

Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

Princes Town

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Princes Town West Secondary School Hall



Rapporteurs' Full Report



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1.0 OPENING

The Consultation began with the playing of the National Anthem; followed by an opening prayer by Pastor Ashwood Sinanan. The Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Wesley Gibbons, then proceeded by welcoming all present to the auditorium of the Princes Town West Government Secondary School. He reminded those present that the consultation was also being broadcasted live on Talk City 91.1 FM and welcomed the nationwide listeners. The key personnel for the consultation was introduced, amongst who were: the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan, Permanent Secretary Ms. Desdra Bascombe and Alderman Anthony Roberts.

This was followed by the welcome remarks which were delivered by the Chairman of the Princes Town Regional Corporation Alderman Aiknath Singh.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

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

2.0 WELCOME REMARKS

Chairman Councillor Aiknath Singh



Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan. Minister in the Ministry of Education and Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, Mr. Lovell Francis. Other members of Parliament, the CEO of the Princess Town Regional Corporation Mr. Jameel Chadee Ameeral. Other Chairmen, Mayors, Councillors, members of the Media, members of the Protective Service. As Chairman of the Princess Town Regional Corporation, I want to heartily welcome everyone here this afternoon to this consultation and at the end, I hope that it will bring meaningful contribution and will bear some fruits with respect to growth and development to Local Government. Why Consultation? Why Reform? Local Government transformation and modernization are required to maintain a people-centered expansion which underpinning factors include poverty, suppression, social impartiality and an expansion of understanding economic growth.

We reflect on 2006 Local Government Draft White Paper, the statement and I quote reform of the Local Government system is a pathway of fulfilment of a covenant between Government and the people to mutually work towards improvement of the quality of life of the citizens through the delivery of service through the amenities which are compatible with local needs and expectation. That was given current in the United Nation Development Program 2011, evaluation report on Local Government. Since taking Office in 2013 what the Council noticed, some of the strengths as being part of the current system, it is understood that mainly focus on central control and supervision. Which has reflected on incompetence and various sector ineffectiveness.

Some consequence may give way of inflated repetition of undertakings between Central and Local Government. Pretty experienced within the system, priorities of expanding the political administrative authority and advancement of services should be highlighted. The factors that help drive Local Government are improving provisions availability and sustainability of public goods and services through delegation of authorities at a local level. They can only be successful and competently accomplished through transformation and modernization of the current system. An American methodologist writer and lecturer Mr. Joseph Campbell once said we must be willing to let go of the life we have planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us. There are several flaws within the present Governance model and positive attributes. What we identify as positive is the development of local infrastructure, services and the involvement of communities within various projects. Strengthen of the relationship and understanding of Government and citizens. Delegation of responsibilities for managing affairs and development at the local level. Higher accessibility for citizens who public goods and services and provision of employment relief have been created. That is some of the positive aspects. Some of the weaknesses, the effect of globalization has allowed every fluctuating demands of citizens and the role of information, communication, and technology, ensuring a people-centred development has become difficult. According to the stakeholders, the analysis has identified various difficulties of the current system and some are. The legislative framework remains

obstinate and not adjustable to change. Strict bureaucratic structure, repetition of services, lack of funding, inadequate human resource, lack of consistency, planning and economic development at a local level. Lack of information, communication, a technology platform which hinders ineffective, instantaneous communication. Community participation and involvement, inadequate training, very slow rate of implementation and constant conflict and lack of trust between Councillors and administrative staff. As change is ever forthcoming countries around the world are being forced to accept alterations of development and demographics, economic, environment, technological and social factors. These alterations present decision makers with the task of reconsidering their methods of Local Government. Local Government is changing, leading to one that ran substantial political and administrative authority, local authority.

What are some of the ways forward? I don't want to highlight too much but I want the people to mention what is the way forward. I would be brief, provision of constitutional protection for Local Government. The life of the Corporation should be four years. A forming of a funding Local Government, the establishment of a Municipal Court, development of an institute for training. Classification of salaries and allowances for full-time Councillors and Aldermen and Municipal police to be under the protection of the Police Service Commission. Before I leave this platform, Mr. Minister I remember at a meeting at your office. The question was asked, what is the current situation with respect to administration building? You mentioned that presently it is being reviewed knowing that a loan was already granted. I want to indicate that our present habitable building there since 1981 is inadequate for both Council and staff. We are looking forward very early if it is that we are going to have Local Government Reform, to be able to get this building in order to house the competent people and for members of staff to perform their tasks with distinction. There are a lot of challenges, my Councillors are here on a daily basis. The administrative staff is here but whatsoever we get we try to maximise and make use and full benefit. I am pleading with you that you would look into the matter so that the Region of Princess Town would be able to have a separate administrative building. The Region of Princess Town is a blessed place and you have gas line traverse from Guayaguayare through Barrackpore. There are farmers but our resources are so limited in order to implement certain programs. I plea as Chairman of Council that this is the time not only to talk the talk but to walk the talk in order for development. Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to thank you all very much for your undivided attention and I hope that at the end of this program, you all will bring some meaningful contribution so that when the administration analyses what has been said there would be some growth in respect to Local Government Development. Thank you all very much.

3.0 MINISTER'S ADDRESS & VIDEO PRESENTATION MINISTER FRANKLYN KHAN



MINISTER KHAN

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, addressed all present and welcomed them to Princess Town West Secondary School for the consultation. He delivered his address with the aid of a video presentation which was displayed at the beginning and end of his address. The Minister gave a brief explanation of the video presentation which was shown to the audience. It was as follows, "The video you just saw illustrates a system and the dynamics that are not unfamiliar to any of us. Whether it's a river, a crack in a drain, an empty lot next door, delivering a social service to someone in need; crime and security, a blown streetlight, medical care, school repairs, a local heritage site, unemployment, waste management, a bus shelter etc. Under the current system when a community needs to get something done, it has to take a place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run to the centralised heart of government. That is fundamentally the governance issue in Trinidad and Tobago and this is what we are trying to correct."

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

He began, Good Evening for those of you who don't know I am Franklin Khan, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. I want to warmly welcome you to this eight consultation being held here at Princess Town West Secondary School. My thanks to the Chairman of the Princess Town Regional Corporation Mr. Singh for hosting us here in the Princess Town Regional Corporation. I want to publicly recognize the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland and Minister in the Ministry of Education DR. Lovell Francis. I also want to specially recognize my senatorial colleague Senator Shrikissoon; ladies and gentlemen welcome all and thank you for coming to these Consultations.

For far too often centralised Government has taken responsibility for our lives, we do not determine what happens in our communities. This process of Local Government Reform I take no paternity to it, it is the progression of a series of initiatives but somehow it never bore fruit

and I will explain that as we go along. The issue of Local Government Reform started many years ago. Miss Hazel Manning when she was Minister of Local Government did a tremendous amount of work in doing the Local Government Reform. In 2013 Minister Suruj Rambachan at the time was Minister of Local Government, he had a green paper and a white paper and all sorts of papers. When I went to the Ministry of Local Government there was a pile of reports stocked highly on Local Government Reform. Ladies and gentlemen somehow or the other it never happened. It never happened because intuitively human beings do not like to devolve power and authority. It is just part of our psychology that we maintain control and every time someone comes and say you have to give up that control you resent it. That is why this administration starting from the top is committed to Local Government Reform and this leads me on to something. I don't want to get too political in this gathering because it is a National Consultation but I take you back to the General Election Campaign. Virtually every night the Political Leader and now Prime Minister DR. Keith Rowley spoke about two transformational issues on the PNM agenda: 1. Was Local Government Reform and we are serious about it. 2. The creation of a brand new Ministry called The Ministry of Rural Development. To tell you how much accent this Government places on Rural Development we reduced the Cabinet from 33 to 23. Ten less Cabinet Ministers and still we saw it fit to have a Ministry entirely dedicated to rural development. Rural Development falls snap back into the Princess Town Regional Corporation. There are four distinctly Rural Corporations in Trinidad and Tobago. Toco/Sangre Grande, Mayaro/Rio Claro, Princess Town and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. Those are the four unadulterated rural areas. The point we are making is that since Independence the national developmental agenda has been skewed towards urban facilities. What happened there is that we created something call the East/West Corridor which is a megalopolis urbanization that spans from Diego Martin in the west to Arima in the East. Coming close on its heels is what I call the Couva/Chaguanas Complex, so central Trinidad is now fast becoming and urbanized centre and more so than the East/West Corridor. The issue of Central Trinidad is that it has the expanse to grow, it is flat land and can grow on all sides. Whereas San Fernando has certain restrictions, Port of Spain has certain restrictions but the growth potential is tremendous when it comes to the development of Couva and Chaguanas. To have rural development here what will happen, in any time you do any stringent economic analysis on any project you have to talk about market size, the rate of return and payout. When you use these analyses on projects invariably the rural areas cannot compete. I cannot tell KFC to go and open a branch in Moruga although Moruga people will be glad. The KFC managers will tell me that the market size cannot pay for an outlet; so their return on sales can never pay them for the Branch. The point I am making here ladies and gentlemen is unless there is direct government policy intervention rural development can never take place. It is a strange paradox in life because it is the PNM who have been accused of being an urban party in the past. Here it is in this new dispensation under the leadership of Dr. Keith Rowley we have seen the light and we are saying, ladies and gentlemen, you have to swing back the pendulum to a more balanced spatial development and give rural people their space.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is in the context of rural development that I implant the whole idea of Local Government Reform where we will be empowering the Corporations to handle much more than they currently do. Over the years, I know much has been said in terms of the impediments for local government. Local Government you all will recall the days when it had

the County Council, they were Nariva/Mayaro County Council, Victoria County Council, St Patrick County Council and St Andrews/St David in Sangre Grande etc. then in 1990 under the NAR they introduced the Municipal Corporation Act and really and truly to be fair the only significant thing that has happened to Local Government since Independence is the Municipal Corporation Act of 1990. Fourteen Regional Corporations were formed and they were empowered to do certain things. The story ends right there because at its most fundamental level the County Council system and the Regional Corporation system was one in the same thing. All that happened is the boundary changes but the responsibilities never changed. So in the days of the County Council, they were in charge of Cemeteries, Recreation Grounds, minor roads, minor water courses, sanitation, garbage and some aspect of Public Health. Check your portfolio now that is what it basically is. Nothing has changed fundamentally so the empowerment that the Corporations need basically to advance the schedule that they would now be responsible for is what we are trying to put right. The impediments to Local Government obviously was political interference and manipulation. Something about Trinidad and Tobago that everything seems to be political, we can't breathe. It's either a PNM breathing or a UNC breathing, we have to get away from that. So you see why this Local Government Consultation and this Local Government empowerment is so profound it's because we are going to empower communities and Corporations independent of their political stance.

The Mayor of San Fernando is here, in San Fernando all the Councillors are PI's and they only have one Alderman who is a COP. In POS, twelve Councillors are PNM the four Aldermen are PNM. In Diego Martin, the eleven councillors are PNM the four Aldermen are PNM. The same power under this new system that the Chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation will have the Mayor of San Fernando will have is the same power the Chairman of the Regional Corporation will have. It matters not whether the Chairman of the Corporation is a UNC or a PNM because you do not make Legislation for UNC and for PNM. You make National Legislation, let the chips fall where they may because if the people of Princess Town vote for a UNC Corporation that is their right. Just so it is the right if the people of Port of Spain and the people of Diego Martin vote for a PNM Corporation, you fight it out on the battlefield of politics but when the election is finished and the results come in the state has to recognize the will of the people. It is in that context the Local Government Reform Process will take place. It is not making law for PNM, it is not making law against UNC it is making law for Trinidad and Tobago and equitable distribution of authority and power to do your work.

Inadequate funding: every Regional Corporation Chairman and Councillor will know you don't get enough funds. From since 1962 in the County Council days, we didn't get enough funds. In 1990 with the Municipal Corporation Act we didn't get enough funds and as we speak 2015, 2016 you are still not getting enough funds. This time around with limited resources what we will be trying to do is allocate the funds where it is needed. I will show you how it is not the lack of funds, it is where the funds are allocated. Let me quote two examples: Recreation Grounds under the Municipal Corporation Act, outside of the major stadium in the country all recreation grounds fall under the Regional Corporation. Twenty and thirty recreational grounds as much as a hundred in a Corporation. Your budget for recreational grounds is just about four or five million dollars. Obviously, that is insufficient to maintain those grounds for a year or to do any significant work on it but hear what happens, low and behold something call the Sports

Company of Trinidad and Tobago appears on the scene. They start to put up lights, you don't know who they asked, where their list comes from or what is their priority because their priority may not be your priority. However, you as the Regional Corporation should be determined in where the priority for recreational grounds lie. Here you have the Ministry of Sports spending hundreds of millions of dollars in building pavilions and putting lights on recreational grounds that the Regional Corporation has absolutely no say in. They cannot do that in Tobago because the THA Act is written in such a way that if the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago take a plane and land in Tobago and say they come to fix a ground Mr. London will tell them where to take the next flight back. It cannot happen in Tobago and that is why we say we want to use the THA Model in this situation so that when we make a schedule for the Regional Corporations and say that you are in charge of the recreational ground, no other arm of the Government will be empowered to come into your territory. If we say you are in charge of Local Tourism Sites and Local Heritage Sites, you will be in charge of that. I will deal with the schedule that we plan to give to the new Corporation. Lastly sluggish administrative structure, I will talk about that a little later on but as we speak, even though I am saying that we are giving so much authority and power to the Regional Corporation; the Regional Corporation presently as it is, is not equipped to handle it and I make no apologies for that. The Regional Corporation is understaffed, under-resourced and they do not have the right skill sets to undertake their responsibilities. There are no engineers in the Regional Corporation, there are no auditors, there are no supply chain managers, there are no quantity surveyors, they are no project managers; all these are skills that you need to execute your work. The culture of competencies and the culture of efficiency is not something that permeates the Regional Corporation. Let me tell you something I am the Minister of Local Government and I am the first to admit one of the most unproductive parts of Government is Local Government. You go to a Regional Office 10 o'clock, you can't find nobody and all of you all know that. You go to look for the gangs 8 o'clock and they disappear and they go home already. They are not working for their money. You cannot say you're going to a state agency a Government office 10 o'clock and you cannot find a secretary to ask a question. Far less for the CEO and the road superintendent, and the County superintendent etc. If we are giving you the authority and the power it comes with some responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen the point I want to make here now is that the Ministry of Local Government is not Local Government, the Ministry of Local Government is Central Government. Local Government resides at the level of the Corporations that is why it is a part of the Government policy to retire the Ministry of Local Government. When this transformation process is completed there will no longer be a Ministry of Local Government because I cannot empower you and have a big stick over your head. Too many things have to come to the Minister, I spent half of my day approving things that I does ask the PS if I have to approve it. That supposed to be the Chairman or the CEO of the Corporation job to do that. Too much ministerial time is spent, a Minister is supposed to chart policy framework for the country and to talk strategic things. He cannot be tied up in signing leave and approving a five thousand dollars or a ten thousand dollars for somebody. You have a budget, you debate the budget and you have your allocation, spend it as you see fit you determine the policy in your area. Why should you have to come to the Minister for box drain and then he's asking you if you are building the box drain in Manahambre why don't you build it in St Madeline? That is not his

business that is the business of the Council. Local Government Ministry will be no more in a couple years' time and the Ministry of Rural Development will mushroom to its rightful place.

So our vision for Local Government as we say is a fully operationalized and network Government system. It is people centred and it is really giving the communities the power to handle their own affairs. Let me deal specifically now for the next 15 minutes or so with our specific proposal. The PNM 2015 Manifesto indicated a vision for Local Government which seeks to remove all the red tapes and bureaucracies that prevents Local Government bodies from doing their work in an effective and efficient manner. We plan to revolutionize that, what we are saying is that the PNM Manifesto has now been adopted as official government policy so everything you see in the manifesto is in fact government policy which we plan to implement. I will now deal with for the next 15 minutes with the specifics of what we plan for the Local Government Reform. Keeping in mind ladies and gentlemen I am outlining to you what we plan to do but we are not going to do what we plan except we have your buying to it. That is what these consultations is all about. That is why we didn't prepare a Green Paper or a White Paper because there is a sting in the tail with that. If we come with our hands swinging and say we come to consult with you what do you want? You would say well you should have brought a document with you let me read it and then comment on it. However if you bring a document on the other side you can say well you all have already planned and you all know what you all are doing and only come to fool us and say you're consulting. We prefer to wipe the slate clean, give you the basic concepts that we want to articulate and let you give us the feedback as to what you want. First and foremost:

Secure Funding- ladies and gentlemen any part of the world you go Local Government authority is empowered to collect and retain local taxation. New York, London, Manchester, Liverpool, the cities collect their own Municipal taxes. If the Ministry of Finance is responsible for tax collection, the Ministry of Finance officers, in which half would not be even living in Princess Town their incentives to collect the taxes will not be as strong as if the Princess Corporation has the responsibilities to collect the taxes and keep the taxes and spend it within their region. You would therefore have greater compliance because the officers now will pick up the rolls and say these are the properties that are supposed to pay taxes. You send out your officers and when March reach and the time expire you will go and say boy, interest is starting to accrue, pay your taxes. When you have that level of connection with the community you will pay your taxes and then people will be more encouraged to pay their taxes now. They know that their taxes will do something for Princess Town and the taxes not going into some bank account in Port of Spain to be redistributed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Obviously that will call for serious legislative changes to give you the power to collect and maintain your taxes because as we speak now the Government has one account. This is called the Consolidated Fund and every single cent that the Government collects goes into that account. We will have to fundamentally change the Law so that you can establish an account on behalf of the Government; collect the taxes, retain the taxes and then have a system to implement it.

Executive Authority- we are trying to pattern the Tobago House of Assembly model, Councillors cannot be part time anymore and your salaries are so low because the Salary Review Commission deems you to be part time so they adjust your salary to suit. Just as how Members of Parliament are deemed to be part time and obviously any Member of Parliament knows that

a Parliament job is not part time and so we will have full time Councillors. We will have some form of executive authority whether it will look exactly like the THA or it will be a deviation from the THA it will all depend on the views expressed by you all. The THA has an Executive Council we are looking at modelling something similar to that probably not identical to it, to have a Council to adjudicate. For example you may have a Secretary for Infrastructure and Public Health and those type of things. We are playing around with the idea and we really want to get to what you ask. However it is very likely, again from your consultation that Chairmen and Mayors will have to be elected Councillors. So the days of Aldermen Mayors and Aldermen Chairmen and there are a lot of you here, May well be over. This is not cast in stone it depends on the consultation of the people but if we going with the THA model the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly cannot be an Alderman. He is virtually the Prime Minister of Tobago and by the same token if we empower the Local Government Corporations in almost like State Government so the Chairman of the Princess Town Corporation will come like the State Governor of Georgia. The Governor of Georgia, it matters not whether he is a Republican or a Democrat, Obama can't tell him what to do in his state. He has the autonomy to run his state as he sees fit, Federal Government has different responsibilities. While we are not implementing that system in its entirety it resembles it so you at the Regional Corporation will have the power and the authority to run your Corporation as you see fit obviously with over sight.

Accountability- Ladies and gentlemen it has been said many times and I will say it again, we give you authority, we give you power, you have to be accountable. Let me tell you all one time, you are not spending your money; you are spending the people's money. There is no bank account and the only thing that I does see and that is a part of the Corporation Act I don't like at all is the Mayor's Fund. The Mayor can't have no fund, it is the people's fund. The point I am making is that you are spending public funds and when you are in charge of public funds you have a sacred responsibility to protect those funds and use it in the interest of the people. That is why there is something in Law called In the Public's Interest and when something is done in the public's interest is the highest form of law. Democracy recognizes that the ultimate interest is the public interest. It is not secular interest, it is not partisan interest, it is not family interest, it is not business interest, and it is not individual interest, it is the public interest. You have power, you have authority; you have to be accountable. Under this new system we are hoping that you will get your allocations, you will collect some taxes and it will be topped up with state allocations. There will be no Ministry of Local Government you will be accountable to the Minister of Finance for what you spend and you will be accountable to the Auditor General on how you spend it. What you spend and how you spend it is the two most important factors. You are authorized to decide how you spend it once you spend it under the guidelines of the Procurement Legislation. Most importantly the Auditor General will be looking at you with a Hawke's eye because you cannot play the fool with the public's money. Ministry of Finance, Auditor General and how you perform, the Corporation will be accountable to you all because every three years you have a chance to vote them in or vote them out. So if you didn't like how they perform you know what to do. So they are accountable to you as the burgesses and then they are accountable to the Minister of Finance and to the Auditor General as to how they spend the money.

New Responsibilities – The third area and this is the most...probably...apart from collection of taxes and executive authority is new responsibilities. I outlined the same schedule of responsibilities under the county council system. I outlined the same schedule of responsibilities under the municipal corporation. This reform exercise is going to give significantly more responsibilities in terms of your schedule of work and any other transformational process. First and foremost: **School Maintenance** – As we speak now, one company called the Education Facilities Company (EFC) is responsible for two hundred (200) plus secondary schools and over six hundred (600) primary schools and every September 3rd or September 4th, you know what the headline would read, ten schools ain't open and you looking to see how much ain't open. If the school maintenance program fell under the regional corporation where you know in your space called Princes Town you have five (5) secondary schools and say thirty (30) primary schools, isn't it a more focused attempt so that when you award a contract very likely to a person or to a company from Princes Town to repair a primary school, it would be incumbent on you as a Councillor to make sure that that school repair takes place in time for when school reopens? And it is a smaller cadre of work and it is in smaller batches that you will be implementing this program, so it has to be more efficient because you have buy-in into it because the council that is supervising this work is a Princes Town council. Very likely the contractor who is doing it is from the area, so what better way to do it? **Social Services delivery** – Secondly and probably the most important addition to the portfolio of Local Government is the delivery of social services. Ladies and gentlemen, let me just talk about Social Services. Check the budgeted allocation for social services over the last ten (10) years. Every year is a couple billion dollars. We have spent almost \$30 billion in the last ten (10) years to deliver social services to the underprivileged and those in need and it ain't help the poor people you know. There is still poverty in Trinidad that is not commensurate with the amount of money we spend on social services because everything is seeping through a crack and is seeping through inefficiencies and in some cases, corruption. The people that this money has been earmarked for is not receiving it. So an old lady wants to get her pension; she has no money in the bank, she has no income but she taking two (2) years running around from Port of Spain to Princes Town to San Fernando for some officer to say yes you are entitled to a pension and they want to see your bank account and they want to know if you have family abroad and they want to know if they sending money for you and they want to know if the house on your name and if the house on your children name. Granted there has to be a screening exercise but it is so cumbersome and it is so unfriendly to the people who are wanting in need that it is not effective. You know more than anybody else who are the families at risk, where does intense poverty reside, which family is suspicious of child abuse or incest or crime. As it is said a society is judged by how it treats the vulnerable; vulnerability of children, of the aged and the families who are at risk. **Local Contractors** – I've said that all along during the consultation. Within reason, we would want the contracts that are awarded by Local Government to reside within your community. Obviously, if you have a community that does not have a qualified contractor you would have to go outside. When you have local contractors or somebody from your corporation, the chances are that the workers would be from here. When they get their pay they will buy in local groceries, local shops so you have the multiplier effect in the community. So by and large, we will want to institute a system where corporations work within the confines of the constitution remit you have to understand that anybody is entitled to work anywhere in

Trinidad and Tobago, so we will have to devise a system where it will have some sort of rating process to give preference to local contractors under local jurisdiction. **Municipal Policing** – We have gone public on that, in our manifesto you will see 100 police officers per corporation. As we speak I am in discussion with the Minister of National Security as to how we want to implement this program but we should be starting the recruiting exercise very shortly. There are some issues in terms of municipal policing but they could work hand in hand with national policing because it really makes sense for a corporation of a borough to have its own municipal police. As we speak they report to the CO; there is a thinking in the Ministry of National Security that it is a military and security function and somehow or the other they must have a line of authority that reaches the commissioner of police because the CO of Princes Town can't discipline a superintendent. The disciplinary function has to come from the police service commission and by extension, the commissioner of police but that is legislative. Administratively, we will be proceeding shortly to recruit those hundred (100) police officers per corporation. **Developmental Control** – We will be implementing new legislation so that more authority will be given to the local Government corporations to approve plans, to approve buildings, to approve even some subdivisions within their own community. **Infrastructure works** – Again we want to put the municipal corporations in charge of infrastructure according to the Act. I quote the example of Sports Company and I would quote another example in terms of infrastructure. There is a programme in the Ministry of Works called PURE that spends approximately one billion dollars a year in road paving. At least 40% of the roads that are paved in PURE are minor roads that fall under the jurisdiction of the Regional Corporation. If the Regional Corporation is restructured with the quality of staff to implement projects like these, that is four hundred million dollars coming your way. It is not that Minister Hinds want to pave minor roads you know it is because the Local Government architecture and the Local Government infrastructure does not have the manpower and the expertise to manage some of those projects, that is why it has been centralised in a Ministry of Works under a particular programme called PURE. So when we go through the Reform process and we put in new structures in the Regional Corporations then and only then the monies are available. It is just that the money is now allocated in a very centralised model and the decentralisation process that will bring the type of resources that you all need in the Regional Corporations. **Disaster Management** – I want to congratulate the regional corporation, this is one aspect where first respondents are doing an excellent job. Finally, **Involvement of Civil Society** – Governance is about people. I am sorry Minister Young is not here today but he is contemplating including in the legislation making it mandatory to consult on certain decisions. It is all well and good to have a vote every three (3) years and you have no say after that. We may even make it mandatory in the legislation that before certain things happen in your community, you have to consult. The state of Vermont, one of the most beautiful states in the United States does not have any fast food restaurants. Vermont has no McDonald's, no Home Depot because the people of Vermont have decided not to allow big corporations into their state so that small businesses can thrive. It is a revelation not to see the big M sign but that is their right. If Wal-Mart wants to go into a community to build a store, Wal-Mart could know Obama, he could know Hilary Clinton, that can't help him. Is town council meeting in his tail and if the town says you can't come there, you can't come there. That is how American democracy works and that is the type of power we want to give to local communities.

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

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

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

4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

❖ **Richard Moore (Male African 30s)**

Goodnight, special goodnight to Dr. Lovell Francis and Minister Franklin Khan Princess Town Regional Corporation Chairman and CEO. Mr Franklin Khan, now that Princess Town Regional Corporation has all these new developments, HDC development and they are understaffed right now. What do you all have in plan to deal with that? Because plenty of the work that Corporation is doing right now cannot facilitate everyone. What you all have in plan for that because they are understaffed now, bad.

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

I don't want to say because of the Local Government Reform exercise we put everything on hold. If there is need for additional staff we would look at it in the context of infrastructure, let me just inform you initially that the HDC developments are not immediately handed over to the Corporations to come under Corporation jurisdiction. So the HDC, for a while sir will be responsible for their own infrastructure. The general growth of Princess Town I know is an issue, the chairman brought up your issue with the Regional Corporation Headquarters that is a major concern.

However, we don't want to proceed with a Regional Corporation Headquarters as yet, not understanding what our new structure will look like. We don't want to build a building and one year after it becomes redundant. So we will probably come up with this exercise to a schematic plan as to what a new Regional Corporation Headquarters will look like. The flagship of Regional Corporation Headquarters is really Chaguanas and that has been a well-designed building.

I don't think it will look much different from Chaguanas but we also want to have the local input for the exercise. By and large, I know Princess Town has a facility problem in terms of where you are presently housed but you are not unique in that Mayaro/Rio Claro has the same problem. You will be surprised to know where Diego Martin resides so it all shows the level of neglect that was shown to Regional Corporations over the years. We are trying to make it right, it will take some time with limited resources now but you have our commitment with that regard.

Moderator:

Minister the concern about housing that was raised by the gentleman, is it envisioned that Local Government Corporations will adopt some level of responsibility for the housing of the constituents, of the burgesses?

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

For the time being no because you cannot just hand out everything to the Corporation. What they have now if you expand their portfolio 100% then that would be a major jump. I didn't delve too deeply in Rural Development but we will be coming up with something call

a Rural Housing Policy. As we speak Fairfield has already been established but it is not my intention to go into no rural community, bulldoze 50 acres of land and build 1500 houses. It destroys the community and has no nexus with the villages. What we will have is a Rural Housing Program where we go into individual villages and build 30 or 40 houses and expand the villages. So that the village will now incorporate the housing estate and not vice versa. In other words, people are coming from all over Trinidad and they settling in Fairfield. You don't know from whence they came, there is no identity and it's something we have to live with. Under the new housing administrative, especially as we come into the rural areas we will be going more with village expansion than these massive housing estates that resemble Edinburgh 500, Maloney, and La Horquetta.

❖ **Premchand Sookoo, Chairman Regional Corporation Penal/Debe (Male Indian 60's)**

A pleasant goodnight to one and all Member of Parliament for Princess Town Mr. Padarath, Chairman of the Princess Town Regional Corporation and all you very important persons who are here this afternoon to be part of this consultation on Local Government Reform. On the 13th of April, I am exactly 33 years in Local Government. Having heard the Honourable Minister indicating to us is a concern to me. I am Chairman of Penal/Debe, what he said there you go 10 o' clock you can't find anybody. That does not happen in Penal/Debe, I am not defending the staff but it does not happen in Penal/Debe.

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

Well, I am so glad to hear that.

Premchand Sookoo

Mr. Minister, you are asking us, I have told some years ago, former Minister Hazel Manning that apparently this exercise is in futility. It was a done deal in that plan, that Green Paper Local Government Reform. Penal/Debe was going and Rio Claro/Mayaro was going that 12 Regional Corporation to form that consultation. I am wondering the same vein this afternoon whether it's a done deal because you're asking us whether 12 is sufficient or 14 is sufficient. I would say we need to have more Regional Corporation, I would tell you next week why.

However, Mr. Minister, you said that it's a proposal, it is an official policy and of course if it is an official policy we are mandated to carry out that official policy. So this tells me, it's a done deal while I will support Mr. Minister the question of consultation in Local Government Reform.

I am for that if we are saying that you want to have the THA model my friends who are here Councillor Terry Rondon, Mr. Roberts, my good self, Chairman Hazare. We are here for several years, 15 years and if they are having a THA model it is only obvious, consideration is to be given to the Councillors who made at least two terms or three terms to get at least a pension. If I should go home tomorrow morning I will not be going home 33 cents is that fair. A Member of Parliament once he or she completes two terms in office is entitled to a

pension. I am saying if it's according to the THA model if you really want to have transformation in Local Government, make it viable. At least the electorates in Trinidad and Tobago will be proud of Local Government.

It will give us the opportunity to continue and to continue. Having received, you indicated in your final comments that this Local Government Election will be held sometime in October or November in the old system or the present system. Having received the EBC report on the changing of some of the boundaries, you know what amaze me, Mr. Minister, I don't know if you have the power. Some of the Electoral Districts in Trinidad, 2500 electorates. Some of the divisions in Deigo Martin 11000, Penal/Debe, Princess Town 8000, more is that fair. I am saying a Councillor in Princess Town and a Councillor in Point Fortin, a Councillor in Port of Spain receive the same thing out of pocket allowances Thank you all very much Mr. Minister.

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

He will have his day in the sun when we go to Penal next week Wednesday but just to give him the assurance. Nothing is pre-set and with regards to the boundary changes we are not coming here to say there will be 12 Regional Corporations as we speak there is 14. Unless there is very convincing evidence to change that it will not be changed.

❖ **Phillip Quan Kim (Male, Mixed, 50s)**

Goodnight everyone, if I should use the quote from Martin Luther King that says, the beginning of the end of a man's life starts when he remains silent on the things that matter. It is with that, that I am driven here tonight. Only about 4 o'clock this evening I heard about this consultation and I decided to pop in because I think I have a contribution to make. My question or more of a comment is not so much as to the policies that you all have in place or the programs that you all want to implement. It is more about the how and by whom. How are we going to do it; these are the things that I think should be consulted? I think we can appreciate that most of the programs that you want to implement have been well thought out but I am not sure whether or not how are we going to implement it are all well thought out. For example, when you mention a while ago about graduates getting jobs we may think that once you go to school and you're qualified you are entitled to a job. Failing to realize that you should earn that job, as against to having an entitlement to it. Am only saying that to introduce the topic of reformation and development. What are we to reform and what are we to develop? Are we just reforming policies and systems? And what are we developing? Is it that we are developing space? My suggestion here tonight is that we should develop people first. So that whatever plans and programs you have, when they buy into it that is the time that these things will come into fusion. How do we develop people? How do we reform people? It is said that statistics will show that in rural areas unemployment is very high. What is also very high in quantity is space. How do we marry those two? People's time and space we have. When I was a young man growing up in Bastille Village Moruga I actively helped with the building of the Community Centre by just

passing some blocks. I ask the question why we have Community Centres and an elderly man mentioned to me. He said he think that the idea came about when our then Prime Minister DR. Eric Williams visited Nigeria and India. What he observed there was that in every village he went to there was a tree in which the elders would sit and that became as the Council. What DR. Eric Williams did was to replace that tree with a building to be used for the very purpose that the elders were using it for in those countries. Unfortunately, we did not do that and it has generated some problems today that I don't know how we are going to solve. Secondly, you mentioned about trying to eradicate poverty. In Trinidad and Tobago, the only thing we are poor in is not money. Not having money alone is not poverty but being poor in ideas, being poor in commitment, being poor in determination. These are some of the things that we have to address, we just can't give poor people money or people without money and say just because you're poor you are going to grow and develop. We have to make them understand, I am just raising these points to show that we have to be careful as to how are we going to reform and develop.

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

I would just like to say that human development is a holistic thing, largely based on the education system. On the issue of how and who will do it, let me make a statement; in all the consultations you get this undercurrent from people. Certain people in the consultation think that change could never happen for the better and ladies and gentlemen for Heaven's sake as a people we have to have confidence in ourselves to do things. We have educated three generations of Trinidadians since Independence, we have to have trust in our own ability to make a better life for us in Trinidad and Tobago. This new Local Government System is the most fundamental change in the Governance structure since Independence. Let us embrace it and let us make it happen, it may not happen 100% right, it may not even happen 80% right but if it happens 70% right we would be much better off than where we are today.

Moderator:

Ms. Bascome a part of the gentleman's concern was regarding how it will relate to the process. I think he probably required some clarity with regards to the process; we have the consultations now, what next.

➤ **Response from Ms. Desdra Bascome:**

Okay in addition to having the consultations the technical committee which has been set up by the Cabinet are in the process of doing a policy paper. We proposed to have that completed by the end of April. It will be reviewed by the ministerial committee, we will put some of the information on our Facebook page and on our websites so you the members of the audience can get feedback in terms of what your contributions ended up as. Far too often you have consultations and then you do not hear anything about it after. We do not intend to go down that road. Once all has been debated and massaged we will take the document to Cabinet for their purview, review, and final decisions. The technical committee will also be a part of an implementation committee because I am sure that all of you know

that implementation is one of our more serious problem in the region. So that is the process.

❖ **John Brathwaite (Male, African, 50s)**

Good night to one and all, earlier on I was happy to hear Minister Khan refer to the need for the reform of the organisations of Regional Corporation as well as to use some of our many graduates and perhaps even students from some of the tertiary institutions. Every year we generate hundreds or thousands of young people who can add intelligence and who can add management expertise and that sort of thing. However, what these students and graduates lack is experience and one of the things that you can probably look at is perhaps having a second MET program with some of the private sectors so that you can have experienced and qualified people who can be on loan to Corporations. They can add an input and change the whole face and performance of the Corporations.

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

To me that is an excellent idea, we have to have the training component to it. Obviously, we will not bring in a group of young people and tell them to run this because they will not be able to do it but do not underestimate how quick they go up the learning curve. So we will have mentorship, we will have experienced people both from the public and the private sector but at the end of the day we want to have a very robust organization delivering the goods and services to the people. Your point on training is extremely valid.

❖ **Allister Mitchell (Male, African, 30s)**

I am the President of the South/Central farmers division, I am a system analyst by training but I am proud to be a farmer. I am a third generation farmer and the association that I represent we are forty-odd members and are centered in the New Grant area. We were formed in 2014 and since then we have been able to observe first hand from an organizational standpoint some of the shortfalls in our community. This forum and the structure that you are proposing it meets a lot of interest for my farmers. One of the things that we don't hear however is a provision for Agriculture within that mix In terms of the community being able to feed itself.

To that end, we would like to put forward a few ideas which we hope will meet your approval or at least your consideration to help compliment the structure. In terms of that state governance model that you referred to early. So without further a due, one of the things that farmers face as a challenge is infrastructure. As the Minister of Rural Development coming from Mayaro and working with us here in the constituencies, you will appreciate the importance of infrastructure. What we would like to see would be a component of the proposed structure that deals with farmers' needs in terms of infrastructure. If we can have a resource allocation, not in terms of money but equipment in a timely response that would empower the farmers to meet the communities need for

sustainable agricultural produce. We want to couple that with a need within each of the Corporations as they would be newly constituted for a sale area.

Somewhere I would prefer it to be public as in easily accessible to the public. It will encourage the agriculture and even help the young people to understand that farming is a business. To the end of the day since the upkeep and maintenance of schools would be devolving to the Corporations we would also like to be able to have some input there. I believe it was mentioned that we are looking to have an increase local component in the school feeding program. What we are saying is that we would like to see, for instance, my organization the opportunity to meet that need within our community. Next, we are looking at quality control, all that we are doing is delivering a service from the Corporation perspective. What we would like to see is quality control in terms of works being done.

Too often roadways are done and have to be redone in the next couple of years because of the porosity of materials and the shoddy work. We believe that the road officers they are overworked, they do their best. Sometimes the Councillors they want to do their work but again the resources. Quality control will go a long way in ensuring that when these scarce resources are allocated they are used in the most effective and efficient manner. You spoke about customer service and this thing of public service is about customer service. We the public are the customers but what we will really like to see is quality control in terms of the response to needs. Something like the service industries that are regulated like T&TEC or TSTT.

You have a charter that guarantees a response by a certain time. We would like to see some accountability where if someone comes and say listen I have a very serious problem that it doesn't take two years or three years. If you know that this is supposed to have a response by one week or two weeks and it doesn't come we would like to know why. We would also like to see that level of accountability extend to the Town hall type meetings as you were speaking about where people would be able to present their questions and get answers. Thank you for your time.

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

A lot of the points you raised has really to deal with Agriculture but understand the consultation. We are talking about the issues that will be delegated to Local Government for under its jurisdiction. Agriculture is not one of those, there will still be a Ministry of Agriculture that is in charge of agricultural policies and agriculture deliverables. Just to make one thing clear on roads, there are four types of roads in Trinidad. Highways and main arterial roads which fall under the Ministry of Works; minor roads which fall under the Ministry of Local Government and by extension the Regional Corporation. Then there are Agricultural access roads which fall under the Ministry of Agriculture and there is something called orphan roads which don't fall anywhere. Orphan roads are by and large people, private developers who establish housing estates. After the lands sell, they abandon the resident and the residence will obviously call on the State to accept those roads and with time we will be accepting all those roads.

❖ **Pearl Reid (Female, African, 50s)**

I am the interim President of the New Grant Caretakers Committee. Now recently we have been having some problems I would say with the Regional Corporation but when we looked into it, they were saying that the fault was not theirs and tonight Minister Khan kind of cleared the air on that. We have a Ground in our area which is the New Grant Recreational Ground, there are a lot of young people who use this ground. The ground is not lighted which the youths and they would like to have. The toilet facilities the door was broken by certain people. Much to say to the Regional Corporation today I went to the back and I saw that there were four steel doors allocated there. I would like to thank you in open forum to them for this so at least we know that we are getting somewhere. Now I am passionate about the young people and within the Princess Town, Moruga/Tableland area I find nothing is really going. I can see youths in our area have to be getting up all 4 o' clock in the morning to go all Cunupia, Piarco, and Maraval to work. When we have a big established area New Grant/Princess Town and nothing is going on. Not a Community Centre is being built, not a school is being built, and not a library is being built. No roads are being repaired and we are just sitting there taking that. Personally, I find that I had enough of that because it's the people in the area who are losing out. We have a big business community am not too sure what they do and if you go by them for certain funding big businesses will be giving you ten and twenty dollars. For a big area people who spending millions of dollars during the year. I think the business community in an area have certain things that they should be doing too for the community. They should not be waiting for weather is Local Government or Central Government to be doing these things. Each one takes one and I think the business communities in Princess Town and by extension Tableland, Rio Claro etc. supposed to be doing more, how far it go. There is a lot of young people within the Moruga/Tableland area, look at our ground, is there a Ground in St Marys? Is there a Ground in Indian Walk? There is a little community centre, a lady by the name of Cheryl using a little place in Indian Walk to teach children to dance and drum. All the ceiling falling out, have to be begging people to come and do certain things. I think the Moruga/Tableland area has had enough of that and it's time that we take things into our own hands with Central Government and Regional Corporation and we all work together to make sure that something happens in this area, thank you.

❖ **Joseph A. Bridgewater (Male African 60s)**

I hope of course Dr. Francis would forgive me; I'm no historian but certainly listening to the farmers of New Grant a while ago, I hope that you're not getting a hard bargain in this new process. Honourable Minister, there's no art to tell the mind construction in the face as we celebrate Shakespeare very shortly 400 anniversary but you spoke with the sincerity of purpose that convinces me, what is proposed in this transformation would see the light of day. I say this as someone who has attended Hilton Hotel with Minister Dumas and thereafter we would have had Minister Hazel Manning and recently you mentioned your own self in the context of reform in Local Government. So I am looking forward with much anticipation to the unfolding of what is going to take place. I would, however, wish that we speak about the municipal police. I remember when I used to be at the Joint Services staff

making overtures for police from the regional municipal corporation to be part of that training. It always baffled me why the municipal police were not involved to a greater extent in the context of law and protecting the citizens and I would perhaps like to ask you would there be a change in the way the municipal police operates. There was a time when we would say alright, that is a market police so he pass everybody on the road and we do whatever we want and no respect for those. In the new Local Government situation, would the municipal police have a relationship with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service such that to arrive at the point where our communities are safe? I looked at the clip and we felt assured that right in our neighbourhood we had these police who would protect us. I also want to say, Minister, through the Local Government reform process I would like to see...I don't know if it would class with education...sensitization of people within the communities to have a better response when we have matters like disasters and so on. What would the disaster management unit role in this new Local Government reform process? I thank you. I am also aligned with a company called Quality Communication Services and we would be delighted to speak with the Minister and others from time to time.

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

The municipal police are being very well handled, what I just spoke about is that we will be recruiting a hundred (100) per corporation. As we speak, I am in discussion with the Minister of National Security and the Attorney General because really and truly these municipal officers are officers of the law. They do not fall under the Police Service Commission and more importantly, they do not fall under the Police Complaints Authority. So if they misbehave, what agency of the state would be responsible for that? The present thinking is that we would be recommending that the municipal police fall under the Police Service Commission and also the Police Complaints Authority. The last point you made was the disaster management...as I said disaster management first respondents are being very well handled by the corporation but the office of Disaster Management Preparedness and Management falls under the Ministry of National Security because first respondents are just for minor disasters but if a major disaster really hits which is a major hurricane, major fires or industrial explosion or a major earthquake the disaster management raises to a higher alert level and...because at the end of the day ladies and gentlemen, disaster management is a function of National Security.

❖ **Tikchan Jaisaree (Indian Male 70's)**

Good evening to everyone. Mr Minister, you spoke about political interference and manipulation; that is like telling us the sun will stop shining in six (6) months and rain will not fall again. Not in this country of ours Mr Minister, so I am very sceptical about what you said. Secondly, you spoke about funding and tax collection with the new legislation that you're going to pass for the Local Government body. You didn't tell us where the taxes are coming from; you're going to increase my property tax to \$60,000.00 a year. Who is going to have to pay for that? The owner of the supermarket; you're going to increase his

property tax to \$80,000.00 a year. He is going to absorb that or that is going to run down to the consumer? Give us some clarification on that, please. Mr Minister, there are laws and legislation in place at this time for every organization in this country to provide every citizen with quality service. So coming to tell us here that with legislation and all this nice thing going to help us and we're going to be happy...no, it's not going to happen. So you build my confidence by giving us a little more clarification. Now if your government wants money, let the Prime Minister know close the Equal Opportunity Commission down; they are a waste of time. They are an organization inflicting injustice on the citizens of this country. How is the Local Government body going to collect taxes?

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

The setting of the tax raise and people's tax liability is a function of the Ministry of Finance. Local Government reform...all that I am saying is that the regional corporation will be empowered to collect and retain the land and building taxes. We will not be setting the rate. As we speak it is our intention to re-impose the land and property tax at the 2009 rate. I don't want to get involved in this property tax discussion here tonight but what you have happening ladies and gentlemen for the last five (5) years, no citizen of this country paid a cent in land and building taxes. That happens nowhere in the world! As a matter of fact, it is so bad, I know when I was small when the 2nd January reach, the first thing my mother want to do is go and pay land and building taxes. The old people felt that if you don't pay your land and building taxes the government will seize your property. There are a lot of people out there who scared as we speak. People prefer to pay their land and building taxes because they know it is a legitimate tax. As to what the quantum of tax will be, that is a different issue but as I speak, 2009 rates will be applied either this year or next year and hopefully when the legislative reform is completed the municipal corporations will be empowered to collect and retain land and building taxes.

❖ **Mr Panday (Male Indian 60s)**

Mr Minister, we hope that these consultations would not carry us in a position where Local Government elections be postponed. When Hazel Manning was Minister of Local Government, we had a number of consultations that even went to the parliament and each year the Local Government election was postponed. I have very little faith in politicians and with those circumstances (*audience erupts in laughter*)...I mean past ones...I mean the point I am making is I would like to see Local Government enshrined in the constitution so it goes into the supreme law and no government which comes later could in anyway chance the life of local government. The other issue is you say Tobago House...all I could say is we hope that is so. When we were in the parliament we were arguing for the THA model and what the then Prime Minister said what happen to you all? You all want fourteen (14) Prime Ministers in Trinidad and Tobago? Because what they were talking about was decentralization but not devolution. What I see in your document here, it appears to be going in the direction of devolution of power and I think that is the way to go and I think the

country should support that. Another issue, why don't we merge the municipal police together with the larceny squad and put it under the jurisdiction of the Local Government authority so we could have them working all day, all night? Another issue we have, we're going nowhere fast if we don't give Local Government real power. As it stands now, somebody made a statement about the public service commission. I say that should have no say in Local Government. What should happen is the council as the body should have the power to hire and fire and then be responsible for their actions. Right now you're in the council and somebody behaving badly in the council and you can't deal with them. They say you can't hire me, you can't tell me what to do and that leads to a certain amount of indiscipline, a certain amount of lack of productivity and that unless we give that power to the council as a whole I think that you'll have people who are functioning like Local Government without any responsibility to the council. That's an area we should look at. On the issue of taxation, as in England what happens you have the local governing bodies and they have all the local taxes, they keep it and they move forward? Having regard to our own system in which there are certain regions which are poorer than other regions, what I humbly suggest is that some taxes are collected and kept by the region, when those taxes are added up, make some ventures so that every corporation would be on equal financial footing. So that you will have no area like Beetham, where you have people just in the gutter and can't come out...the city corporation says we are coming smaller and smaller, people moving out of Port of Spain, we can't get taxes. There are certain areas in a region suffering because of that. What we need to do as central government, is really to have a holistic view of the development of the country and those circumstances taxation must work in consonance with intervention. Somebody made a statement that councillors after two terms should be given pension rights and thing. We have made several arguments to the Salaries Review Commission and what they have been saying is that you are part time so what they get is a stipend. What is happening is we must make Local Government make sure that everyone is a full-time officer? As it stands now, you want a fair day's work for a fair day's pay but when you see the councillors themselves are in a position of not given a full day's pay you have councillors saying to hell with you, you can't tell me anything. Go in the corporations and see what they doing. We have to deal with those issues from the top or we can't talk to workers. And this is the way we need to handle the situation. And when that happens then I would agree with you that we can reviews to the Salaries Review Commission and say that they are like parliamentarians and see if you could get better salaries and also pension rights for the parliamentarians. As for Princes Town, I want to talk about duplication of resources and integrity in public life. I want to ask you here today, would you investigate whether there are any councillors in Trinidad and Tobago who have CEPEP contracts and competing with the council for the same thing? Then cleaning road, the cutting grass by the side of the road and the council have people cutting grass at the side of the road. You know they cutting the same grass twice, this is the kind of accountability we need. You as a councillor cannot have a CEPEP contract whether it in your name or your friend's name, we need to go into that and deal with it. We need to have integrity legislation to deal with this because we talking about Local Government reform but it cannot take place in a vacuum. We need over-arching legislation to deal with this. For example, integrity in public life should be expanded to all them fellas in the regional

corporation who have the power to give contracts. The technical officers, we must check them too because what happens is you have a contract for \$1 million but the CO could only give contracts for five hundred, you know he bust up the contract in 5 pieces and share it with who he want. We've got to deal with that. These are the fundamental issues that Local Government reform must deal with. Unless we strengthen the Integrity Commission and the Integrity in Public Life, in fact, I feel with all the good intentions you have, I feel there would be so many obstacles and problems in the way that all your goodwill would vanish in thin air. Thank you.

➤ **Response from the Honourable Minister of Local Government Franklin Khan**

He raised a lot of good points. I just want to make a quick quip to say he's the only person to say I have no confidence in my own self and my illustrious brother also. Having said that, seriously, a couple things Mr Panday; I give this audience the assurance on behalf of the Prime Minister during my presentation, that local government elections will not be postponed and we will be sticking to that; it is an official government Prime Ministerial commitment. The issue of enshrining local government in the constitution is being actively considered by the committee as we speak. We just want to hear the views of the people; I don't want to prejudge how it will turn out but it is under active review. The other thing you raised about empowering the corporations to hire and fire: you know more than anybody else that there is something called the Service Commission in Trinidad that is deeply entrenched in the constitution. If we go there, the first thing we will be accused of is trying to politicize the employment process. These were safeguards that were negotiated in Marlborough House and it is something I think we will have to live within the foreseeable future. When you make one kind of analogy on it, it sort of stultifies progress to some extent, it makes the system inefficient, it is slow but when you challenge it all types of accusations come towards you. Finally, the issue of the municipal police: with the staffing of a hundred we are contemplating a 24 hour shift system with the municipal police and especially in rural communities like here, I could see us having a close relationship with the premiere larceny squad because that is where the major thieving takes place in rural communities. Thanks for a wonderful contribution.

❖ **Anne (Female, African, 30s)**

We were so thankful for the regional corporation to come in our community and deliver some drains but to my detriment about 14 houses away from my house there is a drain. Thank God they build the drain half high and half low, so half goes down into my neighbour's yard. The other piece about it: T&TEC put down a post for we for a long time, they stop the drain right in front of the post. That is not right. We were thankful for the drain but better they had left the invert drains to be precise. If they know they were coming to stop or to do these kind of work, they should not have come to start. That was in 2015. I have been to the regional corporation, my councillors them had helped me but now we can't see nobody. These 14 families, when have start to come from the back and higher up the road which they say our land has to be tested for box drain to run and the road to be fixed and all of these things. But they came in, we were so happy, welcomed them with

open arms and these drains are still unkempt. My family, my neighbours, half of them have to build box drains now over because these drains are not working. We would like to have some comments and views from anybody who could help us, please. Thank you.

❖ **Pooran Ramlal (Male Indian 50s)**

I love your presentation but it is nowhere near the THA model. That model was developed in 1986 by the NAR government of which I was part of the development and thing. So we have to do a lot. Their budget is \$2.5 million, we don't know what the budget would be here. Will collect the taxes for land and building from the industry? Big, big taxes, \$100,000.00 a lot. So you have to think of that very carefully. There are many more things I would like to talk about but my minute is up. Thank you.

❖ **Mr. Maharaj (Male Indian 60s)**

The consultation here tonight depends on the delivery of goods and services for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like this consultation to be extended to employees of the corporation and special sessions because they are the ones that know what is lacking in providing necessary and effective good and services to Trinidad and Tobago. And I have not heard anything...I heard about an executive that is going to be set up and I quite agree with the minister in saying no, to put it in the hands of the executive to hire and to fire because nepotism is something that I can a take along with my experience. However, what is there Mr Minister to prevent corrupt practices of goods, vehicular and equipment in the government services? I know there is the Board of Survey and what not but in my experience you have corporations taking thousands of dollars of vehicles that belong to the government and send them to the dump and say they going for safe keeping and have their friends and family taking them up, cutting them with torch and loading them on wreckers and going with them and when you speak out about it, you're being victimised and discriminated. How are you going to deal when nepotism goes with friends and those that will clean the gill of the big fish and are being protected by the big fish that they come to work, they hold a senior position and they telling you plain, I not working with Johnny Come Lately because I here all the time. I give up my time and they are not working, holding a position. You have to do their job and other people doing their job. That is existing right now in the Local Government body. I would like to know how these things are going to be done. If you write the PS, it goes back to CO, it goes into a dustbin. Call to speak to the Minister, what is it about? Write the Minister. When you write it goes into a dustbin. I would like bodies to be set up to deal directly and to investigate these complaints, enshrined in this legislation that you are going to prepare.

❖ **Derek Mathura (Male Indian 30s)**

I think as a body and as a council we need to meet to go through what has been laid out because the thing about it is, what is the long term plans? For example, you would have the 100 municipal police but what is the structure in place for that? Not only that, where are we going to house in the short term, these 100 municipal police officers? The second thing is between the proposed executive council and ministry and the state enterprises that would now form part of the delegated authority, would there be dialogue? For example, T&TEC, WASA. You don't want to T&TEC to have a development plan...to go into the regional corporation while the council itself also has a development plan. So I just want to find out what would be the dialogue between these enterprises together with council. Thank you.

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

Is a lot to assimilate there...The woman from Sixth Company, I mean I know what she is speaking about; I walk that road during elections. I just want to advise the corporation, especially the technical staff, when you're doing drains there is something called outfall. You cannot build a drain if it doesn't have an outfall. So anytime you're designing a drain you must start from the outfall and then carry it up. So if you have money to build 20 meters of drain, don't bring it from the beginning and then leave it hanging midway and the water has nowhere to go. Take from the outfall and work backwards. It's a simple exercise in engineering and drainage. The gentleman with Point Lisas, it is a challenge we know we have where it will affect two corporations: Point Fortin if they're allowed to collect land and building taxes for Atlantic and Point Lisas in terms of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. Is something that we have in front of us and we're looking for ways deal with that because they are two unique circumstances and we may well adjudicate that you will be allowed to collect land and building taxes save for except Point Lisas and Atlantic LNG? The gentleman who spoke about corruption and he articulated made by this gentleman here that you could have what is called a Local Government Ombudsman where you have oversight and oversight. But ladies and gentlemen, let me just close off on this point. Who will eventually guard the guards? As a people, we have to start to trust ourselves. Granted there would be rotten apples in the bunch or in the barrel; statistically, that is a reality of life. The best run countries in the world like Switzerland and Norway and thing they have their semblance of corruption too. Look the Prime Minister of Iceland resigned yesterday. Iceland has one of the highest ratings in the corruption index in the world. I think they are in the top five (5) in terms of the cleanest countries and yet you had a Prime Minister resigning yesterday based on the Panama Papers but that is how these countries operate you know. In our case, we have had a history of foolishness going on here. The challenge we have...do you know I go to some of these consultations and people say don't empower local government because you're spreading the corruption far and wide. So centralize the corruption and leave it in central government but don't spread it to local government because that is how people see us as public officers. And it is a travesty and a sad day for Trinidad and Tobago where generation after generation we continue to see ourselves in that light. What we must have is an oversight, audit and vigilance. You the union have a

saying the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Eternal vigilance is the only assurance that you have that these things won't happen and the vigilance must come from the communities. If it comes from the communities there must be some form of investigating. I agree with the gentleman you know because I get letters on my desk every day accusing specific people of specific things in the corporations. But I don't have an official arm in the ministry to go out and investigate like a police. So then I send it to the PS and what she would do? She will send it to an officer who is a friend of the officer in the corporation. So it is a flaw in the system that I am aware of and I am searching for avenues to correct it.

➤ **Response from Alderman Anthony Roberts**

I think the Minister's presentation was so all-embracing that he touched on most of the issues that we raised here this evening. As it relates to the lady with the drain, it's exactly what Minister was talking, the absence of the level of expertise within the regional corporation that we will have to deal with in the new dispensation. As it relates to productivity, it is a real issue because notwithstanding all the good ideas that we will have and we will want to implement, if we don't deal with the issue of productivity as my mother would say, we'll be spinning top in mud. That is an issue that we have to pay particular attention to because we know that there are so many persons in our society today who believe that they must be paid for doing absolutely nothing. I am saying so because you too as individuals have a contribution to make when it comes to the issue of productivity and we hope that you too will play your role in the family. You have to talk to your members of family and instil in them that willingness to want to work and as Mr Panday indicated, for a good day's pay you must be able to deliver for it. I want to thank all the persons here who have made their contributions this evening and to give you the assurance that we are taking on board the issues that you have raised. As a matter of fact, they are actively being considered as we develop policies for the transformation of Local Government.

➤ **Response from Permanent Secretary Ms Destra Bascombe**

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to assure you we cannot do this without you. We cannot sit in kent house in Maraval and make policy decisions which impact your life and your community. This has been a special consultation in that I heard one or two key new ideas which we will actively take on board. I particularly like the first suggestion that the gentleman made in the second row about the citizens ombudsman and we may even take it a step further and think about a citizens' charter for the government and for the corporation. I like the idea of integrity in public life and part of the problem is enforcement. There are regulations in the public service about conflict of interests and doing what you wish with the people's money. Regulation 37:1 talks about conflict of interest; there's also a code of conduct. Part of the problem is with enforcement; we need to be each other's keeper. Supervisors need to supervise and I am not talking about whistle-blowing but at least bring it to the attention of the relevant parties when you see public funds being wasted. There was also a suggestion that the members of a community can talk to the council and determine policy programs and projects within their community. That is an excellent idea and as the chair of the technical committee, we are also looking at areas that

can be implemented prior to this full roll out of this Local Government reform initiative. In fact, we are working with the UNDP to look at a pilot project, either to pilot the whole reform initiative in one or two corporations or take specific aspects of the reform and pilot it in different corporations. We feel that we may get more traction in that way but it's all about you, it's not about us, we are in this together.

5.0 CLOSING

To conclude the proceedings of the local government consultation at the Princes Town West Government Secondary School, Minister Khan noted that this was the 8th consultation and that every night something new is presented. He believes it is an indication of persons thinking and desiring genuine change. He related the story of the establishment of Panama's subway system in a record four years to tackle the underlying scepticism about Local Government reform that emerges in the consultations. He assured that the Prime Minister has taken personal responsibility for the reform; as a result, it will happen. He is aware that there are challenges but hope lies in self-belief. He thanked everyone for coming out and for sharing their ideas with him.



PRINCES TOWN CONSULTATION

6.0 ANALYSIS

6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

There were approximately 250 participants in attendance. Participants were generally receptive to the presentations of the Ministers and they were eager to give their input to local government reform.

There were approximately 150 (60%) male participants and 100 (40%) female participants. The majority (85%) of participants represented the age range 40 – 70 years. There was less than 10% representation of participants under the age of 40 and approximately 5% of participants over the age of 70. The majority of participants (90%) appeared to be middle-class income earners with less than 5% from low income and some high-income class. There was 50% representation from the Afro-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 50% being a majority of Indo-Trinidadian (40%) and some mixed-race participants.

6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 13 respondents from the plenary; 11 female and 2 male. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	6	40 – 70 (4), under 40 (2)
Indian	6	40 – 70 (5), under 40 (1)
Mixed	1	40 - 50

6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

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

Topic	Frequency
Understaffed Corporation	1
Housing	1
Pension for Councillors	1
Boundaries	1

Process – how and when	1
Use GATE graduates in Corporations	1
Agriculture – boost in communities	1
Quality control – work and services	1
Accountability	1
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – drains, roads, parks etc	2
Municipal Policing	2
Political interference and manipulation	1
Taxes – who will be affected	2
Local Government elections	1
Empower Corporations	1
Corruption and nepotism	2
Dialogue between stakeholders	1