

Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government

Local Government Reform Consultations

Arima

11th April 2016

Arima New Government Primary 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 Chief Ricardo Bharath Hernandez. The Master of Ceremonies, George Elias, then proceeded by welcoming all present to the Arima for the first of the islandwide series of consultations on Local Government Reform and thanked them for their presence.

This was followed by the welcome remarks which were delivered by the Mayor of the city of Arima, His Worship George Hadeed who welcomed everyone on behalf of the Ministry to the 9th Local Government Reform Consultation in the Arima New Government Primary School.



MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

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

2.0 MAYOR'S WELCOME REMARKS

His Worship the Mayor Alderman George Hadeed



Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Arima edition of the Local Government Reform Consultation. Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government; the Honourable Anthony Garcia, Member of Parliament for Arima and the Minister of Education; the Honourable Brigadier General Ancil Antoine Ret., Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara and the Minister of Public Utilities; Senator Nigel De Freitas, Vice President of

the Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and I welcome also the Honourable Maxie Cuffie, Member of Parliament for La Horquetta/Talparo and Minister of Public Administration and Communications; Permanent Secretary, Mr. Isaac James, of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; Permanent Secretary, Ms. Desra Bascombe also of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; Chief Ricardo Barath Hernandez, President of the Santa Rosa First Peoples; CEO of the Arima Corporation, Ms. Cheryl Surju Chong and Deputy CEO, Mr. David Williams, my fellow members of council; Deputy Mayor, Lisa Morris Julien, welcome to the Royal Chartered Borough of Arima, the crown jewel of the east to some, the satellite borough to others but to us Arimians, it is simply home and home is where the heart is.

There are no Port of Spainians or San Fernandians or even Point Fortinians but there are many Arimians or as our French ancestors deemed us Gems De Arima or as we prefer J'arime. To explain our sense of pride, permit me to give our guests a bit of Arima history. To commemorate the golden jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1887, Arima was declared a royal borough established by the Royal Charter on the 1st August 1888. The Royal Borough of Arima was the only one of its kind in the Colonial Caribbean and it remains that way up to today. The Charter established the boundaries of the town, the powers of the local council which would be responsible for its further development; back in the 1800's the new system of town government placed the emphasis on local democracy and therefore intended to provide some independence from central government. So, my dear friends, history has taught us the story of local government reform, is nothing new. However, some things do change; today the Borough of Arima extends over approximately four square miles from its original one square mile. The population according to the 2000 report of the CSO is 32,278 persons. It heralds a growing, modern, industrial municipality. The area of Arima has quadrupled over time, you can say that we are literally bursting at our seams. While it is wonderful that we have had this growth, however, the resources financial and physical of our council and the Arima Borough

Corporation have not kept pace with this modern day reality. We have been working with the same workforce that Ashton Forde met in office as Mayor many moons ago.

So while our town is expanding, our administration is limping behind needing much more resources than what is currently allocated. This has created a significant disparity in our ability to meet the needs of our community effectively. Notice I said needs, not wants. Our burgesses' needs must be met more efficiently and we know that local government reform is the key to more productivity. What is currently, urgently needed is an Administrative Complex to accommodate the Members of Council, the Arima Municipal Police and Administration Staff. We also need a Cultural Centre and every burgess you meet will lament about a much needed new market. These are just a few of our needs and I would not want to get into our wants because then we would be here all night long.

Our burgesses today are much more vocal and do not hesitate to let us know our shortcomings. In the age of social media, any matter can become viral. In Arima, our council has employed social media to our advantage; we have had tremendous success with this and can only see this as growing as today's teenagers become the adult burgesses in our borough tomorrow. To date, we have replied efficiently to over several thousand queries regarding issues in the borough. The residents are now more informed of the state or status of his/her query in real time. Some seem to expect, however, for us to wave a magic wand and fix issues immediately but unfortunately, we cannot! However, with local government reform, the long back and forth would soon make such expectations a reality.

Local government reform has had a long history with successive Governments; it is my hope that we can make this a reality under the leadership of our Honourable Minister of Rural Development and Local Government and our Honourable Prime Minister, the right Honourable Dr. Keith Rowley.

At the core of the local government reform, there are 3 key deliverables; better quality services, better communities and stronger councils. As the Mayor for the current term, I fully endorse these. Most of you may know of my business background in the Arima community. This is where my parents let down their proverbial bucket, I am J'arime, Arima born and bred on Farfan Street. I love my hometown, it is in my heart and as I have stated before, home is where the heart is. Having accepted the responsibilities of Mayor I was soon challenged with the reality of private business as compared to government led organisations. I want to highlight this major point to bring home the fact that there is a need for a work culture change: "I want a borrow wuk!" "Ah get through wukking in the Borough boy!" "Life nice, it real easy." The changing of this ingrained culture is imperative if we are to have success with local government reform. Productivity is critical to the success of any business, be it private or public. We cannot continue to work for 2 hours and go home to our children and boast of a short day's work and then demand that our children get the same kind of 'wuk'.

We in Arima must set examples; we must lead the way in changing this mentality. We are in effect perpetuating that culture that working for the borough or government requires 2 hours of work on the job. Mind you I do know of our dedicated staff members in the Arima borough corporation who work their full 8 hours and even beyond. I commend them for their efforts on being examples to others. We have to start now to change this culture, let us engage the recognised Trade Union and get their support to remove this productivity gap. As a corporation, as a nation, we must recognise that our level of input and output must match our remuneration. The success of our borough corporations will result in the success of our communities. We must take pride in our workmanship, our craft and our town, which is why we have launched 2016 as the year of "Arima Pride." This is the year every man, woman and child in Arima will take pride in our efforts and work towards building a hometown that deserves city status.

Trinidad and Tobago's current economic circumstances require all of us to be different in the way we operate. We cannot continue to do the same things and expect to be successful, productivity must become our priority, so we could work our way out of this slump.

On behalf of my council and the Arima Borough Corporation, let me once again take this opportunity to welcome you. We look forward to a successful consultation, we look forward as eagerly as our burgesses towards, and I repeat; better quality services, better communities, and stronger councils. I thank you!

3.0 MINISTER'S ADDRESS & VIDEO PRESENTATION MINISTER FRANKLYN KHAN



MINISTER KHAN

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, introduced himself to all present and welcomed them to the 9th consultation of the local government reform. He informed the audience as to what the rest of the schedule entailed inclusive of a consultation in Tobago and the final consultation being held on the 27th April in Diego Martin Corporation for which the Prime Minister would be in attendance. He thanked Mayor Hadeed and the audience for attending and then he then 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 the system and the dynamics that are not unfamiliar to most of you. Whether it’s a river, a crack in a drain, an empty lot next door with bush, social service delivery, a blown streetlight, school repairs, a local heritage site, waste management, what have you; the list goes on and on. The point we really want to make with this local government reform is that under the current system, the centralised government 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 through the centralised heart of government. That is the fundamental problem. Community facilities have to go through central government. That is the context of which we have put this local government reform.

For those of you who recall the election campaign, the political leader and now Prime Minister spoke virtually every night depending on where he was on 2 transformational issues that we

plan to tackle in this administration. The first was local government reform and the second was the creation of a brand new Ministry called the Ministry of Rural Development. Now I wouldn't deal much with rural development much in this audience because Arima is a borough but for my friend, Mr. Garcia, the constituency of Arima is still largely rural because it goes way up into Blanchisseuse on the Paria Road and even as far as La Fillette, ok so it is largely rural but I wouldn't say much on the rural side today.

The transformation issue of local reform government; ladies and gentlemen, it is important to put this thing into context and I like to make the point that what makes a society underdeveloped? It's because nothing transformational happens for decades. We stay in a sense of inertia and live like that. So here's what happens, you get into administration and you just keep doing the same thing over and over and by the time you catch yourself. And then you may have done enough to just get back voted in office and then you catch yourself and a decade has passed and in a jiffy, 25 years would have elapsed and when you check back what has been transformational in your society, it's nothing! Our governance; 1962 independence, 1976 Republican status; not much difference in the constitution but at least they took away the Queen as the head of state and you made your President. Outside of that nothing has changed fundamentally in this country you know since independence, since 1956; sixty years now. And this local government reform is striking at the heart of governance in Trinidad and Tobago, this is the most significant exercise that will be undertaken in this country since independence to now and it's in that sense that we take this matter seriously. The issues of Local Government Reform as the Mayor alluded to; has been articulated over and over and over. I go back to Mrs. Manning, she did a tremendous amount of work on Local Government Reform; reports after reports, after reports. When I went to the Ministry of Local Government they had a pile of reports high so, all on local government reform. Suruj Rambachan had a white paper, a green paper, a brown paper, a wax paper, everything and it didn't happen and the reason why these things ever happen is 2 fold. First and foremost, for something like this to happen it must have buy-in from the top because in a Cabinet if I say I want A, B and C to come under the jurisdictions of local councils and local corporations, these responsibilities currently lie with Cabinet Ministers and Cabinet Ministers have a tendency to protect their territory. So the local transformation could never take place unless there is buy-in at the top. Ladies and gentlemen, I say this without fair of contradiction that this local government reform agenda is being driven by the Honourable Prime Minister Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley.

There have been major impediments over the past in local government. The second point I need to make also is that the reform exercise never took place because there wasn't sufficient buy-in from the top and secondly the nature of human beings is that they do not devolve power and authority easy, so it is natural to centralise the power and to give up power and authority is something strange to the human being and it is that psychological thing; that is why Dr. Rowley was so adamant that when this reform exercise is completed, there will no longer be a Ministry

of Local Government because just the fact to have a Ministry of Local Government still tells you there is a Central Government arm with a big stick over your head. We want to clear out that paradigm and we want to give you the evolution of authority, the evolution of power and you will be in charge of your own affairs.

There have been a lot of impediments in the past, political interference, manipulation and expediency and that has always been the case. And let me make this point and I normally like to make it in corporations that are run by the UNC, Arima; thankfully so is all PNM, every Councillor, every alderman and I guess almost every voter; but the point of the matter is that when you have a Central Government, you will have regional corporations, some of which swing left, some of which swing right. It is very very important that in this whole transformation process, the process becomes A-political. I tell the people that when I finish my presentation and you see all the authority and all the powers that will be passed over to you, that same power that will be handed over to the Mayor of Arima, where he has all the seats PNM and all the aldermen PNM, that same power and authority will be handed over to the Chairman of the Penal/Debe Corporation, who has 12 UNC, 4 aldermen, totally UNC. It is as broad as it is wide. We cannot make laws for part of the population where the chips fall where they are. You are empowering a community; it matters not who the community votes for. That is their right! That is your right as a citizen of Arima to vote in a PNM Councillor in office, I clap you for that but when I go to Penal on Wednesday, I will also tell them that this is an offer for them also. It can be no other way.

Inadequate funding, a major, major impediment in local government because; I don't want to use the word step child, I might get in problems but the local government was never seen as a delivery arm of government and the only time that occurred in a real sense was the passing of the Tobago House of Assembly Act and it is the people of Tobago, who because of their struggle has really shown us the light in terms of this local government reform because today, the Tobago House of Assembly is literally in charge of Tobago. While this local transformation would not give you all of the authority Tobago House of Assembly has, there will be a significant amount of new responsibilities that will be handed over to the regional corporation.

Inadequate funding, all of you who are Members of Council know that the Council suffers from inadequate funding but it is how the funds are administered, that is the problem. Not that there aren't any funds for you to do what your work is you know. I will quote 2 examples for you, recreation grounds; the borough might have about 8 or 9 recreation grounds that fall under them. In some corporations might have 40 recreation grounds involved. Your budget for that is about 4 million dollars a year, obviously that is insufficient money to maintain so many recreation grounds for a year. Now what happens is that you have a ground that wants a pavilion, a ground that falls under the regional corporation under the Borough of Arima. You have no money to do it and up appears a company called the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago and they put up lights, put up a pavilion and they walk away. You never know from

whence they came, who asked them to do it, where they got their instructions from and what avenue of the representative system did they use to implement that project. It happens throughout; when you fly over Trinidad in the night, it's like a Christmas tree you know, every single ground in this country light up, virtually wasting electricity 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock in the morning but that is a different issue. Another example, the Ministry of Works has a program called PURE. PURE spends approximately in the past, a billion dollars a year in paving roads but 40% of the roads that PURE paved are minor roads. Roads that legitimately fall under the regional corporation. So here you have 400 million dollars locked into the system at the level of Central Government that really rightfully belongs to the regional corporation, the boroughs and the municipalities. So it is not that we have to find money to allocate to the Regional Corporations and Municipalities, we will just have to take a new paradigm shift in how we budget and how we allocate resources.

There is a sluggish administrative structure, the Mayor mentioned that. He said since Ashton Forde was Mayor of Arima is the same structure but we will deal with that shortly. So these are some of the impediments that go on.

So local government has become ineffective and burdened with bureaucracy because control, funding and authority are centralised in what is called the Ministry of Local Government and not with the Regional Corporations. I want to make the point, the Ministry of Local Government is not local government, the Ministry of Local Government is Central Government. Local government resides with the Corporation and it is in that case we are saying you have to cut the umbilical cord and let the baby go because it happens in the States. The Governor in the State of Georgia is the Governor in the State of Georgia you know, Obama cannot tell him what to do you know, in his State and it matters not what the Federal Government whether he is a Republican or whether he is a Democrat. He is in charge, he knows what his responsibilities are under the Act and he operates to suit.

So our vision is a fully operational analysed network and local government system. We think it is imperative to people-centred government and the accomplishment of our national vision.

Now let me deal specifically now with the PNM 2015 Manifesto. We published a Manifesto where we said the vision for Local Government seeks to remove all of the red tape and bureaucracies that prevent local government bodies from doing their work in an effective and efficient manner. That PNM document is now official government policy, so everything written in that PNM Manifesto is now government policy that was adopted by Cabinet. Here are now some of the specific proposals that I am putting forward to you to get your views as to whether we should proceed, how we should proceed and matters like that.

First and foremost, it is the intention of this reform to provide the Municipalities and the Boroughs with secure funding. In that context we will be changing the Audit and Ex Checker Act to allow the Regional Corporations and Boroughs to collect land and building taxes and to keep

it. Not only to collect but to collect and retain so that will give you an immediate source of income and then we will top it up from Central Government allocation through the Ministry of Finance. Ladies and gentlemen, if the Arima Borough Corporation is responsible to collect property taxes in Arima and you know that when you collect that tax that it stays in Arima, to be spent in Arima, wouldn't the Arimians who are empowered now to collect the taxes go more aggressively at the taxes? But when it falls under a centralised system, it's just an officer doing a job but here now you have a commitment to collect the taxes, so the compliance factor will be significantly higher than if as we currently operate. If you heard Minister Imbert speak, he still speaks about leakage in the system, he still speaks about noncompliance in the tax administration and there is a lot a lot of taxes that is legitimately owed to the Government and not collected. If we decentralise and empower the Corporations to collect the taxes, keep it and spend it in your community, we think it will go a long way.

The second aspect of this is Executive Authority. For those of you who are in Council, you know you are not in charge and the CEO's make you know that and the County Superintendent make you know that and the AO and the PRO, I don't know what type of names they have. But the public servants make it very clear to you that you have no Executive authority. As a Council you can take certain decision but not individually, not even the Mayor. The only thing the Mayor is in charge of is something called the Mayor's fund other than that he is in charge of nothing individual. We plan to adopt something similar to the Tobago House of Assembly where there is an Executive Council. An Executive Council will have portfolios and certain types of responsibilities will be allocated to these Executive Council by virtue of secretaries. Whether we call them secretaries of infrastructure, secretary for health, secretaries for what have you so that you will have executive authority. What that means by extension is that if you have executive authority you have to be full time. So you will be full time Councillors, full time Chairmen, fulltime Mayors. And the other thing we will be throwing out for your consultation; I hope I don't offend Mayor Hadeed too much but the Mayors will have to be elected and must not come from the stream of aldermen, because if we use the Tobago model you cannot have the Chief Secretary of the Tobago Council not being elected into office. You are virtually the Prime Minister of Arima. Well, don't take that serious, something resembling a Prime Minister.

Thirdly, accountability and this is where I want to get serious now. We're giving you a revenue stream dedicated and topped up and supplemented by Central Government. We give you executive authority and very shortly I will tell you we are giving you additional responsibilities. You have to be accountable and with this system you will be getting your allocations from the Ministry of Finance, you have to be accountable to the Minister of Finance for your allocation. How you spend it and how transparent you spend it. You will be accountable to the Auditor General and ultimately if the people feel you have not spent it wisely you will be accountable to your burgesses once every 3 years. So there is no greater accountability than that, to the Minister of Finance, not to the Minister of Local Government. To the Ministry of Finance for the

money, to the Auditor General for how you spend it and to the people on whether you spent it in an appropriate way in terms of satisfying the needs of the community. And ladies and gentlemen to me, you cannot want a more democratic system than that.

New responsibilities – let me rewind to when they had the old County Council system. Arima was always a Borough but here was St. George East, I think up to Arima. After the County Council system the most significant thing that happened to local government was the Municipal Corporation Act of 1990 which was a NAR thing and it worked largely okay. 14 regional Corporations were formed and very largely, it was just a matter of boundary changes, so the old St. Patrick County Council became Siparia/Penal/Debe. The St. Andrew's County Council that Mr. Rondon would have been in charge of; now called Sangre Grande. St. George East largely became Tunapuna/Piarco. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo was part of the Caroni County Council and what have you. But at its most fundamental level the responsibilities of the Regional Corporation remained the same as the old County Council system, because hear what the County Council was in charge of; recreation grounds, cemeteries, minor road and water courses, some aspects of public health and some aspects of building. And that is the same portfolio you currently hold now, nothing more, nothing less. So what this Local Government Reform system will be doing is transferring a significant amount of new responsibilities at the level of the community into the hands of the local government system.

First and foremost we envisage **School maintenance** as a responsibility that will very likely go with the Regional Corporation because if Arima Corporation, Arima Borough Council is in charge of the repairs of Arima schools, they will have better supervision, they will have better contract management and it will be more incumbent on them to make sure the schools open on time because it is their children who will be going to the schools. So there is an added responsibility to protect your space and to protect your institution and the service delivery, it is extremely important that it is disseminated at the level of Municipalities, Regional Corporations and Boroughs. **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, far less officers to serve the people. A lot of people, and I am saying this as the line minister, are drawing money under false pretence, protected to some extent by the councils themselves. That has to stop. That is why the technical committee of this transformation process headed by PS Bascombe is mandated to come up with new structures and new skill sets that could populate this new responsibility. As we speak, most regional corporations do not even have a single engineer, they don't have quantity surveyors, they have no procurement experts, they have no supply chain managers and all these new skill sets of the 21st century do not reside at the level of the regional corporation. And one of the most attractive things about this Local

Government reform to me personally is the avenue it will bring for young people to get meaningful jobs at the level of the Government. New skills...ladies and gentlemen, we have invested \$6 billion in GATE for the last fifteen (15) years. Very good but what are the GATE graduates doing. We didn't go through the full cycle of thought but when you give free tertiary education, if the economy cannot absorb the graduates, they are more frustrated that if they didn't go to school. I make the point that underemployment is sometimes worse than unemployment. You all have children; you would not like to know you send your child to university, to UWI or UTT, they come out with a Bachelor's degree, they tell them to go back and further their studies, they come out with a Master's Degree and when they graduate now you feel sad that they cannot find meaningful employment. It deflates your ego. It deflates your sense of accomplishment. This is an area where we could be absorbing a large quantum of skill sets and I want to make the bold statement that this will be largely staffed by young professionals.

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

4.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SESSION

❖ Ulrich Williams (Male, African, 60s)

To all the Ministers present and all the officials, when I heard you speak about disaster preparedness, I decided to let you know that after 27 years and 164 days in the military; that I have quite a large knowledge in disaster preparedness that I can offer to whichever community or whichever council needs my assistance. I would want to start with the cleaning up of the country; we have already won the gold medal for being the nastiest country and we have already won the gold medal for having the country with the cleanest air. So I don't know which one of the medals we intend to keep. The gold medal for nastiness, I am prepared to clean it up, starting from the east, Manzanilla. As long as I get the support of the necessary authorities to do the cleaning up, I am available. I would start in Manzanilla but I would want Port of Spain, the Dry River cleaning at the same time when I start in Manzanilla. So by the time I reach into Port of Spain, we won't have to clean up any rubbish there, it would have already been cleaned. Thank you very much, folks, have a good night, God bless you all, reach home safely everybody.

❖ Gerald St. Louis (Male, 60's African)

I am a born Arimian before the advent of party, party politics came and met me alive. I would like to ask, I listened intently to everything, Minister Khan. I remember the person who was in charge said all protocols observed, so I don't think it would be taken as a shortcoming on my path. I listened carefully to what you said and all the different areas of local Government you mentioned but I am recalling in 2009 and there has been a curious mixture of party politics and central government and governmental politics. In 2009, in the Campus College Tour where the PNM as a run up to the election went to the different communities. When you came to Princes Royal Park in Arima, it was proposed to be discussed Local Government and therefore the first was unfolded either a plan or a policy which would have seen every single employee of the Corporation being a contract worker bar 1, at first I thought it was daily paid workers alone, only to find out that also went to monthly paid workers. As an Arimian who started to work at 6:25 each day in the Corporation, I can speak to hundreds of Arimians who because they were permanently employed could have approached financial institutions for loans based on the fact that they would have had a continuous stream of income from which relevant deductions could have been made to finance and increase in their social status, re: improvement of living standards and so. If workers are to be kept on contract or go to contract employment, the banks will not or financial institutions will not extend loans to that category of person. Apart from the personal effect that would have, it also means that those people who would be borrowing money and using it to buy blocks and all the things that go with construction will no longer be able to enter into that level of activity. So I am asking, just as when the PNM was there and when the last Government was there and held the consultation in the Eastern Credit Union in Arima under Suruj Rambachan. I am now asking again, what will be the situation, what is the proposal with respect to the employment status of daily paid workers of Regional Corporations? Secondly, Mr Minister you spoke about additional responsibilities, you spoke of funding coming primarily from the raising of property taxes but if I am recalling correctly in terms of the national expenditure, property taxes is a very minuscule amount but I am seeing an explosion of responsibilities for local government bodies and I am wondering if the proposal to raise revenue locally by way of taxes will be

any real difference in terms of the total expenditure required by the corporation if all those things that you mentioned have been taken into place. Thirdly, I would like to know with respect to responsibility and accountability of Corporations, what then happens because I have sat and looked at the Parliament Joint Select Committee on local government questioning authorities. It ties into what you said Mr. Minister, when you have a CEO who is not an Arimian; living in Diego Martin and San Fernando, we have a local situation under the bureaucracy that obtains or will obtain, how then are we best served by having somebody at administrative level living out of our community and if the proposal is that person should come from within, what are the proposal to change the laws with respect to the public service or relevant authority within no longer having the authority the assigned staff to different regions in the country but is it that Arima would be able then to employ permanent public servants at whatever level, not the daily paid workers. Thank you and good evening.

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

Mr. St. Louis you are treading on a little dangerous ground there because the CEO is a function of the public service and the Public Service Commission and the CEO is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, you cannot deny him to say he cannot be posted in Arima. Your Councillors who you will be electing, they will come from Arima, they will be fighting electoral districts in Arima but the point you have made about contract workers, we will be going away from contract workers. The Prime Minister is quoted as saying once again he wants people to have careers in the Public Service, okay so the Public Service is a career and we would stay away from contract labour. We will try to have an official establishment set up by the Regional Corporations and this consultation to be sanctioned by the Ministry of Public Administration and hopefully to get the Service Commissions to do the recruitment as fast as possible but it is not intended that contract labour permeate this local government reform process. As a matter of fact, as we speak we have 4 labour representatives on the technical committee; The Public Service Association, NUGFW, Amalgamated and Contractors and General Workers' Union. Those 4 unions represent the workers in the Regional Corporation, they are deeply engaged in the process and as far as possible we will be staying away from contract labour.

Gerald St. Louis

I was speaking specifically, even though I mentioned overall all the category of workers within the local government. I was speaking specifically to daily paid workers whom the society still looks down on in spite of the overall important role and function and services they provide to the community and I was asking and incidentally the Health Economics Department at UWI could probably tell us what is the alternative course for replacing the services provided by the front end providers of preventative health care services with respect to curative health care services The society still looks down on the person who goes into the drain to clean the drain and sweep the street ,that's a reality and that is why I am acknowledging that you don't go into the public service realm, but daily paid workers because the proposal was that people who are now permanently employed will then become contracted workers with all the attendant ills that could follow such a system sir. So I am merely asking for information; has that system been withdrawn, that proposal been overturned?

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

That will not happen, nobody is looking down at the daily paid workers you know. I will tell you something, a daily paid worker in the Regional Corporation works for more money than a Clerk I in the Public Service who is monthly paid.

❖ **Bobby Charles - (Male, African, 50s)**

I will tell you about the 7 used to do all the scavenging services in Arima, a lot of people here don't know about that and I could tell you about the Arima Race Track where the 7.5 furlongs were located at the Doctor corner, nobody knows about that. Mr. Minister and the Worship his Mayor, all protocols observed and to my colleagues, Councillors and other persons. I tend to agree with you and the organising personnel within this Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development on the aspects of the initiatives you want to take of making Arima a better Arima. In 1976, when I stepped in I heard you were speaking to my learning friend, who we both started in politics Mr. Ashton Forde, we both started together and you just spoke about having the municipal police under the guidance and supervision of police service and I tend to agree with that because in 1976 under the late Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, Minister of Local Government and Health in Arima here, our youth arm, did submit recommendation to increase the police. It was 3 persons riding a bicycle, it was 3 official officers and it went to 23. I can give you histories and today we have 23 but sometimes you can't even see them. The public is not serviced properly by them and I want them to be under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Commissioner of Police and the Police Complaint Unit and all these other institutions that are there for supervision of the service of the police.

You also spoke about how you asked for a recommendation of the expansion of the Arima Borough Corporation. Again my learning it was in his era my friend had it hard that the Arima Borough Council expanded just one mile but right now we could take some more mileage because when you walk into Mausica, you don't say Mausica because Mausica is identified Mausica, because it is Mausica, Arima. You come to Samaroo Village, it's Samaroo Village, Arima. Likewise Malabar, well Malabar is already in the borough because the boundary is on one side on the island of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway. So I want to make some recommendations, they say Maturita Triangle, it is Arima. So I will like to make some recommendation for the expansion of the Arima Borough Corporation in this new dispensation. And as a trained retired forest officer, I can start to give you boundaries, I don't know if you will accept it tonight or if you want me to pen it and paper and send it to you. Thank you!

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

Arima is 4 square miles, I mean based on its geographic location in the context of the east-west corridor, the industrialization of the O'Meara Industrial Estate, the growth of places like Malabar, Santa Rosa Heights and some of these things. There is a reasonable justification for you to expand your boundaries especially since the largest, well I don't want to use the word cumbersome Regional Corporation is Tunapuna/Piarco. So you need to expand Arima boundary, take away some from Tunapuna/Piarco and make yourself into a proper Borough Corporation.

❖ **Mr. Ricardo Bharat (Male, Mixed, 60s)**

Honourable Minister, other members I was not too sure if I should make a contribution and that was precisely because what you said in your presentation that people would say that they have heard this so many times before and I am one of them who has been hearing about local government reform for so long but we cannot give up and I am heartened by what I hear this evening, tonight of how you presented the different aspects to reform local government because the present system is clearly not working. I was once a Councillor some 16 years ago and it's the same system that they operating under and it is not working, it's not reaching the people. So that the initiatives and the plans to transform are welcomed and we have to remain hopeful and pray that things work out. Of course, everything will not be perfect but we must have hope and I stand also to support in the call for the expansion of the boundary for Arima. You might be aware that the Carib community in Arima, the First Peoples were given 25 acres of land and that land is situated on the 1.25 mile mark on the Blanchisseuse Road, not Blanchisseuse but just 1.25 mile from the centre of Arima and that falls in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and the jurisdiction is in the constituency of Arima but not under the Arima Corporation and we are establishing there a model Amerindian village that I always keep saying that if done in the way is intended that will be a flagship project for Arima and by extension the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Right now we are at our headquarters we are cramped for space; we get so many visitors both students and foreigners. We have to share information and showcase to them aspects of the First Peoples heritage. That site when developed will be a living example and a model for people wanting to come in and have a living experience and with the local government reform it is hoped that if the Council is empowered and there are secretaries or however you would call them different aspects that one such Councillor could be responsible for culture and really place this project on the front burner and give the respect to the descendants of the First Peoples of Arima that they deserved. Because even when I was a Councillor I had to say Royal Charter Borough and I always say it with some reservation, why do I keep saying Royal Charter Borough? What does that mean to us? It meant that in 1888 the then Queen gave a Royal Charter to Arima but at that time Arima was responsible for charting its own affairs. Now it is under the general system. So what does Royal Charter mean? We need to in Arima have something that will make us unique and I feel that the First Peoples culture coming back to life will do that for Arima, so I thank you and wish this process much success.

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

Mr. Bharat, you spoke so well because one of the aspects that I really want to see take some root in this Local Government Reform process is culture and local tourism because there is tremendous potential for local tourism that cannot even be handled by the Ministry of Tourism or the Tourism Development Company. You have your First Peoples place, I can go down in Moruga; you have Devils Woodyard. You go into Sangre Grande, Toco in the area, you have the turtles. If the local tourism content is handled by the Corporation, everybody will market their own sites and there will be a competition to attract the local tourist and the foreign tourist and that will all lead to economic activity in your area, plus it protects your heritage. So it's not that you're selling your culture commercially you know. You have a commercial component of it but at the core of the philosophy of it is really your

culture and culture is something that if a society doesn't protect it's the culture it has nowhere to go.

❖ **Ian Forde - (Male, African, 50s)**

Goodnight everyone, my name is Ian Forde, very good presentation. There are some benefits of Central Government control. In Trinidad and Tobago, we cannot seem to get away from party politics and very often there are claims of neglect. Take for instance if we have a divided Corporation, Arima as you have rightfully said, we don't have that problem. But if we have a divided Corporation what checks and balances are there to ensure that minority areas are given their fair share?

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

I am sorry Minister Young is not here, I would have liked for him to answer that, but that is a very, very critical, critical part of the governance process because what you can have happening in the context of party politics; if Arima has 7 Councillors and they are all PNM when the budget comes to Council, it's Ceasar unto Ceasar. You have to sit down and divide up the spoils as to which electoral district gets what and we will assume that you will be fair to your own. However, if you have a divided Corporation like Sangre Grande which is 5-3 and some in Mayaro which is 4-2, you have the situation where the minority Councillors are not treated fairly at Council at all. And the resource allocation is normally skewed towards the people who hold the Chairmanship and the office. We are looking at what we can do with that legislatively, but the jury is still out on that but it is a very valid point you have made.

❖ **Ms. Mc Donald - (Female, Indian, 40s)**

Good evening, all protocols observed, Minister Khan with regards to the proposal; well first of all I want to say that during the election campaign I listened carefully to a number of issues, one of them being Local Government Reform and this Local Government Reform; the proposal is a very good one and I supported the PNM coming into power and I can boldly say that I did vote for the PNM so that this change could come because I believe in good governance. On the proposal, I want to raise a couple of points, one of them you spoke about accountability under this new system. You spoke about the revenue streams with regard to the Executive Authority and who would be accountable to whom. First of all, you talked about the Minister of Finance, the Auditor General, and the burgesses every 3 years but I would like to ask you this question. Are we to wait, we live in our communities and a project is going on and we see the nonsense that is taking place, are we to wait at the end of the 3 years for the contractor to give an account to us? Or is there some way in which as; I can tell you at present, we got a box drain on my street we didn't need. The road has since narrowed and prior to that, there was no consultation. I got home one night after class and I had no yard in which to step into, you know and I am saying under this system it's a total failure. The future proposal; I do not want to wait for every 3 years if something that is going on, if something that is wrong, I want that the contractor gives an account because you cannot have money spending, wasting people are uncomfortable like in my situation. I got home and I couldn't enter my yard, I had to go over to the neighbour's yard, Ms. Beckles you would know where I live, and I had to go over to my neighbour's yard to get home at 10 o'clock in the night and I'm saying that that's not good enough. And I am

hoping that, as I said I do support these changes, all of these changes. I am from Arima, I love Arima! I tell my friends from other countries that you cannot experience Trinidad until you come to Arima. I am a very proud descendant of the First Peoples, I am glad to see Chief is here and one of the points I wanted to make you know, well Chief spoke about it. Thank you!

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

Well, just one quick comment. I know what we have said with the accountability aspects still has major gaps because you know at the level of Central Government we're contemplating what we call a general accounting office in Parliament which will kind of be like an online monitor for Central Government projects. Somebody at a previous consultation said that we should have a local government ombudsman to monitor because you have to have a system of oversight because the Auditor General is post facto, so the Auditor General wouldn't audit your books at the end of the year, so you need something that is more current and it's something we have to look at. But at the end of the day ladies and gentlemen, who is going to guard the guards ok, because every system you out in place you want somebody to have oversight, then you have to have oversight of the people who are having oversight. So somewhere along the line we have to have confidence in ourselves, confidence in the people we select to run for office and we have to be stringent and very select of the people who you vote into office and I know this is party politics but let me make a point that with this Local Government Reform exercise if it is implemented properly, the party now has a responsibility. The political organisation now has a responsibility because it is they who will be selecting the people to send to you to vote for. So the screening committee of the selective parties now have an additional responsibility to choose the right candidate and have a robust screening exercise to offer the right type of people to hold these positions.

❖ **Male Participant - (Male, African, 40s)**

Pleasant good evening Minister Khan; Chairman Roberts and Madam PS; Mayor of Arima; Ministers of Government and Local Government. Mr. Chairman, let me say anything properly packaged and presented it is easy to receive. I must commend you on your presentation here this evening. I am yet concerned, while this is being presented, the burgesses of Arima and the citizens. My concern is that this reform works together with election financing and the reason I am saying this; this could be presented to us but we are living in Arima here, but if we go on that Blanchisseuse Road, we see 3 quarries operating. These people damage the roads on a daily basis, nothing is done; nothing is done to have these people or hold them responsible for the repairs of the road. Money has to either come from Local Government or Central Government. If these people are held accountable, they pay their royalties and they are held responsible for the damages on the road, together with local government reform and election finance reform, it is going to be easy that the burgesses and the citizens benefit because they damage the road, they give to either political party something for election campaign. It is not declared, the roads are damaged, the burgesses suffer from floods lower down the road; rivers are polluted. Mr. Minister let us talk both, local government reform and campaign finance reform. I will have every confidence that it will work together, thank you very much.

❖ **Elma Ramsumair - (Female, Indian, 40s)**

A pleasant good evening everyone, Mr. Moderator I ask that all protocols be observed. Elma Ramsumair; from Arima Northeast. I would like to begin by commending one of the facilitators of the Cert Program. It comes under the Disaster Management Unit as much of you would know and that person is Debra Ng Sy Shoon. I am one of the persons who had gone through the extensive training over a period of about 3 years, a very intensive program to involve the Defence Force, the Fire Services and other professionals. We were very appreciative of the training we had done but we have not been hearing anything at all about the program and maybe there should be refresher courses and more involvement. And we are of the opinion that we should not wait until there is some disaster or some problem where we would be called and be involved. We are also concerned Mr. Minister, you had mentioned that this would be under the ambit of the Ministry of National Security. We are wondering also if that was to happen what will be the eventful situation coming out of that turning the program and the personnel involved? Also with their contracts coming to an end we are also concerned about this aspect of it. I thank you!

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

Ok, perhaps I can give you a bit of advice. You may wish to contact Mr. Earl Hernandez, our Chief Disaster Management Coordinator at Head Office at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, Pent House, Maraval. You can always check me after on contact numbers. I know some of the Corporations are continuing with the Cert Program so it really is a function of disaster management co-ordinator and how integrated they are into the community. In terms of the Ministry of National Security and which program did they say was coming to an end, whose contract?

Elma Ramsumair

Well the personnel, those facilitators who are involved, it is our information that very shortly their contracts will be coming to an end. I stand corrected, I am not sure if that is correct.

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

We can always speak about that after. Thank you for your interest in disaster management. It is a critical component of our Ministry.

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

Just to make the point that the first respondent responsibility is still with the Regional Corporation you know but ultimately at the head of the pyramid is the Minister of National Security because first respondents are by and large called out in minor disasters but if there is a major, major disaster, immediately a whole list of protocols kick in and that involves the Army, the Police and a whole set of national security apparatus which obviously doesn't reside at the level of the Regional Corporation.

❖ **Brennan Pattison (Male African 30s)**

I am a resident of Arima, right across the road. I truly believe that we are living in some good times because as a young person to see these changes coming to local government I am willing to embrace it. I think Trinidad and Tobago is such a state where you can go to

bed by littering your entire walkway in front of your house and wake up next morning and see it completely clean. This is the only country in the world you could possibly do that. What I want to see with local government is a lot more accountability from people and burgesses living in the area. A lot of persons do a lot of craziness; they build structures without approvals, we see persons who mash up their driveways without...doing all these things and there is little accountability, little penalties. There is not much enforcement of the laws in the borough; there are a lot of bylaws in the borough that is not enforced, the mayor knows that. We need to see the burgesses in the areas being more accountable. I think that is a great way of raising revenue. Look for example the Zika, there are a lot of mosquitoes in the Arima area, I see the Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation going about their Zika eradication process, I have not seen it in Arima Borough Corporation as yet but I hope that pretty soon those things would come on board. Things like that. I see a lot of things going up in the area and there is very little accountability for it. Secondly, I would like to say that we need to definitely get things online as to when we roll out local government reform. It's a real run around in the borough corporation now in order to pay certain things. People with businesses would know simple little things you need is a real run around. So I would like to see when the property tax come into effect we could sit down from behind our computers, with the click of a button send it to your credit card whatever it might be...once there is no tax on it. (*Audience laughs*) All these things we could do to make the public sector package a lot better with the reform. Lastly, I would like to say I ran a part of a big conglomerate in Tobago and the THA model works to a point. For somebody who ran a big conglomerate and we needed employment, it was hard because a lot of the skilled employees tend to work for the THA which meant that we basically were getting the dregs of the thing...very little productivity and we had to pay workers almost high salaries. It's a big problem in Tobago; a lot of big businesses get out of it because of the employment issue. I don't want to see the corporations in Trinidad affected by that because we are going to see a lot of young people who can contribute in the private sector being stifled and the corporation could contribute to underemployment. I think is great ideas, I am looking forward to it and we'll see how it goes later on in the year. Thanks

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

Just one point on the garbage collection: We have to play ourselves when we do things good because Trinidad is one of the few places in the world that garbage is collected so regularly on a domestic level. In the United States and England, the garbage truck comes once a week and in some places once every other week to pick up recyclables and what have you. Trinidad is the only place in residential communities where garbage comes five times a week sometimes. I think we should be happy for that. We do not have the discipline, for example, in North America if the garbage truck comes on a Wednesday, you put out your garbage Wednesday morning. What we have in Trinidad, if your garbage comes on Monday and Wednesday, Monday evening after the garbage truck pass you put out your bag so all Monday evening, Tuesday morning, Tuesday night the place looks dirty. So you're really supposed to bring it out just before the truck comes out. Having said that, we have an excellent garbage collection system in Trinidad.

❖ **Male Participant (Indian 50s)**

Goodnight to everyone. Mr. Minister, you mentioned earlier that we are looking at keeping the land and building taxes in the corporation. I want to add another form of income into

that in that we in Arima...there is a lot of wrecking going on and when the burgesses have to pay the cost of wrecking and other traffic offenses that money is sent down to Central. It is robbing Arima, taking money from Arima and sending it down to Central. My thing is to let us add that to the Arima Borough Corporation so that persons that are wrecked and traffic offenses, that money can stay within the Borough of Arima for developmental purposes. It's a lot of wrecking going on and it's thousands and thousands of dollars leaving Arima. If we are wrecking people in Arima for illegal parking let us keep the money and let us use it to develop Arima. If you can add that to your list of incomes that could be attributed to the Corporation, I think that would help us to go a long way. Second point, we are all aware in Trinidad and Tobago where when you are looking for a contractor to do a job you ask your friend, your neighbour or somebody who has done it before and they will recommend someone to you and you go with that person and sometimes at the end of the day, it was not the best choice. I would like to see in the corporations a business registry be established, that anyone who wants to work in Arima over a certain limit, needs to register in the corporation. So if I were to inquire about a mason to do a project for me, I can go online on the borough's website and look for registered masons in Arima and I can see a whole list of them and choose which one I would want to have my work done. Along with that would be a person's profile so I can see exactly what were the jobs he did in the past and what were the ratings he achieved so I can quite reasonably decide and make a more informed decision as to which contractor I would go with, like Angie's List. A lot of times we take contractors with no history, we just get a recommendation and at the end of the day, there is a mess on the job. I would like to see a business registry established within the corporation so persons looking for trained contractors can go in and ask for contractors, look at the list and make a selection from persons who have performed well over the years. Last point, there is a number of construction taking place in Arima and when you look there is no sign. No one knows what is taking place. It is covered around and no one knows what actually is taking place. You can only complain when it is done. There must be some regulation to ensure that every project, there is consultation with the stakeholders in the community whether or not they would like that project and they need to identify what is taking place there when they get the approvals. Thank you.

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

You're pushing against an open door there. Just with regards to construction, if it is public sector projects, government projects you can say yes the government should put up a sign and think but you always have to recognize the private rights of citizens. If I am building a house or a building no government could tell me put up a sign except there is just reason to do that. OSHA regulations now demand that construction sites be fenced and that is why you're seeing these galvanized fences going up and even in private sector projects, it's happening now. That is basically a step in the right direction.

➤ **Response from Alderman Anthony Roberts**

The idea of the business registry is fairly new. Contractors would register with the corporation because they seek contracts from the regional corporation or the borough. I think we will have to take that one on board to determine whether we would want to go with the business registry.

➤ **Response from Permanent Secretary Destra Bascombe**

Additionally, there is the Share Point program under the purview of the Ministry of Labour which lists contractors, hairdressers and all service providers. So there is a beginning and you may check the Ministry of Labour if you're looking for a roof man or a plumber or a mason.

❖ **Noel Maxwell, Phase II, Malabar (Male African 40s)**

I'm happy that the minister had made reference to Tobago, an example of what this reform would be more or less alike because 1986 -1990 Tobago was really crystal clear. One of the amazing things is there are a lot of changes taking place in Tobago and if you listen to the news you would also see some of the problems that Tobago is having. For example, we had some contractors from Tobago who were complaining that they had to close down their block factory because they were not getting work. The vessels that actually run to Tobago, this Minister of Local Government was the Minister of transport we had the best transport service between Trinidad and Tobago. Most people actually used to go on the ferry service before they go on an airplane. So what I am trying to say is what I see happening here is responsibility would be changing. You're taking the responsibility from Local Government who we don't see them acting and put it into the Mayor's hand. The Mayor as we know is for food badges, inspection of your property, wrecker service but when you talk about problems with your property, you got to the Minister of Works. We hardly fit in the local person at that point because they are not seen as much as the Minister or the Mayor. So it is beautiful and what I am saying is Tobago actually shows you where the prejudice and the problem with this reform would come from. If you like at Arima, being one of those smaller municipal bodies...there is also a plan where the Hospital of Arima would become an emergency hospital for Piarco and this actually shows the sort of craziness that is happening because in my days in Arima as a little boy if my parents get sick, my grandparents get sick, they usually used to be in Arima Hospital. I didn't have to go Mount Hope or Port of Spain. What I am saying is if we give this amount of authority to the Mayor, making him now a governor where are the checks and balances for that person? It a great idea; we would love to see it happen and I think most people jump at it already because it already happens. If you understand the conversation here, it happened already and this is the problem with Trinidad. We change things, and the small mind sees it as great but basically when it start happening...where my share, what is it going on with me, nobody cares about me. Nobody cares the guy who going to build a business, look and Tumpuna Road for example. There's a primary school or some educational institute going to build there and the people backfill to build that property and the other properties were totally underground. In the rainy season, you cannot get to the properties in the back because they are flooded out. Imagine the ministry decide to do a backfilling and put everybody else land underwater and that is the government. Unless there are checks and balances...I don't know what would happen to the Minister when we have a Governor of Arima, who would actually control the Governor of Arima when he becomes prejudiced? We don't mind if the Governor of Arima could see everything that is taking place and as you see with your dream, get it fixed but when a small burgess like Arima...you know eventually he has to depend on property taxes and wrecker fees and so on, he might say let us do like Port of Spain, let we just get people with plenty money to build big houses so we could have a nice Arima.

❖ **Male Participant (African 40s)**

I want to applaud you for your comprehensive explanation on Local Government reform. I am now left thinking that what it really is bringing government closer to the voters or the people as it may be. Two questions I have: when all the legislative work is done what percentage of parliament support it will need and the second concern I have, you spoke about the capacity and training of people to make this thing deliver efficiently and effectively and my concern is that Local Government reform should also be going hand in hand with public sector reform which we know is something we've tried on so many occasions because even though we are going to be training new people and young people to bring proper and efficient deliverance of services we require of the Local Government as we envisage it, then all of them would not be coming in at one time and based on how the public sector operates is no training, they put you in a position and you start to work, so I would hope that this is an area that you would look at very seriously to have it addressed in order to make this thing work efficiently and effectively. Thank you.

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

The whole issue of...once you have more local government autonomy there will be reduced responsibilities for central government. It happens in America. This whole thing with the presidential election...we don't want any more big government from Washington. So the more empowered the regional corporations are, it takes it...because to get responsibility you must take it from somebody. We are devolving some of that responsibility to Local Government so by and large, the central government portfolio would get smaller. If we do it right, especially in terms of administration, you may be setting a prototype that the central government office could work with. Let it evolve. With regards, the majority we need, by and large, most of the proposals we would be making would just require a simple majority in the house; we're not tampering with the constitution. The only issues of the constitution as we speak are two-fold now. One: if we have to take the municipal police into the police commission that would call for a special majority and more importantly, it has not been brought up in this consultation but in a lot of consultations people are demanding that local government be enshrined in the constitution because as we speak, a single majority in the house by a government can disband the whole local government system in its entirety and that is not a comfortable place to be in. It is something that the committee is looking at; we will propose that it is enshrined in the constitution. That is why the local government elections could have been postponed to Infinitum by a simple majority in parliament and really that does not speak well for democracy.

❖ **Male Participant (African 20s)**

Good evening, all protocols observed. I just have a few points and a couple of suggestions. Firstly, I want to reiterate the call that a lot of persons made with regards to the boundaries where Arima is concerned. That, I think is sorely needed. I, for instance, live within the Arima borough, however, I am in the Lopinot/Bon Air West constituency which I think does not bode well because you want to identify with one particular area in which case I would identify as an Arimian. The problem I have where that is concerned is that we heard this roughly seven (7) years ago; all of these things were already outlined in the previous iteration of the local government reform which ended up not being passed. Hopefully, this

time, we could finally get it right. Another point is the administrative complex...I think you mentioned that. I think that is sorely needed. A suggestion is, I have an IT background and I came up with an idea while the other gentleman was talking in terms of people littering. That is one of my pet peeves; I can't deal with that. I know we are supposed to have litter wardens which I have never seen in my life, I think one possible way to deal with an issue like that is to give them the authority in the event that persons are caught littering, is to have them clean like for a day or something like that so that they have to pay back their debt then in the situation where they are caught to be in breach of the law. Another suggestion is, well because of my IT background I was thinking of having something such as a database that could potentially work for all the corporations. Especially if you're going to implement a new system where you're doing property taxes...you have all the burgesses registered so you have a listing of all those who reside within the area, that would make it easier for them to go online and check their status, they can check their taxes, what they owe, allow them to make payments and additionally, the corporation would have the ability to see what is the real-time data where that is concerned, also allow people to make suggestions because who is actually responsible for deciding what is to be done in a particular area, who decided that? You decide that you want to put up a hospital, but if that is a need for the area, who determines that there is a need for it. I think there should be some facility where burgesses can actually give suggestions or make their needs heard. That is pretty much it, thanks a lot.

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

A lot of your IT points were well taken. As a country, I think there is still a big digital divide with us. We say a lot of it but we're not using it sufficiently especially at the level of government; it is more widely used in the private sector. I think it's almost a unanimous decision in this consultation that the boundaries of Arima should be expanded and I wish you well. Make your proposal and I think it would be favourably reviewed by the committee.

❖ **Carol Adams, La Horquetta (Female African 60s)**

I am a driver so that is the situation at the intersection bordering Cocorite Road into Tumpuna Road; it is terrible. I don't know what could be done. I am asking if someone could help us there, terrible traffic. You know La Horquetta is one way in, one way out. I applaud all the initiatives that are being taken towards this local...I understand it and I am all for it and I hope everybody who hears is on board because it's a good thing. We will get it right. Thank you.

❖ **Male Participant (African 30s)**

Very quickly, with reference to Tobago, now for the last three years we have worked with Tobago from an emergency management standpoint. You're going there on Friday and I am pleased to hear that because for a small island, three years ago they ventured to do something new with emergency management. In December, myself with a team went to the Bahamas where Tobago as a small state has been looked at as a model for emergency management for the smaller island chains going up to the Bahamas. Working with a local department is a good thing, that's one. Two: I think one of the questions I want to know

from you Minister, how much of a role technology would play in this new local government system? How much of a role would data-driven decisions be made in this new local government system? Simple example, if you're about to make a move on a boundary change, a simple poll in most countries in the Caribbean you can go online and literally in a matter of hours you get a pulse of exactly what the burgesses think, what they feel, whether they agree or disagree. So how much would you be using technology while rolling out to evaluate because it is all well and good on paper but it may work in some areas, it may not work in others? So a use of technology to gather from the persons where to go, how fast to go and when to go. Thank you.

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

Obviously, in a 21st-century environment, we want to capitalize on technology as far as we could but it is the policy of the PNM to be data driven in terms of its policies and decisions. The Prime Minister said that repeatedly over the last several months. We are starting from ground zero in the regional corporations you know and for a regional corporation to operate fully and efficiently, you need basic IT. For example, what is the sense having all these pulses and your accounting system is not even computerised, your contract management is not even computerised, You know there is something called enterprise-wide software that everything is networked and everybody talking to each other but we are so far from that, you know we have to take it one step at a time. Obviously, we will really have to engage in IT because we will be getting young people who are so inclined and I am so passionate about freeing these young minds to run wild and let them just take over organizations and transform it. When smart phones were just coming out, they say, people, not IT trained, a smartphone is a computer. Look how many people who supposedly didn't do well in school and you feel they don't have the IT acumen, they more versed in a smartphone than you and I. So the culture of IT would be sweeping the young generation and if what I have said there about staffing a lot of these positions with young graduates, with young people, bringing fresh blood and fresh ideas into the organization, it will work.

❖ **Pennelope Beckles (Female African 50s)**

Let me congratulate you on your contribution tonight about your overall campaign for local government reform and the selection of the respective committees. Having myself entered politics as a local government councillor and seeing some of the same problems exist for quite a long time, but focusing exclusively on Arima and some other general things I want to ask in the context of local government, where you have these divisions when people talk about...let's use roads for example. You have primary roads, secondary roads, roads that are orphaned roads and so that we try to avoid a repeat of things like the Mt Pleasant road. How do we avoid something where a road takes thirty (30) years to rebuild and something like the Manicou Ravine which has been going on and on for more than twenty-five (25) years, those are practical examples. Some of them are policy decisions, some of them are priorities but clearly it is a question where when you have to make difficult decisions for very costly projects that communities suffer. When we talk about local government reform, I think people who live in those communities that are affected would want to know how do we avoid a repeat of those things because I think is those kind of projects that will probably convince people that the reform of which I know you are very passionate about because I know you recall when you were Minister of Works you came and I know you did virtually everything to try and get that road completed and with all the will, it was not done?

(Minister Khan: And Jack Warner fix it, ent?) I am not going to comment on that but I think you understand what I mean when we speak about that. I looked at the document here that you have prepared and one of the things, I know people mentioned the issue of the boundaries. But I think in a practical sense if I could use a road like Maturita Road for example, where if you're going North left side is the Borough and right side is the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, to use your example, Monday Wednesday Friday you collect garbage and Fridays on the next side. Now those things cause enmity in communities, now how can we understand in a practical way that there should probably be some collaboration so you avoid people saying well ok I will take my garbage from when I love across in the place that only collects two days and I put it across in the place that collects five (5) days. We must find a way where we find a way to collaborate on simple things like that that people feel are not important but that is really I think when we talk about reform, that you should not have to have legislation and all that if you give a contractor to do a job, that he does not say to the people well I only pick up on the left side and I don't pick up on the right side. I think that is something that we need to look at that really solves a very simple problem. Just quickly again, something like education... now I lived in Santa Rosa for many years but my law practice was in Arima. As an MP if you live in Santa Rosa and Pinto and you take your child to go to school in Arima they tell you your child cannot get into Arima because you are from Santa Rosa or Pinto. The truth is there is only one school in Pinto, yes and it's not even a hundred percent in terms of vacancy but because of the fact that there are challenges in the school there a lot of the people don't want to send the children there. If you go to Arima and you say no you're not from the borough...now I mean those are issues that we have to deal with because we have an issue of the number of places, we don't have enough primary schools, we don't have enough A' Level schools in Arima so it's how do we deal with some of those issues that cause again division in the communities. I have a couple other things but I would just be short because I know people have been here for a while. I want to talk quickly about sports and culture. I am looking again at your document and you speak specifically to sporting programs. Now we have had the Arima velodrome, we have had the cricketing facility and I know that you are familiar with the fact that we haven't...the Arima velodrome for example, for years we've had the issues of the cycle track, of this and that, of not having enough funding and I think that of course clearly the objective behind the collection of taxes is to give the borough a greater say in terms of avoiding the challenges and the fact that you could have a facility like that for all these years and we have international cycle meets and then the same things happen over and over. I hope people understand that really the objective of your reform is that some of these complaints that they have had for a very long time, that finally we would more than likely see an end to some of those challenges. Similarly of course to the issue of culture, so if we can have our own facilities built here, what you would have is revenue generation and you don't always have to go into Port of Spain or into other communities. I just want to say I welcome the Local Government reform and I think I can say like many other persons we look forward finally to the implementation. Thank you very much.

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

Obviously, there would still be rough edges. Classic example, there are major roads and highways that fall under the Ministry of Works, minor roads and traces is the regional corporation, agricultural access roads which fall under the Ministry of Agriculture, then

there is what you call orphan roads which nobody owns and those are roads which we largely either illegally developed or developed by private developers and were abandoned and have not been officially transferred to the regional corporation and the examples you quote there is a classic. One of the problems the corporation normally has is that when minor roads call for major investment to repair whether is a landslip or a bridge, the funding is so low that they are averse to spending all the money on one project whereas they want a better geographic spread. The system of boundaries like one side of the road is here, one side of the road is there, it's an EBC function and it's a municipal act function because what happens is that...I'd give you a good example, in the old county and wards system that I think it was Woodford himself who did that, they use natural boundaries to define the counties and the wards. What we do now, we stay away from the boundaries and we use artificial boundaries and the easiest boundary to use is a road. So somewhere along the line, this side of the road is constituency x, this side of the road is constituency y. This side is electoral district x, this side is electoral district y. Do you know it happen in Chaguanas? There is a cabinet note that says you must build your council office in your electoral district. In one instance in Chaguanas this councillor...the road is the boundary, she could not get her property on this side of the road so she builds it on this side. Do you know the corporation refuse to pay her staff because...well, I had to intervene because is madness. So these issues will continue to affect us. Another example and this is a more important point, we implemented the Municipal Corporation Act of 1990 but you know Education still have Victoria district, St George district, Caroni district. Ministry of Works, this office right here on O'Meara Road is St George East you know but that no longer exists in law. When you make legislative change, it is not rolled out towards the entire system but this time around when we make the changes with the municipal corporation act, we will try to get other arms of government to fit into that mold and hopefully then there would be more efficiency. By and large, I think the program is well thought through and I will just make some closing comments before.

5.0 CLOSING

To conclude the proceedings of the 9th local government consultation at the Arima New Government Primary School each of the panellists was given an opportunity to share their thoughts about the consultation. Mr. Anthony Roberts said as a people we tend to doubt ourselves and he said what better check and balances would be required than the people themselves. He then spoke of the issue of productivity and said that if the approach to productivity remained the same where the reform was concerned, failure would be imminent. He closed by stating that the people in the community had a significant role to play in ensuring that the reform in Local Government was successful when it is implemented. Ms. Bascombe said that the Local Government transformation was transformational in every sense of the word. She said that this is not the end of the consultation process as more suggestions and ideas can be submitted via their website and telephone. She informed the audience that they were welcomed to attend the other consultations since this process was about the people. In closing, Minister Khan told the audience that Trinidad and Tobago would change fundamentally from here on out. He said life will not and cannot be the same again but he was of the opinion that the country had enough resources that if used properly could still lead to everyone being happy. He said we had to depend on the resilience of our creativity and productivity as a people. He indicated that we seriously needed to become more productive and it was in this context that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago offered local government reform which they felt was a more efficient and effective way of government and governance. He lamented the fact that the people's participation and support were needed so that the transformation could be implemented successfully in the interest of Arimians and Trinidadians in general. He thanked all for participating and wished them a safe journey home.



ARIMA CONSULTATION

6.0 ANALYSIS

6.1.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

There were approximately 150 participants in attendance. Participants were generally receptive to the presentations of the Ministers and they were very eager to give their input to local government reform as was evident by the queues formed behind the microphones.

There were approximately 100 (70%) male participants and 50 (30%) female participants. The majority (80%) of participants represented the age range 40 – 70 years. There was less than 10% representation of participants under the age of 40 and approximately 10% participants over the age of 70. The majority of participants (90%) appeared to be middle-class income earners with a few from low income and some high-income class. There was 85% representation from the Afro-Trinidadian population, with the remaining 15% being a majority of Indo-Trinidadian and some mixed-race participants.

6.1.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There were 15 respondents from the plenary; 12 male and 3 female. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic background and age of the respondents.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Age Range
African	12	40 – 70 (9), under 40 (3)
Indian	2	40 – 70 (2)
Mixed	1	40 - 70

6.1.3 CATEGORIES/TOPICS

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

Topic	Frequency
Improve and upgrade current infrastructure – buildings, drains, parks etc	5
Employment status of Regional Corporation workers	1
Property Tax	1
Accountability/ Checks & Balances	5
Municipal Police	1
Boundaries	5

Culture and local tourism	1
Politics affecting autonomy – campaign financing	1
Disaster management	1
Improve Government e-commerce/ online services	3
Littering/ litter wardens	2
Retain wrecking fees in Arima	1
Transparency in awarding contracts	1
Capacity building & training of Corporation workers	1
Traffic	1