

# Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

## Siparia

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Plaza Siparia Conference Hall



## Rapporteurs' Full Report



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## 1.0 OPENING

The Consultation began with the playing of the National Anthem; followed by an opening prayer by Father Sirjoo. The evening's proceedings were moderated by Mr Leslie Gibbons who welcomed all present to the Plaza Siparia Conference Hall for the continuation of consultations on Local Government Reform and thanked them for their presence. He 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.

He proceeded to introduce the key personnel for the consultation amongst who were: the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan and Minister the Honourable Stuart Young, Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs who would make up the panel for discussion.

This was followed by the welcome remarks which were delivered by Leo Doodnath, Chairman of the Siparia Regional Corporation.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan, Minister the Honourable Stuart Young

## **2.0 WELCOME REMARKS**

### **Leo Doodnath - Chairman Siparia Regional Corporation**

Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Member of Parliament for the constituency of La Brea and we are of course expecting other members of Parliament to be present here this evening. The Permanent Secretary and other officials from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and my colleagues and Council at the Siparia Regional Corporation; our dear CO (Chief Officer) and other administrative staff of the Siparia Regional Corporation. I am recognizing other Chairmen as well of various Regional Corporations present amongst us; I recognize the Mayor of San Fernando and also the Chairmen of the respective Regional Corporations of Penal-Debe, Sangre Grande and San Juan- Laventille.

Representing the Opposition Leader - Dr Suruj Rambachan, the Member of Parliament for the Constituency of Tabaquite. Members of the Siparia Chamber of Commerce; the President is here himself along with other members, members of the Siparia Inter-religious group, we heard earlier from Father Martin Williams who is also a member of the Siparia Inter-religious group. Burgesses of the region of Siparia, other members of the public, members of the Local Government Reform Committee, members of the media and all other distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

A pleasant good evening to all of you and it is indeed a pleasure on behalf of the Council of the Siparia Regional Corporation, to welcome all of you to this public consultation on Local Government Reform which is hosted by the Minister and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. For Local Government purposes, Trinidad is divided into Municipal Corporations; there are fourteen (14) Municipal Corporations in Trinidad; Tobago is governed by a totally different act altogether.

A Municipal Corporation can either be a City Corporation, in which Trinidad has two (2), Port-of-Spain and San Fernando; A Municipal Corporation can also be a Borough Corporation in which Trinidad has three (3): Arima, Chaguanas and Point Fortin and also a Regional Corporation in which Trinidad has nine (9). The Regional Corporation was formerly called the County Council prior to 1990.

The Siparia Regional Corporation spans a geographical area of approximately five hundred and ten (510) kilometres squared ( $\text{km}^2$ ) and serves approximately eighty-two thousand (82,000) burgesses - which is a person residing in a Regional Corporation within a Municipal Corporation. Even though there are approximately eighty-two thousand (82,000) people residing in Siparia, we are still not the largest Regional Corporation in Trinidad; there are other Regional Corporations larger than Siparia.

For comparison, the country Grenada has a geographical area of three hundred and forty-four (344) kilometres squared ( $\text{km}^2$ ); remembering that Siparia alone has a geographical area of approximately five hundred and ten (510) kilometres squared ( $\text{km}^2$ ). The country St. Vincent has a geographical area of three hundred and eighty-nine (389) kilometres squared ( $\text{km}^2$ ). Tobago which is three hundred (300) kilometres squared ( $\text{km}^2$ ) has a population of sixty-one thousand (61,000) people. I am giving you these figures ladies and gentlemen, so that you can have a clearer picture as we get into Local Government Reform as to where we are as Regional

Corporations, in terms of size and population, in comparison to neighbouring islands; only so that you may have a better understanding as to the complexity and enormity of our administrative responsibility.

Our neighbouring Municipality, the Borough of Point Fortin, is twenty-four (24) kilometres squared (km<sup>2</sup>), twenty-nine thousand (29,000) burgesses. We, the Siparia Regional Corporation, are more than twenty (20) times the size of the borough of Point Fortin and we have more than fifty thousand (50,000) burgesses residing in the Siparia region than the borough of Point Fortin. I say this silently, however, that their budgetary allocations are more or less, the same as ours. All of these figures which I have mentioned ladies and gentlemen alone are justification for Local Government Reform.

I will now explain what a council is - for Local Government Election purposes municipal corporations, which I explained earlier, are divided into electoral districts. Our Siparia Regional Corporation is divided into nine (9) electoral districts so that, after the Local Government Elections, we at the Siparia Regional Corporation will have nine elected Councillors. By law thereafter the Local Government Elections, four (4) Aldermen, based on proportional representation, are to be appointed to each municipal corporation. This is something relatively new which was introduced in time for the last Local Government Elections and this is another question in terms of reform: will this form of proportional representation continue? we need to know.

In terms of the composition of a council, in our case, the nine (9) elected Councillors and the four aldermen - which are thirteen (13) members, comprises the council of the Siparia Regional Corporation. The council, of course, will then proceed to elect the chairman and vice-chairman from among six (6) memberships. It is on behalf of this council ladies and gentlemen that I welcome all of you to this Reform. I would like to take time-out now to introduce my council to all of you.

Our Vice Chairman and Councillor for the Electoral District of Otaheite/Rousillac - Mrs. Chanardaye Ramadharsingh; the Councillor for the Electoral District of Cedros - Mr. Ramesh Sewnal, the Councillor for the Electoral District of Brighton/ Vessigny - Mr. Gerald Debesette, the Councillor for the Electoral District of Erin - Arlene Ramdeo, the Councillor for the Electoral District of Palo Seco - Mrs. Christine Neptune, the Councillor for the Electoral District of Mon Desir - Mr. Deryck Bowrin, the Councillor for the Electoral District of Avocat/ San Francique North - Rajwantee Bullock, Councillor for the Electoral District of Siparia West/ Fyzabad - Maurice Alexander. Our four (4) Aldermen are Alderman Shankar Teelucksing, Alderman Junior Thompson, Alderman DR. Shaun Ramroop and Alderman Patsy Ransome. My name is Leo Doodnath - Councillor for the Electoral District for Siparia/San Francique South and also the Chairman of the Siparia Regional Corporation.

Now, I hasten to add ladies and gentlemen under this present system, the council is only the policy-making arm of the Corporation. Our powers are limited only to policy making. Implementation of policy falls strictly under the purview of the administrative arm of the Corporation. I am hearing with the Reform there will no longer be a Ministry of Local Government. I am also hearing that the Municipal Corporation Act will be amended to give Corporations a greater level of autonomy and Councillors will now have executive authorities similar to what is enjoyed by the Tobago House of Assembly. I am hoping today that we get more details about issues like these under which Government tells authority, if only for

accountability purposes will Corporation now fall? What will really be the composition of these executive councils? What will be the management structure of Corporations? Who will the employees be accountable to?

I am a little taken aback mind you, that we do not have a base document - a White Paper as it were to refer to; as indeed we had - and I recall when Mrs. Hazel Manning was Minister of Local Government and she was driving the Reform process; there was a proposed document, that we could have referred to, out of which, we could have made comments and that's really commendable. As was the case when Dr Rambachan was Minister of Local Government and Reform was being considered. He had produced a booklet for comment outlining precisely which section of the Act, which paragraph, which line, which word had to be amended, edited, deleted, etc. and that as well is commendable.

My issue is that we have only general ideas; what exactly will be the additional responsibilities of Corporations? Will the provision of social and other Governmental services be added to our portfolio? What aspects of Government are going to be decentralized? What about staffing? Who is going to manage the transition? I am hearing that the reform is scheduled to be completed before the next Local Government Elections; during the last quarter, or so, of this year, and that Local Government Elections will not be postponed. When will we arrive at the stage of having a legislative agenda? What are the timelines? Will political parties have sufficient time, after the Act is passed; and the new format is now known, to prepare for Local Government Elections?

So today in the absence of a White Paper, and I am suggesting that a White Paper can still be prepared; in the absence of such, I am really hoping today, for more details and specifics as to the Reform proposal. For indeed and I hasten, that all of us, are really committed to Local Government Reform. Let me just quickly add ladies and gentlemen, as I mentioned earlier, that the implementation of policy falls under the purview of the administrative arm of the Corporation. The administration is held by a Chief Executive Officer, our CEO is here Mrs. Gowrie Gene and in each Corporation, there are four (4) other Chief Officers. A Principal Medical Officer of Health, a Corporate Secretary, an Engineering and Surveying Officer, and our Chief Financial Officer, who is here Mrs. Linda Whaite-Wells.

Also attending this forum this evening, ladies and gentlemen, some of the Heads of the various sections of the Corporation, and other members of the administrative staff. I am taking the liberty to welcome you on behalf of all of us of the Siparia Regional Corporation, I warmly welcome all of you, to this, the fourth public forum, of Local Government Reform; thank you so 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 Plaza Siparia 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, "Ladies and gentlemen, the video you just saw illustrates a system, the dynamics of which are not unfamiliar to most of us, if not all of us. Whether it is a river, a crack in a drain, an empty lot next door, delivering social services to someone in need; a blown street light, school repairs, a local heritage site, waste management, a bus shelter, what have you, the list goes on and on. Must I dare say that under the current system, when a community needs to get something done, it has to take place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run through the centralised heart of Government? It is in my humble opinion that this is a fundamental government impediment to service delivery in Trinidad and Tobago."

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 a public consultation in Trinidad & Tobago will take place only in Trinidad. The reason being, quite simply ladies and gentlemen is Tobago's local government's machinery and service delivery system have progressed well beyond that of Trinidad; it is a fact! Go to Tobago and everything seems to operate better there. The public buildings are better kept, the verges of the road are better kept, the whole atmosphere, the garbage disposal system is more efficient and this is directly due to reforms in their Local Government status and the new social contract that now exist between the Tobago House of Assembly and the people of Tobago.

Like many communities across Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago used to have to come to Central Government for just about everything. Today, with legislation passed in 1996, the THA was given legal and local authority and autonomy to change that. Because of the THA Act No. 40 of 1996, Tobago now has the authority and autonomy to inform, manage and dictate and influence virtually every aspect of its own affairs and development. As a result, we see examples in Tobago, for example (TEMA) the Tobago Emergency Management Authority. There are something called medical alert devices that are being issued by the THA; five-hundred and thirty elderly persons have a system, a chain where if they fall or need emergency help they just press the button. This is very modern but all this social service delivery system operates in Tobago with very positive and immaculate results. These are some of the few examples ladies and gentlemen, that illustrate the differences in our bureaucracy.

Tobagonians have the power to treat with their own community. They have the power to treat with their own unique culture and their own way of life. Why shouldn't we? For somebody in Siparia, Siparia has its own unique culture, Fyzabad has its own unique culture, La Brea, Vessigny has its own unique culture; Point Fortin, Cedros and Icacos, they are, we are not the same in a general sense as the people who live on the East-West Corridor. Just as the Tobagonian is distinct, we have distinct social and geographic entities in Trinidad that we need to focus on and to build communities out of those. Today ladies and gentlemen, this is really what we are exploring here this evening; in this islandwide series of consultations. But before I delve directly into the Local Government reform process, let me just deal with a couple issues that are fundamental to the ministry that I now head.

We have formed (this Administration), a Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. For those of you who followed the election campaign closely, you'll realize that the People's National Movement promised two transformational issues. One, Local Government Reform and two, the creation of a brand new ministry called the Ministry of Rural Development. So transformational is this ministry, and by the way, I am the Transformation Minister, so fundamental is this ministry that this Administration, under the leadership of Dr Rowley, cut the size of the cabinet from thirty-three to twenty-three. Ten ministries were merged into other ministries and yet he saw it fit to have a ministry totally dedicated to rural development. To me, that is transformational; Local Government reform is also transformational.

Let me make a point here, one of the attributes of under-development is that nothing transformational happens in the society for decades. An administration gets into power and they plod along doing the same thing, probably slightly with slightly more efficiencies here and there and the time you catch yourself five years has passed; you may be voted in for another term of office and then ten years will pass. Another Administration will come into power and



fifteen years will pass and then by the time you catch yourself a quarter of a century would have elapsed in a society and when you look back and analyse in retrospect, nothing transformational has happened. That is the problem with governance in Trinidad and Tobago and our concept of development versus under-development. So, why we saw these two transformational issues as fundamental to the transformation of new governance; rural development in particular?

I am not blaming which administration it or which administration it didn't happen; what has happened since independence in Trinidad and Tobago is that the development process was hued towards Urban Trinidad and, well Tobago was rural in most cases, Urban Trinidad. This Administration is taking a focused look at that; we have to swing the pendulum back towards a more balanced spatial development. The only way that could happen, because if you do projects based on economic analyse, rural development will never get anything because population centers dictate where development take place- because you looking at the rate of return; you looking at investment size; you look at the market size; so anything, you have to sight! KFC wouldn't go and build an outlet in Cedros. Republic Bank would not go and open in Santa Flora. So for rural development to take place there must be direct government policy intervention.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me just make this point, because at the end of the day I'm a politician also, this process of Local Government reform and rural development is non-political; I'll show you! Toco Matelot, Mr London is here, largely African, strong supporters of the PNM; major under-development in Toco Matelot. Go to my former constituency, Moruga, largely Africans, strongly PNM; total under-development. We go down to Cedros Icacos, largely East-Indian population, supporters of the United National Congress over the decades; still largely undeveloped. Because the forces of economics do not discriminate politically; it discriminates under the economic perimeters in which you work. That is why, it is my opinion and the opinion of this government, the whole concept of rural development is fundamental in switching the pendulum; switching the focus back to the people in rural areas, and bring back more equitable spatial distribution of developmental process and amenities in all of Trinidad and Tobago."

The Minister returns to the core presentation of Local Government Reform...

Since in 1962 successive administration have researched, tracked, discussed and consulted, what have you, in terms of decentralization of Government through the mechanisms of the Local Government reform; a lot of talk. The high point, of that really, was under NAR in 1990; the implementation of the Municipal Corporation Act No.21 of 1990. That was the first time something fundamental happened in Local Government reform. The old County Council System was disbanded and Municipal Corporation Act was implemented. From 1990, this is now twenty-six years, and again we got stuck in a sense of inertia where nothing fundamental took place after that.

What this means ladies and gentlemen is that essentially successive Administration has kicked the can down the road; Mr. Rambachan himself is here. It is Hazel Manning who probably did the most research and consultation and documentation and reports on local government reform; it did not happen. She had white paper, she had green paper; she had all different colour paper but it did not happen. Mr. Rambachan himself had a white paper but for some strange reason, we were not able, as a country, to break through the barriers of inertia. What I

am saying, ladies and gentlemen, is I am giving the commitment of this Administration that Local Government reform and Local Government is transformation, is going to happen this time around.

The pitfalls of Centralised Government have been uncovered, discussed and debated; we now have a wealth of information. These consultations are taking place because in a modern democracy you have to consult. I like to say, when I went to the Ministry of Local Government, there was a pile of reports that high, on local government reform. From boundary changes to what have you, to what have you, to legislative changes, to everything you have; but they were just reports. As I mentioned earlier, Mrs. Manning had a lot of initiative, Mr. Rambachan himself had a lot of initiative; but what we are saying now, I am saying is, this Administration now has the political will to make this happen.

So Local Government reform, I want to make one further point on it; it is psychological. It is you in your community taking charge of your community. It is beyond garbage collection. It is beyond building a retaining wall or a community center or clearing an empty lot for mosquitoes. It is more than the tangible and the physical matters. Almost every decision made by Central Government, inevitably affects our mind and our soul; our hearts; our sense of well-being; or sense of autonomy; our sense of creativity; our sense of community; our sense of being able to make a difference in our basic capacity to dream and passionately pursue these dreams, are taken away from us, by Central Government. Above all ladies and gentlemen, the centralization of decision making affects our needs and ability to unite and build strong communities. So in a very real sense, and, in particular, the pace at which this modern world is moving, Centralize Government, I dare say, without fear of contradiction, is more likely to be the problem, than the solution.

The impediments of the Local Government structure over the years that stopped Local Government from being efficient, from consistent, of relevant, cost-effective, all these- I attribute it's about five (5) matters); first and foremost political interference, manipulation and expediency. For some strange reason, nobody wants to devolve power. Ladies and gentlemen, politicians aside, the human being likes to be in charge; he likes to hold power and nobody voluntarily gives up power. The only person in the world politics that I know, did that, was a guy call Mikhail Gorbachev from the Soviet Union, in a system call Perestroika; he disbanded the Soviet Union to all its respective republics. He is the only person in the world who have ever done it because you do not take away power from yourself. So if you are in charge, you don't want to stop being in charge. So, I am the only minister who is putting myself out of a job, you know. Because I am saying, or the Government is saying, that we will be disbanding the ministry of Local Government and we will be formulating a brand new ministry call the Ministry of Rural Development.

Because, and I say this again without fear of contradiction, unless you cut the umbilical cord, the child will always remain attached to you. So, therefore, what is the sense of empowering Local government when you still have a ministry of Local Government with a big stick over their head? What is the sense of empowering Local Government when everything has to come to the minister's desk for approval? I spend half of my day approving foolishness; sometimes I ask the PS... Do I have to approve this? She said yes, according to the regulations, this, that and the other; because nobody gives up authority. This is the fundamental psychological shift that this

process is putting forward. It is a mind game and it is empowering communities now, to act and to act on their own behalf; so I will deal with that a little later on.

There has always been inadequate funding. Administration come; Administration go, somehow or the other, the budgetary system doesn't cater for the Local Government process; I'll give you an example. During the finance committee meeting at the Parliament, after this budget, Mr. Rambachan himself asked me a question. There was an allocation of four-million dollars for recreation grounds in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation; I think there are one hundred and thirty-six grounds to that effect. Four million dollars for one hundred and thirty-six grounds was madness! Four million dollars is obviously insufficient funds to maintain a hundred and thirty-six grounds; okay, but hear how the systems get complicated.

There is something called the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago and all of sudden, the regional cooperation has no money and the sports company appears and starts to build a pavilion, start to light up the ground. You know, not from where they came. Who have they consulted to know which of the thirty-five grounds in the area, to put lights on six- obviously not the Councillors? So, that is where Central Government comes into conflict with Local Government. So today, by legislation, and Mr Young will deal with that when he comes on the platform; by legislation we will correct that! That sports company cannot go to Tobago and say they come to put lights on a ground in Tobago; Mr London will tell them to take the next flight back home. But they can come into Siparia; they can come into Couva, Tabaquite, Talparo and they could go into Sangre Grande and Mr Terry London doesn't know which ground they coming to fix.

There is a system call PURE (Programme for Upgrading Roads Efficiency). I was a Minister of Works; Mr Rambachan was a minister of Works. PURE spends approximately one billion dollars on road paving every year; half of which is to pave minor roads. Where does the cardray of minor roads come from? Not from the corporations and if that five-hundred million dollars PURE spend on minor roads, is allocated to the Regional Corporations they will have sufficient money, and they will know what are the roads that need the priority. It is not that the country has no money; it is the allocation of resources is so centralized in the psyche of our leaders that it is not filtering down to the various communities. We are going to put that right. Inadequacy of supporting legislation - Mr. Young will deal with that extensively during the question period; and ladies and gentlemen, a sluggish administrative structure which I will deal with very shortly. There is also an overall lack of transparency which again, we will deal with as the presentation continues”...

“Local Government has become inefficient, burdened by the bureaucracy because control, funding and authority is centralised and it is centralised within the Cabinet and within in the Ministry of Local Government; and Corporations, hear this point carefully, corporations as we speak, are currently being treated as departments of the Ministry. I want to make one point fundamentally clear here today; the Ministry of Local Government is not Local Government. The Ministry of Local government is Central Government; Local government resides in the ambit of the Regional Corporation. Again, that is why we have to justify to disband the Ministry of Local Government and now you will be accountable, from a financial point of view to the Ministry of Finance.

You have your allocation each year and you have to account to the Ministry of Finance; you have to account to the Auditor General of how you spent the public's money. So, you wouldn't be under scrutiny, we will take out the oversight of saying, come to the minister to say which drain to fix. You will decide at your council which drain you want to fix and how much it will cost; and you will tender it according to the procurement legislation and then you will be now, accountable to the Minister of Finance of how you spend the money and the auditor general, in terms of transparency and accountability. Be on that; you on your own. And, do you know who is the ultimate aviator in this thing? The burgesses; you, ladies and gentlemen. Because if they don't perform you will vote them out in the next election. So they are accountable to you; they not accountable to me as Minister.

The corporation should now be accountable to their burgesses on how they perform. We will be transparent. We will tell you how much money they get. We will publish it in the papers and say how much money Siparia get; and how much they get for bridges and how much they get for roads and how they get for cemeteries. Now, you call them in their council meetings (and a lot of public consultations will take place), say how you spent the twenty million dollars on recreation work; show me and show us, the citizens of Siparia how that money was spent.

So our vision is a fully operationalized, a network Local Government system; people-driven and people-driven development and we will accomplish this as any national vision. We envision a quantum leap in all aspects of service delivery- health, community development, development of public spaces, local culture, the economy, communications; all aspects of the activities in your community or most aspects of it will now reside at the level of Regional Corporation and the empowerment of the Local Government bodies. So now your ability to fix a road, to build a retaining wall, to launch a festival, will have a direct impact on the quality of life of your community. And Local Government reform, ladies and gentlemen, puts that power back in your hands now. Finally, I want to go through specifically, what we plan to do” ....

“We stated in the PNM Manifesto, that our vision for Local Government reform 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, as you all know, has now been advanced, and has been adopted by the cabinet as official government policy to revolutionize and bring the current system in line with the recurrent recommendations of the many teams, committees, and different administrations that have engaged this process over the years, we now propose the following:

**Taxes-** Through legislation (Mr Stuart Young will be here to take your questions) we plan to change the taxation legislation and the financial legislation to allow Local Government bodies to be in charge of the collection and retention of local taxes, in particular, the land and building taxes. So if you, as a local body, is in charge of collecting this money and keeping it for your own community's development, you will obviously go more aggressive to collect the taxes; because you know all the people in Siparia Regional Corporation, who building you have, you will have your rules, and you will be able to monitor, on a day to day basis, who have paid their taxes and you will send out your officers to tell people, tax due, March interest start to accrue. Then, that will call for greater compliance; so that the monies will now be retained by the regional corporations for expenditure. In all over the world, the United States and in the UK, local taxes

are paid to the local corporations for the development of the local communities and that is basically the model we have been going with.

**Executive Authority-** Mr. Doonath spoke a lot about executive authority; he is right that the council is just policy formulation, implementation and the execution of policy is a function of the Administration. In a large sense, that is the structure of Central government also, but the Cabinet makes policy, the implementation of policy comes through the Public Service but a Minister still has more authority than a Chairman of a Board because most of the legislation are written that you have to take direct and general control from the Minister whereas the Municipal corporation Act does not give you that authority. So, there is the THA model, I think there is a misconception in these consultations and probably I am guilty of it also, it may seem that we going ahead, lock stock and barrel, with the THA model. What we are doing ladies and gentlemen, we are saying as a matter of policy, this Administration wants to give executive power to the Regional Corporations. As to what form it will take, as to what structure it will take, that is the reason we have these consultations. That is the reason we don't Mr. Doonath, we don't have a White paper; because there is a conflict of when you engage in consultation. If you prepare a document and say comment on this, they will say, well you done know what you are doing already, why you all come to consult us for? If we leave the slate too blank, they will say there is nothing to consult on and what should we comment on because the slate is blank? So, you have to have a judicious balance between those two, as to where they are and I think we have a judicious balance because we have a general policy outlined and we now consulting with you to effect the detail mechanics of how this thing will work. This has been an area of keen interest, in all the consultations we have and we seek your comments."

**Accountability-** "I dealt with that a while ago since you will be both decision makers and tax collection will be vested in Local Government bodies, accountability ladies and gentlemen, is of paramount importance. I want to stress this- If we are a corrupt society and corruption is centralised, if we decentralize, all we do is decentralizing corruption. So, instead of five people engaged in corruption, you now have one hundred people engaged in corruption because the fundamental thing is not the evolution of power; the fundamental thing is the psyche of corruption. So you have to be accountable and you have to understand that if we give you more power and more authority there comes greater responsibility and for heaven sake Trinidad and Tobago, please try to understand that. Because if we don't understand that as a people, and if we don't understand that as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago we going nowhere; all this consultation means absolutely nothing. That is the fundamental crux of the matter; if you are empowered, you have to be accountable, you have to be transparent, you have to be honest and you have to understand that you are in charge of the people's money; the money is not yours and you have to account to the people. The money is not yours to spend as if it is your bank account; it is the public purse and public purse must be spent with discretion."

**New Responsibilities-** "The chairman of Siparia mentioned it, it was very commendable in the Municipal Corporation Act of 1990 but let me just criticize it for a minute. All the Municipal Corporation Act did, was change the boundaries and change the names. So from the County Council, so from Saint Patrick County Council it became Siparia Regional Corporation; from Nariva/ Mayaro County Council it became Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation; from Saint Andrew/Saint David County Council it became Sangre Grande Regional Corporation; for most of

Caroni County Council became Couva/Tabaquite/ Talparo Regional Corporation but the schedule of responsibilities largely remained the same- minor roads, minor water courses, cemeteries, public spaces, recreation grounds, some aspect of public health and garbage collection. So a County Council fundamentally is no different from a Regional Corporation. What we are saying now, here is where we are making some fundamental shifts and we must add new responsibilities to the schedule and new budgeting because the world has progressed. You cannot live in the twentieth century in the twenty-first-century ladies and gentlemen.

School maintenance, for example, as we speak there are some eight hundred and something primary schools and a little more than two hundred and something secondary schools. Every September you know what is the headline when school open; twelve to fourteen schools can't open. Parent protesting as to why the schools can't open, why the school could open? Because it is one company called the Education Facilities Company Ltd that is responsible for all the maintenance and the construction work in these almost virtually one thousand schools in Trinidad and Tobago. How good it will be if the Siparia regional corporation, knowing it has about twelve of fifteen secondary schools and say eighteen or so primary schools, have that responsibility. It will be a more laser beam focused approach. So when you award the contracts during the summer vacation, you can manage that, virtually micromanage it, and make sure the delivery is in time for when the reopening of schools. Under the present system, the education facilities company cannot do it and this is where the Local Government reform process will be filtering down to the community level because you will have your responsibilities. Go to Tobago; have you ever hear a Tobago school not open when September reach? Very rarely. So the concept is, you will be empowered to manage your affairs in your community.

Social service delivery, classic example- An old lady needs pension; she has to run up and down in social welfare office and thing. If that goes to the hands of the Councillors, the Councillors have a small geographic space and a limited amount of people he or she is in charge of; you can have a system in your council where you know every single family in your electoral district. If you set up a proper system you will know the families who are at risk, in terms of domestic violence, child abuse, poverty, incest, what have you; these are some of the critical social service deliveries. When you look at Trinidad and Tobago and see the billions of dollars that are spent on social service delivery and holding this so-call safety net for poor people and poverty is still rampant in Trinidad and Tobago. Where is the seven and eight billion dollars going every year? You have to ask the question; okay! Because the system that is supposed to deliver and make these amenities reach out to the people it is not reaching to the people who are most in need; because the system to administer social service delivery is flawed.

A classic example of that is the food card (the minister response to a lady in the audience), sporting programs, agriculture, local tourism, are very good examples; every Regional Corporation has potential local tourism sites, good. Toco/Sangre Grande corporation probably is way ahead of that, in terms of ecotourism and the tourism product but even down in the deep south here we have the La Brea Pitch Lake. If the La Brea Pitch Lake as a local tourism site could fall within Siparia Regional Corporation, it may perform better than under the TDC and the Ministry of Tourism because La Brea Pitch Lake has been given to a national acclaim but when you go there it does not look like a tourist destination; so there is work to be done.

Everybody's talking tourism, tourism, tourism, tourism but you have to drill deep into this thing; enhance the local tourism product at the level of your community and then market it.

Employment exchange, again we can build a database of unemployment and network it with where the jobs are available. I remember Dr Rowley telling us some time ago that he went to a CPA Conference in Jersey, that's in the Channel Islands off England there and he asked one of the members of parliament in Jersey- What is the unemployment rate? Expecting the guy to say, six percent or seven percent unemployment rate; he say, there are one hundred and sixty-two unemployed people in New Jersey. Their database was so accurate; they knew the one hundred and sixty-two people by name, by address, what their skill set are and they are anxiously waiting to match them as the available jobs come in. That is the level of detail this country has to reach to call ourselves developed. Development is not about building skyscrapers and bridges; development is having an administration in place that these things could happen to better the lives of our citizens."

**Local Contractors-** "As far as possible, within the legislation, we will try to let local jobs go to local contractors. Because it makes no sense, you building a box drain down in Santa Flora and the contractor from Chaguanas. Because if you have a local contractor, the chances are he will employ local residents; the chance is when they get paid they will spend their money in local bars and local groceries and local market, okay. So the multiplier effect will be added to the economic activity in the country. So, as I said, as far as the legislation will allow, we will have a system where by and large, local, especially small contracts will have to be allocated to local contractors."

**Effective Municipal Policing-** "I have said a lot about municipal policing, I wouldn't spend much time on that today but what we plan to do is build the municipal police force to one-hundred per corporation which will give you fourteen hundred officers on the ground assisting the national police; I welcome the Minister of National Security and Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, Mr. Dillon. As a matter of fact, we had a meeting last week as to how we will work on the administrative structure of the Municipal police; the jury is still out on it. As we speak now, the municipal police reports to the CEO of the corporation; there isn't a command chain that takes you directly to the commissioner of police. In terms of a quasi-military national security function, there are a lot of merit in taking the command chain up to the commissioner of police."

**Developmental control-** "There is something call the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act 2014 which is a legislation which has been partially proclaimed. As we speak, we are studying it to see whether we want to make amendments to it but basically, that will call for regional bodies in charge of the planning process. So in other words, most of the housing plans and stuff wouldn't have to go to Town and Country for approval, approval will be given at the level of the regional corporation. Both the approval of the plan; the approval of the sub-development plan and also the final completion certificate."

**Infrastructure Works-** "We will have a whole new model for dealing with infrastructure works."

**Disaster Management-** "I want to go on record, I have been saying in all these consultations, Disaster management first respondent, coming out of the Regional Corporation is probably one of the best-run sections of Local Government. It goes to show how, if you make a lot of

responsibilities come down to the level of Regional Corporation, how efficient it is. If the disaster management function wasn't delegated down to the level of regional corporations as the first respondent and it stayed upstairs with the defense force we would have never had the response time that you are getting now. So, it is a very fundamental thing and we think this is the one area, in terms of the evolution of authority to local government that is working extremely well. I just want to caution you, that at its most fundamental level, disaster management is a function of National Security because the disaster is not in the hurricane; the disaster is how people behave after the disaster, okay. So then people start to loot, they start to thief; so watch, the disaster is not really the hurricane or earthquake, it is how people perform and behave after a disaster.”

**Involvement on Civil Society-** “We may well include in the legislation a certain amount of consultation by law that has to take place before certain decisions are made at the level of the Regional Corporation. It is something new to Trinidad and Tobago because I think, there is one piece of legislative requirement that states you have to consult, in some aspect of the law but basically, the legislation in Trinidad and Tobago does not provide legally, for consultation. We would probably want to include some aspect of consultation before major decisions are made with regard to development in your area. The example I like to draw here, I said it already is... if Wal-Mart wants to build a mega store in some parts of the United States, they just can't jump in and do it because they know Obama; is city council meeting and town meeting, and if the community says, no Wal-Mart coming here, you can know Obama, you can know Bush, no Wal-Mart is coming into that community- that is the power of communities.

The State of Vermont which I visit a couple years ago...the State of Vermont have no McDonalds, the state of Vermont have no Home Depot, the State of Vermont have no Wal-Mart because the people of Vermont says, they want to keep their mom and pop stores alive and their local eateries and stuff; they want no chains in their state. You'll be surprised to know, it is the only part of the United States of America where you don't see the big McDonald's sign and KFC sign and the Home Depot sign. It is one of the most beautiful parts of United States of America; that is the power in which your community has.

The example I like to draw is Mr. London, if somebody want to come and put down a big wash plant in Valencia; that falls under the ambit of the Minister of Energy as we speak. But shouldn't the regional corporation have a say? Because the washplant now will pollute the rivers; if the washplant isn't working well and they sending sediments down into the water courses. The most pristine water courses in all of Trinidad is in North-East Trinidad. The Valencia community should have a say in whether Mr X or Mr Y or contractor X or contractor Y want to put out down a big wash plant in Valencia.”

**Regional Development Planning-** “We will encourage, and most of these corporations had done some work in the regional planning concept. Review your document and use that as your vision 2020 what you want to call it; this is your plan for your corporation. This is where you want to see your corporation go over the next decade. This is the type of development that you want to come into your corporation. I could see a system like this evolving into competitions amongst corporations; asking businesses to come and invest in Siparia, assisting from San Fernando. The highway passing here just now; you can develop a whole industrialization policy, in conjunction with Central Government obviously. Say, we want to have a small industrial



estate in Siparia; we want to attract businesses in here and we want to make a business friendly environment for people to come and invest and do not leave investment solely under the control of Central Government. So that is where it will happen.”

**Boundaries-** “All I will say on boundaries is, there are fourteen corporations as we speak. Whether fourteen is too many, I don't know, you will know; the population of Trinidad and Tobago will dictate that. Fourteen corporations with fourteen corporation's executive power-Will that translate to too much government in Trinidad and Tobago? The jury is out, is all I would say. There are some justification to move boundary slightly, especially along the East-west Corridor; I don't really see the sudden part of Trinidad and Tobago really suffering much from that but in terms of San Juan Laventille, Port of Spain, Tunapuna, Piarco, some of those things we can look at it but you can make comments on whether you feel the boundaries should change or should not change. The Chairman of Siparia, Mr. MP for Point Fortin was saying the Point Fortin Borough is so small; I don't know if he wants it to get enlarged. So by and large, that is it.”

**Organization and Structure-** “Ladies and gentlemen, I say all these nice things but the only way it will happen and happen effectively is if you have an organizational structure and staffing at the level of the Regional Corporations that will execute the powers that we are going to give them; that, to me, is the biggest challenge, that is to me, my biggest fear. As we speak, the regional corporations are so understaffed; it will call for a whole new cadre of employment. Most corporations don't even have an Engineer, a Quantity Surveyor, Supply Chain Managers, Asset Managers; all of these are new twenty-first century skills. It is not this long time thing, with WS1, WS2, WS3; it's a whole new organisation structure we will craft for the regional corporation.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me make one point, we will be staffing it with young bright people. This country has invested too much money in GATE for the last decade or so; six-billion dollars a year. We have so many young graduates with bachelor's and master's and most of them are underemployed. Let me make another statement, in a very real sense, underemployment is worse than unemployment. How will you feel as a parent that your child went to University UWI, come out with a master's degree and have to take a job as a clerk in the public service? You wouldn't feel good because you feel you have educated your child, to hold a position of authority and influence, directly in an organization. What is frustrating the young people in Trinidad and Tobago, ladies and gentlemen, is underemployment because the economy has not been able to absorb the graduates at a rate in which they were supposed to be absorbed, and in the right areas.

So it is all nice and good to say that the tertiary level capacity has moved from 20% in 2002 to now 65 or 75%. But what happened to that extra 50% of graduates? Have you absorbed them into meaningful jobs? These are some of the job creations that will come through the regional corporations so that a graduate coming out of Santa Flora, wouldn't have to look to Port of Spain to get a job. A graduate from San Francique can come to the Regional Corporation and find a career in a governance structure that is related to your own community. So there is extremely first class potential in this program.”

“Before I close, ladies and gentlemen...Legislation (Mr Stuart Young will deal with that when he sits here on the stage with me) but we will be dealing with the money bills; we will deal with

the revision of the Municipal Corporation Act itself, we will look at particularly amended Section 69 of the Act to reflect what the governance structure that we will be going with. We plan to a cadre of what I call, omnibus legislation; a package of legislation to the Parliament, hopefully before the next local government.

Let me correct the chairman of Siparia...We are not saying that the process will be completed before the next elections. What we are saying, that the legislative reform agenda should be in the Parliament before Local Government Elections which is due around October, November this year. So, the country will know what legislative reform we are proposing to the nation; it will be very likely we will be subject to a joint select committee so that we have the direct involvement of the opposition and the independence in the senate and the opposition in the house so they can critique and interrogate the legislative reform that we are going to give out.”

“Finally... this Local government reform process, is hard to believe this from a politician, it is not political. The powers that will be handed over to the Mayor of San Fernando, the Chairman of the Tunapuna/ Piarco Corporation, the Chairman of the Diego Martin Corporation- in Diego Martin corporation every single Councillor, every single alderman is PNM but by the same token, the powers of the Chairman of Diego Martin corporation has, is by the same power as the Chairman Penal/Debe corporation, because in Penal/Debe, there isn't a PNM Councillor and there isn't a PNM alderman. So, that is the both sides of the spectrum and there are all these differences in between. Because you do not legislate for a particular group; you legislate for the entire country. Let the chips fall where they be...so we wouldn't want to hold back power because Siparia is a UNC corporation; which it will not be at the end of this year (Minister jokes with the audience)...I need to make the point that this is a political, it is national governance structure that we are looking at; we are looking to provide efficiencies. Our intention is really to bring a better lifestyle to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; especially at the level of the Corporations. Obviously, we need your support and collaboration in this exercise.”

Mr Khan proceeded with a second video presentation and concluded his presentation by highlighting the transformation that took place between video 1 and video 2.

Minister Khan was then joined by Minister Young on the platform to respond the questions posed by the participants.

## 4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

### ❖ Doodnath Meroo, Male Participant (Indian 50s)

I've been a Councillor for ten years at the Siparia Regional Corporation. Good evening Ministers. I listened attentively to what Mr Khan spoke about this evening and the reform that he speaks about here, while we are all excited, I really want to find out if this what is taking place here will really happen before 20/20 because what you described here in the whole transformation process seems like a very long journey. And what you said and the power that you are giving to the chairman and the Councillors, it is very clear that it seems as though that the Councillor and the chairman will expect a salary that on par with the ministers because it is a lot of work for the Councillors and chairman come after this reform. But there are a few points I want to raise here this evening. First of all, the abolishment of Local Government to Rural Development: Couldn't this change take place under the said Ministry of Local Government with the necessary legislative changes to be made and the amendment to the Act? That is one. Minister Khan talk about swinging the pendulum to develop areas without a political agenda, I really want to believe you. We look at what is happening on a daily basis and how government operates. While you were here talking about swinging the pendulum and doing things without a political agenda, last week your government approve 5 community centres at a cost of \$40 million, all fell into PNM controlled areas. I want to know if this is the change we talking about...we talking about swinging the pendulum without a political agenda. That is number one. Number two; you are giving the Councillors the authority to program their work in the various areas. Why can't a minister take up a phone and tell a Councillor, "Aye, I would like you to program so and so project here and so and so project there?" Then the next part comes into play when a Councillor has that kind of authority, what will he do? He will want to program the areas that he got his votes to win the election. That is what he will want to do. He will want to ensure that he retains his support by satisfying the needs of the people who first put him in power. There has to be a cultural shift in thinking by the people in this country. You talk about people standing up against Wal-Mart and big enterprises in America but here in Trinidad when a government is in power and they bring certain things to you, the people who align themselves with that political party will stand up and say yes we will take it whether it is good or bad for we. A clear example was recently, the smelter plant in La Brea when there was the big cry that that was not good for the water table in the country and for the people. And some of the people in La Brea still say we want it. There has to be a cultural shift in the thinking of people. I thank you.

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

The issue you see; there is a paradox in what the gentleman said. I have come here and said this is the flaws in the system, this is what we need to fix it, this is the new paradigm we have to set ourselves to put the government structure in Trinidad and Tobago right, especially at the level of the local authority. Everybody here agrees with what I said and

then you will come up now and say it will not happen. We have to make it happen. We cannot continue to have self-doubt because is self-doubt that will stultify a people, you know. And you cannot always come and say it is a political this and a political that. Look at Trinidad and Tobago. Look at Chaguanas and Couva. It is PNM policy, decisions that have caused the booming of Central Trinidad and Tobago. So where is the politics in that? And PNM policy on rural development will now come and impact in Sangre Grande, Toco, Mathura, Moruga, Siparia, Santa Flora, La Brea, Erene. Ladies and gentlemen let us start to understand what is happening. We need to get up, smell the coffee and understand we need to develop Trinidad and Tobago.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young, Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs**

If I could just add...because the first question is would it happen? The answer is a resounding yes. We have been mandated to make the legislative part happen, which leads me to the second point. So the legislation is going to be laid in parliament before the next constitutional date of local government elections. The next point is...and this is something to consider, you talked about a cultural shift and a shift in thinking. No amount of legislation can drive that. As Minister Khan said, that is up to each and every one of us. Legislation will be put in place; it comes down to the enforcement of the legislation and the mindset of developing how you implement that legislation. So that will happen.

**Moderator**

The Councillor also had a concern about the greater professionalising of the work of local government representatives. How do you see that going with this?

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young, Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs**

Well obviously, remuneration packages will have to match the job specs that you have. One of the reasons why MPs and councillors are so poorly paid is because it is the opinion of Salaries Review Commission that they are part time. But the fact is most Councillors and MPs work full time on their job. But as far as the Salaries Review Commission is concerned it's a part time job. The legislative changes may well consider making Councillors a full-time job with a portfolio so that they can be adequately compensated for their work.

❖ **Vidya Deokeesingh, Male Participant (Indian 40's)**

Minister, I heard you, I took some notes. We would like to see the consulate services come to our community. I'm referring to the second slide you had there, Power from the Towers to Ours. We would like to see the consulate services coming down here reaching out to our community: Immigration, Licensing Authority, the Erene port to be developed into a modern fishing processing plant, reviving of the coconut industry, reviving of the citrus

industry. There is a structure on the corner of Arlye Street and High Street, it is being used by TSTT as a facility they use. I want to suggest that we bring in the different utility services: WASA, T&TEC, and TSTT as a payment centre. Rather now people have to leave here and go to San Fernando. I heard you spoke as an example of the sporting facility; we need to have representatives from various ministries working in tandem with the corporation and I would like to say time to take action. God bless each and every one. Thanks for your time.

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

I just want to respond to Mr Deokeesingh there on one point. And this is the problem that I had with the name changing from the County Council system to the Municipal Corporation Act. Now in the old days was St Patrick County Council, now it is called Siparia Regional Corporation. But it does not give the town of Siparia a monopoly on the Corporation. In the Siparia Regional Corporation, there is Siparia, there is Fyzabad, there is La Brea, there is Vessigny, there is Santa Flora, and there is Erene. So even in your own mind now, you cannot try to build Siparia as the capital and everything must come to Siparia the town. It is just called the Siparia Regional Corporation because there is a lagging even in the context of Siparia...outside of Siparia and Point; the other towns are lagging behind. So we have to come up with development plans for Fyzabad, we have to come up with a plan for what I call 'the Santa Flora Stretch' because from Quarry Village straight down to Erene nothing is happening. Good? And then Fyzabad and its environs...I live in Fyzabad most of my adult life. I does call Fyzabad 'the town that stood still.' Fyzabad still has a bar named High Noon, High Noon was a western in the 1960s. But what you have now is to come up with development plans for Fyzabad, the Santa Flora Stretch and you have to understand what role Siparia as a town will do in bringing the regional capital.

❖ **Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Male, Indian, 60s)**

Thank you very much. Good evening to everyone, Ministers, members of parliament. I'm very happy to be given the opportunity to express a couple of views on the Local Government Reform for two special reasons: One, I was born in Avocat and I lived most of my life in Avocat. I still have property in Avocat and secondly, I was the Chairman of the St Patrick County Council from 1983-1987, tells you how long I've been in the political field also, almost thirty something years. So I have a great interest in what is happening and I want to commend you on your presentation; very clear, very visionary and to say that the United National Congress or People's Partnership have as its vision for local government is not very different from what you have presented here. I think that the difference would be in the capacity to get it implemented. And I am glad that you referred to my stint as Minister of Local Government because if you really go through the records of the consultations...there were 14 consultations across the country and the final document, you will see a lot of what you said there in that document, especially the legislative changes. Unfortunately, I spent only one year and 2 months in Local Government but we also demonstrated during that period, Local Government can perform if there is a shift in the

consciousness of the people at the Ministry of Local Government itself. Not necessarily at the corporations alone but at the Ministry of Local Government itself. It surprises people to know that in that 14 months - 60 local bridges were built, 31 pavilions were started in the country which demonstrated that Local Government has the capacity to perform. And it's not about campaigning, I'm making the point that Local Government if properly driven and managed and led can in fact, achieve. Minister, you made some very important points. I want to suggest that full-time Councillors should be the order of the day. I don't think the part-time Councillor thing works at all. Full-time Councillors are required if the extent of the development on transformation proposed is going to take place. I also think that the problem of local government is as much constitutional and legislative as it is about competent human resources but this will include: the qualities of the COs who are now in the local government system, resource allocation...I am very happy to hear you talk about the taxes and the fact that local government will be allowed to retain taxes. But I don't think that the retention of taxes alone is going to facilitate the kind of development that you proposed. And therefore, we'll have to ask the question in the transform system, what do you envision as the formula that is going to be used in order to make the kind of financial resources available to local government? Are you going to use the formula for 4% like they have in the THA or are you going to propose some other formula? And I really do believe that what we have to do, is to start with a zero budgeting and have proper strategic plans done in each one of the local government areas, engage the widest consultation so you can develop at least a 5 to 7 year plan to which people will be committed and despite whatever political changes take place that that is the plan that will go forward because it would be based on the receptivity and what people have agreed to as committees. And that is why I think the last point which you didn't go into in terms of structure; I think that is a very important point. And I think that the structure as it exists now in local government is inadequate. Four statutory committees are not enough. And it is very fast right now to see how many committees the councils themselves name but they are not functional...because they don't have the resources, they don't have the personnel and they are paid \$700 a month or what have you to be a chairman but I think that should be stopped and I think we should go to the system where you have a wider community base of people involved in the committees which feed into council. So the work of these committees are protected by the laws and that the committee work are taken seriously and brought to the council...like joint select committees or what have you, some kind of adapted form. You named about 16 or 18 committees I saw there on your presentation, I want to commend that and say that that should happen. I want to also say that Local Government should be protected in the constitution. I really think it should be protected and while Mr Young spoke about legislation is not going to do all...I agree with him. One of the things that we need is an instantaneous leap in this country and the local government. I think we have to move from keep saying we are developing...I think that is one of the pitfalls of our...and our demise. We must begin to say we are or we have become and begin to act out what we should be, rather than keep saying we striving towards whatever it is. You referred to the Municipal Corporation Act and I think that is very important. I think it is a good act not because I was a member of the NAR when it happened but I think it's a good act. I think what happened is that there is a lack of enforcement of the provisions of the Municipal Corporations Act. If it

is that people do not want to listen to what I have to say it shows the arrogance of the system. I've come here like everybody else and I don't think this is a political affair. I think it is an affair of coming here to speak about some important matters. I can take my seat, I can leave if people prefer but I am here on behalf of my party the United National Congress and the leader of the opposition and I intend to make my point. And no amount of shouting or insults behind my back is going to prevent me from doing it. I am going to do it. The Municipal Corporations Act I think it is a matter of it not being enforced and you have to strengthen it by having the Municipal Police and using them. But I want to go further. I want to suggest that you have Municipal Court in this country which will dedicate itself to dealing with municipal matters and you have very good examples of it. In Bolder Colorado, you have a Municipal Court, in several states in the United States...you have a Municipal Court in Texas but you need the Municipal Court in order to provide an accessible, efficient and impartial forum for people involved in cases involving municipal ordinance violations. You need to adjudicate cases consistent with the laws, the needs of the individual and the community values. You are talking a lot about community values here today and you need Municipal Courts in order to promote public trust in the justice system and in local government. And I think I want to suggest very strongly that we look in the laws as to how you incorporate a Municipal Court.

➤ **Statement by the Honourable Minister Stuart Young, Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs**

So we take it that we will get opposition's support, special majority is required then, that is the commitment that you are giving?

**Dr Rambachan (continued)**

Let me say to you that as an opposition and I don't mean anything bad by saying this, when we came to the parliament and suggested that members of the Defence Force be given the opportunity to be empowered so they can have the powers of arrest and so, you did not give the support but I want to guarantee you that anything that is good for this country and what I say here today we'll support in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. You spoke about a cultural shift, you need a cultural shift. But you have to mandate a cultural shift in this country and Minister Khan may start by mandating a cultural shift at the Ministry of Local Government. You need to deal with administration, you need to deal with procedures and you need to deal with the process. Do you know Mr Khan it used to take 19 steps between when a budget was passed and when money was released for a project? Because of process flowcharting that I introduced when I was there Minister, we reduced it to 6. And do you know 6 weeks after the budget was passed in 2012, corporations were able to draw out money and begin their development projects in the country? Because we had begun to reform the system by which the whole thing was done and we got opposition for change and the level of the Ministry of Local Government so you need to do something with the attitude, the work attitude of the people at the Ministry of Local Government. I hope this is not a 'we in charge attitude' and you could deal with it is going on here, you know. If it is

the PNM people here want to say that they people who are in opposition have no place in the politics of the country they are wrong! They are wrong! I hope that is not the attitude of the government towards the people. My final point is a very important one, the Facilitation of Development Bill that was passed and that was supposed to empower local government with respect to plans and so on, we'd like to know what is happening with that and whether that is going to be implemented and how quickly it's going to be implemented. I thank you for the opportunity but I will submit a paper to you the details of our position on many of the things.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister Stuart Young, Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs**

The truth is Dr Rambachan, one of the points that you made which is in agreement with one that I had started, there is an enforcement issue and I agree with you. The Municipal Corporations Act is not an efficient piece of legislation. So we are looking at deciding the policy shifts and then we'll work that in via amendment. For example; the collection and retention of property tax, land and building taxes collected by the corporation and what you touched on what is going to be the formula. Because immediately it is recognized that different corporations have a different ability to attract different amounts into their pots, so to speak. So one of the things we are looking at, all corporations will be mandated to collect the property and land and building taxes but what then happens to it? Does it retain, so, for example, Point Lisas which will collect quite a lot under the commercial rates would have an advantage compared to Point Fortin? So we're looking at those types of things. There is going to be a collection and then the distribution and you are right, it will probably come down to a formula. Obviously not a 4% as happens with THA but we are going to look at a proper distribution probably by the population of each corporation. And we're looking to minimise the number of legislative amendments because we don't want it to become a burdensome piece of legislature.

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

And let me just add one thing on the allocation. We're seeking advice on how the resources would be allocated, for example, Minister Young said population but in terms of infrastructure, take the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation which has the largest geography but probably the smallest population but in terms of the kilometres of minor roads, probably there is more in Sangre Grande. Arima Borough Council is 4 square miles in size; obviously by no stretch of the imagination should Arima get the same quantum of allocation as Sangre Grande or Siparia. But you just have to say that now very discreetly because you don't want to offend the people of Arima. So what we'll have to do is come up with a matrix that deals with geography, population, development. Port of Spain, for example, is a big city, it draws a lot of central government resources. In terms of population, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation probably has the largest population. So you have to develop a matrix but obviously, the discretion of central government must play a part.



❖ **Winston Alexis, Male Participant (African, 40's)**

I am a businessman from the Fyzabad area. Long before I heard the Prime Minister introduce Local Government reform, I always daydreamed about Local Government. This plan is different from what the Minister highlighted, it's totally different actually. My suggestion is scrapping Local Government altogether. Because of the small country and political divide that we are, no matter how you want to say you're going to divide without politics, politics would always be a part of it. I'm saying once you have a government elected in the country, that government should rule everything in terms of Local Government and everything else. So you should not have an election for Local Government with political parties involved. So basically, we have one election, whoever government is in power they control all the local governments. For instance, in the Siparia regional area; it is way too big from Siparia go all the way back to Icacos. The suggestion is; that area be divided into 3 areas. The Siparia to Erene which is on the eastern side, then La Brea, Fyzabad and Oropouche on the western side and the Point Fortin borough will now handle the Icacos area. These corporations will be run by a chairman who will be elected by the government based on criteria. This body will basically be a reporting body, will be fully staffed and so on. All the various government agencies, statutory bodies and committees, they will now form that corporation. For instance, Siparia Regional Corporation will now have WASA, T&TEC, SWMCOL; all those bodies will be on the corporation. They will be planning out the work what needs to be done in that corporation so you don't have duplication of effort. Those statutory bodies will be taking those roles. But on the corporation, they will be there reporting to the corporation on a monthly basis. So they will meet in their corporation, plan out what water works need in Siparia regional...they will bring it back to the corporation. Councillors, on the other hand, will be elected in your village, the Councillor will be elected by the people, you should have a council election in which it has no politics in it. The Councillor should be somebody who lives in the area, who works in the area with people. He will sit on the corporation and bring all the projects from that particular village and bring whatever concerns the village have to the corporation who will then answer the questions. WASA will say well we are building a road...WASA will have to report we are doing this, so everybody on the council will be aware of WASA is doing, what T&TEC is doing and so forth. The Councillor would also be a full-time person with a staff; he/she would be responsible for community work. So the community actually would then have a village council. The village council will comprise of all the community bodies like the church and whatever bodies have you. To get the politics out, you have to bring local government to the people themselves and the best way to do that is electing Councillors who live and work in the area who will take that responsibility, bring it back to the general council and say this council is a reporting body. Because you already have Ministry of Health, you have SWMCOL handling all scavenging work.....

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

What you are proposing is totally different. It is internally inconsistent because what he is saying is that Trinidad too small for Local Government but then you articulating a system

that having ten times the Councillors that we currently have. But the idea of community groups and community council, that still exist under the Local Government system. You will have a Councillor for Fyzabad but it does not stop you from having a village council or a sporting organization but I mean every point is something worth listening to so it will be catalogued.

❖ **Francis Bertrand, Male Participant (African, 50's)**

I am the Chairman of the Point Fortin constituency and I am also a past president of the Association of Local Government and World Conference of Mayors. During my tenure, I have been involved in Local Government for about 25 years and clearly, I have been through several processes of transformation. While I commend the minister for his commitment, I think there is always a bit of scepticism where local government is concerned in terms of genuine transformation. Politically, some of the transformation methods suggested by the minister would, in fact, threaten the members of parliament and the ministers, in terms of the devolution of power and that is a political reality that would have to be addressed. In terms of real transformation, under the new system, a mayor should be at the level of a minister and be afforded that kind of status. In terms of the remunerative aspect, while we are talking about full time and part time, I think we should focus on just compensation for service. If you say a Councillor is full-time, then you may detract from the quality of persons that might be interested in that position. A lawyer might say he can make more money as a lawyer but at the same time, you want to have the competence to implement some of the new measures. So it is possible to be a professional doing the job but also have a commitment to work and put out in local government. So that is a dichotomy that has to be addressed. On the question of the constitutionality of Local Government, that is very critical but I guess based on the political realities it may have to be done in two stages: one, we may have to amend and implement a particular act and then maybe after we try to get it into the constitution. Because if we go one shot, as Stuart kind of alluded, we not sure how the opposition will react in parliament and that could stymie the process. That is, in fact, a reality, something we need to look at. Building capacity is very critical. One of the challenges with this new system is, while we now have a smaller cabinet, we are now going to have a bigger administrative structure in terms of Local Government and there is a cost attached to that...in all the young professionals and so that has to be empowered...so from a financial standpoint that should be considered. Fundamentally, I think any new dispensation should have a mechanism where the mayor of a corporation should be elected. The people should have an idea who is going to be the mayor when I vote in this particular election, which is very critical in terms of empowering the people. Another challenge I think any government would have, with these empowered municipalities, how would we get in some of the opposition areas so that we ensure that the local government cannot stymie some of the national development initiatives? In a perfect world, everything would work fine but that is something that has to be addressed. And very quickly, the question of Local Government, one of the fundamental conflicts has always been the question of the CO and the councillor, who is really in charge? The

administration says you come here for 3 years and you leaving and the Councillor say they are the ones accountable to the people. So fundamentally, I think Councillors should have the authority to appoint a CO and you live or die by the CO you put in power. If you appoint your friend and he/she can't deliver the people would deal with that. But you should not have a situation where the Councillors are being pressured by the burgess and the CO might be of a different priority. That is a very critical area in terms of the effectiveness of local government and must be addressed. The question of allocations, yes it is good to see we're going to collect the allocations but the fundamental policy has to be whether we retain and whether it's going to be part of the overall allocation. Point Fortin has been collecting allocations for years but then when you collect 10 cents, they cut your allocation by that amount. And then there is the challenge with the communities with the industrial bases, like Point Fortin you have Atlantic LNG and even Petrotrin in terms of how you collect those royalties there. That is supposed to be done on a per well head basis. It has never been properly addressed but you will find areas like Point Fortin, Fyzabad and these areas; that is something that could be quickly addressed. On the area of the boundary allocation, while the EBC has their formula, we have to come up with an effective formula. Is not only in terms of the number of people, we have to be focused on the community. There is no reason where Cedros where Point Fortin is the town centre for that area, Cedros, Erere naturally gravitate towards Point Fortin. From a practical standpoint, they are separated by the oil fields, so we have to look at that, both the demographics and all in all I would want to commend the Minister for his efforts, the proof of the pudding would be in the eating and we would ensure, certainly Point Fortin, that we lend support and hold the government accountable for delivering that type of facility to the people. Thank you very much.

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

You have to understand the difference between a borough and a regional corporation. Cities and boroughs are basically small geographic largely urbanized centres; that is why you qualify as a city. There are two cities in Trinidad: San Fernando and Port of Spain. There are three boroughs: Chaguanas, Arima and Point Fortin. So you cannot; based on that concept, expand the borough of Point Fortin to include Cedros and Icacos. It is just impractical. That is not the concept of a borough; otherwise, you will actually be making a Point Fortin Regional Corporation. And everybody wants to be a city but there are consequences of that because your geographic space is now limited...so you're misunderstanding the concept of regional corporations, boroughs and cities. Secondly, your issue with CO and council, the minister could say the same thing. Give me a chance to appoint my own PS because the PS is thing. There is something called the service commission which is enshrined in the constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and that was designed when we had our independence constitution which separates the political interference with the operation of the administration and the public service. It is something we will have to live with and what you have to do, any corporation you have, you have to build relationships because the public service is protected by the constitution. Finally, with your point on MPs, the point I like to make is the prime role of a Member of Parliament is that they are a legislator. People

vote you into the office to be a legislator to go to the parliament and make laws for the country. What has happened because of poor service delivery over the years, the MP has now become the main service delivery. So that the member of parliament for Point Fortin, when he goes to his constituency office, he have 100 people waiting to see him to find out to fix a drain but that is really the role of the Councillor. So the Councillor will not be usurping the role of the MP, the Councillor will be allowing the MP to do what he has been elected to do. How I judge the service delivery of Trinidad and Tobago is how many people I see coming to the MP offices on a Thursday. If you have a situation where people have to come to the MPs for simple service delivery issues, the system is not working. And the proof in the pudding is that when you get a local government infrastructure in place that is functional and efficient and effective, you will start to see the line in the MP's office dwindling.

❖ **Kurt Phillip (Male African 50s)**

Good evening all, Kurt Phillip is the name; I am here this evening in the capacity as a resident of the Siparia district, and also as an employee of the Public Health Department of the Siparia Regional Corporation. Part of my function in that department is taking complaints from members of the public. I know right now, the focus is on health issues like Zika etc. but I think that there is something at present that is looping, growing unseen and maybe unnoticed; that I should quite rightly say, that no attention is being paid to. Before I go on that line, I would just like to ask what would be the position, with respect to the functions of the Public Health Sector, within the Corporations. Will it be going hand in hand, or duplicating, the Ministry of Health, like the functions in CMOH (County Medical Officers in Health)?

At present we are seeing a lot of ineffective duplicating taking place, with respect to mosquito infestation and rodent infestation; but I am very passionate about something Mr. Minister. Within the course of any given week, we will get between eighteen (18), and twenty (20) complaints about rodent infestation. We have a very small team of rodent control evaluators, and the thing that concerns me is they are not given the opportunity, to be as effective as they should, to alleviate the rodent infestation situation. I would just like to make a little recommendation; I am being very curt, in making a simple recommendation. I am not clairvoyant but I want to believe that some way, "along the road" we will see an outbreak of Leptospirosis or other rodent-borne diseases rearing its head.

We have a serious rodent problem in this municipality, "the little ten workers", that I said we have not working because when these goodly people, leave "the yard" in Siparia, on any given morning, to take complaints elsewhere and may have to go to another area, like Cedros; the efforts of revisiting previous areas and complaints are curtailed. I want to advocate if the Corporation can organize, or the Ministry as a matter of fact, can organize to have, for example; five persons assigned per district, to save on time; same goes for the mosquito control unit.

There are people, who are of the opinion, that this is just another “talk shop”, but I think we need to be proactive. Yes we are in recessionary times, but we have to try to avoid, in this case, “that explosion”, my main concern here being the rodent infestation, thank you.

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

Yes, Public Health again is duplicity of responsibilities and that goes to show, how significant this Local Government Reform process will affect the Governing structure of Trinidad; and what he drew attention to, is the classic example of trying to divulge power and still keep it. It’s the Ministry of Health; when the Regional Corporation Act was implemented, that was to follow the system in England; and when the Regional Health Authorities were formed, the Ministry of Health was just supposed to be a Policy Unit; but the Ministry of Health never gave up its powers.

So now we have three sets of powers in Health; Local Government Authority in Public Health, the Regional Health Authority, which runs the hospital and the Ministry of Health, “which have the big stick over everybody”. This is what we are now trying to get away from, in the Local Government Reform Process; because as we speak, Insect Vector falls under the Ministry of Health. The Minister of Health asked me last week, he said, “I would like to hand over Insect Vector Control to the Regional Corporations because it better resides there”. So Public Health, I personally will be pushing that, the issue of Public Health, be largely a function of the Regional Corporations; because it is only there, that Public Health would be effective.

Public Health is to deal with the public, and the issue of rodents, mosquitoes, etc. The issue of Sanitation and public health goes hand in hand; the Regional Health Authority is to deal with the various levels of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Healthcare, which largely resides with the Hospitals and Health Centres. So again, there are a lot of overlapping, and cross-wiring of the system, but this Local Government process will, at least, make an attempt, to streamline responsibilities in an effective way.

❖ **Ernest Thompson (Male African 60’s)**

The name is Earnest Thompson, resident Palo Seco; Dr Suruj Rambachan just left, but I wanted to ask him kindly, to stay out of the people’s forum, when the people have their contributions to make. Now I live in Palo Seco, and I want to know, what has been happening with Palo Seco over the years, Tesoro and BP has gone; and the place is now a virtual shutdown. Now I saw Dr Surju Rambachan in Palo Seco speaking about the repairing of the roads....

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

Sir, let me just interrupt you, you are speaking to Minister Young and myself, so keep the focus on the Local Government Reform.

**Ernest Thompson**

Now all of this is Local Government that I am tying into because the Siparia Regional Corporation takes in from Oropouche to Icacos and it includes Palo Seco, Santa Flora, Quarry, Erin, so I am speaking with regards to that. I want to know if there would be development in Palo Seco, in terms of Housing, Interconnected roads, training for the young people and facilities; because there is absolutely nothing. The last time Dr Rowley was here I spoke about the NEC centre and it was opened. In this consultation my colleague talked about, the rodents and the health, I had to speak about that too but I withdraw; because there is no interest, no emphasis, on the rural development.

Now that you are speaking about Rural Development, I want to know:

1. Will the Corporation be in charge of issuing contracts?
2. Will they be the ones to facilitate any form of development in this part of the south-west?

It is apparent that under the last five years, nothing was done with regards to Palo Seco, Santa Flora. Nothing - big "potholes" in the road.

**Moderator**

Okay Sir, your concerns are the powers of the Municipalities under the new system. You are concern about the awarding of contracts, and you are concerned about development within the Corporations.

**Ernest Thompson**

Yes!

**Moderator**

Well, the Minister did address some of those issues, is there anything else you want to add to that?

**Ernest Thompson**

Well, I just want to know, will these development structures, be placed in the hands of the Corporation, or be placed in the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of Rural Development etc. this is what I want to know.

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

There is still some semblance of overlap; the Ministry of Works will still continue to be responsible for Highways and major roads. The Regional Corporations under the Statute will continue to be responsible for minor roads, bridges, and minor water courses. The Ministry of Rural Development is a policy oversight, to make sure that the Rural Development Agenda is achieved; but ladies and gentlemen I know the issue is specific to this part of Trinidad. I lived in Fyzabad for most of my life, I worked in Santa Flora for most of my life and I have seen these two parts of Trinidad die. Between Fyzabad Oilfield and Forest field reserved Oilfield, which is called the Fyzabad Anticline, I am a geologist.

It has produced one billion barrels of oil, from since it was founded in 1913; look at Fyzabad today. The Santa Flora stretch from Quarry straight down to Erin, the Palo Seco oilfield; that was the Headquarters of Trinidad to Tesoro and BP. It is now the Headquarters of the exploration and production arm of Petrotrin. However when you do not have a developmental agenda of sustainability, oil is a wasting asset; oil is a depleting reserve. In Fyzabad 'oil-boom days', they had Strand Cinema, Empire Cinema, Hi-Lo; everybody in Santa Flora was booming with beach camp, and Palo Seco and GP's (Grand Prix) small Velodrome, not understanding that one day the oil will finish.

If you do not sew the seed of sustainable development, and you do not understand that and you get caught in the present, it will come back to haunt you. So now, we have to and as a Minister of Rural Development and as a Member of the Cabinet, I understand what your issues are. Now we will try to craft solutions of sustainability, one of the issues we have in Rural Development, is to sew an economic seed in each community. For example we will build the Moruga fishing port, we will build the Valencia to Toco road and the Ferry service in Tobago and in these communities in St Patrick we have to now sew economic seeds to bring some form of sustainability to these areas.

We now, are going to map them out geographically, and look at the sociology of these areas, and come up with meaningful development plans in relation to the Regional Corporation. For the first time whether PNM or UNC are "in power", areas like these will come on the radar. I am the chairman of the PNM, I can talk; this is not a political "thing". Take Fyzabad for example, Fyzabad has had one MP for thirty (30) years, they now have a second one; and under that MP the UNC was "in power", and nothing happened in Fyzabad. In the constituency of La Brea, the PNM was "in power" for years and still nothing happened in La Brea. Ladies and gentlemen, let's get real; I am on a developmental agenda, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Okay Minister, if I can just add; because it seems that part of the concern that you were raising is even in the boundaries of a Corporation, some areas will be neglected. Two of the ways we intend to address that from a legislative point of view is; now that you would have your own budget, at least semi-annually, you would have to come and present as we do in Parliament; how the money has been spent. And that provides now the burgesses, the citizens insights with the opportunity to raise the concerns you've raised; so that's one way, at the budgeting level and the accountability as to how you spent the money; will be to the people in the region.

The second is, we are thinking of introducing, as Minister Khan said in addition to the planning stages; that you have town hall meetings for the Corporations at certain points during the year to allow people the opportunity to come forward and raise the issues as to what is happening or is not happening, in their relevant areas.

❖ **Dave Ben (Male Indian 60's)**

The name is Dave Ben, Pundit, teacher, lawyer; however that is not why I am here, I am a citizen of Fyzabad. I must compliment the Minister, Minister Khan on your presentation, it was wonderful and I would like to point out that you said it was not political. My only problem is that you also said that many plans have come before and you have the political will; I intend to hold you to that because we have had many lofty plans before, as the former Minister said. If this could happen, I beg to disagree with my partner, who spoke about getting rid of councils because I do see that it will bring the people closer and I think this is what Local Government is about.

I see some of my friends came up and talk about “this” is not getting there, and “that” is not getting there. Well, I got the point, where you said that you will be responsible because you will now decide whether you want a KFC, whatever. So I got the point that you the people will be responsible but I have questions and this would be more for Minister Stuart because it deals with legislation.

Have you set in place a timetable? I know that Minister Khan said, it will not happen before the elections; I understand that but if it is really going to happen and have the political will, then I want to follow this timeline that you are giving me. So when you set up your legislative framework and everything else, not only the legislation; if you are coming to consult with us; we must also have some point in which we can hold you to. If you have said that by next year, so much legislation is going to Parliament and we are going to deal with “that”, I am looking forward to something like that.

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

The Legislation is going to Parliament as we said, before the next election. So by October of this year, the Legislation will be laid in Parliament.

**Dave Ben**

Alright, in Minister Khan’s presentation he spoke about; if I wanted to improve the health facilities in my area and also in your presentation you said, we are taking out the Minister of Local Government because now you are empowered, the money will now only come from the Minister of Finance. If then, I want to build a health facility, I probably might be able to build the physical structure; but I will have to have some sort of “thing”, to deal with the Ministry of Health, so as to get this “thing” enacted. What is the devolution of power then; that will come from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Local Government for that to happen?

My last question is that we have talked about constitution reform, many things have been said; the previous Government tried with the Local Government in the form of Proportional representation. What is your stand on it? Whether it’s going to stay, whether it’s not going to stay? Or have you all not considered that just yet?



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

Well as you know, the Proportional representation is now part of the law of Trinidad and Tobago; we haven't had a discussion or a decision, to remove the Proportional representation, it was utilised in the last Local Government. That will be a policy decision.

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

Yes, that will be a policy decision, on the face of it, I personally don't see anything fundamentally wrong, with the Proportional representation as it relates to the appointment of Aldermen. You made a point about Ministry of Health; I would like to make something very clear ladies and gentlemen. We are seeking devolution of power to Regional Corporations, adding to their schedule of responsibilities; but I would just want to caution you on one thing, we are not going to form fourteen (14) independent Republics in Trinidad and Tobago; there is still something called a Central Government that is in charge of the planning process of the national development agenda and there will still be a Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is not a Federal Government with fourteen (14) Independent Republics and a Federal system. You are a Local Government in the context of Central Government, with enhanced powers and authority, to run your communities up to a certain point.

❖ **Debbie Cameron (Female African 50's)**

Goodnight Minister, and everybody here, all protocols observed; my name is Debbie Cameron, I am here in the capacity, as a community activist and also the welfare officer in my community, so it's not political. Sir I have observed some things in this town of Siparia, pertaining to the Siparia Regional Corporation that is very disturbing to me. Before you all leave here tonight, I would like for you all to tell me, the real role and functions of the CEO of the Siparia Regional Corporation and any other Corporation.

I have some questions; why should a CEO decide the fate of the re-election of the Representative, due to her actions? Refusing assistance to several community activities when the politician supports same.

The Penal/Debe Corporation has been assisting community groups within my area and we have a Siparia Regional Corporation here, with Councillors etc. All assistance to community groups like Siparia Spurs, San City Boxing Group, Siparia Envirofest group and a group in Quinam, has been cut; in fact, I want to ask the Minister, if this time around, when we had "stuff" in Siparia if you all decided not to send any money. I observed as a community activist on Carnival Friday, the Corporation "lock tight", no assistance to community groups. That is unforeseen because here I sit and I hear you speaking about enhancing communities and ecotourism and I am not getting that out of the Siparia Regional Corporation.

Should the vote of the CEO be based on how much money she or he returns to the treasury? Or how much he or she did for the community within the five (5) years? I support the elected representative meeting the needs and not the CEO as it is going now. So I

suggest Minister, before you leave here, put the CEO right in this Siparia Regional Corporation for me, please!

❖ **Francis Paul (Male African 60's)**

Good afternoon to all, the name is Francis Paul former Councillor, for Moruga district and I am here representing Buenos Ayres; Buenos Ayres is a small community almost in the middle of nowhere. Minister Khan in terms of Rural Development, you would have understood why some rural communities have been neglected; Buenos Ayres is so close to Point Fortin and so close to Siparia but yet development is so far away from the community of Buenos Ayres. Two things I want to raise; in terms of the landfill, recycling and garbage collection, in the expanded role of Local Government Reform; will each municipality be responsible for their own landfill?

There is a challenge in terms of garbage collection and the distance the Municipal Corporations have to go to dump the waste. A case in point, just on the Siparia old road, the Corporation puts up two signs, no dumping and "they" are actually dumping garbage on the signs; so there is now a new dump on the Siparia old road which is really causing a serious threat. The next issue I would like to raise, in terms of Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Local Government; in terms of under the new system when talking about devolution of power and empowering communities, what role will be played in terms of developing the Local Cottage Industries. In terms of Agriculture, moving from Primary production to processing, to assisting the communities like what NEDCO does on a national basis. Will that happen within the Local Municipalities? Thank you.

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

Yes, I need to respond to those two points, first and foremost, I was very complimentary of the first respondents in terms of Disaster and Preparedness; the worst performing aspects of Local Government technology over the years is in garbage disposal. We have been disposing of garbage the same way, as we have disposed of it since the 1950's, I said I met a very "high pile" on Local Government Reform, the second highest pile, was on modern methods to dispose of garbage, nothing never happened. This is one area that I plan to have a proper discourse on and to come up with firm proposals before the Local Government transformation processes takes place.

We cannot continue to fill landfill sites and keep putting more fills over them, without separating or recycling garbage, or having modern garbage disposal mechanisms. That is a classic example of third-world countries, and I am working on that feverishly. The second point, Agriculture obviously has a critical role to play in Rural Development; because rural communities are agricultural communities. If you listen to what the Prime Minister is saying; he is focusing a lot of this new administration's efforts in the area of agriculture and agriculture production.

Our food import bill is six billion (\$6,000,000,000) dollars and when the Governor of the Central Bank inadvertently told us, who were the biggest user of foreign exchange in the

country; the biggest user of foreign exchange in this country is PriceSmart; and that is imported “stuff”, so we have to go back to buying local, like Dr Williams in the sixties (60’s). Buy local and eat local food, and that will be the trust in agriculture and the Rural Development Minister is working very closely with the Minister of Agriculture in rolling out our plans.

❖ **Bernard Hinds- Vice President of the Siparia/Erin Cocoa and Allied Association (Male, African, 60”s)**

My concern is firstly: land tenure, I’ve been in agriculture for the past thirty-five years. I got into agriculture due to Ms. Muriel Donawa Mc Davidson, that is in the years gone by and for all these years we’ve been clamouring for regularization. I represent a lot of farmers in this area- from Erin, Santa Flora, Palo Seco and thing; everybody at this point in time is still waiting for that piece of document. Governments came and governments go and nobody seems to be paying attention to agriculture; no government, at all. It seems like nobody want to eat? Right now I hungry; I going home to eat some provision, it important. Another thing too is the allocation of plants. Now we looking to revamp the citrus industry in this country. I’m a certified plant provocation person; our problem is obtaining plants from the nurseries. I believe that the people who are edified in these areas they need to pay more attention to these farmers.

Another thing is water; I am a pig farmer, I recently introduced two cattle to my farm - turkeys, ducks, fowls; the problem is with water. They promised to dig ponds for us. The Extension Officer called me recently and asked me if I interested in the pond; I say well we clamouring for that for the longest while. Nothing is being done and the WASA water is inadequate for our projects. Well, we can’t do short term planting at all; we business is about cassava and plantain and so forth. And as you say, Mr. Minister, that our import bill is too high for food and if you pay some more attention to the small people down here, who crying out to you, when time, elections time we see you guys and our cry is always there. Please attend to our cries!”

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

The minister already addressed the issue of food production and the role of Local Government; however he proceeded to respond as follows:

I was just coming to say, he has hit the nail on the head. Three big bugbears in agriculture are land tenure, water management and the third one he didn’t mention is marketing. I speak to the Minister of Agriculture, I am not an expert in agriculture but those are the three main issues. Once we get solutions for those three issues I think we well on our way to increasing agriculture production.

❖ **Peter Sozano- Businessman and President of the Evolution Go-Carting club (Male, African, mid 40's)**

Now a lot has been mentioned and it sounds really good and I support a lot of your ideas but all work and no play make Jack a dull boy and our club has been set up in the area to bring the young people out and do things that are positive. We have had a lot of support from Mr. Doodnath here, to make it possible and we are trying. You mentioned the Santa Flora to Palo Seco stretch, we have a plan for that stretch; we have a plan for this area that will change the way people look at South. It's also a plan that's supposed to roll out into schools because we want to create safer young drivers. I lived in London for twenty years and before I went to London when people get in an accident they go to the hospital; while I'm there I'm hearing, when they crash they die. This carting club could create something in schools that could create safer young drivers; a lot of parents wouldn't be crying today. So if we could get support from you all to have a facility for our club we could roll that into different areas and help the community development as well; it is a community development club. That's my contribution.

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

Well said, and I think you will have the support; you speak to Chairman of the Corporation.

❖ **Tracey, Male Participant (East-Indian, late 30's)**

Good evening Ministers, I'll just be one minute. Minister, I want to commend you on an excellent presentation. What I want to say is you spoke about the level of detail needed to take us to being a developed country and at the same time you spoke about the fact that the plan is not complete; you are waiting for the consultations to be completed; look at the body of suggestions that have come from the public before you go forward with the plans. I would just like to ask a couple pointed questions to see where you all are thinking of heading if not, decisions been made already regarding a couple of issues.

The system sounds fantastic; it's very dynamic. I would like to know, in these lean times, do you all have a ceiling on the budget to make this transformation a reality? And if you do have a ceiling, what is that ceiling? Because we all know we live in lean times in terms of revenues from oil and gas. You speak of the Corporations being in charge of their development in their particular region or borough or city. Then, can you illustrate a little bit more on what it is the actual role of the Ministry of Rural Development then? Because I'm not tying it in; I'm not seeing the link, if you can just illustrate that for me.

Also, you put a chart that showed possible thirteen committees. Is the legislation, Minister Young, going to provide for specific numbers of committees? Because for example, in Siparia Regional Corporation we have thirteen members of council and if you have thirteen committees, are you going to legislate for that or are you going to leave that up to the regional corporations?

Last but not least, whereas Ministries of Health, Works and Transport, Culture and Education would now have some of their responsibilities come under the purview of the

Corporations, do you all foresee any; one, redundancy in terms of jobs and two, I know I am just predicting the answer- If there is no redundancy is there going to be a systematic absorption of workers into the regional corporation? Thank you very much; I look forward to your answers.

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

Let me just say there obviously there will be no redundancies; as the process unfolds people will be reallocated. What I can tell you is there will be the creation of a significant number of new jobs; that is a fact. In terms of a cap for the transformation process; the transformation process itself, the process is cheap you know. The process is just hosting a consultation like that; paying some lawyers in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and setting up committees to work out the plan. The money really is in the implementation of the new governance structure in the regional corporations. I went to town to identify where monies could come from when I made the example of the recreation grounds; four million for a hundred and thirty-something grounds whereas the Ministry of Sports through the company spending hundreds of millions of dollars on grounds. It's just a poor allocation process in terms of where you get the best value for money; that basically is what will happen.

The country, let me just get one other thing straight, the last budget that Mr. Manning had in 2010 was forty-five billion dollars, 2010 you know. The last UNC budget was 63 billion dollars you know; check 45, 55 is 13 billion dollars extra, okay. The issue ladies and gentlemen is that for 1.3 million people, 50 and 55 billion dollars is a lot of money to run a country you all. It is just the allocation of resources, the haemorrhaging, the corruption, the mismanagement and the inefficiencies in the system. Once we get that right, this country, when you look at the quantum of expenditure that passes through, you want to look and see what you got for it. Because the inefficiencies in the system absorb the money like a sponge and you do not get delivery for the type of resources that we got.

Let me just make one more point that I forgot to make in my presentation, is productivity. I said it to the level of all the other constituencies but let me just close by saying this- the lowest productivity, probably in any arm of Government is Local Government. You cannot go to a Regional Corporation office ten o'clock and meet anybody. When you look on the roads to see where the gangs are eight o'clock, it ain't have nobody working on the road. So all this talk about Local government reform and empowering Local Government, you all have to get all of you all act together you know; because the government is not going to spend money to waste it you know. I don't want to say put that in your pipe and smoke it but I almost mean that."

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

Just to follow-up on you last point on the thirteen committees. It is something we going to have to look at, recognizing, of course, the resources, I mean we face the same issues in Parliament with the number of joint select committees and statutory parliamentary

committees etc. So, I am not going to commit now and say one - it is going to be thirteen definite committees and two - if we legislate we going to have to bear in mind how you going to man these things, the resources etc.

❖ **Dr Boodoo - Member of Parliament for Fyzabad (Male, East-Indian, late 50's)**

Good night ladies and gentlemen, I want to say a special welcome and thank you at the same time to Ministers Khan and Young and welcome to Siparia: Siparia is actually part of the constituency of Fyzabad and also to my parliamentary colleagues from Point Fortin, La Brea and Senator Addison Bash. Like Minister Khan, I have deep roots in Fyzabad, I was born Avocat St John's Trace and now the newly elected member of parliament for Fyzabad. Like you minister, I share the view, especially with regards to the lack of development to the stationary development in Fyzabad main road and was very pleased to hear you mention, and I quote know, "economic analysis not being the basis for rural development" and I agree with you because in the last six months I have actually attempted to get a second bank into Fyzabad. We had someone come and visit and of course when they do the math's, it doesn't make sense. I have also attempted to speak with some of the food companies to come and look but again when they do the maths it's not feasible. So I hear you talk about direct government intervention and planting the economic seed in Fyzabad and I do look forward to that. And of course, Fyzabad main road does need development as you mentioned High-noon is still there. And of course, you would remember the days of HILO as a striving grocery and so on. Just to also support you in terms of; just to mention as well, ecotourism and to mention the Oropouche Lagoon would lend itself to that type of project as well as the revival of agriculture; in some areas it is a mixed constituency in terms of both rural and urban areas. I also want to commend the citizen engagement aspect of your presentation; I want to commend you as well on your excellent presentation. I think it does have an important role in Local government and just to also say that public health issue is one I would be happy to see dealt with.

As the former Chairman of the South-West Regional Health Authority I had the situation where in terms of both public health inspectors; some were employed by the Ministry of Health and some by the RHA and practically as well with regards to the county medical officer of health, who would be employed by the Ministry of Health but would have RHA employees under him. So it did create that dichotomy and I really think that needs to be dealt with once and for all and I think Local Government is the perfect opportunity for that to happen. I also want to agree with you that they don't see it as a threat to the Member of Parliament; in fact, it supposed to be a symbiotic relationship in terms of helping the Member of Parliament in terms of infrastructure. I do agree with you that law-making of course is our primary concern but I will close by saying that the second most important function of a Member of Parliament is the oversight of Government function, of course, you will appreciate that. So we look forward Minister to your development and again, I thank you."

## 5.0 CLOSING

To conclude the proceedings of the local government consultation at Plaza Siparia in Siparia, Minister Young thanked all who came out and contributed to the continuous success of the consultations. He reiterated that they have been mandated to get this done and it will trickle down to the citizens. Minister Khan added that this was the 4<sup>th</sup> Consultation thus far and it was a success. He reminded the audience that the issue of Local Government Reform has the 'direct buy-in of the Prime Minister' and he encouraged citizens to get rid of self-doubt, to believe in themselves and to support the Administration's efforts in making it a reality. He thanked them for their participation and for their presence.



SIPARIA CONSULTATION

## 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. There was initial hesitation by Siparia participants to present their input to local government reform. There was a sense of great support for points raised by Ministers Khan and Young; evident by a great amount of applause and chants of approval by several participants.

There were approximately 210 (60%) male participants and 140 (40%) female participants. The majority (75%) of participants represented the age range 30 – 70 years. There was less than 5% representation of participants under the age of 30 and approximately 20% of participants over the age of 70. The majority of participants (85%) appeared to be middle-class income earners with a few from low-income and approximately 10% high-income class. There was 75% representation from the Afro-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 25% being a majority of Indo-Trinidadian and some mixed-race participants.

### 6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 14 respondents from the plenary. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	8	40 – 70 (6), under 40 (2)
Indian	6	40 – 70 (5), under 40 (1)

### 6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

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

Topic	Frequency
When will reform happen	2
Pay of the Councillors must equal work	1
Influence of Political agenda	5
Decentralization of services	1



Alternative revenue – revive agriculture: coconut, citrus	3
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – buildings, roads, parks etc	3
Fulltime Councillors	1
Proper resource allocation	3
Local Government protected by the Constitution	2
Enforcement of the Municipal Corporations Act	1
Establish a Municipal Court	1
Scrap Local Government altogether	1
Devolution of power – who is responsible for what?	4
Collection of allocations	1
Boundaries	2
Function of the Public Health Sector	1
Rodent infestation	2
Capacity building - staffing	2
Proportional representation	1
Siparia Regional Corporation not supporting communities	1
Garbage collection - responsibility	1
Land tenure	1
Water management	1
Give small enterprise fair chance	1
Community club to create safer drivers from young	1
Role of the Ministry of Rural Development	1
Ecotourism	2