

# Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

## St. Joseph

25<sup>th</sup> April 2016

St. Joseph Secondary School Hall



## Rapporteurs' Full Report



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**Contents**

- 1.0 OPENING ..... 3**
- 2.0 CHAIRMAN’S WELCOME REMARKS ..... 4**
- 3.0 MINISTER’S ADDRESS & VIDEO PRESENTATION ..... 6**
- 4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION ..... 15**
- 5.0 CLOSING ..... 34**
- 6.0 ANALYSIS ..... 35**
  - 6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS ..... 35*
  - 6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS ..... 35*
  - 6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS..... 35*

## 1.0 OPENING

The Consultation began with the playing of the National Anthem; followed by an opening prayer by Councillor Stenley. The Master of Ceremonies, Wesley Gibbings, then proceeded by welcoming all present to St. Joseph for the 12<sup>th</sup> of the islandwide series of consultations on Local Government Reform and thanked them for their presence.

This was followed by the welcome remarks which were delivered by the Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation, His Worship Edwin Gooding who welcomed everyone on behalf of the Corporation to the 12<sup>th</sup> Local Government Reform Consultation in the St. Joseph Secondary School.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

Ms. Desdra Bascombe - Chairman Technical Committee, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan,  
Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee

## 2.0 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME REMARKS

### His Worship Edwin Gooding



Minister of Rural Development and Local Government the Honourable Franklin Khan, other government ministers, members of parliament, Chairman of the San Juan Regional Corporation Mr Anthony Roberts, PS Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government PS Bascombe, Vice-Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation Councillor Paul Leacock and other councillors and aldermen of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, CEO Ms Loris George and staff and management of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, members of the business community, members of the media, members of the protective services, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, welcome.

I am indeed extremely excited about the consultation that we are about to have today because of all the many benefits and exciting new ideas it will bring; dramatically changing how regional corporations do business. But what is consultation? In my view, consultation is about communication. It is about sharing; it is about having discourse with all major stakeholders involved in any change project. It is to seek out all persons and entities that will be affected by the proposed change to hear their views and to get their suggestions and more importantly to allay their concerns or fears of the proposed change and to reassure them that your input is invaluable and will be taken into account when the final decision is made. The objective of consultation really is for our burgesses to speak freely, make suggestions, proposals, raise concerns and seek clarity on what is being proposed. At present our council has full responsibility for everything that takes place at the corporation and the region but in many instances if not all, council does not have the authority or autonomy to so act. This obviously creates what I consider a dysfunctional system where many times decisions that can be made quickly and have major beneficial impacts for burgesses cannot be taken or are not taken because of bureaucracy and or failure by those who have the power to execute the wishes of council.

Local Government reform will empower the council and management to make decisions quickly in order to satisfy the day to day demands of our burgesses, to be more efficient in what we do and be responsible and fully accountable to all our burgesses. Local Government reform is something that I recognized very early in our term of office as being critical for Local Government to make a quantum leap forward to raise the bar in terms of improving the quality of service we deliver in Tunapuna/Piarco and by extension, the whole of Trinidad through the other thirteen (13) regional corporations. The old paradigm of central government running

things through a local government ministry bureaucracy in my view has outlived its usefulness. As stated above, what we have is a dysfunctional system that falls woefully short in terms of what burgesses want and I dare say, are entitled to and what corporations are able to deliver. So today I welcome this consultation in the Tunapuna/Piarco region because I know that at the end of this exercise when the reform is realised our burgesses will get better services, better governance, a more caring system that we cannot give as we are presently constituted. I am convinced that consultation is the way to go and we have done everything possible to implore our burgesses to come forward today and make their contributions to let us know what they would like and I would like to give them the assurance that your contributions will be accurately recorded and be seriously considered when the final decisions are made to determine what form or format the reform Local Government would take.

This government's approach to change whenever change is identified across the board is one of genuine consultation with the people and I endorse this change process one hundred (100) per cent. Change, as we know, is never easy but is the only constant in our lives. That said, change has to be carefully managed and going the route of consultation is a tried and tested step to successful change. I look forward to lively and meaningful consultation that will contribute to the eventual success of a reformed Local Government. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.

### 3.0 MINISTER'S ADDRESS & VIDEO PRESENTATION MINISTER FRANKLYN KHAN



MINISTER KHAN

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, introduced himself to all present and welcomed them to the 12<sup>th</sup> consultation of the local government reform. He thanked Chairman Edwin Gooding of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for hosting the consultation. He informed the audience that this was the last leg of the consultations then gave them a breakdown as to the dates and locations of the other consultations that would be conducted during the week with the final consultation culminating in Diego Martin Corporation in which the Prime Minister would be present to give his closing remarks. The Minister commenced 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 have just seen illustrate a system and the dynamics which are not unfamiliar to most of you. Whether it's a blocked river, an empty lot next door that needs cutting, a blown streetlight, school repairs, a local heritage site, waste management, a bus shelter; the list goes on and on. Because under the current system, when a community needs something done, it has to take a place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run through the centralised heart of government. I could stop talking now. Ladies and gentlemen that is the fundamental government structure in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the fundamental weakness why as a nation we have not been able to deliver the quality of service to the people of Trinidad and

Tobago despite all the money we have pumped into the system. That is the problem. The problem in Trinidad and Tobago is service delivery. The system for service delivery is centralised, it is bureaucratic, it is antiquated, it is inefficient and it is not people friendly.

As a party when we campaigned for the 2015 election, the current Political Leader, then Opposition Leader, now Prime Minister articulated to very important, major policy shifts that we were offering to the national community. These are one; local government reform and two; the creation of a brand new Ministry called the Ministry of Rural Development. I have the honour to lead both sides of the coin. When I am in Corporations like Sangre Grande, Mayaro, Siparia in the deep-south, I spend some time on rural development. Today, it is not probably the best place to speak rural development because Tunapuna/Piarco is basically the corridor's Regional Corporation. You start and Mt. Hope and you end somewhere by the Valencia river although there is some rural component to it as you go across into the Caroni and into the St. Augustine seat and in certain parts of the valleys of the Northern Range, like Lopinot and to Valencia electoral district. But all I would say is that it is a major policy shift when a PNM Government, a Government that has been accused for decades of being largely urban centric and all we focus on is Port of Spain and the east-west corridor, saw it fit and under a new administration under Dr. Rowley to create a brand new Ministry to focus exclusively on rural areas. To me, that is a fundamental shift. It even goes further we reduced the Cabinet from 33 to 23 and yet the Prime Minister saw it fit to still have a Ministry out of that 23 dedicated entirely to rural development but today we are dealing with local government reform.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the attributes of underdevelopment is when nothing transformational happens in your society. So decade after decade passes, we became independent in 1962, you reach '72; you reach '82; you reach '92; you reach 2002; you reach 2012 and you will reach 2022 and at the level of governance the system has not changed. It has always been said that if we reform local government, it will be to the benefit of everybody and when you look at it logically, that is a fact! But for some strange reason, it never happens. You all could recall the old County Council system. It was Governor Woodford who Woodford Square is named after in 1840 something, who defined Trinidad into Counties and Wards and for those of you who are old enough like Mr. Lalman, remember the days of St. George East County Council, St. Andrew, St. David County Council, Caroni County Council, Nariva/Mayaro, what have you. It was in 1990 I think that the Municipal Corporation Act was enacted by NAR Government and what they did, they disbanded the County Council system and they formed 14 Regional Corporations. I think that was a commendable move in terms of Legislation.

However, it didn't fundamentally change the level of governance or the system of governance because the responsibilities of the County Council became the same responsibilities of the Regional Corporation. So here you had the County Council in charge of minor roads, minor water courses, cemeteries, recreation grounds, public spaces, some aspects of public health. It is the same thing that the Regional Corporations are now responsible for, so there schedule of responsibilities had not changed. The administrative structure had not changed, so the service delivery could not have improved. So all you had were geographic boundaries realigning themselves and something called Municipal Corporations but fundamentally the system of governance has not changed and that is where we differ. So what we are saying now is that the system of governance, the empowerment has to change. In a very strange way, when we were

at Princes Town, it was Subhas Panday who got up in the audience and said all the other local government consultations spoke about decentralisation, what y'all are speaking now is devolution and to me, he had captured the whole essence of what this is all about. So what we are saying, for the first time we are talking about devolution of power, devolution of authority.

There have been impediments in the past. Everybody knows we have a Ministry of Local Government and once you have a Ministry of Local Government and you have Central Government and you have Local Government, you must have politics. So you had a system where if the PNM is in power, the UNC Corporation feel that they aren't getting enough and they are being pressurized. If the UNC is in power now, the PNM Corporation feels the same way because that is how Trinidad is structured. What we are saying is there may be some truth to that, I am not the judge of that but what we are saying this time around is that the autonomy that we are giving to each Corporation is totally independent of politics. So after we finish this reform exercise, the same power that Mr. Gooding will have as a PNM Chairman of Tunapuna/Piarco, it will be the same power and the same authority that the Chairman of Penal/Debe Corporation will have, where incidentally, Penal/Debe Corporation is 9 UNC, 0 PNM, 4 Alderman UNC, 0 PNM.

So we are not discriminating against your political wishes because ladies and gentlemen in a democracy people are entitled to vote for who they want. Central Government cannot and should not interfere with that. So the political interference thing, I hope it would and I will deal with that a little later on when I come with funding and we hope it would be something of the past. Inadequate funding is something that has plagued the Ministry of Local Government. For those of you who have been in Local Government for some time, there has always been inadequate funding. You have recreation grounds, you have cemeteries; you just physically do not have enough money to maintain the amount of assets that fall under your portfolio and the reason for that is because of the way funds are allocated to the budgetary process, it is again flawed in the context of the delivery of service, and I will deal with that a little later on but let me just tell you something. People speak about funds, I will speak about 2 programmes here; the Ministry of Works has a programme called PURE. PURE spends approximately 1 billion dollars a year in paving roads but when PURE makes its programme to pave roads, it is not only the main roads they are paving you know they paving the minor roads but the minor roads and the traces and the streets fall under the Municipal Corporation. But you the Councillors have very little say as to what roads PURE paves. You do not know from whence they came, but granted things 'tight' so you're glad if they pave a road in your thing so you're not quarrelling but really and truly, administratively in terms of service delivery that information and that expenditure should come through the Council. Another example; here you have PURE spending a billion dollars and 500 million goes to local roads, that's 500 million available to the Corporations you know. Another example is recreation grounds, u have in a Corporation, I think it's 4 million dollars to fix 20 recreation grounds or 30 recreation grounds, obviously, it is insufficient but low and behold an animal called the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago appears on the scene and the Sports Company just come and put up lights on your ground, start to build pavilion without consultation with the Councillors. So you may have 6 grounds under your electoral district and the priority which you want to fix the grounds are A, B, C and D and here comes the Sports Company without consultation with you and decide to fix ground D.

Now you will be happy because they are fixing a ground in your area but obviously if you had that money allocated to you, you would have prioritized it different.

Thirdly, in terms of impediments, the Legislation that we have is obviously inadequate but we will deal with that later on and finally, the sluggish administrative structure that currently runs the Corporation. Because since the days of the County Council, actually let me just tell y'all something; the first job I had was a checker in Nariva/Mayaro County Council. I had just left school and since I was there and that would have been 1976 or 77 somewhere around there. It had a CEO, it had a County Superintendent, it had a Road Officer I, a Road Officer II; it's same structure 45 years after so how can you expect to improve service delivery when the administration is as old as Governor Woodford himself. That fundamentally is the issue because the transformation that a society needs is not happening, and that is what make us third world you know. Nothing else you know, because we have skyscrapers down on the waterfront you know, we have National Stadium that is as good as any in England you know. We have everything in terms of the infrastructure that makes us developed. We have Mt. Hope Hospital, we have a new Children's Hospital to come in Couva, but yet we are third world because we don't have a governance and a service delivery model to deliver.

Another example of inertia, when the Municipal Act was passed in 1990 that disbanded the County Council and the Counties, so in law as we speak there is nothing called St. George again you know, there is nothing called Caroni again you know, there is nothing called St. Andrew/St. David again you know but low and behold, the Ministry of Education still has a St. George East Office, they still have a Victoria Office. The Ministry of Works still has a St. George East and St. George West, St. George East is in Arima. I was a Minister of Works already. So it tells you how locked we are in the old system and we're not liberating ourselves to bring service delivery to the people. And I make the final point that the Ministry of Local Government is not Local Government. The Ministry of Local Government is Central Government because that is the Central Government big stick over the Regional Corporation and that is why we are saying now under Dr. Rowley that we have to disband the Ministry of Local Government. Because unless you have that unless you have that, you will always have the concept in your mind that you are not empowered and there is honestly very little autonomy and empowerment that resides at the level of the Corporation. I spend half of my day as the line Minister approving small innocuous matters that obviously a Mayor or a Chairman or a CEO in the Corporation should be approving. That's just how the system operates and that is what we're trying to disband and create something new.

So our vision, ladies and gentlemen is that we will have a fully operationalised network and local government system because we think it is really designed for people-centred power and for the empowerment of communities and the key word here is communities.

Now specifically let's go through our proposals that we planned to implement and let me just give you a word of caution. What I say now is not to say that is what we are going to do. This is what we are proposing to do. And that is the basis for this consultation. If you like what you hear, say you like it if you don't like what you hear, say you don't like it? If you want to put something new on the table, please do. But this consultation, everything is recorded live as Mr. Gooding said; everything will be transcript and transcribed into pros and everything will be assimilated, digested and distilled and when we come out with our legislation and out policy

paper, the views of all of Trinidad and Tobago including the 14 consultations. As you all know the PNM Manifesto, as you see there is now official Government policy everything inside there now, we just took out the Balisier and put in the Coat of Arms because it is Government policy and it is what we are going to implement.

First and foremost, we are going to make serious legislative changes to give the Regional Corporation a secure source of funds, there is something called the Finance and Audit Act or the Ex Checker Act. That was there since the British was in Trinidad and Tobago. We still have the word Ex Checker on the Act; the Minister of Finance in England is called the Chancellor of the Ex Checker. As we speak the Government only has one account, it is called the consolidated account and every single cent that the Government collects has to be deposited into that account. That was so since the British and it continued since Independence, it continued into Republicanism. As we speak, nobody in law is authorised to open an account on behalf of the Central Government except that one consolidated account. We are going to change that Act and empower the Corporations to collect and retain all land and building and property taxes in their area. That will immediately give you a cash flow to start to run your thing because when you have to wait for an allocation, it is a tedious exercise. So you will be collecting your and retaining, authorised to spend the land or building taxes and or property taxes, call it how you want, that you have been able to collect. Check the resource base now of a Corporation like Tunapuna that starts at Mt. Hope and ends down at Valencia.

Furthermore, if you hear the Minister of Finance speak, one of the problems we face is tax compliance because we as a nation only collect 60 – 65% of the taxes that are due you know; because there is something called tax evasion and Trinis know how to do that. Now if you Regional Corporation could collect your taxes and spend it in your community for your people, wouldn't they be more incentivised to do it? And from some officer from some other part who works with Inland Revenue in charge of the tax collection system with no incentive to collect the taxes. We feel this will be a great effort and we plan to change the Finance and Ex Checker Act, the Finance and Audit Act to allow the Corporation to do that and we think that it would have significant far reaching effect.

Secondly, we plan to use the Tobago House of Assembly model to give executive authority to the Council. As we speak and I hope I don't offend any Councillor, but Councillors...absolutely no power! Have no executive authority, the only decision you can take, they can take it as a Council to approve projects and to approve policy. The Corporation is run by Public Servants, you have a CEO and if you and your CEO ain't on good terms, you will know where the power lies because they will flaunt it on you because you will have absolutely no executive authority.

So this reform exercise, hopefully, will give some form of executive authority to the Councillors and the Council, something similar along the lines of the THA where they have secretaries for this, secretaries for that, secretaries for the other. We are not sure whether we will adopt this thing in its entirety or a hybrid system because there may be challenges in certain Corporations. For example, Tunapuna is fine, 15 Councillors and 4 Aldermen, that's 19 and if; let's say the election comes close and you win 10 and you lost 5 or whatever, what have you. It will still have a cadre of Councillors that you can form an executive council with. But let's go to Mayaro/ Rio Claro for example, where there are only 6 Councillors and is a very tight area, so let us say the vote is 3-3 and you pull your straw and you decide to form your Council, obviously you can't run

an executive council with 3 members. So what we will have to do now is find some hybrid system as to how to deal with these eventualities.

**Accountability**, ladies and gentlemen, we're giving you money, we're giving you an executive authority, we're giving you power. You have to be accountable, you have to understand, you're spending the people's money and you do not play the fool with public funds. Let us welcome Minister of Health, Minister Deyalsingh, Member of Parliament for St. Joseph. You do not play the fool with public funds. Public funds...you have to be accountable, it is not your money and people have to get that into their head. It is not your money. You are acting as a trustee to the community, you are a trustee to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and when something, if you know law...when something is put in trust that means something you know. You have these trust funds and you have all these things, money is put in trust for your thing. So accountability will be a fundamental part of this process. The way we plan to run this accountability thing, as I said there would be no more Minister of Local Government. You will be getting your funds similar to THA directly from the Ministry of Finance. So you will be accounted for your expenditure and your budgetary requirements to the Minister of Finance. How you spend it and the processes in which you spend it, you will be accountable to the Auditor General. So the Minister of Finance and the Auditor-General will bring financial accountability.

However, one of the comments we got from the consultations now, the last 10 or so consultations is that the Auditor General is a post facto audit, so the Auditor General doesn't start to audit until the financial year is finished. Probably we need a more online system to audit it because things can happen during the year and there has to be a system that monitors you on a continuous basis whether it's a month by month or a week by week basis as to how this money is spent. There is something called the Accounting Office in the Parliament which is an idea which we are playing with, if that come to fruition we may assign the Accounting Office of the Parliament with oversight responsibility for Local Government. But ladies and gentlemen at the end of the day the judge of you will be the people and you play the fool you would be facing an election every three (3) years and the ultimate accountability is to your burgesses. For Heaven's sake do not take people for granted; they see through you. They see through all your misgivings and all your underhand dealings and they would deal with you when election time comes. Never underestimate that. So we have that system; you have your funds, you have your power, you have your authority and you must be accountable. Ladies and gentlemen let me just make a point on this; something is happening in the parliament now that I particularly like because the parliament is the highest office in the land and ultimately you have to be accountable to the parliament because it's the parliament that voted you into office. The government, the executive, the cabinet is accountable to the parliament through parliamentary committees and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that because there is a power and there is an authority in this country that goes beyond the cabinet and the Prime Minister and that is the institution called the People's Parliament. That is what democracy is about.

**New Responsibilities** – The third area and this is the most important probably apart from the collection of taxes and executive authority is new responsibilities. I outlined the same schedule of responsibilities under the county council system. I outlined the same schedule of responsibilities under the municipal corporation. This reform exercise is going to give significantly more responsibilities in terms of your schedule of work and any other

transformational process. First and foremost: **School Maintenance** – As we speak now, one company called the Education Facilities Company (EFC) is responsible for two hundred (200) plus secondary schools and over six hundred (600) primary schools and every September 3<sup>rd</sup> or September 4<sup>th</sup>, you know what the headline would read, ten schools ain't open and you looking to see how much ain't open. If the school maintenance program fell under the regional corporation it is a more focused attempt so that when you award a contract very likely to a person or to a company from Tunapuna/Piarco to repair a primary school, it would be incumbent on you as a Councillor to make sure that that school repair takes place in time for when school reopens? And it is a smaller cadre of work and it is in smaller batches that you will be implementing this program, so it has to be more efficient because you have buy-in into it because the council that is supervising this work is a Tunapuna/Piarco council. Very likely the contractor who is doing it is from the area, so what better way to do it? **Social Services delivery** – Secondly and probably the most important addition to the portfolio of Local Government is the delivery of social services. Ladies and gentlemen, let me just talk about Social Services. Check the budgeted allocation for social services over the last ten (10) years. Every year is a couple billion dollars. We have spent almost \$30 billion in the last ten (10) years to deliver social services to the underprivileged and those in need and it ain't help the poor people you know. There is still poverty in Trinidad that is not commensurate with the amount of money we spend on social services because everything is seeping through a crack and is seeping through inefficiencies and in some cases, corruption. The people that this money has been earmarked for is not receiving it. So an old lady wants to get her pension; she has no money in the bank, she has no income but she taking two (2) years running around from Port of Spain to St. Joseph to San Fernando for some officer to say yes you are entitled to a pension and they want to see your bank account and they want to know if you have family abroad and they want to know if they sending money for you and they want to know if the house on your name and if the house on your children name. Granted there has to be a screening exercise but it is so cumbersome and it is so unfriendly to the people who are wanting in need that it is not effective. You know more than anybody else who are the families at risk, where does intense poverty reside, which family is suspicious of child abuse or incest or crime. As it is said a society is judged by how it treats the vulnerable; vulnerability of children, of the aged and the families who are at risk. **Local Contractors** – I've said that all along during the consultation. Within reason, we would want the contracts that are awarded by Local Government to reside within your community. Obviously, if you have a community that does not have a qualified contractor you would have to go outside. When you have local contractors or somebody from your corporation, the chances are that the workers would be from here. When they get their pay they will buy in local groceries, local shops so you have the multiplier effect in the community. So by and large, we will want to institute a system where corporations work within the confines of the constitution remit you have to understand that anybody is entitled to work anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago, so we will have to devise a system where it will have some sort of rating process to give preference to local contractors under local jurisdiction. **Municipal Policing** – We have gone public on that, in our manifesto you will see 100 police officers per corporation. As we speak I am in discussion with the Minister of National Security as to how we want to implement this program but we should be starting the recruiting exercise very shortly. There are some issues in terms of municipal policing but they could work hand in hand with national policing because it

really makes sense for a corporation of a borough to have its own municipal police. As we speak they report to the CEO; there is a thinking in the Ministry of National Security that it is a military and security function and somehow or the other they must have a line of authority that reaches the commissioner of police because the CEO of Tunapuna/Piarco can't discipline a superintendent. The disciplinary function has to come from the police service commission and by extension, the commissioner of police but that is legislative. Administratively, we will be proceeding shortly to recruit those hundred (100) police officers per corporation.

**Developmental Control** – We will be implementing new legislation so that more authority will be given to the local Government corporations to approve plans, to approve buildings, to approve even some subdivisions within their own community. **Infrastructure works** – Again we want to put the municipal corporations in charge of infrastructure according to the Act. I quote the example of Sports Company and I would quote another example in terms of infrastructure. There is a programme in the Ministry of Works called PURE that spends approximately one billion dollars a year in road paving. At least 40% of the roads that are paved in PURE are minor roads that fall under the jurisdiction of the Regional Corporation. If the Regional Corporation is restructured with the quality of staff to implement projects like these, that is four hundred million dollars coming your way. It is not that Minister Hinds want to pave minor roads you know it is because the Local Government architecture and the Local Government infrastructure does not have the manpower and the expertise to manage some of those projects, that is why it has been centralised in a Ministry of Works under a particular programme called PURE. So when we go through the Reform process and we put in new structures in the Regional Corporations then and only then the monies are available. It is just that the money is now allocated in a very centralised model and the decentralisation process that will bring the type of resources that you all need in the Regional Corporations. **Disaster Management** – I want to congratulate the regional corporation, this is one aspect where first respondents are doing an excellent job. Finally, **Involvement of Civil Society** – Governance is about people. I am sorry Minister Young is not here today but he is contemplating including in the legislation making it mandatory to consult on certain decisions. It is all well and good to have a vote every three (3) years and you have no say after that. We may even make it mandatory in the legislation that before certain things happen in your community, you have to consult. The state of Vermont, one of the most beautiful states in the United States does not have any fast food restaurants. Vermont has no McDonald's, no Home Depot because the people of Vermont have decided not to allow big corporations into their state so that small businesses can thrive. It is a revelation not to see the big M sign but that is their right. If Wal-Mart wants to go into a community to build a store, Wal-Mart could know Obama, he could know Hilary Clinton, that can't help him. Is town council meeting in his tail and if the town says you can't come there, you can't come there. That is how American democracy works and that is the type of power we want to give to local communities.

So these are some things that we are contemplating; it is not easy to make legislation because when it becomes law when you do not implement the law you break the law. The punishment for breaking the law is either a fine or jail and that is how the system operates.

Just two other points I would like to make: **Boundaries** - There are 14 regional corporations in Trinidad. Is that too many? Is it enough? If we have 14 empowered corporations, Trinidad and

Tobago may be the most over-governed body in the world. However, the floor is open on that, whether it should be consolidated in 12 or remains at 14. I just ask you the question; I would like to get your feedback. Finally, **Organization and Structure** - As we speak, Local Government is one of the most inefficient and unproductive parts of Government. I make no apologies for saying that. Eight o'clock in the morning you don't know where any of the gangs are and you go to the regional corporation office at ten o'clock and you could hardly find a secretary, far less officers to serve the people. A lot of people, and I am saying this as the line minister, are drawing money under false pretence, protected to some extent by the councils themselves. That has to stop. That is why the technical committee of this transformation process headed by PS Bascombe is mandated to come up with new structures and new skill sets that could populate this new responsibility. As we speak, most regional corporations do not even have a single engineer, they don't have quantity surveyors, they have no procurement experts, they have no supply chain managers and all these new skill sets of the 21st century do not reside at the level of the regional corporation. And one of the most attractive things about this Local Government reform to me personally is the avenue it will bring for young people to get meaningful jobs at the level of the Government. New skills...ladies and gentlemen, we have invested \$6 billion in GATE for the last fifteen (15) years. Very good but what are the GATE graduates doing. We didn't go through the full cycle of thought but when you give free tertiary education, if the economy cannot absorb the graduates, they are more frustrated that if they didn't go to school. I make the point that underemployment is sometimes worse than unemployment. You all have children; you would not like to know you send your child to university, to UWI or UTT, they come out with a Bachelor's degree, they tell them to go back and further their studies, they come out with a Master's Degree and when they graduate now you feel sad that they cannot find meaningful employment. It deflates your ego. It deflates your sense of accomplishment. This is an area where we could be absorbing a large quantum of skill sets and I want to make the bold statement that this will be largely staffed by young professionals.

I want to give you the assurance on behalf of the Prime Minister that Local Government Election will not be postponed; it is going to be kept within the constitutionally due time. What that means is that we hope to complete the legislative agenda by September, early October hopefully before a joint select committee and we will be contesting the election saying we have completed the reform agenda, this is the legislation in Parliament, go out, vote for your respective councillors and we would have the next two and a half years to roll out this program. The minister ended his speech with a final video presentation and he thanked the audience for their time and attention. He invited members of the audience to pose their questions and make comments at that time.

## 4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

### ❖ Lennox Bernard (Male, African, 60s)

Good night everyone, my name is Lennox Bernard. I am retired. I'm living in Maracas/St. Joseph, I felt it was necessary to make an input more so in the context of the role of Government in Education. It was heart-warming to hear the Minister, Senator Franklin Khan outlines the fact that there will be more holistic approaches to local government in terms of community development and I felt crucial to that would be the whole question of education. Now my presentation, short, is based on 3 principles. One, as the Minister himself, noted, the Ministry of Education is a monolithic institution; that is that it's seeking to do so much and despite its best intentions, it's unable to service the educational needs of the entire society. I also believe as he said that the local authorities know better than anyone, the needs of the population. And then thirdly, the other principle is that Local Government can provide enormous savings on effort and duplication by combining our resources as they relate to professional development and training of our teachers and administrators and the sharing of recreational facilities. I will explain so that I feel we will not be left out, even though 3 years hence or rather in preparation for the next election, we hope that we will get in on the ground floor education wise. I wouldn't touch again on the point of school maintenance, the point that he himself made but I am sure Councillor Rondon and others will agree that many of our rural schools and in depressed communities and in rural areas require fixing. If I can use that broad term and fixing should not only include the physical facilities but we also need to fix these schools by major changes in the professional ability of the teachers and administrators at those schools. And these will in the long run help us not to possibly use that word that we don't like to 'zoning' although I think some form of modified zoning is necessary but that we will be able to attract high ability level students at these schools, thereby changing the choice of school patterns as they now exist. And this is an important point, Minister Khan, because I think all, all of our power brokers, our Governments of the past and now still believe in the concept of equal as same. That is, as we share each must get the same, each constituency representative, the same sum. Modern thinkers tell us that there is nothing really as equal as same. It's a goal yes, but if your equal is as same cannot match your equality of output, then you have to think again and try to see how you can get equal as different, equal as fitting.

### **Moderator**

Dr. Bernard, how would you propose a reformed system of local government would address that particular conundrum?

### **Lennox Bernard**

Well just to give 2 examples, Minister Khan is here; Rio Claro/Mayaro, Sangre Grande always at the bottom of the pile in terms of school performance. There is huge wastage in that area, it means that we have to clinically investigate our societies to see where the needs are greater, thereby making a better effort to share the existing needs. Let me give an example, equality of opportunity suggests, yes we have our schools in Mayaro, yes we there are all, their teachers are there, yes they can all get to the University if they study but what is happening with these children. Rio Claro/Mayaro, Minister, in 2014 five of your six schools performed below your 40% of 5 O'level passes, 5 of your 6. The idea then is that our local government institutions because these people are on the ground. They can literally tell you where are the homes with children where there are problems related to asthma, where the homes with the children that are suffering from poverty to the point that they have to go around the neighbourhood to get a breakfast.

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

I want us to guard, we are expanding the remit of Local Government; it is not our intention at this point in time to include education as part of that. Education is something much more fundamental than that. Education has to do with curriculum planning, it has to do with the setting of the syllabus; it has to do with teaching criteria. All that calls for expert advice which resides at the Ministry of Education. The issue of underperformance of schools in the rural areas, I attribute that to rural underdevelopment and challenges that are specific to rural communities and just for the record Sir, I went to Mayaro Government and I attended North Eastern College, proud to be Mayaro Government which is in the south-east counties and North Eastern College which is in the north-east county. The 2 most underperforming educational districts, so we know there are challenges. But I really do feel at this point in time that falls under the remit of the Ministry of Education but we are still willing to listen.

### **Lennox Bernard**

No, I was not ever suggesting that it should leave the Ministry of Education. What I was thinking is that you can have the campus effect, whereby you can have school supervisors, student support services, food feeding programmes all within one campus so that there would be that synergy. So just as you are saying with the Ministry of National Security will take care of their officers, the Minister of Education will be in charge of these people but that the synergy that would exist would be of the nature, and Mr. Rondon can bear this out, that the officer can check on the Local Government Officer can find out what is necessary for the curriculum.

❖ **Dr. Ragoonath (Male, Indian, 60s)**

First of all, let me say apologies on behalf of the Campus Principal, UWI Campus Principal, Professor Sankat, he cannot be here this afternoon but he has asked that I represent him as well as my colleagues here, all of us here from the University. Minister well I have seen the presentations both here and at the Ministry's Offices when you presented to the TALGA membership and like we had said at that time we thought it was a very good programme. In fact as a local government person in the Caribbean and from the CLGF, we looked at it; we discussed the programme afterwards, very good programme....question. Are we being over ambitious? And I am just throwing that out at this point in time because bearing in mind several things that we have to do before the election or if we don't get it in time for the election where do we go from there? But before we go to that one of the things that I must say that the idea of doing away with the ministry, we saw the attempt in Jamaica and it has worked to some extent and it is a good thing. The challenge, however, is how do we treat with the staffing issues and you really spoke about it in terms of the staffing, training everything else. I can tell you, you talked about contract workers versus the public service, just last week I met with the Public Service Commission and I got the figures. Do you know the Public Service now is only about 30,000 people who are public servants as opposed to 12,000 who are contract employees in the public service? And when they told me that, they said well, we have a problem because we are the Service Commission and we don't know how to deal with that. But the real challenge here comes and this is my concern when it comes to staffing, I have been training people in the Public Administration for the last 20 odd years. When we put a person or when somebody comes from the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation or the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and they come and they do my certificate programme and they qualify, next thing they pull them out of Tunapuna/Piarco and put them in some Ministry and they send somebody else, from some other Ministry and the qualified people or the trained people are the ones who are being taken out of Local Government. That creates a problem. For that reason we started the Certificate in Local Government studies programme at UWI and we now have the proposal, well not proposal, the programme that is there ready to kick off the degree programme in Local Government but it think it is something that we have to start thinking about. How are we going to ensure that when we train staff in Local Government, they remain in Local Government and are not dispersed throughout the public service and that becomes an issue? And I don't want to take up too much time, I just want to mention 3 other points with regard to where we go from here. You showed one of the slides and you talked about local contractors, somebody said to stop the corruption, we need to deal with the Procurement Legislation and we need to ensure that that Procurement Legislation is applied across the board to all Corporations and all State Enterprises. That I think is something that we need to deal with quickly. The issue of accountability, in Belize with the legislation and I

know you talked about people have to be accountable to the citizenry. In the Belizean Legislation on Local Government, it is actually stated that each Councillor must have a meeting once every quarter with his electoral district. That is stated in legislation, that is something that we could consider as we go forward. And my final point, because I know other people would want to speak, would be relating to the issue of participation. You know when I heard your presentation; I had a little challenge in my own mind. You spoke there and you spoke to councillors and that I am happy about but the challenge that we have is that when we talk to councillors sometimes councillors become small Prime Ministers and after they become a small Prime Minister, the people who elected them, they ignore them and that is where we now have to get that issue. How do we bring real inclusiveness? In your presentation you talked about civil society inclusiveness, I don't talk about civil society because my training in local government; throughout Trinidad and Tobago when I did my Ph.D. Studies in 1989/90 what did we find? We found that people did not know who their local government councillor was and that continues to be a challenge and we need to find a mechanism to have inclusiveness to bring the people back into local government, with that I will end.

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

It is quite a mouthful to take but let me just make the point, the IMF said Trinidad has a very educated population, that's one of the pluses they have put on the table. You as a university professor is cognisant of the fact that we have a lot of trained people. They may require some specialised training but I just want to caution you that it is our intention not to create a local government administration you know; local government must be a delivery machinery. So you see your course in local government whatever that's administration but skills are what we need in local government is what I outlined before, project managers, quantity surveyors, supply chain managers because this is where the system has broken down. That is the type of skills we need. Why the footpaths are not building properly because the checkers are doing the estimates, there are no quantity surveyors, there are no engineers, civil engineers, there are no card experts who can go on the plan and do the drawings, the outline approval. These are the specialised skills. We get tied up in administration, it is not bureaucracy that we are going to create, it is dismantling one and we are going to create a new suite of skills set largely staffed by young professionals, very well trained. Obviously, we will have some experienced people to train them but this is service delivery machinery that we are planning to put.

**Dr. Ragoonath**

Procurement legislation and accountability?

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

Well, the procurement legislation went before a Joint Select Committee; it will be back into the Parliament within a month or so. Am I right Leader of Government Business? So it is there, we made some adjustments to the Joint Select, I was a member of the Joint Select, it was chaired by Government Minister Imbert and it is coming back on. But at the level of procurement, it will be handled there.

**Dr. Ragoonath**

Just one point, the degree that we have in local government studies is not about administration. It's about GIS, its bout project planning, project management. Those are the courses that we have developed, that we have put together in a suite of programmes, in a suite of courses to make sure that we have the proper person in local government.

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

Well, I am very happy to hear that.

❖ **Ricardo Barren (Male, African 40's)**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ricardo Barren from the Constituency of Tunapuna. As Minister Khan mentioned, the number of Corporations; my question was relating to the human resource component and I am all for local contractors getting contracts under respective Corporations, however, my concern is, will the Corporations have or be allowed to hire the requisite engineering and other technical experts to advise, monitor, evaluate projects pre and post completion? Further along the line of staffing within the Tunapuna Corporation, my understanding is that - and you would have mentioned the very large area - there are only 3 public health officers are there plans to increase the compliment of staff, to heavily service that geographical area that the Corporation has the responsibility for? And as far as executive authority which is what you would have mentioned as well relates to developmental work in communities, be it within or without what structure or process in place or is being proposed to determine what community project gets priority over another? Basically, how do you guard against communities where friends or family of Council members may be getting, you know their area may be getting preference over another?

### **Moderator**

How do you propose to address that occurrence? What system do you think should be in place to ensure that you don't have these favours or handing out of favours?

### **Ricardo Barren**

Well based on what I heard, the Councillors currently don't have the power to make independent decisions. While I want the Councillors to be more effective, perhaps it should remain, to some extent, the body making decisions in terms of what areas get development first based on needs assessment and the infrastructural shortages within the given area.

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

Your points are well taken, but at the end of the day you have to empower people and in a democracy, the people who most qualify for empowerment are elected representatives. There is no question about that; that is what the principle of democracy is based on. So in one way we want the empowerment of the community but when we start to see the individual council that's when we say that man getting so much of power boy! You know you can't take it like that and it is a trait of underdeveloped societies, we just do not believe in ourselves to make the transformation and we invest so much in education and we invest so much in empowerment, we come to meetings like these and we talk about it but when it is about to happen, you mash your brakes because we eh sure if we want that. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my firm opinion that it is time we move ahead and while there may be issues at an individual level, you may find a corrupt councillor, you may find an inefficient Councillor, you may find more than one nepotistic councillor but it doesn't take away from the system that we are trying to implement, ok! And I will make this final point, it is now incumbent on the political party to review their screening exercise to choose the right set of councillors that we will now need in this empowered environment to offer good people to the population.

### ❖ **Daryl Bodkin (Male, African, 30s)**

My name is Daryl Bodkin, I am from Arima, living in Curepe so I fall within the area right now. My first comment would be that I think to sell this mammoth task, would require taking a bit more time to sell the motivation for making the change because you're going to have key stakeholders like the unions and even the employees of Local Government. In other words, when you come with your presentation of legislation, say on an annual basis we have been wasting or haemorrhaging x amount, our return on investment in the money spent has been this bad and we are at a place that we need to be able to do better. If you

could show your motivation from financial basis, from a social basis I think that would help sell it more but my greater concern is that we all acknowledge the price tag of GATE and it has been bandied about a lot. The 600 million and I can understand the concern; why not take this a step further. Now after this 14-day consultative process, you are going to go with your team to do what they have to do, and we are going to hear about this when it comes to the Parliament after it through the LRC etcetera, etcetera. Why not follow a similar approach like vision 20/20 and say that we have so many young people, so many bright minds who are so intelligent. What about if we ask a few people to come on board voluntarily to work on digesting the data, digesting the proposals and coming together with a document. That's my suggestion.

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

Very good comment, I mean very, very good comment. The challenge there is that you know you can't have analysis paralysis and we have gone through a round of consultation here bearing in mind this process didn't start in September 2015 you know. If we rewind the clock, Mrs. Manning had done extensive consultation on local government reform. There is a pile of reports in the Ministry this high, Suruj Rambachan in 2013, he had done some consultations and stuff. A lot of the work there that resides in the Ministry are good work you know. When you go through the reports it makes sense. What we are doing now, we are incorporating some of those, we have come up with our own policy position, PNM's policy is now Government policy. We are into this final round of consultation. What I am thinking about right now, after we draft the legislation and we have the policy document, we will probably hold 2 more consultations; one in north, one in south and say hey guys this is what you propose, let's have a final round of feedback before we actually table it in Parliament. But I think there is enough on the table, there have been a lot of good ideas that have come out of all these consultations and we are ready to move ahead.

➤ **Response from Ms. Desdra Bascombe - Chairman Technical Committee**

In addition to what Minister has just said, we will also use social media and technology to gain more feedback after we have drafted the policy. So we will put the draft document on our website and citizens would be able to add comments, tell us what they like, what they don't like.

**Moderator**

Tell us more about the work of the technical committee. How does the technical committee work with this material?

➤ **Response from Ms. Desdra Bascombe - Chairman Technical Committee**

Ok, our technical committee comprises members from a host of ministries, senior public officers and we have been working assiduously since October 2015 on this project, this transformation project. We are at the stage where we have almost completed the draft policy but we're also taking into account all the feedback we would have received from the various consultations. In fact, at the end of each consultation, the rapporteurs do a report and we have an officer that goes through that document to pull out all the gems and the pearls of wisdom which you are sharing with us, so that would be added to the policy. In addition to the host of information which we have had consultations, we have had over the past few years. After we have done that policy, it would be submitted to the Ministerial Committee for review. Minister Khan is Chairman of the Ministerial Committee, they will review it and then it would be taken to Cabinet after we come back for your feedback.

❖ **David Taitt (Male, African, 50s)**

My name is David Taitt, I represent the St. Joseph Community Council and we have perused your documents and we would like to say that on the ground floor level, the community council is the one who deal with the man in the area. We are below the Councillor and we are the ones who should be part of this structure. The Councillor should consult with the Community Council in the area on certain matters. We have seen where the Councillor fix some drain or some box drain because they feel to fix that and where the Community Council through the people have seen something more urgent to be done and it is not done. We would also like to know that in the new set up if, Civil Society could have 3 Aldermen without voting power but will be there on the Council to put our ideas forward, one Alderman from the Branch Association of Village Councils, one from the religious sect in the area and one from other Civil Society to bring to the pool of ideas that may exist at the Council level right, because you are talking about inclusiveness. You want to bring everybody on board. Also, we have noticed over time that the people have voted in a Councillor and then the Councillor come and tell you they can't do this and they can't do that because in some cases you may have a CEO who is running contra to the whims and fancies of the Council. We believe that the post of CEO should be contracted. That is our belief of the St. Joseph Community Council. Also, we the people, who we have consulted in St. Joseph pays tax and we asks ourselves, we paying a labourer 2 something a day in the Corporation, we paying a labourer 1 something in CEPEP but the one who we paying 1 hundred and something in CEPEP going home 12 something in the day and the one who we paying 2 something going home half past 7 and half past 8 and not much job is being done. I am not blaming the worker, I am blaming the management and we are saying the time has come now, especially with this recessionary period where we may have to decide where we

putting our taxes because if you want us to pay property tax and other taxes within the region, we have to get our monies worth. We can't see people going home half past 7 and they taking my money. The Corporations are the only institutions where they do not make money off of faeces, other private trucks who pick up faeces and thing, they make a profit but the Corporation makes a loss off of faeces and these are things the Corporation have to restructure, how they perform. If you want our taxes and you want our money we want more accountability and we don't want accountability when it is election time, we want accountability on an ongoing process. We also would like you to put internal auditors in the Corporations because a lot of people say it is not the Corporations and for instance they would say Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; they say Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corruption. What we want is the corruption within the Corporation because there is a lot of corruption in the Corporations because we, our taxes paying and our taxes are fed up fuelling corruption, inefficiency etcetera.

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

You spoke well; I can't envisage a very strong audit function in the new structure which is a necessity and the issue of productivity. I have been saying it at all consultations. I didn't harp on it too much today but there is a serious challenge in productivity, not only in the Regional Corporation but throughout Trinidad and Tobago and ladies and gentlemen, sometimes I say, sometimes God knows what he is doing when he drop the price of oil because it is a wake-up call to Trinidad and Tobago you know. No longer can this country depend on the bounty of the Almighty to survive you know. We have to survive now on our own resilience as a people and our own productivity. If we do not become more productive as a Nation, crappo smoke we pipe ok. And finally with regards to the; it is a point that has been coming up at the consultations and we will probably consider it is what they call independent Aldermen, which is 0 as we speak you have Aldermen from the 2 political parties, the concept of 2 or 3 independent Aldermen, as to how you choose them we could work out a formula. I think that is getting some fertile ground with the Committee and possibly they will make certain recommendations with that regard. But the point of the Aldermen coming from the community council or from the church groups and thing, I think based on the community aspect of it; it makes some sense to me.

**Moderator**

The gentleman also raised the question of ongoing consultations with respect to specific projects but shouldn't there be a framework for ongoing consultations for the broader issues, the budgeting issues for example for the Corporation, should that not be part of a consultative process?

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

Well, Minister Young says that in most of the consultations. We may contemplate the Tobago House of Assembly has to present their annual budget in some form of consultative process to the people of Tobago, we may want to look at some aspect of that with the Regional Corporation before they make their budget presentation at the annual budget to the Minister of Finance, they have some level of consultation with the community.

❖ **Nigel Henry (Male, African, 40s)**

I am glad you brought up the issue of boundaries. As a statistician and someone who has experience and interest in election data, you know I believe boundaries is the crux - you know - is the fundamental decider in representative democracy and I think both the specific boundaries of the Regional Corporations and definitely, the process by which boundaries are drawn needs to be looked at. I mean Tunapuna/Piarco, I am a resident of Tunapuna/Piarco and as you said correctly, it starts at Mt. Hope and goes almost to Valencia or something like that. You know that might have been good back when it was drawn but is it good today? Now my comment is, are we really going to redraw 14 Regional Corporations before another election this year? And if we doing that, then we need to be very serious about having some kind of round, it doesn't have to be as big as this but some series of consultations before that. What tends to happen as you well know is boundaries have to be redrawn, is that the Government of the day; both parties do it, they wait until the last minute, sometimes after the election is called to present the recommendations of the elections and boundaries committee which is bad enough in itself. We the people have never seen these recommendations, we aren't told when it is coming out and there is no changes or recommendations from the Parliamentary representatives, whether positive criticisms or negative criticisms or otherwise because I understand you're constrained, you don't want to be seen as bad talking the EBC, all that is fine. But if we don't see the boundary reports, how is it that we are going to be able to tell, how can I tell Mr. Forde, my Parliamentary representative, you know...I live in a district now, I think it's called Maracas/Santa Margarita. Now the people who live in Acono and La Mango are different from the people who live at Santa Margarita hill. Now I well know that these boundaries are going to change before the next election, but the people in Acono, the people in Santa Margarita, nobody will know where they are until the last minute where they are changed in the middle of the night. So I guess to just summarise my comment, I don't think we should rush, it is very important to do but I don't think we should rush. There are other models, in the United States they actually open for draft maps to come in for different

segments of society, there are different things that we could do and secondly, at the earliest time we need to put forward these recommendations, I am glad that the Leader of Government Business is here, bring forward the recommendations that were filed 2 years ago by the EBC, Parliament, what are we waiting for? Bring it at the earliest opportunity, thank you very much.

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

There are 2 issues, you see boundaries are as per EBC is different to when I say boundary changes to the Regional Corporation. The basic building block of the electoral district and the polling division is a function of the EBC but its orientation in the context of the Municipal Corporation Act is a function of the Government. We cannot cut an electoral district in 2 but we can take that electoral district and we can say as a Government and take it to Parliament that we want certain parts of Tunapuna to now reside in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and to make the point, boundaries is not only in the context of local government. Boundaries are not only about election, boundaries are a configuration of service delivery and culture and geographic space in terms of uniqueness and that is the mistake we have been making in the past. So that is why we have now arbitrary boundaries, people saying the boundary on one side of the road is Tunapuna one side is San Juan/Laventille. The rubbish truck only coming and picking up rubbish on this side of the road and not on the other side. Whereas in the past, when I spoke about Governor Woodford, they were using natural geographic boundaries to subdivide the counties and the wards. In our case now, we use manmade infrastructure, so there will always be challenges, even when the Municipal Corporation Act was implemented, there were its challenges because I will give you a good example, the former county of St. Patrick was in an entire thing, then they felt at the time and probably rightfully so that there was something distinct about Penal/Debe in terms of its sociology, in terms of its ethnicity, in terms of its geographic space that was unique, that they could have carved a Corporation out of it and leave the rest of the County St. Patrick to be called Siparia Regional Corporation which included most of the rest of the County. Probably that made sense, I am not being judgemental but what I am saying is that when you are creating these boundary spaces now, it has to have a rationale and it has to have a matrix that is robust enough that could make some sense out of it.

❖ **Krista Ferguson – Past Councillor (Female, African, 60's)**

Mr. Chairman while I was coming down the road my van went down in a pothole on the Eastern Main Road. Now I can't go and tell my Councillor to fix that pothole; he will tell me

to go to the local...go to the Ministry of Works. By the time we reach the Ministry of Works about ten (10) cars get damage on the E.M.R. So why can't the councillor fix that road? You have to make it so that the councillors can fix that road too with the local roads. This big cut off...which road is this one and which road is that one can't work. It is not working. The other thing, I am from village council. Over forty (40) years I am a village councillor. We think that village councillors make better councillors, even MPs. We have three (3) in the corporations right now. You know why? They are accustomed to people. They serve people. But some people go in, they don't know how to serve people and I am taking from up down. So please. I remember the last consultation we had; it was in the constitution and they took it out. Our past Prime Minister Dr. Williams inserted that there but somebody took it out so I would like you to put it back. Let the new councillors some way, somehow pass through a village council so they will know how to treat people. Mr. Chairman, I know there are some MPs who don't even look at a Councillor twice. They living in their area and they wouldn't even invite them to their office. I used to wish sometimes that my MP invites me to come and sit down in his office to see the people coming because as Councillor I had an office at that time. Now I am seeing Mr. Forde is doing a different thing; he is bringing in all these councillors and he talking...which is very good Mr. Forde. You're doing a wonderful job. The other thing, when you go into the council you don't know anything and there is nobody to complain about you. You find so many things to complain; nobody to complain about. There should be somebody that the councillors could talk to and put them on the right road. You see because sometimes the chairman tries but he might not know the...thing...to put those councillors on the right road and I wouldn't take anything else So Mr. Chairman I want you...I heard Mr. Taitt speak about the village council and you did not reply to that one and I want you to reply to that one. Let the councillors come from village council, thank you very much.

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

The village council movement has been there for a very long time. It has worked well. It has worked better in some communities than others. One of the challenges we face as we speak is that long ago there were only three (3) groups in a village. At least during my time as a teenager and a child, the women's group and the youth group. Now if you go into the average community in Trinidad, there will be five groups who claim they represent the community, They call them village council, the call them community council, they call them all sorts of things and they claim that they represent the people. So it is not a simple exercise now to say that you must come from the village council but at the end of the day representation out of the communities is an acceptable form of governance and we will incorporate it.

❖ **Dean Allen (Male African 40's)**

I realise everything kind of hinging on accountability and auditing in this whole process. I have a project in Aripo as a farmer and nobody come up there to clean the road and there is no accountability to the people who are supposed to clean that road and maintain that part of the road. I would like to see a statement of what are the fines...I know my fine if I break the law I would like to see something stated which would hold. What are the accounting measures that will help with errant councillors and CEOs? I don't know if it's a fine, a people's court or something but I think that should be stated; people should understand what are these accounting and auditing measures. I think you mentioned that councillors should meet quarterly but I think it should be stated clearly and irrevocably what are these measures. In planning and development, I would like to see what the guy was stating – the village council or the community centres and this idea of diversification and how the local government in developing cooperatives and developing and empowering communities. The community centres at least in my experience up in Aripo are useless; they are broken down. Village councils cannot upkeep them and luckily I have a Councillor I am working with who we are trying to empower the new village council into a new kind of cooperative thinking in the idea of chocolates...that kind of movement and that kind of way of sustainable village development. I would like to see maybe something happening there and I will also like to speak along the line of aesthetics. I know in the Education committee which was headed by Dr. Assad looked at Caura to Mount Hope as to changing the whole paradigm of...from that whole area around shared parking, the market area and the whole kind of livability of our communities. Development without aesthetics is not really development. We have seen a kind of craziness thing going on in our development. There must be some design and there must be something aesthetically pleasing about our development.

➤ **Response from Alderman Anthony Roberts**

There is a school of thought that in addition to the maintenance of community centres, that local government should have some responsibility for village councils. We are giving consideration to that and I would agree with him as we develop the community. It should be aesthetically pleasing so that too is part of local government's responsibility in terms of the sanitation and maintenance of the community. So I agree with the comments that the gentleman has made.

❖ **Alicia Hospedales – Former MP Arouca/Maloney (Female, African, 30s)**

I would like to find out from the panel whether or not there are plans with reference to dealing with the delinquent private developers who refuse to turn over their developments to the regional corporations and all of us would know the challenges with regional

corporations servicing the developments that have not been turned over. Are there any plans legislatively to penalize or to attach a penalty to these developers for not turning over the developments within a certain timeframe or holding them accountable for the maintenance of the infrastructure that occurs within the developments? The other comment is in reference to participation Minister. Normally at the regional corporations approvals are given for developments that occur within the constituency or the electoral district within which the councillor has responsibility but there is no consultation with reference to the regional corporation coming to the residents indicating that this particular developer has a plan and they came basically to hear the concerns. So I agree with Minister Khan when he said they would like to consider the EMA model where there is a specific process that must be followed and there is some measure of consultation that must occur. I would want to agree with the minister on that. The third thing is in reference to the delivery of social services by the regional corporation. I am still trying to wrap around my mind exactly how that would be done because you have a ministry with responsibility for delivery of social services. An entire unit of the ministry that focuses on social welfare specifically where the workers are trained to deliver the service so I am trying to understand how is this going to be implemented in the framework of the local government reform. In ending, I just want to commend you for the proposals you put forward. I think some of them are really out of the box in terms of thinking and I really hope going forward they can be implemented.

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

With regard the social service delivery, we haven't really finalised how it will operate. Suffice it to say, if it does go that way we are not putting the social service responsibility to local government. In other words, there may be a realignment of staff, for example, coming out of Social Services and Family Affairs into the corporation. So instead of being accountable, they will be accountable to the corporation or to some extent to the councillors. The issue is accountability at a functional level because there are specialized skills that that reside in the Ministry of Social Services and Family Affairs. Counselling services for example, families that are at risk, families that are subject to domestic violence, child abuse, rape, incest, some of these things are specialized things. You just cannot leave that in the hands of and any anybody. I was more speaking about social service delivery in terms of assistance like the food card program, the disability program, what we call the old age pension program where all you need to qualify is attain the age of 65 and you do not have income more than \$3000.00 a month or something like that but the people best qualified to engage that type of citizenry is operating at a local government level but there are specialist skill sets that reside in the Ministry of Social Services and Family Affairs that

will obviously have to continue to reside there. We were just talking about the delivery component of it. Let me just warn you all about something, you could take this argument to the tenth and make a justification that everything could fall under local government and logically it would make sense because of at its most fundamental level it is supposed to be a more efficient delivery mechanism but where we are now and where we want to be we cannot jump over certain things; we have to take it incrementally. So what we are proposing here now is an incremental adjustment. If the situation unfolds itself and it starts to get more and more efficient you could have a further transformation a decade from now to broaden the ambit of thing...but I want to caution that we don't bite more than we could chew and choke.

### **Moderator**

The question of the interface between the Ministry of Planning was raised both by Ms. Hospedales and the speaker before so I suspect that is what the minister what's to come in on now. If not then you can address that as well.

### ➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister of Planning and Development Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis**

Thank you very kindly, good evening ladies and gentlemen. I just wanted to indicate two (2) things. With regard to the planning aspect from the Town and Country Planning aspect as to what will happen with Local Government, already there is an interaction between the Ministry of Planning and the regional planning function. What we anticipate will happen is that the regional planning function will get the skills that they need to ensure that simple development and particularly for the development of houses, that the regional offices will be staffed in such a way that those developments can be assessed and decided upon by the local government...by the region. It does not necessarily have to come to the Ministry of Planning for final approval. So the objective, therefore, is to have enough planners be able to execute that function and from the regional level and that is the kind of devolution of power that we are anticipating. With regard to the social services, the objective is really to cut the country up, not physically, but in terms of a grid so that for each block there will be a social worker who actually knows every single person in that particular part of the grid and they know what are the services that these people need, what are the complaints they have and they are able to access a particular social worker or group of social workers who could deal with their issues specifically. What we have now is not enough social workers or not enough detailed work social workers. Some of you may recall some years ago under the last PNM administration we did manpower planning and we knew that we needed a certain number of social workers and we gave scholarships specifically for social work and that outturn is now coming to fruition and is going to be used to ensure that our social workers

play an active role in the communities. So they know everybody in the community and can facilitate whatever is needed to make sure the people are properly taken care of in terms of their social work needs. Thank you.

❖ **Katherine Romaine (Female, African, 60s)**

I believe part of the reason for the reform would be more inclusiveness and citizen participation. I want to suggest if I live in a traditional village setting, I can get information quite easily by word of mouth as I walk through the village or someone at home will give me the information. I heard the suggestion that information would be on the social media; there is a large segment of persons in Trinidad who are still not on social media and who will never use social media as a means of information. Then there are those of us who leave home when the stars are out and who get back home when the stars are out so we are not in the community for most of the week. I want to recommend that perhaps the various councils could produce a monthly newsletter which you can drop in our post box, keep us updated and therefore keep us interested in what is happening and if we are updated and interested then we are more likely to participate.

➤ **Response from Alderman Anthony Roberts**

The approach has to be a multi-prong approach. Any means in terms of communicating has to be employed. Minister usually speaks to it and he indicated that the intention is to legislate to ensure that we have that kind of communication with the community and the social civil society organization; that is a must.

❖ **Stanley Clouden (Male African 60s)**

I am very happy that the discussion continued on the social services because as we know the local government system comprises of two (2) core sections: the physical area and the social development area. I hope that coming out of this consultation the final document will not focus in a kind of imbalanced way...more on the physical development and not including the social development in the way that it should be included. A lot of people spoke of the social development here this evening and more so going into the community and the role that the community should play to some extent. I want to support all those who mentioned the involvement of village and community council. I think we tend to neglect the significant role that these organizations have been playing in the sense of our independence. And I hope the local government document...the role that the community council plays will be shown in a significant way. As somebody mentioned, I think it was the past council, that village councils were linked to the local government system in the past and that is true. As

part of the local government documentation, a member of the association of village council had to be an alderman. You had to have an alderman as part of the local government structure. And as they mentioned a number of MPs came up through the local government system, think about Eulalie James and Norma Lewis, they came right through the local government system. And these organizations have been playing a major role in the development of the country and they have not been identified in any formal documentation and I hope that out of this consultation and in the final document that the recognition and the authority will be given to community council for performing their role. In terms of the social services as the minister mentioned, she isn't really too clear about what role would the social service and Minister Camille Robinson-Regis you know she tried to identify in terms of having them in smaller zones you know where they could understand the needs of the people and that is important. I think if you look at the initial document on local government you will see that there is an understanding of the importance of the social sector in that we try to put it on the same footing as the physical sector because, in the local government sector that exists you have a committee that meets with the CEO comprising the various physical development sectors, for instance, you will have the Ministry of Works, you will have the URP...I am clarifying what he said about village council having three (3) groups. If you look at the same original documentation, you will see that a suggestion was made that we should have rural councils because you have rural communities that may not have a large organization and urban councils where you will have a networking system. If you have ten (10) groups in an area you will form a council comprising members of the ten (10) groups rather than having one (1) community council as such. So you have people from all areas, sports, culture, education, everybody coming together. I want to make one more point coming out of that original documentation. There was a suggestion that the different units of the social sector should also form a community in the region that will share ideas and knowledge and wisdom about everything

#### **Moderator**

Apparently there is a tendency to focus on physical infrastructure and not enough on the delivery of social services. What role would the reconfigured system play? That came up in previous consultations where people were talking about locating networks of social delivery providers of the state within the context of local government.

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

All these social services portfolios were never assigned to local government; local government was largely an infrastructural unit based on public spaces. Cemeteries, minor roads, minor drains and what have you. For the first time, we are talking about handing

over some form of social service delivery to local government and you know that would be a challenge in its own right. We will probably have to look at community councils, village councils. I am not sure of the association of village councils is still functional and that is a unit in terms of the community organization and I think we will have to see how best we can incorporate it.

❖ **Female Participant (Female African 30s)**

I want to applaud the minister and his team for actually...not just looking at infrastructure as development but also his human resource. With that, I would like to bring to the forefront an area board , like a district board where we are not just the village council...it's not just about the village council but there interest groups that are there and having the whole community at their heart. I am suggesting an area district board where we are representatives from each sector in terms of the village council, the association and whatever interest group that wants to push their community forward and each member can attend a meeting with their MP or chairperson to more or less voice their opinion and whatever projects or proposal they wish to see take place in their community. I am a farmer as well and I want to state some of the things that Wallerfield more or less has been neglected. In your planning, you can get your engineers and your different skills and we also have that in the farming community and the people who we collaborate with. The minister spoke about the multiplier effect and in Wallerfield I am looking forward to:

- A security camera being posted and I strongly believe there should be a policy with regards to that in the community.
  - A technology-based system to show what to plant, how to plant, how much to plant to more or less you basically take it back to the Minister of Agriculture.
  - A farmers' market in Wallerfield. Marketing system to assist the farmers in their development and the sale of their crop.
  - A community complex which we do not have, we often use the temple to house our meetings
  - Education – Farmers need to be trained as individuals and we are asking for a library.
- In all your policies in reforming the whole community we ask for these points to be put forward, sir. Thank you.

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

I mean your point is well taken. Wallerfield is an established farming community. I didn't delve much into rural development today but the Minister of Agriculture and myself are working very closely on how we plan to make life better for the farming community which

almost by definition is rural community and it is our intention...our mandate is not to urbanize rural areas, it is to make rural communities more acceptable and have it in a way that all the amenities that urban people enjoy you can also have it there. You can be a proud farmer. If you go to Europe, farmers are proud people. They have Mercedes Benz park up under their yard you know. They have tractors and trailers and SUVs, they have internet, they have everything. They have schools. What is killing farmers now is the middlemen because you buy it and it goes through three (3) hands before you go to HiLo and pay \$18.00 a pound for something that the farmer sold at \$4.00 a pound. The value is being creamed off by these so-called traders who is not adding value to anybody; they are not helping the farmers, nor are they helping the consumers. That is another aspect of the developmental agenda that we are working on. In terms of specific regional corporation functions obviously, that does not form under the local government reform policy.

**Lennox Bernard (cont'd)**

I feel a little vindicated when I heard that social services can remain within its portfolio. The idea was that local government would have at its beck and call all these facilities available to it and you, in fact, supported me when I was going to suggest as well that we collapse the social districts now under the ambit of the regional corporation and a more meaningful look would be given to those various areas. In your municipal policing it would be good if you can consider some truant officers; officers who would spend some time investigating the movement of children before and after school. Not only would it help with academic learning time but it would also help with human trafficking.

## 5.0 CLOSING

In closing, Mr. Roberts referred to a point which he deemed as fundamental, he said social workers assigned to the local government bodies were important since they would be able to drill down in communities and become intimate with families and be able to identify some of the problems within families and help change the circumstances within these same families. He said that this was important as they tried to deal with the whole issue of poverty in which local government played a critical role.

Ms. Bascombe closed by saying that the local government thing could work since it was all about everyone. She indicated that what we really needed was the empowerment of the people, engagement, and enrolment. She said that we could do it together. Finally, Minister Khan thanked the burgesses of the Tunapuna/ Piarco Regional for participating in the process, he said new ideas came out of the consultations while some ideas were repeated throughout the process but he said everything was being incorporated. He said at the end of the day, people wanted to live in better communities, where service was delivered in a timely and efficient manner; where the garbage collection system was regular and predictable even though we may have one of the best garbage systems in the world since no developed country had garbage collection 5 days a week. He said that we had certain systems that worked well and people wanted to live in communities where they felt safe, where they felt empowered and where they there was a sense of comradery and this whole Local Government Reform process was to aid in bringing communities closer together. He said people had fallen out of love with their community since no one really identified with where they were born or grew up and where they now resided. Minister Khan said the sense of love and patriotism had to be brought back to the community. He drew reference to the Borough of Point Fortin, where he said the burgesses loved their community a lot and that this needed to be adopted throughout the country. He said that he found that this reform exercise would also be able to improve the social fabric and it was realised that we should not only focus on the infrastructure but on the softer issues of the communities where we could have a better lifestyle. He concluded by thanking everyone present for participating and said it was a pleasure being there.



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## 6.0 ANALYSIS

### 6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

There were approximately 175 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 115 (65%) male participants and 60 (35%) 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 (85%) appeared to be middle-class income earners with a few from low income and some high-income class. There was 70% representation from the Afro-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 30% being a majority of Indo-Trinidadian and some mixed-race participants.

### 6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 12 respondents from the plenary; 8 male, 4 female. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	10	40 – 70 (7), under 40 (3)
Indian	1	40 – 70 (1)
Mixed	1	40 – 70 (1)

### 6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

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

Topic	Frequency
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – school, roads, parks etc	2
Rural schools – underachievement of children	1
Staff – proper training, motivate through financial rewards	3
Accountability – penalties?	4
Procurement – governing laws	1
Projects – who determines priority	1

Utilize previous information on reform process	1
Public/private partnerships in reform – village councils, churches, etc	3
Better Management at Corporations	1
Boundaries	1
Councillors – better representation	2
Empower people – more information via social media	1
Agriculture/Farming – technological advances, market space	1
Crime – security cameras in areas	1