corporations instead of waiting for five years to repair their house. Too much pressure on poor people in this land but today I really feel proud to hear a PNM Government Minister, you know giving hope in a direction that you did it today. You really are an honourable man from Mayaro, you understand the suffering of poor people. Listen, whether is Social Welfare, whether is the Pension Division, people are being kicked, poor people are being kicked in this country. Shamelessly you had a Partnership Government, I am so proud to hear you say nothing didn't change in that five years. You know your trouble was in a post box but we will not talk about that now, we will talk about that some other time. Today every single thing I have on my paper here you have answered it and then you bring somebody who has to write the Law in order to make these things happen Mr. Minister Young. So I am holding you to your word, every single thing and whenever this

thing happens the future of poor people's lives will go up a little higher; not right up in the middle class. You talk about help everybody, let us do that thank you very much.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Thank you very much for the compliment.

❖ **Irma Agad, La Romaine (Female, African 60's)**

My Councillor supposed to be Mr. Ronald Hall, I listened to the Minister and as the gentleman said, I am very happy with all of what he had said. I am sad to know that I have to follow the gentleman that spoke first and I am trying not to go on that ledge but that is why I am here. I am living at #111 Street La Romaine and the Councillor, before I go there let me talk about the administrative authority that you spoke about Minister Khan. In that, my problem because I don't have to go into the details of my problem but my problem I have with my Councillor and where I live; I went to Penal/Debe Corporation and I wrote letters. They keep referring me back to my Councillor and my Councillor is not helping me and I have my own reasons why he is not helping me. It is not a help that I caused on myself, Penal/Debe Corporation built 100 feet of box drain two houses from me at #107 and #109 and I am # 111. We lived 25 years there we had no water problem, no box drain problem. They decided to build 100 feet of box drain #107 to #109 and the way the contractors; I know it is not Penal/Debe Corporation who actually did it but they are the people in charge. The Contractor build it and send all the water in front of me. I have no box drain, the water settle in front of me and it is seeping underground and it is eroding my property. When I realize that Mr. Stuart Young would have been here tonight, I didn't realize he was here for the plans and to draw the legal plans for the Reform. I said he will come and help me how to sue Penal/Debe Corporation for my property. I wrote that letter to Penal/Debe Corporation the water is seeping underground and it is eroding my property foundation. When I go to Mr. Hall, Mr. Hall say go to Stacy Roopnarine that was before September 7th because it is since 2012 I am having this problem. Go to Stacy Roopnarine because he has no money, yet I see the work is being done in my area at other houses. As I said I have my reasons believing why my property is being eroded. Penal/Debe Corporation built 100 feet of box drain and sent all the water in front by me. When I went to the Corporation last month the customer representative, as you said, very pleasant young lady she tried to help me. She sent me to a supervisor and the supervisor said to me, all decisions the Councillor will decide which works to be done where. So if I want to know if the administrative authority, when your Reform; how it will give the administrative people, which are the public servants; the say as to which work is done where and not the

Councillor. If the Councillor, if he hasn't found you in favour with him you will be left behind. That is why I am here tonight and I am so happy to hear all that you have said Mr. Minister and I thank you for your time with us, thank you.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Did You write me a letter on that matter? I think I saw a letter on something like that you know.

Irma Agad, La Romaine

No, but I have a letter address to you, Mr. Franklin Khan. *(Minister receives the letter)*

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Or okay and the lady raised an important point in the administration of work. Now long ago at the level of the Corporation, there was a lot of work done on the recurrent budget. The capital budget which was largely contracts had to be approved by the Council so in other words if the Council say well we want so many feet of box drains, so many pavements and so many pavilions fix; you approve a schedule of work do out your tenders and you do it. But there must always be work on the recurrent side that falls within the county superintendent and the County CEO and them to do because the recurrent budget is being done through your staff and you buy material from goods and services. Things like that because you cannot run a system where everything has to be a contract. You must have recurrent work going so what I would like to see happening and it is now happening in URP that you are not contracting out a lot of these work. The contract system came in vogue when the system of in-house work had started to fail and you said you felt you were getting more efficiency from contracts. There is also a role to play in recurrent work and it is something I would look at because that what she is explaining there is easily something to be done on the recurrent budget. You just have to buy some six-inch blocks, three pieces of steel and do the drain and let me tell you, I said this at the last consultation and I will say it again. Ladies and gentlemen engineer quantities layers in the Corporation. Drainage is something cannot just build a drain that starts nowhere and ends nowhere. A drainage must have an outfall and when you design a drain if you do not have an outfall for the water you better had and don't build any drains because you will create more problems. You cannot start a box drain here and finish it there, it doesn't start anywhere and it does not go into an outfall into natural water courses or fall into another drain. That is simple basic engineering, I know you all don't have engineers but at least your road supervisors should know that. That is para engineering that is, you know as how you have paralegal; the legal

clerk will know that so the checkers and them supposed to know that. I've heard a lot of stories on this drain that starts nowhere and ends nowhere. So, mam, I would probably take a personal look at this.

❖ **Prakash Nanlal (Male, Indian, 50's)**

I want to talk on behalf of all the Councillors in this St. Patrick, Shanti Boodram is one of the Councillors that work real hard in the whole of Penal/Debe Corporation. To tell you I working five years going with her and Penal people and the whole of people in particularly didn't want to work for \$160.00 a day right. The Corporation had a contract going on for \$160:00 a day and then they raise it for \$170.00 but now as how they have ten days and you building service count. Right now most of the people rushing for the work and they saying that the Councillors wasn't helping them but that wasn't the point. The point is that the people from Penal Rock Road and all these places didn't want to work for \$160.00 but now as they working for service count they rushing for work now because you getting your full salary from the Corporation. Shanti Boodram is a hard working person she do plenty work, Mr. Councillor Diptee, Marsha all of them. These Councillors help plenty people, plenty poor people because I never had a job, I had four children going to school, I have a son married and isn't working no way. These Councillors and them- you could have go out and talk to these Councillors and tell them well look my son is not working or I not working, I have my sick mother and they always look out to you to help you. But it reach that in a way that Penal/Debe Corporation have , just the other day we had a little strike or what the case might be but right now Penal/Debe Corporation once we Councillors and them have say the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Penal, Siparia and Rock Road everybody will have good jobs. Will at least have something to carry home for their families when the week reach or the fortnight reach so this is not really no racial system. The point about it if you walk right now on one mile, Alda Village, you see the Corporation build a nice pavilion because people of Trinidad and Tobago like nothing betterment for themselves. You see the toilet bowl break up the lights thief in the bulbs and all these things. When the Corporation do something and they do it for the people, is the people who have to take care of it. People depending on the Government to clean a 10 feet drain in front their house. I find the like a drain in front of your house, people should able to clean that for themselves. A twenty feet or a thirty feet drain, not wait for ten people to come to work and clean a ten feet drain for the end of the day. I live at Penal Rock Road I used to clean about nearly three hundred feet of road both side left and right, okay thanks very much.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

The gentleman did what he had to do but he made a valid point, the final point was a valid point. There was a time in Trinidad and Tobago when people took responsibility for their gap and you sir you were in charge of even the public spaces in front of you. All of a sudden every single thing now has to be done by the government. That sense of community, self-reliance has to come back. A man will pass the wacker and if he knows the boundary here and that is government land he will cut it off right there he wouldn't even say well he will make a little space beyond his lot. That really breeds the selfishness that has permeated our society ladies and gentlemen and what is happening is that we are no longer our neighbour's keeper. That is an urban culture, sorry to tell Stuart Young that but it is starting to permeate the rural areas because long ago with your neighbour your gate used to be open, your front door used to be open, children playing in neighbour's yard. Let me just say something about rural development, I didn't talk about that one but I have been saying that the purpose of the Ministry of Rural Development is not to urbanised rural areas it is to bring back a rural culture in the community apart from the infrastructure work. Ladies and gentlemen trust me there is nothing better than rural living and let us bring back that Penal/Debe and bring it back to Trinidad and Tobago.

❖ **Rajendra Suchit (Male Indian 50's)**

I live at Suchit trace between Gopie trace where the new highway is passing, for the past five months we have been having a very serious problem with the dust everybody is using the road as it is an open road. We have been to all the relevant authority and to this day nobody has been able to help us. The police, the MP, NIDCO, the Regional Corporation and everybody else. To this point in time, nobody has been able to help so I would like to know what the situation with us is because I live on less than a 1000 feet off of the highway. There is a little child in the house and the whole village is being suffered due to this. There is a private contractor in Debe trace who uses the road as if is his one. We spoke to him, one day he send he water truck, I see the truck come and then the truck went back down the road. I would like to know what is the next situation with this problem that we are having because as it is nobody in authority seems to be able to help; so I would like to know what is the present situation as it is, thank you very much.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Well the highway has stalled I mean and that is a different issue but what happen is the base and the sub-base has already been laid. The asphaltic cover has not been put on as yet

so even if they're using the road obviously it will kick up dust but that road is not a public road and it should not be accessible to the public so they should block it off.

Rajendra Suchit

This is the point I am trying to put here, the road is not open and everybody using the road. Race cars, the contractor, everybody is using the road and we are having a hell of a time and nobody in authority seems to be doing anything about it. Not the EMA, not the police, not NIDCO, not the Regional Corporation and in the meantime villagers suffering so what do I do?

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Is it Gopie trace you said or Suchit trace?

Rajendra Suchit

Between Gopie trace and Suchit trace just off Suchit trace. I have in my possession here a letter for one Mr. Navin Ramsingh the Director of highways, I don't know who the gentleman is but we spoke to him two days ago he said he might be present here so I have this letter for him.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

Give it to us and we would...

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Give the PS it and I would get it on to Navin but he is the Director of Highways and between him and NIDCO they should do something about it.

Rajendra Suchit

Thank you sir.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

I am actually meeting with NIDCO soon so I would raise the issue with them.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

And the idea of drag racing and thing going on there is not acceptable.

Rajendra Suchit

It have drag racing cars going on there, where they come from I don't know, everybody Tom, Dick and Harry and the dust is unbearable. And is a whole village suffering, little children. My sister-in-law has a little baby who is one year old, he can't find he way. The whole village is suffering and especially so the contractor from Debe trace he like he owns the road. Yuh know is dust night and day I mean oh gosh man we need some help. Nobody in authority nobody the police the EMA nobody who should be helping is of no use, what to do please I begging.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

We hear you, sir. Thank you, sir we hear your cry.

❖ **Male Participant (Indian 50's)**

I did a letter, I did my recommendation but I would like to read out something because I see like it's taking a trend here and I think I want to read what I did. Now I work in the public service right, thirty-eight years, thirty-five years of which I spent in Local Government. I have worked at the Penal/Debe Corporation I started from down to the bottom as a checker, the road officer one, road supervisor three and I am now the building superintendent Ministry of Works Construction Division. I came up with some points this morning while sitting down having some tea. My concern with Local Government Reform is that we need trained technical staff right, you will see it on my level because it address to you and it is in the box there. Fully staffed these Regional Corporations with qualified trained technical staff in the engineering department. All monthly paid, daily paid and contract employees who can enforce all laws and bylaws that apply to the highway act, public health; all the Acts that Regional Corporation use. The reason is that if one looks at all the projects undertaken by the Regional Corporation approximately 80% or more, they are of substandard quality. They are not in accordance to good and sound construction engineering, procedures and practices which is equivalent to a waste of financial resources. In numerous instances, one can observe projects taking place mainly, box drains, pavements, culvert, road works which are not going to benefit the general public but to the wimps and fancies; sorry to say it. To the wimps and fancies of Councillors and those associated with technical studies done. According to somebody with some drain just now,

no studies being done to justify the project, they just build something because the Councillor want it there. Secondly, we talk about contract work and employment, after every election, Local Government Election, now I have been involved in Local Government for thirty-five years so I am speaking from experience. After every Local Government Election, you see new staff especially daily paid coming, I don't have a problem. You see new contractors, I don't have a problem but what we need to do is that the rules must be implemented for transparency and good accountability. One of the things is that Chief Executive should also ensure that when contract works are undertaken it should be executed by bonafide contractors in accordance with the contractual agreement and not Corporation officials. Everybody know what does be going on, Corporation officials functioning as subcontractors and contractor agents, that is happening all over, I am speaking from experience. Elimination of such practices from officials the State can now obtain value for money on State projects and State expenditures. Thirdly I am speaking here now about the selection of Aldermen, now in most instances the selection of Alderman is by the various political party. I am of the view after working for 35 years in Local Government there should be additional Aldermen. The President of T&T should select approximately 50% of the elected Councillors and Aldermen, 50% of that quota should be independent Aldermen so that complaints like what these gentlemen them have here could be attended. The reason why I am suggesting that is that there are too many highly qualified retired residents living within each Regional Corporation who can make a significant contribution to the functioning of Regional Corporation. Independent Alderman can question decisions that are about to be taken. Making meaningful contributions by demanding transparency and accountability without having any affiliation with political parties. Any way you go the pole will show you, the data will show that Local Government Election is less than 50 % of the population votes. So you have another 50% who, well I am not going to vote because I don't get anything, but they have a problem. There are numerous individuals within the region who do not wish to be affiliated with a political party but remain neutral and objective and at times have no avenue to express displeasure as to what is taking place. Such concerns could now be brought to the attention of Independent Aldermen, thank you.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

Throughout our Consultations over the past few months, we've heard the plea of moving away from party representation and the introduction of some level of independence, along the lines of what the gentleman has suggested. When we study other jurisdictions we know that it takes place, I think Minister Khan had pointed out previously for example in the Province of Ontario in Canada. So it is something that we are actually looking at we believe there is legitimacy in that cry and justification for it. There will have to be certain policy

decisions taken and in particular whether the President be the person charge with the responsibility of appointing such independent people to represent the various parts of the Constituency. So it is something that is receiving our attention and something we've heard throughout the rest of the country.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

And just to pick up on what Minister Young has said there; I am not a lawyer but in Law the President is the only person who really can say I am appointing an independent person or persons. I've been seeing a trend in a lot of committees, especially those that are being championed by the multilateral agencies and International Organizations like the IDP, the extractive industries committee. I don't know if we can legislate that but Mr. Young will guide but apart from that if we cannot appoint independent people, whatever that means; what they do now is work Law and in regulation the role of Civil Society. If you can say Civil Society Representative and if Civil Society comes from established Civil Organizations, the chances are you can get some independence out of that. We have found ourselves in terms of a governing structure in Trinidad in a brutally political system and it is an inheritance that we got from Independence to now and it is the Westminster system. The Westminster system is very adversarial in nature so sometimes when we have consultations like these you hear from the people. There are weaknesses in the system and we are aware of it but you know sometimes you're trapped in it but the point the gentleman made I think is quite valid and it's something we can look at.

❖ **Marilyn Agar Toussaint, Union Hall Gardens, (Female, African, 60s)**

Good evening to the head table, now I want to say that on behalf of the residence of Union Hall that we welcome this initiative and we hope that it will bear fruition in the not too distant future. Why I say that is because at present we in Union Hall are suffering a little bit. First of all, when the development was constructed we were under the San Fernando East and then we moved across. We got some lights in the San Fernando East when it was there. Since it moved across we have been trying desperately to get assistance from the Corporation and everything is just falling on deaf ears. Now we have a Councillor Ms. Marsha Jaimungalsingh, I tell you if I ask for the ground to be cut in order to have any function on the ground she's going to get it cut for me. That I sure I will get but the other things we are desperate. In 2009 we formed our community council; you know where our community council holds meeting? In a garage and we have an area for a community centre. We run Divali programs, we run family days, we have discussions in our meetings, we bring in people to discuss in those meetings, in a garage and that is our official

community centre. I tell you when we have an AGM the national body brings people from other community councils to see how this thing is run because we know we have nice clothes but we don't have court clothes. So we do the thing right and we expect to get the best out of the community. Now what we have for a playground is to me and I insult our intelligence because it's on a slope and I can safely say that because I just retired, Curriculum Officer Physical Education I have been in the service for forty years. Now I want to give back, 2009 we started and we have been asking. There was a pole on the ground we ask just relocate because as the ground is sloped the water gathers down in that area so just to relocate the pole. One Mr. Manwar the Councillor before had done it, and put the pole there. Just to relocate the pole and is pressure, they made us plant a pole, we paid thousand and change dollars at Petrotrin for the pole. We as the community we planted the pole now is just to move the lights and the junction box to the upper end of the ground, they telling us we need to find forty thousand dollars to do that. This is not our house I believe that the Corporation has to find a way to assists; we say it takes a village to raise a child and that is true, irrespective of the kind of child that would raise. We want to ensure that Union Hall Gardens remain pristine and remain that anybody who comes in there to live would want to live inside there. All we are asking the Corporation is to give us the assistance, guide us as to where we go, help us because at the end of it all we don't want others to disgust. We want to ensure that if every community is properly organized and given basic amenities we would not have the cause to talk about 100 police and 100 this because every community will be well served. We ask to give us a hard court, we pointed out to the Minister. They came in 2012 just before the election, they brought some plans into our meeting. I said Sir, Mr. Baboolal please don't take us for red; I said I am going to work late this morning because you asked us to come on the ground. He said they will give us a building and this is how they will be constructing, after the election that was it. When I called one Mr. Sebastian Edwards last December he said you'll didn't get that yet? I said but AA; He said but I thought you all get that already. He look into it but he not working in that area again but he'll try to help. Please just give us some assistance and I am going to tell you it's sad but I am going to say this, no, I hate washing dirty linen in public. We need assistance to keep Union Hall and to build the union in Union Hall, I thank you. Is it possible that I can talk to you all privately I would prefer that because I really have a lot to say but I am not into this, too much things in the public.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Just one question, Union Hall is still under the jurisdiction of the HDC?

Marilyn Agar Toussaint

It is still under the jurisdiction just like Serenity Heights down in Penal here and Serenity Heights is well taken care of and they came on long after Union Hall. They are well taken care of, they have lights on the field and everything. We are getting nothing and everything is a push around, go here, go there. In this package here a number of letters that I have written, we have written, HDC, Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, Dr. Roodal Monilal, the works right in here.

❖ **Roland Hall (Male African 60's)**

A pleasant good evening to all, I am Rowland Hall, the councillor for the electoral district of Palmiste/Hermitage but it also includes a great part of La Romaine. I am proud to be the councillor and also the vice-chairman of Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. Why am I proud at this point in time to be a councillor? Because we saw a certain type of light, I always like to say thank you and thank you so I thank you Minister and your team for coming. You were quite eloquent in your words, in your explanation and as they say, I hope I moving out of the dream world. What you have said of moving out from the local government, what I would like to say also, we had a problem at one time, of managing things and if local government was properly managed at a certain era the complaints that people have today for the type of money that pass through this country, all those problems would have been solved.

So if we move on, I like going forward because they say forward ever backward never, I will come around before I go there again to continue to say thanks and I will say why I now enjoy under all the pains I hear the people speak about. You see, we saw a certain type of light, there were some words called neglect, neglect, neglect, for these areas that were in opposition for most of the time but there came a lady by the name of the Honourable Kamla Persad Bissessar and she brought a type a light to the communities that were seeing neglect. I'll come back there in a while because I want to move on with the consultation.

And I said that, if local government was properly managed then we would not have a way to go that way. So I'm hoping with the plans that you I have and not just living in hope, I like to pray a lot, because there were some words that would have faltered some last administration, what you call 'implementation', and we live for years in seeing things not implementing and the other word I want to add to that is 'maintaining'. Because when you implement you have to maintain and those are some of the problems we have seen with some past regime of implementing. I remember I was around in the time of Sadiq Baksh. I came from an engineering background; I worked TSTT for thirty-seven (37) years, so now I come as a councillor I tell people I'm doing God's work. I'm out there most of the times of the day; I'm doing God's work.

So I look, I had the privilege of sitting at your first meeting of chairman and mayors, I represented my chairman at that time and you had made mention of our administration building and you said it's one of the two administration buildings that had the go ahead or at least should be in the construction phase at some point in time, so I would like you to give me some answers on that particular point. I also want to make a plug for our police, our regional police, because they would, you speak about putting 100 policemen, and we don't want to put the cart before the horse, we want to put a building for them, so we are saying at this point in time, I am saying, I am asking also at this point in time with the administration building if we can house them in that particular administration building when the time comes for that, I hope it will be a speedy action. So I hope as we move forward in all that you have said, we really get there.

I'll wind up now by touching on these issues of the people; well I see we don't have much line behind. The people, I want to compliment, just as I would compliment and say thanks to the Honourable Kamla Persad Bissessar, I want to complement the councillors of the Penal/Debe regional corporation. And you know why you hearing so much from the people because it appears as it is the first time they have had this type of access to their councillors. And it is one of the things the Honourable Kamla Persad Bissessar had instituted in us; go out and meet your people and when your people come to meet you try to solve their problems...."

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Let me just make an intervention here, ladies and gentlemen, this is a government public consultation on local government reform, it is not a political forum. Monday night meeting was Monday; today is Wednesday, okay. Let us stay away from hardcore politics, okay. Let us stay away from the hardcore politics, if a burgess, this is the peoples' forum and the people come here to say, they will obviously want to say something about their Councillor. Some of it will be good and some of it will not be so good. You have to take it and its par for the core sir you're the vice chairman of a corporation and it is par for the core. So if a burgess makes a complaint about a particular councillor you are not supposed to so aggressively defend yourself in the context of that; that's all I have to say. Let's hear the next lady.

❖ **Patricia Daniel (Female African 40's)**

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Patricia Daniel from La Trace Rd. I was very pleased and I'm very happy to hear what you all have in place; is what I would like to see done but at the same time because again I live in Penal and I understand the political whole thing and

I don't want to go to the political thing. What I want to ask that we have representation; all I'm asking is that everybody in Penal have representation. I like what this gentleman was saying about independent senators coming in as well and all; anything that can be done so that whole of Penal can get fixed, not just, if you are UNC or if you are not UNC, everybody. I just, that's all I want. So I feel good to hear what you say but I get frightened; I feel real good you know but I get real frighten, my belly start to boil. Because I start to say to myself, oh Lord, now they have everything that is it there for us; we have nothing to get again here. Because we've been here, I've been voting as long as I can remember. Whether is PNM or UNC, we don't get nothing here, because you know is political. But I'm asking that this new thing that you doing, that you remember us and we can go forward, thanks.

➤ **Response from Minister Stuart Young from the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

I think I'd like to make a point at this stage, we haven't touched on tonight. With one of the moves towards evolution, there must come a higher level of accountability and transparency because the regional corporations are now going to be given their own budgets; they must come before the people. One of the things we are looking at legislating for is a system similar, we have in parliament. With every year, once you have your budget, you must come and present it to the people and then at the end you must come and account to the people the same way we do it in parliament. And that, when we legislate for that, that is going to give every single burgess or citizen the opportunity to attend in a town hall style like this and ask the hard questions. And the politicians need to step up to the plate and you need to be more mature; you're not always going to please everyone but everyone has the right to voice their opinion, once they so in a respectful way. And how you respond to the people is a direct reflection of your maturity because we are the leaders and we must show and lead by example.

❖ **Participant (Male Indian 50's)**

Mr. Minister, I would like to welcome you to Penal, you and your entourage and to wish you all success in this afternoon's consultation. Minister, as you are aware, we have a lot of farmers going back to the land. And we have something we call; we have hundreds of kilometres of roads, in the Penal/Debe area which we term agricultural access road. However Ministry of Agriculture do not have the resources to maintain these roads and they call on the corporation from time to time to do the necessary work. We would as the Penal/Debe to support our farmers because you know the contracting work is out and so forth. We are asking what your guidance with respect to agricultural access roads in Penal/Debe region, thank you very much.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

There are four (4) sets of roads in Trinidad and know that needs to be synchronized. There are roads that fall under the Ministry of Works and Transport; those are highways, main arterial roads, main roads. Then there are Regional Corporation Roads which are minor roads and traces; then there are agricultural access roads and there is something call of orphan roads. Orphan roads have to parents and orphan roads are largely roads that come out of private development that people just develop some lot, sell it, and they just abandon the people they sold the land for and nobody has jurisdiction over that.

Agricultural access roads has an issue and right now we are in discussions with the minister, I am in discussions with the Minister of Agriculture and the Prime Minister is kind of looking over it and to determine whether a significant portion of the agricultural access roads will fall under the ministry of rural development for execution. Because remember, the Ministry of Rural Development is an arm of the government to deal with rural areas. The agricultural and fisheries portfolio is so wide in terms of agriculture policy, reducing the food import bill and thing, and really and truly the road function is really an engineering function which really doesn't reside as a good bit fellow with agriculture, and agriculture policy and vectors and beekeeping and fisheries and what have you. So that will be sorted out shortly but we, I glad he brought up agriculture because ladies and gentlemen obviously this is the direction in which Trinidad has to go.

Male Participant

Yes Mr. Minister, the reason why - see how Penal/Debe will develop will be different from other areas because the gentleman might start with a little farm and then he will build his house there; so the problem with where we separate the agriculture access road he will go into the farm. His children will take part of the land. They change; they will apply to change the farmland now into a development so that they can build. So that's why I'm asking that we look, take a serious look at these agricultural access roads and ensure that something is being done to protect our farmers and our people who intend to their properties and so forth.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

"Well said, well said."

❖ **Marsha Jaimungal Khan (Female Indian 40's)**

My name is Marsha Jaimungal Khan, councillor for Debe East Esperance Union Hall. Mr. Minister all the councillors at the Penal/Debe regional corporation try their best to support their burgesses outside there. Minister, I would like to get some clarification from you with regards like, we have roads that fall under the jurisdiction Penal/Debe corporations and yet there are other orphan roads where I mean burgesses will come to us and ask for assistance for a little yellow crush and oil sand to fix these roads. Minister when we, we I mean as councillors, when we walk and campaign for election, we never went and ask, you are PNM or you are UNC, we all ask for their votes. And I think if now they come to councils and ask for some help like that I think that we should be able to assist. When we go to our meetings we will pass it through our meetings Minister but we will hear from the administration that these are private roads. I would like you to explain what are private roads; being in the corporation.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

That is a hard question. You see, that is why I was pushing for a recurrent budget to do things like these because if you have to go to council to get formal approval, obviously the law demands the roads must fall under your jurisdiction; so I don't expect councillors to break the law. But again we cannot be slaves of the law. So in other words, you are a councillor, you representing people, a piece of road that needs some gravel, it doesn't fall under the schedule of the ministry of local government, for heaven sake you are a Councillor, or you are an MP and if they go to their MP, the MP has to find a way to get some gravel to do that.

And if you have a recurrent budget that has goods and services and basic material you can buy, I see nothing wrong; I hope I'm not speaking out of turn, in ordering two (2) load of gravel and spread it on the road. Because you are not thieving the gravel. The gravel is for the people. We can't be boxed in you know with legislation and sometimes it handcuffs you. And that is what I was saying all the time we have to be flexible; when I made the point if somebody comes to the council office, err on a way of helping them. There are grey areas but err on the side of helping them.

➤ **Response from Minister Stuart Young from the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

Just to add to Minister Khan's point, and I think it does come down to a budgeting point; he's right. So now that you'll be charged with the responsibility of administering your own budget and having more responsibility, in particular, collecting revenue and these types of things; it is going to come down to the board and for you'll sit around the table to decide

how you going to be dispensing the income. And I agree with him, we certainly not encouraging you breaking the law but ultimately we all there as representatives to assist the people and we have to change our mindset to be able to assist the people. And one of the areas you have to factor in is when you are now charged with the responsibility for planning and development within the corporation.

The example of the gentleman before you was giving of people now moving from agricultural land, maybe asking for a change of use to mix, etcetera. Those are the things that need to be factored in, so maybe in that stage you implement, so if you moving from agricultural to residential, charge them with the responsibility to of maintaining the roads and this type of thing. But also, the taxes you will be collecting within your various jurisdictions, you have to supply a certain amount of your budget towards it. But in the planning stage, think ahead; think that this is not always going to remain as a strict private road. When you giving planning permission to people to develop these residential areas, make sure that you have charged them with the responsibility to maintain the roads going forward. And if you have to, I agree with Mr. Khan, take 2 loads of gravel and help the burgesses.

Marsha Jaimungal Khan

I must say thanks, Minister I hope the administration of Penal/Debe will hear that. Minister, and also with Ms. Agad who complained about the HDC, we have a good communication there but since I've been the Councillor, this has been my second (2nd) term I've been tried to my very best to get things done in Union Hall. Under my electoral district, I have three (3) HDC developments that fall within - Serenity Heights, Union Hall, and the Retrench Settlement. As I heard her say that Serenity Heights is up to a standard. Is not Serenity Heights is to a standard, we all, I have in my office hundreds of letters that I'd wrote to HDC with regard to these developments and HDC see it fit to put those developments, those play parks, to place it there. HDC is the one who did that. But being a Councillor for these few years I have not gotten any - rarely assistance from the HDC development with regards to any drainage, works, roads or anything in that area. Minister, before I go I would also like to ask you our regional complex, if you can give us an idea when that will be started and also I support the views in the last forum at Princess Town where I heard Mr. Subash Panday saying that councillors are the ones who only find integrity that the CEO and the technical officers at the corporations should also find integrity; Mr. Franklyn Khan, I do support that.

➤ Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development

Integrity - you have to be careful how wide you put the net. Let me just make a statement with regard to Penal corporation administration building. The local government reform

process started under Mrs. Manning, when I say, the modern era, okay. There was a lot of issues dealt first but she was really gone go on this, she did a lot of work and stuff like that. And based on some of the work she had done a decision was taken to build regional headquarters or regional complexes for the fourteen (14) corporations. Every single corporation had poor accommodation facilities and poor facilities for housing their staff, for housing their equipment, everything.

The program started and we built the Chaguanas headquarters, Chaguanas borough headquarters and that really is the prototype as to how a regional corporation should look like that you know, it was well done. But as we speak there are thirteen (13) corporations that have the same problem that Penal/Debe has, okay. Sangre Grande, if you see where Sangre Grande is, if you see where Diego Martin is; I mean it is all an issue. Two (2) administrative buildings were getting closer to start construction, which was Princess Town and Penal/Debe. Princess Town was the subject of a loan which the loan agreement faltered just before elections because certain fees were not paid and the loan has lapsed, the cost was 115 million dollars, Penal/Debe was 100 million dollars.

Ladies and gentlemen you see I don't want to get too political, we are re-looking at all these administrative buildings and to come up with a schedule of order in which to put it. Let me say one thing, under the last administration, they constructed a lot, I think nothing about that, but for heaven's sake everything was costing a 100 million dollars and more. The Princess Town building is a two storey building with 30 thousand square feet of office space and the contracted cost, the estimated cost was 115 million dollars before vat. That is 3500 dollars a square foot... Mr. Farish Khan was involved in land development in Port of Spain...so obviously these things have to be relooked at.

Okay, it has to be relooked at and then we will go back, we will audit the quantity surveying thing and then based on these consultations we will come up with a plan and hear the dilemma we face. Let us say, let's say Port of Spain and San Fernando have some kind of headquarters, let we just leave them out the while, I don't want to offend the mayor; so you have eleven (11). Let us say we have money to build three (3). On what basis you choose the three (3)? If you choose it in PNM area they go say you bias. If you mix it up they go say, why Princess Town and not Sangre Grande? So what is my intention? That is where you borrow. I have eleven (11) corporation headquarters to build at an average cost of 50 million because I cannot see those building costing more than 50 million and not 115 million dollars as in Princess Town.

So eleven (11) at 50 million dollars is about 500 to 600 million dollars; you go to the IDB, get a soft loan for 600 million dollars, which is small money compared to what was borrowing before and you go out you take UDeCOTT or NIPDEC or somebody and you simultaneously tender for eleven (11) buildings; it is the only way out. Cause I cannot say I going to approve the Penal building and approve the Princess Town building, and Diego Martin have a

building and Arima want a building and Sangre Grande wants a building Mayaro/Rio Claro regional corporation wants a building.

So is not that we pressurizing Penal because the sod was turned the Sunday before the elections; or because a loan was about to be procured for Princess Town. And then I asked on what basis was Princess Town and Penal chosen out the eleven (11), we being fair. So I think I the plan I am articulating is a more altruistic plan is a more transparent plan, where after this consultation we will look at the capacity, we will look at the organizational structure that we will be putting forward because we will need staffing. You will need to have a design for the building and to see what the new responsibilities of local government will be. What is the type of office space they will need and then now you go to the multilateral agency and procure a loan for that so that there will be no accusation of bias.

❖ **Azam Piprawala (Male Indian 40's)**

Good evening to everyone the name is Azam Piprawala, Imam of the Debe Mosque and Alderman of Penal/Debe Corporation. Minister, I saw the presentation and I must comment all those who would have their input into it, like my colleague before me as well; we commend the efforts. But there was one thing I was looking for; I don't know if I missed it. There's a meeting we have at the corporation, which is a very important meeting, called the regional coordinating meeting. I really didn't see much of that in your presentation. Further to that, might I add, I have seen the importance of it, however, the regional heads who are supposed to be present at that meeting, one very important one which is the office of the ombudsman, I haven't seen for a long, long, long, long time.

Other agencies for people who have issues for like people who live in the HDC settlements would come to this meeting and they would hear the cries of burgesses; two things happen, one they will come, they will take a note, next month at the next meeting, well I called this person and we didn't get through. Okay, so what's the next step, right? Minister the next problem we would have, we would come and sit at a meeting, I have nothing to report, everything remains the same. I think for the last three (3) or four (4) regional coordinating meetings right, I don't know, I'm not trying to be political here, but it would be targeted because each of these officers that come, each of these officers that come, they come with the same report, we have nothing to report, nothing to report. It puts us at a disadvantage when we would hear burgesses cry out. You know they make a request to the councillors so the councillors have a magic wand with they have money in their pocket where the mud pull out, and do a job or get this done and that done.

Councillors and I must assure all those who are listening and here today, this is my first term, maybe my only term in council, but I know for certain they bring request, they bring reports, they bring complaints of the burgesses to the administration and it is executed to a

certain extent, with certain haste. Now I've come from the private sector so imagine, when I reach in public sector, how annoying it is to get a document moved from one desk to the next desk. To hear it takes a month, to hear at a next meeting, which comes a month after, well no - we didn't do the letter yet, we will do it today. What policies is there in this proposal, yes autonomy is given, authority is given, but not just to come in a town hall meeting and complain, I not getting this or that. What formal process is there going to be in this proposal? If I have, I'm member, if I'm living in a particular area and I am not getting a particular service that I am supposed to be getting. What policy is there, in your proposal that I can complain to? Example the Office of the Ombudsman etcetera or is that still going to be the process to follow.

Moderator

Councillor, before the Minister answers, do you have any suggestions or recommendations from your time spent?

Councillor Azam Piprawala

My time spent?

Moderator

With regards to the same issue you just raised.

Councillor Azam Piprawala

Firstly like I've said, I've raised a number of issues.

Moderator

The one with regards to the Ombudsman.

Honourable Minister Franklin Khan interjects:

No, the regional coordination meeting.

Councillor Azam Piprawala

The regional coordination meeting, I think is one that should be maintained. However, as it still remains under the ambits of the ministry of local government and rural development I believe and I've heard chairmen of councils continuously say this at every regional coordinating meeting, the Minister or perhaps the ministry itself must get in involved at this stage now. It is becoming annoying to know that the officers must be present, further to that they will come to the meetings and say, 'I have nothing to report'. Everything, all the

complaints that were listed in the meetings, they remain the same; three months past, come on. Thank you very much.”

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Okay, it is an area we will have to look closely at because the regional coordinators’ meeting is a good instrument to have things done. I think it is attended by WASA, T&TEC and the other service, the public utilities in particular. And you see that is the problem because the local government is not empowered and the principle of centralised government is so entrenched in the governance structure of Trinidad. Because a WASA manager will put a regional coordinators meeting, last on his list priorities. So it is the culture that has to be changed and we have to get the sense into the governance structure, that local government is important, and then well the responsibility will be now the Minister and the Cabinet to make sure that these regional coordination meetings are very well taken. I know it is a weak point I have heard this complaint for the first time and we will address it.

❖ **Trevor Sudama (Male East Indian 60’s)**

Thank you very much, Minister Young, Minister Khan, welcome to Penal/Debe. I didn’t intend to say anything here this evening; I really came to listen. But I thought I’d make a little contribution. I live within the boundaries’ of Penal/Debe corporation and as you know I have been writing about local government reform, a number of years now; seven (7), eight (8) , night (9) years ago coming down to the last few years. And I am very happy that a lot of the proposals which I put forward have been incorporated in government’s policy; but there are one (1) or two (2) things which I want to address.

The first is we are dealing here with structural reform of the local government process; evolution, whatever you want to call it. My contention is that in addition to structural reform we have to have at the same time political reform, the relevant political reform to accompany that and by that I mean, that here you are, giving additional powers responsibilities, choices to the local government bodies and what we need, two (2) things, is a strengthening of these bodies by having a higher calibre of local government representatives and secondly of course support services, mechanisms and so on, the administrative, legal, financial techno support and so on which would be more of less of a permanent nature.

Unless that is done because you see, that is also tied up with the issue of accountability. In-between the term of a councillor, to whom is that person accountable? And you can’t tell me he or she is accountable at elections time because you know once you get the nod of the party’s hierarchy you go on the party ticket and you don’t have to be accountable and

performance is not an issue, okay. But in the interval, how is accountability to be realized, in such a decision? I mean it took me four (4) years of pleading to get some potholes and some depression fixed on the road in front of my house, four (4) years.

So as far as I'm concerned that's an issue because the way councillors are selected as candidates is also of importance in terms of determining the calibre of people and of course their commitment. The other issue has to deal with the permanent staff, as of present you have permanent staff in the local body; you have CEO's and other people and so on. To whom are they accountable? They're not accountable to the corporation. If they are accountable to some distant permanent secretary in Port of Spain, you will understand that is hardly likely to be any kind of significant system of accountability. I mean some of them don't even bother to respond to a telephone call or return your call or make an appointment to see you. I mean in particular the CEO of Penal/DEBE; I have had that experience. Because they are accountable, it seems to nobody.

Now, in your reform system, the issue really is these permanent staff, there have been many and there'll be a larger number of technical people and so on. To whom are they accountable? Will it be to the regional corporations or will it be to some other body? How will we assess their performance? I'm not sure how that will work. Two (2) other points I want to make. The question of how constitutional provision for this local government reform; except you amend the constitution to put in this reform there is nothing that prevents another administration from coming and turning the whole thing over. The other point I want to make is regarding the independence of funding.

Now you mentioned about local government retaining property taxes and so on but you know some local government area are much richer than others, right. And I proposed that a formula be established to take into account population, geographical areas, the interim state of infrastructure and a host of other things on the basis of which will be the mainstay of funding for the relevant corporations. And finally, you are giving more powers, more resources, more responsibility but except we have a robust and rigorous system of audit internal/external, and I'd also propose an annual or semi-annual meeting with especially determined, especially proposed parliamentary committee on local government to whom all these corporations will report on a semi-annual or annual basis on their performance, their mandate, so on and so forth. So generally the question is we welcome this; the issue lies in its implementation. If the implementation is correct and we get the political side reasonably well sanctioned then I think we are on the right road. Thank you very much.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Thank you very much Mr. Sudama; just too quickly respond, we running out of time. The higher calibre of councillors who have been offered to the public, that becomes such a valid

point but that become the political responsibility of the political parties. It has nothing to do with the legislation now; you cannot legislate for, to say, if somebody running for public office, you cannot say, they must have a degree. To run for public office all you need is to be eighteen (18) years and have no police criminal record. The other comment I want to make; you are so right in terms of, we have to develop a matrix as to how we , who will have more taxes and how we top-up, whether it is based on geography, whether it is based on population and Minister Young is looking at that.

Finally, probably your most valid point is audit. Because I refer to the auditor general but that is a post facto audit. The auditor general audits you after the financial year finish and sometimes the auditor general audit comes five (5) years after. We, this administration office has put forward something call the General Accounting Office of Parliament which is supposed to be something like an online accounting unit; so that we are hoping and we will discuss that with the Prime Minister as to how he thinks the general accounting of parliament, which is really designed to have an over-site of the expenditure of ministries. If we could expand their scope, to probably look at regional corporations but your contribution was extremely well done.

❖ **Cecelia Gunness (Female Indian 50's)**

Good evening, welcome to Penal/Debe Mr. Minister and Mr. Young. It is nice to have a country boy in our mists. First off my name is Cecilia Gunness; I am a proud employee of the Penal/Debe regional corporation. While I know we don't live in the perfect world, from where I stand, I think that we try our best. Mr. Minister, I work at the front desk and I challenge you to come 8 am, 10 am, mid-day between twelve (12) and one (1) or four (4) and you will see me, okay. I challenge you.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

Thank you very much and I compliment you for that.

Cecelia Gunness

Thank you and I take a bit of offense because there are hard-working people like me at the Penal/Debe Corporation who try our best to be there at 8 to serve the people but also we have delinquents. So recognize us please, thanks a lot. What I want to talk about is duplication of works; CEPEP, URP and the corporation, okay. Something needs to be done about that. About her problem with PURE, that would have happened to me as well. PURE would have done all kinds of work all over the place including in front my house where water never came in my yard before but it is coming now. The Penal/Debe regional

corporation is saddled with remedial work being done by PURE. That said, whatever you had to say here this evening sounds very good. My concern is the balance between public servants and politicians, okay. I think you'll need to talk about that and I want to know who will be hiring staff for the new reformed corporations if it is that you will still be calling them. Thank you. Excuse me. I also want to say that at our corporation, customer service is a big thing that is being driven by our CEO Mr. Raymond Seepaul, thanks.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Franklin Khan Minister of Rural Development and Local Development**

The hiring of staff is something under serious consideration, on the committee, somebody from the Ministry of Public Administration from, we are working closely with the Service Commission. What we don't want is the proliferation of contract staff. The Prime Minister has gone on record saying he wants people to build back a career in the public service. The public service is something we will have to live with for a long time to come. What has, the public service has been decimated over the years, sometimes for justifiable reasons but we cannot continue to run a government with contract workers. Because it is not a career and you, there's a sting in the tail with that because people do not see it as a career so they do not put out in terms of the way they should out and we are committed to re-staffing the public service and more likely than not, the staffing for this reform will obviously come from the public service. As we speak we have four (4) members of the technical committee from the union, one from the PSA, one from NUGFW, one from Contractors and General Workers, and one from the union Amalgamated, which represents the city of Port of Spain.

❖ **Hance Scanterbury (Male African 50's)**

Good night, my name is Hance Scanterbury, from Pleasantville. This is not the first meeting I attended; I attended the meeting at Preysal. There I suggested that I am a public servant and I'm all for the empowering of the councils because I'm of the view that you can't hold somebody accountable if you haven't resourced the person and the council requires simply to get the funding. I had articulated at the Preysal meeting that the council should be given the money, the funding, and they will determine that they will engage the public service in order to deliver the goods that they paid for. So this is the only way that the council will get exactly what they paid for and the public service will be held accountable at the same time. There's a problem with the public service where there's moral dilemma there because of lack of resources because most of the joint select committees will articulate additional resources. But nobody; none of the politicians who are responsible for providing resources for many, many years have given in to these numerous reports to resource the public service. So sometimes you have a public servant doing yeoman. I know for myself,

sometimes I reach to work 4 o'clock in the morning and sometimes I work until 10 o'clock in the night.

That might be hard to believe but if you check my, the register where I work, this would, we have a lot of committed public servants who love their country and want to see that the country does well. But the problem we are having is that the corporation doesn't have the funding to engage any project because everybody comes to the corporation and them to say that they have a need and then when it reach the committee stages you find out that there are no funds; so that is where the backlog takes place.

The public service I know, works very hard, as many previous public services had articulated but the problem is the corporations do not shift enough to resource with the finances and that is all we need. You can give them addition and create a schedule for them which give them the responsibility but you have to give the council the funding, whatever matrix you come up with, the funding in order to execute the project now. Whatever happen, it is said that because is because of Tobago Model; that is the reason why Tobago is in a better position than Trinidad, but that is not so. It is a correlation but is no, you cannot say, I don't think you can, you don't have the study to say is because. So saying you will adopt the Tobago model and that will ensure that we have, we deliver...

Moderator

Sir, correct me if I'm wrong then, the issue that you're highlighting here is that of funding, correct?

Hance Scanterbury

Yes!

Moderator

Okay, is there anything else you would add to that because we really need to wind up?

Hance Scanterbury

Yes, yes, yes.

Moderator

Thank you.

Hance Scanterbury

What happen is that I love to look at fights and one of the best fights I saw is between Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran, you know. I am for empowering the council but I am also for empowering the public service so that we can fulfil our functions which are to ensure

that the excesses of the politicians are kept in check and the politicians can ensure that we do what we are been paid to do. I thank you.

➤ **Response from Minister Stuart Young from the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs**

I think to touch on the last part you made about ensuring that the politicians are kept in check. The good news is that the law provides for that, right. The minister had pointed it out earlier on, for example, between Ministers and Permanent Secretaries, and knowing when to draw the lines and the boundary. But, the point with public servants, the only way Trinidad and Tobago was able to move forward for the past few decades, is due to the commitment of dedicated public servants. I think public servants need to be recognized for that and we do recognize it. As with everything, the problems in the system and it's up to the public servants to help us unwind that as well, all right.

Hance Scanterbury

What happen is one of the issues also is that you mentioned auditing and the problem they having especially to do with the DPA, DPA hands are tied. If you look at their reports every year, sometimes 100 cases they would investigate. They have a monitoring and evaluating agency or departments. What I see that could be a solution is take away all the HR functions from the ministries. Give all that HR staff to the DPA so that DPA now can become responsible for managing and evaluating and keeping a check on the public service because there are public servants who profit from the inefficiencies in the system and there are politicians also who profit because of inefficiencies in the system. So you have, the same auditing function, if you can increase the staffing, even the auditing function, try to, whether it is in an agency or whatever formula you'll comes up with, but we have to empower the DPA to do what the constitution require them to do.

5.0 CLOSING

To conclude the proceedings of the 10th Local Government Consultation at Penal Government Secondary School, Minister Khan expressed that he thinks the evening's session was wonderful. He thanked all persons in attendance and said that he appreciated all the contributions and thanked all for participating.



PENAL CONSULTATION

6.0 ANALYSIS

6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

There were approximately 100 participants in attendance. Participants were generally receptive to the presentations of the Ministers and they were eager to give their input to local government reform.

There were approximately 70 (70%) male participants and 30 (30%) female participants. The majority (85%) of participants represented the age range 40 – 70 years. There was less than 5% representation of participants under the age of 40 and approximately 10% participants over the age of 70. The majority of participants (90%) appeared to be middle-class income earners with a few from low income and some high-income class. There was 70% representation from the Indo-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 30% being a majority of Afro-Trinidadian and some mixed-race participants.

6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 13 respondents from the plenary; 9 male and 4 female. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	6	40 – 70 (5), under 40 (1)
Indian	7	40 – 70 (7)

6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

The following topics were raised during the course of the consultation.

Topic	Frequency
Politics affecting delivery of services at Corporation	4
Accountability and Transparency of Councillors needed	6
Trust in Minister Khan's promises	4
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – buildings, roads, parks etc	2
Government dependency for trivial matters	1
New highway – too much dust	1
Staffing at Corporations – training	1

Contracts – transparency and accountability	1
Independent Alderman	1
Farmers assistance - roads	1
Councillor jurisdiction on private roads	1
Regional coordination meeting as check-up for various offices	1
Representatives of higher calibre	1
Audit Corporations/Ministries	1
Property Tax	1
Hiring of staff – responsibility?	1
Autonomy for Councils	1
Empowerment of public servants	1