

# Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

## Couva/Tabquite/Talparo

20<sup>th</sup> January 2016  
Preysal Secondary School



## Rapporteurs' Full Report



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## 1.0 OPENING

The Consultation began with the Master of Ceremonies Ms. Nisa Pierre welcoming all present to the Preysal Secondary School for the second of the island wide series of consultations on Local Government Reform and thanked them for their presence. Ms Pierre went on to make all aware that the consultation will be broadcasted live on national television, over the radio as well as on the internet.

Ms. Pierre introduced the personnel for today's consultation: the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan and the members of the cabinet appointed technical committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government Ms. Desdra Bascombe Chairman and Mr. Anthony Roberts Deputy Chairman.

There was then the playing of the National Anthem followed by a prayer by Councillor Suresh Pooran Maharaj and welcoming message by Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

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

## 2.0 WELCOME REMARKS

### Mr Henry Awong - Chairman Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation



Thank you very much for your kind invitation. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Senator The Honourable Franklin Khan, Chairmen of Corporations, Members of Councils, Permanent Secretary Ms Destra Bascombe, Permanent Secretary Mr Isaac James, C.E.O of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation Ms Carol Dial, Members of the Cabinet Appointed Committee, ladies and gentlemen; a pleasant good evening.

Welcome to the region of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, the second largest corporation in Trinidad with a population of 178,160 and a geographical space of 719.6 square kilometres. Our 18 member council comprises of 14 councillors, 4 aldermen. 15 of those are UNC members; we have 2 ILP members and 1 PNM member, my good friend in front of me here. Our main town centres are Couva and Gasparillo, (75% of the region could be deemed 'rural', and some parts I like to refer to as 'rural of the rurals'), with Tabaquite and Talparo being identified as in our regional plan as areas to be developed into towns.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all eat, sleep and breathe local government. In my 13 years as a Local Government practitioner, I have been to numerous Local Government reform consultations with various ministers of Local Governments, namely Remy Dumas, Mrs Hazel Manning, Dr Suraj Ramjattan and now, the Honourable Franklin Khan. A substantial amount of work was done but was never really implemented. Up to the year 2012, councillors did not have an office, nor a secretary. So we were all thankful when that was made available to us by the People's Partnership government. I must add based on what I just mentioned, there is consensus across the political divide for Local Government reform.

Last night I was going through my Facebook page and something popped up. A former councillor, one of the best councillors I have ever known, the late Councillor Ferez Ali, was on a programme...it was a government programme and that popped up last night and I opened it. And he made a very profound statement. He said, "Local Government is much more than roads and drains. Local Government brightens up the lives of people." He was a very, very good councillor. May he rest in peace. Based on that, I just want to point out a few things. We have started our local chosen drive in this corporation with the intent to create local economic development. We have identified and started developing some sites, for example, Knolly's Tunnel in Tabaquite. We have allocated funding for the conceptual design for the Calie Bay Waterfront Project and we are hoping that we can have the neighbouring largest industrial estate in the Caribbean, Point Lisas Industrial Estate; partner with us on this project. And just to inform the minister, we have also agreed to present this proposal as our Carilent project.

Other areas that stand out in the region as possible tourism sites are the La Vega Estate, the Temple in the Sea at Waterloo, the largest Hanuman statue in the Caribbean at Waterloo, the San Antonio Cocoa Estate where traditional methods of drying the cocoa and so on are still

practiced. I would like to take this opportunity however, to point out a very important matter. I would like to inform the burgesses of the region that due to lack of releases for materials and supplies for the months of October, December and January...none under what we call our "6/12 materials and supplies"... we understand the economic situation that we are in but the burgesses must know it is no fault of ours when we are unable to deliver. Just last Thursday, both administration and members of council had to carry out the hard task of cutting 7% of our budget allocation for the present financial year, mainly from goods and services. Honourable Minister, I want to make a proposal. There are government-owned quarries, one in this region that can be opened so that we can access materials to develop roads and so on in these trying times.

And as I wrap up on behalf of members of council, administration and burgesses of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo region, I want to thank the Honourable Minister and his team for selecting the Couva/ Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the second consultation on Local Government Reform. I have some questions I may want to pose later on after I hear what the minister has to say and I want to thank each and every one for coming out and we look forward to a very successful consultation. Thank you very much.

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



MINISTER KHAN

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, addressed all present and welcomed them to Presyal Secondary School for the consultation. He delivered 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, "The video you just saw illustrates a system and the dynamics that are not unfamiliar to any of us. Whether it's a river, a crack in a drain, an empty lot next door, delivering a social services to someone in need; crime and security, a blown streetlight, medical care, school repairs, a local heritage site, unemployment, waste management, a bus shelter etc. Under the current system when a community needs to get something done, it has to take a place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run to the centralised heart of government."

After having explained the video to the audience, Minister Khan proceeded with his address.

He began, "These consultations are unique, in the sense that it is one of the few occasions that public consultations in Trinidad & Tobago will look solely at Trinidad. The reason being, Tobago's local government's machinery and service delivery systems have progressed well beyond that of Trinidad's. This is directly due to reforms in their Local Government status, and the social contract between the THA and the people of Tobago.

Looking at the Tobago experience we see that there is more that separates us than water. We are separated by a whole different system of service delivery – so it's not the sea but whole bureaucracies that differentiate our local government landscapes. Like many communities across Trinidad, Tobago used to have to come to the central Government for just about everything. With legislation passed in '96 the THA was given legal and local authority and autonomy to change that. Today, Tobagonians no longer have to come to Port of Spain for a passport. Why should we? Tobagonians no longer have to rely on central government to maintain their cemeteries or any other public space. Why should we? Tobagonians no longer have to come here for driver's permits or liquor licences. Why should we? As a corporation, Tobago doesn't have to come to town to protect, preserve and promote their own heritage sites and tourism. Because of the THA Act #40 of 1996, Tobago has the authority and autonomy to inform, manage and dictate and influence almost every aspect of its own affairs and development. As a result, we see advancements and initiatives like: The Tobago Emergency Management Authority, Medical Alert devices in (3 years 520 persons), Social service delivery (example of young person suffering abuse). These are just a few of the many examples that illustrate the differences in our bureaucracies. Tobagonians have the power to treat with their own community, their own unique cultures and ways of life... why shouldn't we? This is really what we will be exploring here this evening and in this island-wide series of consultations. School repairs are handled by the Tobago House of Assembly and by and large when you go to Tobago and you want to be honest to yourself things just seem to be happening better, especially at the local government level. The place is cleaner, the roads are better kept, public buildings are better kept and social service delivery and delivery of all aspects of service seems to be superior to us. Tobagonians have the power to treat with their own community. Just as how the Tobagonian is unique, don't the people of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo culturally feels different to the people of Diego Martin? The answer is yes. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo was part of the Caroni County Council and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo and Chaguanas has replaced the County Caroni.

Since in 1962 successive administrations have researched, tracked, discussed and consulted with the public on the benefits of a decentralization of government through the mechanisms of the local government. The high point of Trinidad's evolution in this regard came with the Municipal Corporation Act #21 of 1990. But essentially, successive administrations have kicked the can down the road, this administration does not plan to kick the can down the road any further. All the work has been done you know, very, very good work, but nothing happened. Nothing happens in developing countries because something called inertia permeates the society. This administration has the political will to do it and local government reform is going to take place.

The pitfalls of centralised governance have been uncovered, discussed, debated and documented over and over again for decades and consistently, all endeavours have pointed to stronger local governance – a broadening of our democracy. What this history and wealth of information presents us with is a pool of thinking – a collection of information that allows us to now strike with surgical precision and real-world relevance.

Beyond garbage collection, retaining walls and waterways, traffic and transport, community centres, empty lots, mosquitoes and the more tangible and physical matters; almost every

decision made by central government inevitably has an effect on our software. Our hearts and minds: our sense of well-being, autonomy, creativity, security, identity and belonging, and our sense of community. Our sense of being able to make a difference, and our basic capacity to dream and to passionately pursue those dreams are gradually absorbed away from us. I will give an example, if Walmart wants to come into a community, you just cannot come in you know. There is a Town Council meeting and if the Town Council say they do not want any Walmart, Walmart or Obama it does not matter, not in America, it does not work so, you cannot come there. The state of Vermont has banned all fast-food chains, no Home Depot as they want to protect the mom and pop stores. That is the power of decentralisation, state government who will override federal government. Above all, the centralisation of decision-making affects our need and ability to unite and to build stronger communities. So, in a very real sense, and particularly at the pace of the modern world, centralised Government is more likely to be the problem, more than the solution.

The major impediments preventing existing local government structures from being efficient, consistent, relevant or sensitive, cost-effective timely or sustainable are: Political interference, manipulation and expediency, inadequate funding, inadequacy of supporting legislation, the sluggish administrative structure that only facilitates unnecessary bureaucracy and an overall lack of transparency and equity.

Local government has become ineffective and burdened with bureaucracy because control, funding and authority are centralised in the Ministry of Local Government and Corporations are currently treated as departments of the Ministry.

Service delivery - How many ministers know your communities like you do? Can they all know the lady down the road who can barely walk anymore? And that she has to go to Port of Spain every year she survives, to the Ministry, to prove to them that she is indeed alive. Otherwise, her pension will be cut off.

Can any single Minister know every community, every street and every house? Far less for every old lady; or every need in every community.

Our vision is a fully operationalized and networked local government system. This is imperative to people-centred development and to the accomplishment of any national vision. Empowerment is the mandate, empowerment to the counsellors and your representatives. The reason why we do not want a Ministry of Local Government is that you will be accountable to the Minister of Finance for your money, you are accountable to the Auditor General for how you spend your money and you are accountable to your burgesses of how you perform. Every three (3) years your burgesses will tell you whether you performed to their satisfaction or not. That is the ultimate level of accountability.

We envision quantum leaps in Health & wellbeing; Family and community life and security, development of public spaces and the environment; local culture, Identity and creativity; entrepreneurship, Local Industry the Economy and Commerce, Dynamic Social and political Interaction, Communication & Media, and Information and Technology. Your ability to fix or plan your own roads, build a retaining wall in the community, or to launch a festival, all have direct impact on the quality of life in your community and local government reform puts that power in your hands.



Our proposal, as we stated in our 2015 Manifesto, the PNM's vision for Local Government seeks to remove all of the red tape and bureaucracies that prevent local government bodies from doing their work in an effective and efficient manner. This document has now been advanced into the official policy debate. To revolutionise and bring the system in line with the recurrent recommendations of the many teams, committees, and different administrations that have engaged this process over the years, we propose the following reforms:

**Secure Funding – Collecting Your Own Taxes** – a lot of debate was expounded on the property tax, whether you axe the tax or don't axe the tax. The fact of the matter is that you will be paying property tax at the rate of 2009. It is a highly politicised issue but I just want to say one thing, tell me a well-run country in the world where you do not pay property tax? And to make matters worse you know that there are old people, my mother included, she is passed now, but when January the 2<sup>nd</sup> reach, the first thing this lady has to do is to go to the warden office and pay land and building taxes, because they feel that if they do not pay their taxes the government will cease their property. That six (6) years or so where people were told do not pay land and building taxes. It is the law and you just cannot say do not obey the law. So we will be implementing the land and building taxes as per your 2009 rates. However, hopefully by 2017 the land and building taxes will be the responsibility of the Regional Corporations and the funds so collected will stay within the region, to develop your local community because it is your local taxes. It happens all over the world and that will give you a cash flow to handle your business and you will get your subventions as and when required. It will be an immediate cash flow and based on what corporation you are talking about a lot of money. Three hundred and fifty million dollars are collected a year in land and building taxes. Let us say thirty million dollars per corporation your capital budget is ten million. So there is a lot of room for improvement, if you are looking at pure money, the resources are available in the country you know, it is just allocated in a haphazard way and not focused on where it is actually needed and it is needed at the level of the community.

Local Government bodies will be allowed to keep certain taxes and other revenues collected within their boundaries.

**Executive Authority** – Local Government bodies will be given a level of autonomy and executive authority similar to that of Tobago House of Assembly. First and foremost councillors will have to be fulltime and there will be a secretary of infrastructure. In the past we would have had these committees, you might have had a secretary with direct responsibility for that, these are some of the issues we are working out as we speak. But you will have executive authority.

**New Responsibilities** – the Municipal Corporation Act that replaced the County Council Act by and large, all that did was to change up the boundaries because the schedule and your responsibility level remains basically the same. What we are planning to do now is give you new levels of responsibility - school maintenance. Most importantly ladies and gentlemen, the Prime Minister spoke about this in a lot of his speeches, so you know it is gospel, social welfare delivery. It is at the community level you would know the families that are at risk, you know who are the poor people; who are the poor families; who need shelter; who need a housing grant. Right now it is just which MP you know and which Manager in HDC or in National Self Help Commission Unit. I am being real and I am being honest. But if you have a decentralisation system of social service delivery, you will have at the level of the corporation

your social welfare officers, working with you and they would be in charge of a smaller area, so they supposed to know by name who the at risk families are, who is suffering from child abuse, who is suffering from domestic violence, all the myriads that plague social society.

Local Contractors – as far as is allowed by the constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, local Government work should be given to local contractors. If you have a contract in Couva or Gasparillo and a Gasparillo supplier gets there is something called the multiplier effect, so the workers may very well be from Gasparillo, when they get paid, their wives will go to the Gasparillo market or the Marabella market; if they are taking a little beer Friday evening, in a Gasparillo bar they will be drinking hopefully. That is the multiplier effect that goes into the community.

More Effective Municipal Policing make changes – recruit a hundred (100) Municipal Police per corporation and restructure it, into a command chain that takes it to the Commissioner of Police. Right now the Municipal Police reports to the CEO, we do not think that is an acceptable administrative structure for law enforcement. I will be meeting with the Minister of National Security next week to work out a plan on that.

Development Control – Town and Country Planning a lot of the planning functions will now be delegated to the regional corporations. Right now you give completion certificates but you cannot approve plans and someone building a normal flat house at the back of Caratal, what they have to go to San Fernando or Port of Spain to approve a plan for that for? If it is a big commercial building well you may say that there are other issues that are tabled there, so you need some centralised planning permission. But the normal residential areas obviously it is a waste of time, it is a waste of bureaucracy for these things to happen there.

Infrastructure Works – a new model of infrastructural works as I outlined before.

Disaster Management – the Regional Corporations as first respondents in disaster management is one of the areas of regional corporations that works extremely well. If we build on that capability I think we are on the right track.

Involvement of Civil Society make changes – I do not know if we would be mandated in the Act but procedurally you will have to keep consultations and town hall meetings. That may even be legislated I am not sure. But you cannot, important decisions for a community sit down in council and take the decisions by yourself. There has to be a statutory requirement for consultation. Somebody coming to open a quarry somewhere in the Central Range, no one arm of the government supposed to give that permission, because if you are quarrying in Mayo and you are going to expand your quarry in Mayo, quarries have dust and big trucks mashing up the road. You have to keep consultation with the residents and say hey guys, there are two (2) sides to this coin. Economic activity where you will be getting jobs, you will be getting an income and then there is an environmental side, it may cause for inconvenience, the dust level may affect your children's lungs. So all these are issues that face you the people, it is not for a government to adjudicate on that and if you feel that that project is not in the interest of the community, at least you should have a right to voice that opinion and have an avenue to express it and probably try to stop it because that is how it affects your lifestyle.

Regional Development Planning – Local Regional Spatial Plans which the Ministry of Local Government has coordinated and each Regional Corporation already has some embryo of a

plan. In the PNM's election in the 2013 Local Government Election, we produced fourteen (14) Regional Plans for the fourteen (14) corporations. The PNM run corporations will be asked to look at that plan and give effect to it, obviously we cannot ask a UNC run corporation to take our plan and put it, it will still be made available to them, but you have the right as an elected body to come up with your own plans, obviously subject to some centralised authorisation because even though we are delegating authority to the Regional Corporations to do Regional planning, remember there must be centralised planning. In other words Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo cannot come up and say we want to build an aluminium smelter in Mayo because that will be inconsistent with National policy. So the National policy framework would be made available and then within that National policy from the Ministry of Planning you will be able to develop the details of your Regional plan.

Two final points. Boundaries – this is one of the areas that we need consultation on. With this amount of executive authority that we plan to give out, is fourteen (14) corporations too much? Because I tell you, if we have fourteen (14) corporations with executive authority like the THA, so we have fifteen (15), fourteen (14) in Trinidad and one (1) in Tobago, a Central government that has a cabinet of that size, Trinidad would be the most over governed country in the world. So it is something that we need to be mindful of. Whether fourteen (14) corporations is too many? Whether it should be cut to twelve (12)? Where should the boundary changes lie? So all these are major, major policy decisions that will have to be taken in this consultation.

And finally ladies and gentlemen the organisation and structure of the New Regional Corporation. As we speak few regional corporations have an engineer, far less a quantity surveyor, all they have is a building inspector, a local health something I do not even know and WS1 and WS2 and WS3. None of them have the level of qualification, the certification to administer complex contracts. So if you are getting the empowerment to handle complex contracts and high cost contracts, to handle complex project management issues, you have to source the skills. There is something called supply chain management now that is sweeping the world, those are new skill sets that is required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need auditors, we need accountants, we need organisational experts, we need field officers and on the engineering side like I said, we need procurement people, we need supply chain managers, we need engineers, we need project managers. We need a whole suite of new skills. So the recruitment process in the new administration in the Local Government area will be a highly active area, where we plan to absorb new skills. It will call for a lot of employment creation. And I will just make one (1) statement on that.

This country has invested billions of dollars in GATE, all of you all of children who have degrees. Billions of dollars in GATE. The average person on the street, if you take a random sample in Chaguanas, Couva anywhere and you say 'you what is your qualification?' The chances are one of them would have a bachelor's degree, some of them have masters degrees. I made a statement in the parliament and Ms. Ameen took me to task for it, but I will make it again. We suffer from underemployment, more so than unemployment and I took the liberty to state and I will state it again. Sometimes underemployment is worse than unemployment because you have your child, with the great expectation of going to university, getting a degree, going on to do post graduate, getting a master's degree, getting an MBA and coming back out and have to take a job that is way below what they are qualified to do. It hurts you as a parent. The society

and the government is responsible for that, we dealt with one part of the equation, which is the free tertiary equation. So everybody Tom, Dick and Harry in university now, but when you come out on this side of the conduit, there is nothing. The Local Government Reform would be some of the issues that would be employing new people, would be employing new skills and as far as possible we will try to recruit people from the area. So the skills of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo should more often than not be sourced from the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Region. It will help solve the traffic problem to a point too you know. If you check everybody that is going to Port of Spain, it is just like crazy ants you know, people up and down, working here, working there but there is no centralised planning and coordination of some of the activities in Trinidad and Tobago.

On the legislation side, like I said we will amend the Municipal Corporation Act, we will amend the relevant taxation laws. Basically those would be the two (2) sets of Legislative Reform that we would be planning. The time table as I said, a lot of the work has been done already, we have twelve (12) more consultations to do, we will do it in quick succession in the coming months. At a minimum as you all know, you all are councillors, Local Government Elections is due in 2016, I think it is the 21<sup>st</sup> October. When the term expires you have three (3) months after that, so at the back end you are looking at 21<sup>st</sup> January 2017. January 2017 is also THA elections, so very likely the Local Government Elections will be held in the end of 2016. I cannot tell you the date that is for the Prime Minister to say, but I am just telling you the window in which we have to hold the elections.

At a minimum we want to have all the legislation in parliament by the time the election is due, so you will know that this is the New Legislative Framework in which you will be involved in. When the Local Government Elections is called and who so ever win, lose or draw and then you will start now the transformation process on the ground. It will probably take two (2) to three (3) years for this whole thing to unfold, to get flesh and to be implemented.

This Local Government Reform ladies and gentlemen in closing is probably the most significant activity that is taking place in the governance structure of Trinidad and Tobago. If this goes according to plan the governance landscape of this country will change completely. We will almost be moving into a federal and a state type system. So you have federal government has its jurisdiction, the state government which is in terms of the Regional Corporation will be in charge of local matters.

In closing I solicit your support and your collaboration in this exercise. As I said trust me, I am probably one politician you can trust (crowd laughed), there is no sinister motive in this, there is absolutely no sinister motive in this and by and large, there is no political flavour to this Reform, because it is as broad as its wide. It is equal opportunity for UNC, PNM and if ILP still exists by the next election and MSJ, sorry Mr. Abdullah.

*The final video clip was shown and Minister Franklin Khan made the closing remarks:*

Ladies and gentlemen what we tried to do was show you graphically a video at the beginning that shows the bureaucratic blocks and the passing of the buck as the system currently exists. This video tries to capture what the new dispensation could possibly look like. It will take some time and effort for it to happen but that is the image we want to portray. So those are our thoughts from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and from the

Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The rest of this evening would be to get your contributions and let me tell you ladies and gentlemen bring up anything you want, nothing is taboo, do not be afraid to say what you want to say. We are talking about Reform, I know a lot of you would want to bring up specific problems in your area, while we would want to accept some of that, do not let the conversation go too much down that way, those are operational issues.

## 4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

### ❖ Arlene Nysus – Statistical Data Collection (Female, African, 40's)

Hi goodnight to one and all. Question: Given that the Central Statistical Office seems to be relatively inactive, will it now be the remit of the relevant local government body to collect statistical data in their respective area or will this remain the purview of the CSO?

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

There will be a new statistical institute that is being formed as we speak and it will be a collaborative effort between the government, academia and the private sector. So it will be independent of central government. So it will be an independent institution and they will be mandated to compile all the statistics. The committee that is doing that is already in place and we expect that to be operational within the year.

### Moderator

I will presume that there are some follow up questions with respect to the quality of the data that is going to be collected. Because there is a broader question of disparities among and between the various local government constituencies or areas with respect to resources and capacity and if you're going to be giving these regional corporations or regions all of this power and responsibility, perhaps your data collection ought to focus on capacity as well.

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

I think that data collection wouldn't be a core function of the regional corporation but they can probably supply some data to the statistical institute. It's a strange thing because it had a very functional CSO for many years and everybody felt comfortable with the statistics and information that they gave. Look at the quantum leap in data based management that is available in the world today; the data should be available at the click of a button. There are so many queries you can do, there are so many operating systems and everybody could upload and download and share information in what you call enterprise wise software. So sometimes it baffles me why we are not in a better place as we speak in terms of data but the institute will deal with all of that.

### ❖ Male Participant (Male, Mixed, 30's)

Goodnight to the panel and everyone here. As you mentioned in your presentation, each regional corporation would have the capacity to execute their own services that may be unique to their specific demographic. What systems if any would be in place that will

effectively link each region together with regards to things such as medical history, access to employment opportunities, as well as the economic cross-development where regions will develop well defined economic relationships with one another, similar to what Trinidad has with Tobago?

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

It's something that forms a fundamental part of the consultations and I will hand over to Mr Roberts to say something on that. No matter what spin I put on it and what spin the committee puts on it, we are empowering 14 corporations...they say they are autonomous and what have you...but there will still be some residual local government function at the central level, which is a coordinating arm. I don't feel the Ministry of Finance can effectively do that. So is either we say... under the Ministry of Rural Development there is a coordinating arm to handle the synchronization of the 14 corporations or whether a group like TTALGA, there is a Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Bodies...that we could redefine a role for them or what they see their function as. I'll just hand over on Mr Roberts to speak about that association.

➤ **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

Well TTALGA is an association of local government practitioners and it operates at this time like a trade union for the local government practitioners. We believe the TTALGA could play a more effective role in local governance by looking at some of the issues that you have raised and that the minister referred to. All these things at this time are now being given consideration.

**Moderator**

Gentleman, does that fully answer your question? Because what I am also getting from you is a question of technical interconnectivity. So as in the delivery of services and you cited health, for example, will there be this capacity among the various regions to share information at the technical level, such that you have a high level of interconnectivity?

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

Well the answer is yes but through which agency? Because you may have, for example, because of personalities...let's say the chairman of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo and the chairman of Grande close, they may be sharing knowledge...shared knowledge, best practices and what have you. That time Mayaro suffering down there and nobody talking to them. So you have to have some officialdom in a system like this, so where it is coordinated through some central agency. But again, you don't want to go back to centralization where you just left it, so it's some of the dilemma we face. But what I just want to warn this

audience about...not warn, but to bring to your attention, is that you wouldn't get everything right and let us not attempt to stop the process because we cannot get everything right. I think if we get 70% the way we want it we would have accomplished a tremendous amount and with time we will move from 70 to 75, from 75 to 80 as the case may be. One of the problems we have in a society like ours is that in our effort to get it right...because everybody will tell you why it is not right, so paralysis analysis, paralysis analysis and you have consultation and you have report. Then you have a report on the report, and then a report on the report on the report. So that is the handcuff I don't want to get in. So our objective is if we would have gotten 70% right, I think we would have succeeded.

❖ **Kathy-Ann Ainse (Female, African 50's)**

Hi good day. I am from Preysal Road, Grand Couva, particularly in the Freeport/Chickland district. Just before I make my statement, I heard the chairperson say about a hundred and something recreational grounds, Grand Couva does not have one recreational ground, unfortunately. We have had a situation with a road and sadly to say since 2012 where officers got offices, I have been saddened by a road which has a wooden bridge which cannot even accommodate a fire tender. Houses had burned down, we have complained to the councillor, we have written the chairpersons, past, present, and we have now reached the ombudsman. My concern is that right now, the ombudsman's office does not seem to be getting any response from the regional corporation so that at this point in time, we're at a stale mate. I want to know what is there going to be in the structure for when it is that constituents have problems with the regional corporation? In particular, in our case, we have no drainage, we have a derelict road and we have a bridge that cannot accommodate vehicles. Thank you.

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

It is difficult to get a straight answer to that because there are several issues there. There is the concept of scarcity of resources and the equitable allocation of resources. So on the face of it, your councillor is responsible to seek the interest of his burgesses to get the work done. But the councillor will come to a council meeting and there are 14 other councillors and they have \$2 million to share among 14 of them, that is less than \$200,000 per corporation. That is if they go equitable. Then \$200,000 can't build a bridge. So then you might say it is better, more effectively spent to do 4 fifty thousand dollar projects as it would impact on four different communities. But at the end of the day, the state has a responsibility to provide amenities and services to its citizens. Let me just share what was the genesis of the creation of the Ministry of Rural Development...because in the grand scheme of things, you go to the Ministry of Works to build the bridge and if they have a similar situation in St Joseph, where the broken bridge affects 600 people and your broken bridge affects 5 families, the classic analysis of that situation will say we have to fix the



bridge that affects 600 people. So that is why the Ministry of Rural Development who will come in as a policy ministry on rural development deliverables can make an intervention in that regard. Because we have a mandate in the Ministry of Rural Development...it has not been crystalized in its final form as yet because it's a new ministry, we are now putting the infrastructure in place that we can make interventions on matters specific to that. I'd quote another example, rural transport. I got a complaint from Moruga today that they went to P.T.S.C and P.T.S.C didn't have the resources...because P.T.S.C. would prefer to put their buses on profitable routes. So if you have a route from San Fernando to Princess Town that you could run five times a day and the bus full going and coming, you wouldn't take a bus and send it down to Moruga. But the people of Moruga are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago with the right of service also. So if you don't have a policy intervention at the top it will never happen. And that is the *raison d'être*, that is the reason. It is early days still but I would say give me some time and we would put a framework to start to solve some of these problems that you have articulated.

#### **Moderator**

I want to bring Alderman Roberts in here and I know that you want to respond to that particular point but also, the second part of the lady's question had to do with accountability and to whom do you turn institutionally for recourse under this new framework that is being put together?

#### ➤ **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

Certainly in this new dispensation, the minister in his presentation indicated the importance of civil society organizations. And there civil society organizations would have the opportunity to be able to being pressure to bear on the regional corporations in order to get work done in their communities.

#### **Moderator**

So is it envisaged that there be an ombudsman type of function attached to the local government's sphere, not only in the event of a falling down of the local government representatives, but malpractice and other things that happen that prevent development from taking place?.

#### ➤ **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

The structure will have these built-in agencies to ensure, not only situations like that but to ensure that there is integrity and there will be no corruption in the system.

❖ **Hans Scantleberry (Male, African, 40's)**

Hello goodnight. My contribution is that I'm of the view that the comparison between the THA and the Regional Corporation is flawed because on the one hand you have the THA that getting about 2.4 billion and you have the Regional Corporation who gets about 200 million so to me I think the comparison is flawed but I am of the view that the council should be empowered and should be given the finances in order to almost as act as sponsors to decide which project must be done in their area so it will be similar to T&TEC. They will decide that they want a project done and they will pay the public service the financial resources in order to execute the project on the council's behalf. In that way, whatever their allocations are, they will determine based on their needs of their region and utilise public service who already have the structure that is required, who already has the expertise in order to execute these projects...properly planned projects because we have a Ministry of Planning, we have several engineers in the public service to be delivered goods and services as was planned to the burgesses and to the citizens of Trinidad.

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

With regards the THA and the Regional Corporations comparison being flawed, you are partially right in the sense that I was more talking about structure than resources. So we want to implement a similar structure. If you attribute the success of Tobago only to the quantum of money that they receive, well then your argument is right. But I think the success of Tobago is not only the quantum of their budget...because they have significantly more responsibilities than the regional corporation at presently existing...it has to do with the structure and that is why we say we are putting a similar type of structure in place and then hopefully we would deal with the allocation of resources. Let me just make a point on allocation of resources; that will be a major challenge for central government. Let me make it abundantly clear to this audience, because there is a difference between 'equal' and 'equity, equitable.' Equal is very easy, you divide all your money by 14 and then you treat everybody equally. Equitable means a fair sharing of the resources where the needs are. How you compromise those two theories is subject to see. I'll quote an example, take Port of Spain, no take Arima. The Arima Borough Corporation is 4 square miles, so if you check how much kilometres of roads that exist in the borough of Arima, it is small, compared to somebody like Sangre Grande/Manzanilla. The amount of traces it have in Sangre Grande from Mazanilla to Toco, straight to Valencia and up into Matelot. And then when you check the Regional Corporation budget, Arima gets the same amount of money for road repairs as Sangre Grande. So you now have to define 'equality' and 'equitable' and it is a challenge we will face but obviously we will come up with algorithms and matrices to deal with that matter.

❖ **Hans Scantleberry**

I heard what you said but what you're saying to me is somebody that has a lot of resources in comparison with somebody that has less resources, you are saying to me that the person

with more resources...I trying to be fair. It is difficult for me to compare the two because obviously the person with more resources if we comparing a yard, he will be able to maintain his yard better than somebody who has less resources. So when you are looking at the outcome, the delivery of services in Tobago, you have to factor in the resources. Yes they have more responsibilities but they have more...if you work it out per square kilometre per person, it is significantly more.

#### **Moderator**

Point is taken and it was addressed by the minister when he said there needs to be some kind of formula because as I said in the very beginning, there are huge disparities not only in terms of needs but in terms of revenue generating capacity, in terms of what people's personal incomes are in the various regions.

#### ❖ **Female Participant (Indian, 30's)**

Good night everybody. I think you all just answered the question that I was going to ask but what I wanted to find out, in terms of the resources and the subventions, I just wanted to know if there was a fixed formula for the allocation of the resources...not as yet and if you do and you are considering it, would you consider...like how you have the THA and that one, that's the 4% or if you would consider the needs analysis of the region or if there would just be a fixed formula based on the equality of...

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

I honestly cannot answer that at this point in time but what you should do is probably give the committee a little document, you know a two-page document on what are the possible formulae we could use and which is the one you recommend. And on that point, people are welcome to make written submissions. As a matter of fact, written submissions are encouraged.

#### **Moderator**

Before we move away from that, I'm going to put the chairman of the committee on the spot here. What would be the guiding principle...clearly we're dealing with a mix, a hybrid between the subventions, which is the traditional model, *vis a vis* revenue generating capacity, what's the principle in terms of the balance that you're trying to achieve?

#### ➤ **Desdra Bascombe – Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

Well our basic ideal is empowering all communities. So we will be looking at both resources available within the community, for instance, if you look at Point Fortin, that borough would

be termed a wealthy borough. And also we would be looking at equity, somewhere like Arima which is not really generating much income to satisfy the needs of the burgesses, so it would be a mixture of equity and even distribution, as well as we'll be talking into consideration the specific needs of target communities. So there would be some level of tweaking of the formula.

❖ **Female Participant – Follow-up question**

In our region, it's not only country and as you mentioned earlier as we have the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and as you mentioned there would be a subvention of the taxes also, the taxes collected and if you have anything in place for like Industrial Estates and also when you consider the resources when you said that Point Fortin, the borough, how much is allocated to them and Couva/Tabaquite is a big area and we have prepared our strategic plans and we already have a plan in our area as to what we would like to do, so if consideration would be given to that?

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

You have the strategic plan but we have to know where to stop this line of argument because what I don't want to happen with the regional corporations is that we create such an identity that you forget you are Trinidadian. So I don't want to have 4 independent republics under our federal government. You are just a regional corporation looking after your community. And this idea of allocation...Ms Bascombe brought it up. If you take property tax for industrial areas and industrial plants and equipment which is part of the act, and commercial and industrial were in effect. The only one that wasn't effected was the residential property. So you may find the borough of Point Fortin collecting a tremendous amount of money when you work it out and I don't want to say what the figure is. And also Point Lisas...Point Lisas would generate more revenue under the taxation laws of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of property taxes that could possibly be allocated to Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. And even though the legislation says that you have to keep the resources here...you know where you could take this argument to? Freeport/Chickland councillor is not part of that. So Mr Alif now who is Couva, he would say well you see that 30 million that is mines because that fall under my jurisdiction and that has to be spent here. So the entity really that is collecting it is not Point Lisas/Couva electoral district, the entity that would be collecting it is Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

❖ **Katherine Jofield (Female, African, 50's)**

Firstly let me say goodnight to the Honourable Minister, P.S and chairman of San Juan/Lavantille. Mr Minister I would like to personally congratulate you and the Prime minister on keeping your election promises on local government consultations and bringing it to the reform and bringing it to the people. I have listened to you in your local government discourse which was your first meeting in San Fernando. One of the things I

would like to emphasize as someone who worked in Local Government for 19 years and also served on an alderman level...one of the problems affecting local government operation with respect to the effective relationship between the council as the political body and the administrative arm is most time there are lack of accountability and transparency with respect to the administrative arm through the various officers specified in the municipal act from the C.O. come down and not bringing the true picture of the regional corporation status to the council when they come. And most time the council does not have the power to the administration book to see exactly the status of the corporation. That is one. I am not seeing in the vision where we are having the...I would like to see...I don't want to condemn it and I agree with what you have outline here but I would like to see firstly the C.O.'s of the corporation being held accountable for the tax payer's money. Because what we are witnessing in our country today where you have many allegation of corruption coming out of various ministries, there is no doubt that under the Ministry of Local Government several corruption activities has taken place. I would also like to say...could we see in the act where the accounting officer of the regional corporation cities and boroughs, the Financial Officer especially...that is a post I have witnessed where the corporation where I was they hire willy-nilly and sometimes when you check at the qualification of the Financial Officer it is not in par with the standard that is expected to manage the tax payers' and the burgesses' funds. Another thing too, I would to see the increase in the local government policing. I see you have that here...this is my third consultation and from time to time there have been promise after promise and I would really like you to implement it. One more thing is...for instant, in my burgesses where I am living. I am a burgess. I am part of Chaguanas and part of Couva/Tabaquite...I am presently right now. And many times you have to go begging to the regional corporation and the borough (because I am between a borough and a corporation) for basic amenities. Right now in my community, 3 weeks now no rubbish have been taken out. I will like to see a proper, effective implementation on the collection of out waste disposal. I am specifically referring to the open tray. Last but not least, with respect to the chairman of the mayor. I am totally in agreement with the committee and the Prime Minister and the government that a chairman and a mayor must be elected. It is high time now we stop appointing chairman and mayor to corporation. When they are appointed they feel they are a law unto themselves. Most times they don't represent a burgess or a particular electoral district. I have witnessed where mayors will tell you that your area vote for this party or that party so they are not representing you. And I would like to see these things be implemented into the Local Government Act. Once again, I thank you very much.

### **Moderator**

Several big questions. Started off in terms of accountability with respect to the accounting officers and the politicians who are elected to the corporation?

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

I think I'd answer that. It is a main area of concern for the committee and we would really have to find a system that is workable. As we speak the C.O. boss is this lady, is not no mayor or chairman, you know. The chairman and C.O. of Couva/Tabaquite Regional Corporation report to Ms Bascombe because the chairman has no executive power. But in a really large sense I am Ms Bascombe's boss because I am the minister and the minister means certain things in the legislation. But because the Municipal Corporation Act had never given executive authority to mayor and chairman, they are an appendage, an annex to the administration. So they system now operates on who builds the best working relation with the C.O. and vice versa. When I did a scan of the 14 corporations...the corporation that I think is working well is where the mayor has a good working relationship with the C.O. and the corporations that are not going good is where they have a sour relationship. So right now it has to be based on relationship but it really should be based on legislation. So it is a very creative area and she give me a good idea there because if you have empowered corporations, just as how the permanent secretary in the ministry is accountable to the Integrity Commission, we probably should pass legislation where the C.O. of corporations has to declare integrity reports, just as how the chairmen and the councillors have to because they handle more money than a councillor...more government money. So it is an idea that has taken some root with me that under the new legislation the CO's of corporations should probably have to file integrity forms.

➤ **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

Moderation, what complicates things further; the legislation is that the CO has to carry out the lawful resolution of the council and it was tested in court in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and they won. So that notwithstanding, the CO of the corporation answers to the PS, he or she finds himself or herself in a bind because you have to carry out the lawful resolution of the council. So that is an anomaly that we have to deal with.

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

Well let me just make the point, the lawful resolution of the council, not the opinion of the chairman or the mayor. It must be by resolution at a council meeting.

❖ **Charlene Hosein (Female, Indian, 40's) – Indian Trail**

Special goodnight to all ministers, all mayors, all councillors. I live at Indian Trail which is the next flyover after the children's hospital. I have 4 points and I will say it in 5 minutes. The first one is over a hundred years the village of Indian Trail exists and that is the only flyover that does not have a bus stop. Minister I work at Port of Spain, Nicholas Towers and on

morning I have to get up at 3 o'clock to get dressed to get the first PH taxi to go to Couva to line up there by the market to get the bus to go to Port of Spain. If you don't get that first bus, if it is full, you have to wait on the next one and you reaching Port of Spain after 9 o'clock. I do not understand. Forest Park there is a turn off, Preysal there is a turn off, Chase Village there is a turn off, even the Nagar site that have a festival once for the year, Divali, why it is Indian Trail doesn't get a cut out when it is over 1000 people, 600 houses. That is really, really sad. Not even a trace to cut out, not even a bus stop. Do you know how much I spend in transportation every day, every month? Is almost \$2100.00. My co villager there, sometimes we have to pay a Preysal taxi \$35.00 to drop us home on a Friday evening. It is not safe as a female person. Next point: There is a break land in Indian Trail, a landslip that if somebody die tonight a hearse cannot even pass, much more for an ambulance and that is sad. Indian Trail has been neglected for years. Nothing has been done for Indian Trail. There is no recreation for the children of Indian Trail. There is a ground with no lights. I have a personal problem. I need the Couva Corporation need to get their act together. The Minister of Health, that office of Couva, I have a box drain where I have a neighbour who has 9 dogs, 15 sheep, all his water is running in my yard. This is not to slam anybody but since 2009 Mr Maharaj came by me, he never came back up to this day. My Awong, I need you to give your councillors a phone that is working because every you call the cell phone they do not answer. 2009 till now! This is 2016. I work in a ministry and every day I have to pass dog shit, my neighbour cesspit running in my yard. I have to go to work and hear what they hell people would say, they writing the corporation to put a box drain 9 years now. What is that? Give the health people some more authority.

❖ **Ramchand Rampaul Maharaj, Alderman CTTRC (Male, Indian, 40's)**

Thank you. Honourable Minister, Mr Roberts, Ms Bascombe, Chairman, Mayors, Councillors, Colleagues. Local Government reform as you stated minister sounds very interesting and exciting. I need some clarification. If you have to abolish Local Government Ministry then what becomes of your position as Minister of Local Government? The second thing is, Mr Roberts mentioned some time ago, there will be some sort of overseeing by central government although you are talking about total decentralization and devolution of power to regional bodies and if that is the case, then we are a bit fearful that the CO's will still be appointed from central government...that is a...and I want you to allay the fears of many of the local government practitioners by that. And the other thing is, you said that Local Government elections should be held before or at your end and if this is to be implemented could you say for sure, you talk about 70%, but looking at it from 70% in train, where will that leave the local government bodies with councillors...new councillors coming on stream what have you...wouldn't that lead to some sort of chaos in the operations of the new council? Thank you.

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

Well I am Minister of Rural Development. That is the ministry and we have put Local Government transformation under my portfolio but I am supposed to implement that, get the reform in place, get the legislation in place, get the operating systems in place and then disband the Local Government component. But if you check how the ministry is called, it is called the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. So from 'and' we will take a red pen and scratch it off. That is a very valid point you make. What I said is that before the next local election which is due at the end of this year, the legislation very likely will be in the parliament in front of a joint select committee. When we pass the legislation we would not have the infrastructure in place for its full implementation as yet and that will be the process for the second term, which will be the 2016, 17, 18 and 19 term because in that term now, hopefully we could get everything rolled out. This thing is very complex you know and it is very far reaching. You raise the point about who will appoint the CO. The CO is a public servant, they fall under the Public Service Commission and it is the public service that is mandated by the constitution to support the political arm of the state. So we cannot flaunt that. Realistically, the administration in the regional corporation will continue to fall under the public service and to fall under public service regulation. You will have greater say based on the Municipal Corporation Act when you get executive power in terms of what you can instruct or what you cannot instruct the COs to do, whether you can give general or specific instruction on how they say a minister can do. All these are areas that we are glad you brought it to our attention and that is why the drafting of the legislation is so important. Let me just make the point and apologize for the Honourable Stuart Young who is the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. There is a technical committee that is headed by Ms Bascombe and it included expertise in local government. But there is also a ministerial oversight committee to oversee this process which is chaired by my good self and the vice chairman is the Honourable Stuart Young and he has been mandated by the Prime Minister to take personal attention to drafting the legislation. Under normal circumstances, Mr Young and myself would be here interacting with you. Obviously, as you will well be aware, there is a parliamentary session going on in the house now so hence his absence. But the legislation is probably the highest priority item but nothing can happen without legislation and if legislation is not drafted properly it is probably worse than where we were. We have to be very careful how we draft the legislation, what we want from the legislation and legislation could only be drafted after a policy position is articulated.

**Moderator**

I think that more comprehensive proposals along these lines can be included underwritten submissions because clearly there is a lot of room for very fine details to be addressed here.



❖ **Paula Joseph Henry (Female, Mixed, 40's)**

I am very new to local government and I am very excited, thanks to the minister for giving us such a very educated description of what local government reform. My concern really is that this sounds like a lot of utopia. And you talked about implementation and I am wondering why it is taking us so long to get something that has been written so long about to be implemented. And I think when you talk about the THA Act in the prototype of 1996, I say that if we have a prototype right here in Trinidad and Tobago why don't we have a swifter implementation and then based on what the chairman had said he talked about the fact that local government reform will beautify our villages and I thought well yes that's very picturesque but then I said something here is difficult because we talked about equity and we talked about each area getting its own revenue and I said that in itself is a problem. Because if you have some of the richer, more lucrative areas receiving more money, then they would have more resource...easier way to get their work done. I thought transform and implementation go in the same thing. I thought you having all these great ideas will not go a sole way of transforming. As you say we need to put legislation, we need to appoint councillors, the COs, and we need to have a more tight relationship if we are to get to show on the ground for a more beautiful Trinidad and Tobago.

❖ **Male Participant (African 60's)**

A pleasant goodnight to the heads of the table, to the Minister of Local Government and also my good friend, the chairman Mr Awong. I am so overwhelmed and appreciate all what you have said, Minister. I was sitting there a while ago and I read something here, "Background." And I would like that after I read this here that the public can also look at that. "Beyond garbage collection, retaining walls and waterways, traffic and transport, community centres, empty lots and mosquitoes, there are other key decisions that need to be in the hand of the community. Since 1962, successive administrations have consulted with the public on the benefit of decentralization of government, consistently all these consultations have pointed to and have recommended stronger government." My concern sir, with respect, that I am a community worker and I observed something with the garbage collector; I did not know the rules and regulations but I have an idea. They are supposed to have two locals on a rubbish truck. Some of the rubbish trucks have one, they leaving all the rubbish. I myself does have to come and clean out that. Me ain't working for no rubbish truck. So what I am saying, I would like the Chairman to be very concerned with the contractors. I am very concerned about that. One point; NGC give up that pavilion to Regional Corporation. Right now there is some outlets and I would like you all to take some consideration and have it very secure.

**Moderator**

Thank you very much. Well the Chairman is here and I am sure that he is taking copious notes when these things are mentioned.

❖ **Hafeeza Khan (Female, Indian, 40's)**

Good evening everyone. I want to thank the Honourable Minister for his proposals. I want to touch on the education department. The Couva/Tabaquite area is prone to landslide, bad drainage. I think one of the problems is not having proper people who are educated in civil engineer and architectural engineering to manage these drains and break lands, whatever it is. Concerning the education department is like there are students here who went to school in the university and stuff but they are not exposed to the internship to which to come and implement it in this country. And I would like to see with something being done with the students and them from here whether to go abroad to study and to bring back the experience into this country so that they can develop this country in a better way, especially in this time if globalisation and where Trinidad and Tobago is one of the top Caricom regions.

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

There is a lack of civil engineering skills in the corporation and I have said that in my presentation. They reform process will obviously staff that out. With regards the internship, well that is a function of the Ministry of Education and skills training. All in all, there are so many trained people in Trinidad, is just how does the system absorb them and this is the challenge we face. I made a play about underemployment, there is a OJT programme in place, there are a lot of areas of engaging young professionals and young people for training and the government will continue to do that.

❖ **Female Participant (Indian, 30's)**

Pleasant goodnight Honourable Minister, members of the panel, specially invited guests. Part of my question was answered before; it was mainly the part about the Executive Council. Since we are going to adopt this THA model, you know that it is a top-down transition. And it was really with respect to the staffing, part of your contribution you had mentioned earlier, if the 14 regional corporations ought to be empowered, more or less, Trinidad would be a very over governed country. You mentioned also, where instead of 14, you may have to cut down to 10, 11, 12 or as the case may be. My main issue is that I do hope that you take into consideration when this is being done, of the number of employees attached to these regional corporations because somewhere along the line they should be absorbed and their means of livelihood should not be ended abruptly. And secondly, you went into the point where the regional corporation management plays a very integral part; however, we know that we are more or less embedded by the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and for a fact that close relationship between the Disaster Management and the Regional Corporation, together with what is called TTMAS, which is the body that engoverns the Point Lisas Industrial Estate if there is a unplanned emergency or disaster. You made mention to the extent where it is important of time for first responders and all of that and

also, why should someone who lives at the rural area has to take a taxi to absorb their own funding through the ATM machine. I just want to bring a point to you, seeing that we are at Point Lisas Industrial Estate is more like a chemical time bomb. And we know for a fact that the only closely hospital with burn units and all of that, the closest one would have been the Couva Children's Hospital and therefore in times of emergencies and responding time is of the essence to preserving lives and safely always comes first yes, but the point I am making, it will be very essential to have that Children's Hospital open especially because of the addition of the burns unit which will become very essential if there is an emergency or disaster. Thank you.

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

The Couva Children's Hospital falls under the ambit of the Minister of Health so I will reserve comment on that. When I said 14 is probably over government, I am just making a point. It's not to say that we are going to cut it to 10 or cut it to 12. It was just an idea I was throwing out that we may end up with the same 14 corporations but when you look at the data you may say, it is better organised in 12 or 13 but it's early days still and the biggest guarantee I want to give is that there will be no redundancy of jobs, even at the Ministry of Local Government level, nor at the Regional Corporation. There will be virtually a mass recruitment of new skills when this reform process is complete.

❖ **Anil Baliram (Male, Indian, 40's)**

Good night to the head table. I would just like to find out as a local government practitioner, presently at the regional corporation when we do our estimations for projects to be executed, we have to send it to Ministry of Planning and then to Ministry of Finance for allocation. Would this with the consultation, would we still have to send out projects to the Ministry of Finance for approval or we at the Regional Corporation would have our say to approve our projects on the corporation level right there?

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

Well the legislation has not been drafted as yet but I will take the liberty to say that you will not have to send your estimates to the Ministry of Finance for approval. The Ministry of Finance will be making block allocation just as they do with the THA on a quarterly basis. So if the development program is \$50 million and they giving you a half-yearly allocation, they will allocate \$25 million to you, you are responsible, your accounting officer, in terms of the financial regulations will be your CO and then the council will have executive authority to do what they have to do where you have to account how you spend the money. Nobody has the authority to tell you where to spend your money. As we speak now, I can tell the chairman of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo don't do that and shut it down. You will be empowered to say if you get \$10 million or \$15 million, these are the projects that I plan to

do. It is approved by your executive council that comes like your cabinet. Your cabinet takes a decision and the projects are approved, you do your estimate, your tenders, there will be procurement procedures what have you and it will work. Give it a chance and let us see how it works.

➤ **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

I understand how the Tobago House of Assembly operates. There will be a block vote, the corporation would then have to readjust their projects based on the allocation that they have, the amount of money that is allocated to the corporation. But there is no need really to send it to the Ministry of Finance.

❖ **Darryl Thompson (Indian decent 50's) – Roystonia Couva**

I want to thank the government for organising this series of consultations; I would like something a little more substantial to comment on this. So Minister mentioned that there are some other documents that are being used and maybe a summary of that could be put forward for further detailed consultation. Specifically my questions are what is the plan for the development of a National Building Code and how would the Local Government bodies be empowered with the authorities to enforce those requirements? Right now enforcement is very weak. My final question is you mentioned an example of a quarry development and the right of the local constituencies to object. Where there is a conflict between what Central Government wants for development and what the local community wants, how is that conflict going to be resolved?

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

On the face of it we hope that this country would never be saddled with an irresponsible Central Government but based on the order of authority Central Government is in charge. If it delegates power through the Local Government Reform process, it is delegating authority to you as a legislation. It cannot breach the legislation which the parliament has provided. But in terms of where the legislation of the country gives such power to the Central Government that is the role.

❖ **Joe (Male Participant Indian decent 20's)**

What measures are being considered to treat with underperforming incompetent officials within the local government representatives? (*crowd applauded*)

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

When you say local government representative you mean elective representatives? Well as we speak it does not provide for any recourse, except wait the three (3) years and vote them out. But having said that, you have to lobby, this is a democracy, there is something called lobby, there is something called community response. Embarrass them to the public, embarrass them in the media, I am not saying block the road and burn tyres but have a protest and say my councillor is not performing. There is something called embarrassment into action you know, that is a civil society theory, embarrass you into action and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

**Moderator**

I think his concern also focused on whether there would be a kind of regulatory recourse vis-à-vis a right of recall or some kind of other mechanism.

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

Well the country did not accept the right of recall at the Central level. I want to be realistic, we will consider it but I think to sell the right of recall at a Local Government level in a three (3) year term is pretty difficult.

❖ **Male participant (Indian 30s)**

As Chairman Mr. Henry Awong had mentioned earlier we at the CTTRC our configuration is thirteen (13) UNC councillors, two (2) UNC aldermen, two (2) ILP aldermen and one (1) PNM councillor and probably this is the first time we have such a level of diversity and representation across the board and this is mainly because of the introduction of the proportional representation by the Peoples Partnership Government prior to the 2013 Local Government election. Are you all going to retain the proportional representation in your remodelling of Local Government? (*crowd displayed displeasure with this question*)

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

No decision has been taken on that, it really has not been discussed in any great level of detail, but on the face of it we would not want to cancel legislation that has already been in place. What we want to do is create new legislation for improvements. So I do not want to commit to government that what is the Proportional Representation component of the Municipal Corporation Act but as we speak there is no plan to change that.

❖ **Omeera Ali – Dolly’s Place Home for the aged (Muslim Indian, female, 30’s)**

I would like to thank you for the consultation here tonight I see it will bring a lot of benefit, to me it seems like bringing social services closer to home, easy reach. My question is will these social services include provisions for homes for the aged. I am hearing box drains, everything else problems, but I am not hearing homes for the aged because in this area from what I know of we have two (2) homes for the aged, one lower down Couva and then we have this one just across the street here. Building relationships is very, very important as you said Ministers will not know everybody, we depend on our councillors, we depend on the chairmen, we depend on the CEO to know these people, be in touch with these people.

I would like to applaud you Minister first of all for bringing this consultation for better improvement but at the same time I also want to applaud our corporation, our chairman Mr. Awong and all the councillors the thirteen (13) or the fourteen (14) they have been in touch with the home of the aged across the street Dolly’s Place. Relationships is important empowerment is even better.

**Moderator**

Minister basically focussing on the fact that you had said that part of the visioning of this the use of expanding services to include social services, what is the menu being envisaged?

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

That is a good question we have not worked out the menu in detail but initially we were more looking at social services delivery at the individual level of families at risk and the individuals at risk, the level of the institutional arrangements, which is really the construction of senior citizens home. If we have to build a centre for battered women, you know things like that I guess will still fall under the Ministry of Social Development. But let us say the social service relief like families that are at risk, child abuse and some of these things where you need to engage at a personal level in your community, these are some of the areas we want to empower the Local Government bodies for.

➤ **Desdra Bascombe – Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

At the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government felt that social service delivery was so important that we included a member of staff from the Ministry of Social Development and family services on our technical committee.

❖ **Female participant (Indian 30s)**

What became of the Planning and Facilitation of Development bill that was partially passed in 2015 and who will be responsible now for presenting Cabinet notes in relation to acquisition of lands for the regional corporations in parliament? Why I am asking this Minister is because last year a motion was debated and past in our council of Couva/Tabaquite regional corporation for the acquisition of parcels of land to construct our administrative complex, as well as a central market for Couva and I want to say that it was approved thankfully by town and country and it was forwarded to the Central Government. What is going to happen to that now, who will be taking it to Cabinet, who will be presenting it?

As well as, in your presentation you mentioned that there are recreation grounds, there are streets; there are roads that people will come to us to request assistance for, but it is not vested in the corporation and for instance we have to acquire it. So now who is going to be held responsible to do that?

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

At the face of it I am not 100% sure of what I am saying but as we speak no legislation has changed. The Planning Act has been partially proclaimed also the setting up of the Planning Authority and we have these Regional Planning units. The Regional Corporation from a Central Government point of view, falls under the Ministry of Local Government, so the only Minister that is authorised to take notes on behalf of the Regional Corporation is the Ministry of Local Government for the time being.

The Planning Act; we are currently reviewing it to see whether we want to make changes as a new administration because that Act has only been partially proclaimed. One of the dangerous things about making law and partially proclaiming it is Section 34. We made laws and we partially proclaimed the Children's Act, today we are in a mess. So if you cannot implement a law, it makes no sense going to parliament debating it and proclaiming it. Right now there is a key issue in terms of the Children's Act because the court has ruled that these children's homes are not certified and we have to hustle now and to finish it and build it to comply with a court directive, because understand, legislation means law and when it becomes law the separate arms of government come into play. So the judiciary is to make sure that laws are implemented, the judiciary could charge the government that is how the system operates. So making laws and proclaiming laws when you are not ready to implement the laws is a dangerous recipe for the country.

❖ **Tranil Ghany (Male, Indian 20s)**

My name is Tranil Ghany I am presently representing four (4) groups in the area, the Grand Couva Mountain Biking Association which we recently started, the MSCF which the councillor alerted to, which is the Montserrat Cocoa Farmers Association, Gordon Village - Village Council and Sports Club and the Gran Couva Police Youth Group and Police Council

which I am a member of each one of these. My objective here is really of a plea for assistance for the young lady from the Preysal Road. The Gran Couva area does not have a playing field and part of your proposal we too have an objective we want to achieve. In this area which is east of the Children's Hospital we already have a certain allotment of land where we can put a playing field, we want to have some tourism base, which is being a Mountain Biking Association and putting mountain biking in there, we want to use the natural terrain for the land to have a camping and hiking look out on the Central range and all these we just need to be self-sustainable cause we already have that in place. Just to have some of the residents come in and set up their booths, whether it is a hair salon or whatever the case may be.

We started last week and just thirty (30) people came from all over the country to start this mountain biking trail and that already boosted the economy. We had to get food, we had to get drinks and some snacks, so I am already seeing some positivity coming out of our initiative. What we need now is a start on having the ground prepared and some roads and drains. Thank you very much.

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

Hold on there, I really want to congratulate you all; it is one of the most positive things I have heard for the night. A group of NGOs come together to deal with their community. Gran Couva is one of the most beautiful places in Trinidad, the potential of there is tremendous (*crowd applauded*). I am jumping the gun here a little because I need you to call my office and set up a meeting with me because this is one of the rural areas that I want to air-mark for some serious development. Okay, we have spoken about Toco/Matelot deeply rural, beautiful. We have spoken Moruga deeply rural, beautiful. But we have to spread it in the geography, Biche/Cumuto again deeply rural, central Trinidad and it has to have an area now in the Central Ranges which is Mayo/Gran Couva and those areas that will have to form part of the basis for this rural initiative.

I am so happy to know that in the Gran Couva area there are groups that are thinking along those lines because trust me with the cocoa, the scenery, the mountain bike and whatever you have there is nothing more rural than up there. (*crowd applauded*)

❖ **Mr. David Abdulah Political leader of Movement for Social Justice (MSJ) (Mixed, late 50s)**

The moderator already welcomed me but perhaps I should welcome all of you to the village of Preysal, I being a resident for many years of this wonderful village, of course it is a great village and I am very happy to be living here for almost thirty (30) years. In that regard there are two (2) things that one did not hear from the policies that you were articulating or the issues that you identified. We will send on behalf of the MSJ a very detailed document because we already have a very detailed policy recommendations with respect to Local Government Reform and I want to highlight and put that perhaps in way of a question.



What is going to be the role or the status of the Ministry of Community Development because from the last little graphic video that you showed, it would seem that the Ministry of Community Development would become unnecessary, because Community Development really is about community and therefore Local Government and to have the Ministry of Local Government disappearing and the Ministry of Community Development Remaining.

To demonstrate the concreteness of that, you said nothing about the role of Village and Community Councils and therefore if you are talking about power from Central Government and putting power in the hands of people, you cannot simply be putting power in the hands of Regional Corporations or Boroughs or City Corporations, it also has to be putting power in the hands of village and community councils (*crowd applauded*), which ought to be depoliticised. So it really should be those institutions should be controlled by the community and not by Party groups and so on. Furthermore, financial resources ought to be allocated all the way down to village and community councils, so that they would have power and not merely be in a situation of having to make recommendations up the line and so on.

So I want you to consider very seriously putting power in the hands of people where they live which is putting power in the hands of village and community councils.

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

Well said comrade David. The issue of Community Development in principle, now this is a very broad principle I am going to articulate here. Ministries should really be setting policies for a country and the implementation of policies should really take place at the Local level. So that is how in an ideal world it is. What has happened over the years in Trinidad and Tobago is that even when the British set up the Public Service that was basically their model, the Ministries were directing policy and implementation would have taken place at the Local level. What has happened in the last three (3) or four (4) decades is that all Ministries became key implementers, so you set policy but you implement it.

If we sow this seed of decentralization and we sow this seed for empowerment and devolution of power and it starts to work and it starts to take root, the governance landscape of this country can change. As we speak it may not be practicable to do what comrade Abdulah is saying but I mean there is good thinking behind it.

With regards the community councils and village councils in principle that is true, one of the challenges you would face though is that, you know when I was a little boy growing up in Mayaro it had one Mayaro village council, as you go into communities now, there have five (5) groups will come and tell you they represent the village and it's all kinds of names and some have more membership than others and some have more influence than others. So from a practical point of view sometimes it is difficult to find out who is really the true community council. So it is a challenging we face but in principle what you are saying is totally correct.

## **Moderator**

But higher up the ladder what becomes of the role of the Member of Parliament?

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

The Member of Parliament again, you know how I like to judge service delivery in this country? How many people visit the Member of Parliament office and in the PNM case on a Thursday evening? Right now there are hundreds and when a hundred people have to come to a Member of Parliament office on a Thursday to solicit his/her assistance for goods and services, the country is not working well. At the end of the day the role of the Member of Parliament primarily is as a legislator you know, he is primarily a legislator but nobody sees him as that. They see him as a solver of your problems and a man that can deliver box drains, jobs and what have you, for his continuance. But under the constitution and the law of governance in Trinidad and Tobago he is a legislator and if service delivery starts to improve at the level of local government it will give him more time to do his core function and legislation.

### ❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. (Mixed, late 50's)**

With regards to the lady from Indian Trail who had a concern as regards to landslips and so on, just yesterday at my office I had a delegation from Indian Trail with regard to the same issue and at the moment a report, an engineering report is being done and to be forwarded to the Minister and also included is the estimated cost to repair the landslip. Minister you did write me on it too. I have the engineering report now and the estimate so it will be forwarded to you soon.

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

That is the same report that you had sent to me and it is affecting two (2) houses?

### ❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation**

Yes that is it.

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

And I think I got a letter from the Member of Parliament for Couva South also.

### ❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation**

Right that is the same thing. Minister you made reference to employing adequate staff and so on at the Regional Corporations, how would those persons be employed? Would it be done through the normal thing through the Service Commission or would the council through the corporation have the authority to hire those persons?

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

Well that would depend on the legislation, it is early days still. We know the problems if you go in to Service Commission, there are thousands of vacancies in the Public Service that are not been filled. I would prefer to have a system that side steps for want of a better word, I say that guardedly, the Service Commission. Remember the Service Commission is a constitutionally enshrined body to recruit and there is a limit to where we as politicians can go in that.

There is also the issue of the proliferation of contract labour in the Public Service, the Trade Union movement is making a fuss on that. We have made a commitment on that in terms of a policy position by the Ministry of Labour that we would want to move away from this contract that has proliferated the Public Service over the last two (2) decades. So there are a lot, a lot of issues, when you look at some of the issues that face this country you wonder, what did we do since Independence to now you know? There are so many unsolved matters and on the face of it these matters should have been simple solutions should have been brought. As I said Trinidad suffers from inertia and it suffers from bureaucracy.

❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation**

My other question with regards to the Municipal Police you indicated in your presentation that you are looking at the possibility of the Municipal Police being answerable to the Commissioner of Police. I want to say that I think that will be not a good suggestion, in the sense that, I think it will take away from them being Municipal Police, they will end up just being another arm of the TTPS. Well the answer in this case to the CEO but regards to policing they have their own mechanism how they operate with regards to policing. Administratively they answer to the CEO. I think we should seriously consider maintaining that kind of arrangement, rather than having them answer to the Commissioner and they would just be absorbed into the TTPS as another branch.

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

Let me just say something here write us a paper on that because it is very important. You have articulated a different view. The thinking is that whether you cannot have whether he is an inspector, superintendent for police administering a police force in a community that there is no chain of command in terms of quasi-military function.

❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation**

But that is happening now in the present system.

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

Yes it is happening now but it does not make it right. So what we are saying is that there will be pros and there will be cons in what I am articulating but no decision has been made. But what I am saying is that if you feel based on your experience that that is not the way to go, put pen to paper because we will consider it.

**Moderator**

When that point was raised I saw the two (2) Mayors visibly exchanging ideas, I wonder if one of the Mayors would care to comment on that, because it is important point in terms of jurisdiction for the Municipal Police.

➤ **Response from Mayor Alderman Raymond Tim Kee**

I found it rather confusing when I went in and I met that model because control of his charges there is nothing that he can exercise duly short and therefore unless legislation is put in place where he is given the authority to control, we will have some problems, as we have in Port of Spain now, and the officers do what they want, how they want, when they want and he does not have much he can do. I had recommended that where the Commissioner of Police should have the jurisdiction the full jurisdiction control and I recommended that a Senior Police Officer from the TTPS should be in charge of Municipal Police, so that you can bring some discipline and order in the system. *(crowd applauded)*

➤ **Response from Mayor Alderman Kazim Hosein**

I was telling my colleague here, officers with the new reform will be reporting directly to the Chairman and the Mayors and that should have taken place a long while ago. We do not have any say really, you have to talk to the CEO to give direction on what the police officers should do and with the new reform I am sure that will change.

❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation**

He is agreeing with me because even if they are not answering to the CEO the Executive Chairman, then that is the ideal thing as far as I am concerned.

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

Well the jury is still out on that, discussions are still taking place and no decision has been made on that.

❖ **Mr. Henry Awong the Chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. (Mixed late 50s)**

Now there are other agencies that impact on whether or not we are able to deliver on time and it is good to know that we are bringing those agencies under one body. For instance, I just want to draw a quick point. Mr. Steve Khan came to the corporation, he has an issue and I am drawing from a live example now, with regards to the neighbour encroaching and building a fence on the drain reserve, his neighbour Mr. Mohammed. However, the matter came before us, we were able to hire the surveyors and so on to carry out the necessary survey to determine whether or not that is so. When it was done the fact remains now that because of the fact that there is no director's survey at the point in time in office because I am hearing that a surveyor is getting more than what they are paying the director of survey when they work privately, so there is none in the office now. One year now Mr. Khan is still in his predicament with regards to that.

So the agency the director's survey is impacting on whether or not we are able to deliver to the burgesses. So we need to look at that aspect of things too.

Another quick point before I go. All the nice talk about Local Government Reform and everything else do you know that by a simple majority, you can no longer have local government because it is not enshrined in the constitution. I want to make the suggestion here that it be enshrined in the constitution and protected by the constitution.

**Moderator**

If I remember correctly the last Reform document produced in 2014 had a suggestion similar to that, which is that you tie Local Government functions to the constitution. Perhaps madam chair you want to comment on that?

➤ **Desdra Bascombe – Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

It is an idea worth considering and the Technical Committee is reviewing all the reports to get the best fit for this new round of Local Government Reform.

❖ **Darryl Thompson Male Participant (Indian decent 50's) – Roystonia Couva**

I would like to repeat my question of what is the plan for the development of a National Building Code in terms of legislation to ensure that it could be effectively enforced. Right now there very little enforcement of the existing requirements.

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

The National Building Code really falls under the armpits of the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Works because Works have the Chief Design Engineer and that whole

department that looks at the integrity of structures and what have you. A lot has been said on the National Building Code as it relates to earthquake resistance buildings, you know hurricane protection and what have you. The only thing I would say is that the National Building Codes you have to be careful because if you put too stringent a code for residential property, you may well be putting out of the reach of the poor man the ability to build a house.

Now without compromising structural integrity and health and safety, but you know some of these engineers when you put them on committee they go for the best code in Japan, which is an earthquake prone country and want to regurgitate it and say this is the building code, cause it is international standard. So that is my only reservation on that but a National Building Code obviously we need that as a country.

❖ **Dennis Albert (Male, Indian, 50's)**

Good night I have just a couple suggestions. Firstly any Executive Council I would like to recommend that include a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant and an engineer. Any Executive Council from my interpretation would now be responsible for at least the employment of the CEO and the Chief Officers. I would like to suggest that the job specs for those positions be very specific. That is the only way that we would at least reduce possibility of nepotism, in the employment in those positions.

I also want to suggest that the CEO and the Chief Officers be subjected to the Integrity in Public Life Act and I will tell you why. I am not suggesting that any Chief Officer is involved in corruption but many times they turn a blind eye to subordinates that are under their supervision, committing acts of maleficence.

I want to suggest too that the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill as the Minister, there is a committee in place, you can probably review the committee and look at the possibility of full proclamation to have the implementation of that Bill as part of Local Government Reform. There is too much substandard construction, especially in the smaller construction like single family residence and what not.

Last but not least, I live Couva North – Roystonia North area and we have a problem with services because they fall under HDC Ministry of Housing. We do have a very competent garbage collection exercise that the corporation provides but there are other issues. The road is deteriorating, in many respects the drainage, there is a CEPEP contractor in there who does a fairly good job but the entire development needs preventative maintenance. The only way I can see this can happen is if the HDC spend a little more money in maintenance, or it is handed over to the corporation and the relevant allocation that HDC would have for maintenance be transferred to the corporation.

❖ **Safraz Ali (Male, Indian decent 40's)**

Good night I am the councillor for Gasparillo/Bonne Aventure, I am also the Chairman of the Public Health committee. I want to make two (2) suggestions, one (1) from the lady who made a contribution earlier from Indian Trail concerning the water flowing into her property. Mr. Minister and all Ministers in the corporation we have Public Health Officers, these officers do not have the authority to go into premises and charge people or to serve them notices. So we need to have more Public Health Inspectors with the authority to go into premises and take necessary action.

I want to also talk about the next issue of the garbage collection which was raised earlier. We have delinquent contractors in the corporation however; our authorities are stifled because we have to go through SWMCOL to get any disciplinary actions to the contractors. I am asking if with the reform we will have more authority to the council to take disciplinary action on contractors that are not performing.

❖ **Alif Mohammed (Male, Mixed decent 30's)**

Firstly I want to thank you for affording TTRC the 2<sup>nd</sup> series in the consultations, Alif Mohammed lone PNM councillor in TTRC. The Ministry of Local Government is to be shifted to the Ministry of Finance; a suggestion is that we have more audits, more accountability. Sitting in the corporation one statutory meeting, we had fraud squad lock the building and that made news and from my understanding some of the resolutions passed by council, as I said being the lone PNM there, there are thirteen (13) UNC plus their two (2) Aldermen, if they pass a resolution that is an illegal resolution, everyone all members are held accountable. So I could be doing the right thing and end up in a jail for the night. So would there be more accountability in the Ministry of Finance bi-annually or monthly or audits, especially for audits and all contracts? We know coming up to the 2015 General Elections there were a lot of issues with contractors.

Last suggestion Mr. Minister, would there be a criteria set for candidates for Local Elections? Reason being you have candidates coming into winning the election, selected and then elected, coming into Local Elections and then they cannot function because of their background, no matter what. I came from humble origins, I came as a barber but I would have moved on but not everyone is cut from the same cloth. So seeing that that might be an issue because then burgesses will be affected. If there is no criteria would there be more seriously, more training sessions for local government representatives, as it is very much need. Calcutta does a wonderful job at trying to train but the response is not all that great, hopeful that it will be mandated from the Ministry's level.

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

I just want to respond to that, I want to hit the nail on the head. There can be no criteria set for people seeking public office. The constitution is clear, once you are 18 years and you are a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who is not bankrupt and who does not have a criminal

record, you can seek public office and of sound mind, you can seek public office. It is for the people to vote you, if the people vote you in there is absolutely no basis for anybody to say otherwise.

With the responsibility of the political organisation that is screening people now, that they could have a screening process that would determine what other criteria they would need. But from a constitutional level that cannot happen at all.

❖ **Winston Montano Male Participant (African decent 60's)**

Good afternoon everybody my name is Winston Montano and I have come here from Toco. I think that the process Mr. Minister if you look at what is happening in your hall, your audience is dwindling. The process of consultation is a bit stiff, it is a bit inefficient and I am saying that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. We have a lot of examples in the world of what a central government is and what a state government is. I am thinking that you should be presenting to us who we are basically lay people, with a few people who will have a little more experience here and there. We should be coming up with a plan, we could say based on the UK model, based on the US model and then we bring that here and we make changes to suit. Otherwise we are going to spend a lot of time in consultation and you are not really getting anywhere. People coming to tell you about drains and borough and water in the ravine, this is not what this is about I am sure. So I am saying to you come up with a better plan. Have something, you are the government, you have research officers, you as leaders, the PNM government must start to lead. You are the leaders you have to generate great ideas and rally the people around the thing to listen Central Government is made up of MPs they write laws, we will make law. Central Government will give philosophy. What is the philosophy?

You are going to give the power to the state and when I say state I am talking about the Regional Corporation but you have no philosophy. So Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite do not know what is their national spacing in the community and I am saying this is where Central Government must say right now we are in a very serious position. We are facing financial bankruptcy and therefore we have to bring all of our intellectual strength to bear. As Central Government you have to say this is the philosophy. The philosophy is we are going to put a lot of emphasis on Tourism. So when you give a place like Talparo/Couva and Gran Couva with mountains and things, they know listen, develop this thing for trails, develop this thing for eco lodges, develop something, something, they working with philosophy. You are talking industrialisation; we will industrialise to manufacture to replace foreign goods. So when you go into the places that have manufacturing skills, they know.

The whole thing about it and I will be short and I will change up my plan for this talk. But really and truly the system you are incorporating or you are trying to develop is one that will encourage competition. So I do not want you to come and tell me well boy we do not have any resources but you have a constituency, you have a region, therefore you must have resources and you have to find out and the ones with more resources, who have more corn will feed more fowl and people will become competitive. So I could decide I going and take



my whole budget and build an industrial estate, I put in lights, water, all kinds of facilities and I am going to encourage people to come here and live, because when they come here and live they pay taxes and that taxes coming to me. Right and I will develop my community to compete so that at the end of the day we do not what to hear nothing about you do not have resources. We have to start to invent, think and create and the PNM government has been too long giving people hand outs. You talking about subvention but when you check the tax base of anyone of the regions they have enough money to do things. Then you might want to institute and go the US system, you have a federal tax and a state tax, so it is simple where the money goes.

Mr. Abdulah talking about giving village councils money, it is not so. Then everybody have a money and everybody have an accounting and everybody want to watch everybody. Oh God the budget is in the state and when I say state I mean region, the region has its executives, its authorities, its accountants, its laws and you have national laws. So whatever they do they must do it in conjunction with national. Let us compete, let us create, let us get up and stop looking for hand-outs (*crowd applauded*).

## **5.0 CLOSING**

To conclude the proceedings of the local government consultation at Preysal Secondary School each member of the panel was asked to provide closing remarks.

### **Desdra Bascombe – Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

I liked some of the comments made by the last speaker and in fact it points in the direction that we are heading because in March the Technical Committee would have completed our policy document, which would be submitted to cabinet. So that will set the general direction of the reform, but we at the Ministry believe in a participatory development. We did not want to sit in the Ministry and look at the UK model and look at the Jamaican experience, look at the Singapore model and make decisions which would affect you our citizens and our burgesses. That is why we felt it necessary to have consultations, have fourteen (14) consultations and as Minister said a lot of rich ideas came out of today's exercise and this is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> consultation. I would invite you, we are in Guaico High School next week Wednesday with the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation.

The reform is pro-labour so issues of loss of jobs in the corporations would not be an issue, in fact we would need more staff, we would need more technical expertise and one of the mandates we have been given as Permanent Secretaries, is to hire some more graduates within each Ministry. So the reform has already begun. Some things will happen in a linear basis and some would happen incrementally. It has been a wonderful experience here and we are recording everything and the rapporteurs would submit a report to the Ministry at the end of the consultations and we would take those views on board. Thank you for your participation and for the rich ideas that came out tonight.

### **Mr. Anthony Roberts - Deputy Chairman Technical Committee for the transitioning of the Ministry of Local Government**

People's participation is critical in this process, so that we need to engage and to listen to what the people have to say. So I am extremely happy that we are going through this process as a matter of fact it is my view is that local government is about people. It is not the first time a PNM government will be pursuing the decentralization of social services. I think it is critical that we allow the local government body to deal with the social services as local government is closer to the people.

### **Honourable Minister Franklin Khan – Minister in the Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government**

I guess I have the final word. Just to speak about some of the final speakers, the garbage collection is an area that we have to look at, we have to make more efficient. I just want to draw your attention to something. I go to the U.K. regularly, I've lived in the U.S. for a while in very very upscale communities, and nowhere does the garbage collection service be seven days a week. Nowhere in the developed world is garbage collection 6 days a week. My daughter lives

in Belfast and the garbage truck in...a suburban, upscale area...and the garbage truck comes twice a week. The point I am making is that, we have grown accustomed to waste and the government cannot continue to support waste forever. The worst thing that ever happened to Trinidad...Mr Montano is my good friend, we were at university together, we shared a lot of ideas, is the fact that we use energy money and resources from the energy sector in the time of boom to breathe bad habits into the population of Trinidad and Tobago. And the point Mr Montano made, which I endorse totally, is that as a people we have to become self-reliant once again. Ladies and gentlemen, self-reliance is the quality that builds a nation. And when you are self-reliant, there would be no talk about...as he rightfully said, it eh have no resources. Self-reliance in itself is a resource and that is what we have to tap into as a nation now.

The drop in oil prices and I'm from the energy sector by profession...the drop in oil prices probably is a blessing in disguise for Trinidad and Tobago because we were going down a wrong road. People do not want to work, our productivity level...we are a hundred and thirty something out of a hundred and eighty countries in the world. Our productivity is low, our competitiveness is very low. We have been living in a bubble, we have been living in a cocoon and we have this impression that we are a wealthy nation. But you cannot be wealthy if you are not productive. It is only transient and that is because of serendipity based that God put some oil off the east coast and the oil price got high and today the oil price is low. The oil price is low and everybody mouth open, nobody knows what to do you know. And what we need to do is pull ourselves together as a nation; most importantly, self-reliance and productivity.

We are facing challenging times in this country and I'm glad we're closing off on this note and what we're trying to do in this reform is to make the system more efficient. I have always told people, that fifty...the last five years, we had budgets...Mr Manning's last budget was 45 billion dollars in 2010. The last 2015 budget was 63 billion dollars. 1.3 million people could easily live on 50 billion dollars...because there is too much of hemraging, wastage and inefficiency in the system and we have to come to terms with that. One of the points I didn't raise here today is that the agencies of the state that probably has the lowest productivity level in the country as we speak is regional corporations. You go to a regional corporation office at 9 o'clock you can't find anybody, the gangs and them disappear, the roadworks disappear, the drainage men disappear. You go to the regional council office and 10 o'clock it ain't have nobody to see...you come to see an officer, the place blank. You might barely see a secretary or a clerk. And we come here and procrastinate and pontificate about all these reform processes but we as a people have to fundamentally look at ourselves. And I'm so happy that Mr Montano had the last say because it really anchors us back now that the context of this regional government reform, we are doing it in a changed circumstance. And ladies and gentlemen, put this in your pipe and smoke it, the circumstances in the country have changed fundamentally. The resources that we were a washed with over the last...coming through the 1970's boom and coming through the gas boom of 2002-2006, those days are over. Thank God as a people, we still did certain things right. One of the things we did good is during the time of plenty we invested in human capital. That's the point I make...no matter what spin you out on it, the fact that you exposed so many of your young people to tertiary education, it is an accomplishment that any nation should be proud of. I was the first person from Mayaro to become a Petroleum Engineer and Petroleum Geologist, right now Mayaro a washed with Geologists and Engineers

all because of G.A.T.E. And we have a human resource capacity in this country that we can leverage and really make things better. But attitude is important, self-reliance is important.

The local government process will take place to make it more efficient but at the end of the day, if we as a people do not pull our weight, become more productive, become more forthright, become less corrupt, we will all fail. So ladies and gentlemen, I think it is nice to end on this note because it really puts the whole consultation process into perspective and it is a good idea whose time has come and I want to give you the assurance that, whether we tweak it, whether we remodel it slightly or what, the local government process articulated today in general sense would move forward and it will be implemented under this administration. I thank you all very much.



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## 6.0 ANALYSIS

### 6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

There were approximately 350 participants in attendance. Participants were generally receptive to the presentations of the Ministers and they were very eager to give their input to local government reform as was evident by the queues formed behind the microphones.

There were approximately 228 (65%) male participants and 122 (35%) female participants. The majority (85%) of participants represented the age range 30 – 70 years. There was less than 5% representation of participants under the age of 30 and approximately 10% of participants over the age of 70. The majority of participants (90%) appeared to be middle class income earners with the remainder being high income class. There was 60% representation from the Indo-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 40% being a majority of Afro-Trinidadian and less than 1% mixed-race participants.

### 6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 25 respondents from the plenary; 10 female and 15 male. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	6	40 – 70 (6)
Indian	14	40 – 70 (7), under 40 (7)
Mixed	5	40 – 50 (3), under 40 (2)

### 6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

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

Topic	Frequency
Statistical Data Collection	1
Technical Interconnectivity	1
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – roads, parks, bridges etc	5
Budget & Resource Allocations	3
Accountability and Transparency – more audits	3
What happens to current local government structure	1
Swifter implementation of reform	1
National Building Code Implementation	1

Regulatory Recourse for underperforming local government officials	1
Proportional Representation Act retained	1
Social Services - Need more homes for the aged	1
Garbage Collection	1
Lack of civil engineering education in Corporations	1
Borough employee retention	1
Open Couva Children's Hospital	1
Regional Corporations given autonomy to approve projects	1
Acquisition of lands for the regional corporations	1
Put power in the hands of village and community councils	1
Responsible body for staffing Regional Corporations	1
Chain of Command for Municipal Police	3
Local government be enshrined and protected by the constitution	1
Corporation should be managing maintenance and not HDC	1
Public Health Inspectors given more authority	1
Corporations given authority to deal with delinquent contractors	1
Criteria set for candidates for Local Elections	1
Central Government must pass down the philosophies to be implemented	1