

**CARIBBEAN SUB-REGIONAL MEETING TO ASSESS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD) - 15 YEARS AFTER ITS ADOPTION**

*St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda,
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**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
COUNTRY BRIEF**

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Salutations:

Introduction

The 1994 Cairo ICPD (**I**nternational **C**onference on **P**opulation and **D**evelopment) was indeed a significant milestone in the field of population and development, as well as in the history of women's rights as the resulting twenty-year Programme of Action sought to identify and address key actions aimed at:

- addressing universal education;
- reducing infant, child and maternal mortality;
- ensuring universal access to reproductive health care by 2015 - including family planning, assisted childbirth and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS;
- encouraging population and development policies to advance gender equality, eliminate violence against women and ensure women's ability to control their own fertility.

In this light, I join with others in saying congratulations to the ECLAC Sub-regional Headquarters for the Caribbean; and the UNFPA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the hosting of this Conference; and the opportunity to share experiences and refine our efforts to accelerate progress towards implementation of the ICPD Plan and MDG goals.

The approach of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GoTT) to achieving the MDGs is defined in a “VISION 2020” National Strategic Plan which also seeks to set the country on a path to achieving first world status by the year 2020. Two of six of the major developmental priorities of this National Plan connect with the objectives of the ICPD Plan in a very significant way; these are “*developing innovative people*” and “*nurturing a caring society*”. The Plan expounds Government’s guiding principles in strengthening its commitment towards securing the rights and improving the quality of life of the population.

In examining our efforts towards addressing **poverty, inequality and sustainable development**, we look at *the Interrelationships between Population, Sustained Economic Growth and Sustainable Development*.

Within recent years, the GoTT has witnessed strong economic growth which has resulted in considerable advances towards attaining developed country status. Economic growth and wealth generation continues to be heavily dependent on the energy sector, notwithstanding rapid expansion in the tourism industry in Tobago, which accounts for approximately fifty percent (50%) of its employment. Statistics emanating from the Survey of Living Conditions (commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development in 2005) has indicated that poverty has decreased from 24% in 1997/1998 to 16.7% in 2005. The SLC also indicated that for the first time in many years, the unemployment level was in the single digit range.

While growth in certain sectors may be evident, vulnerabilities in the society, the environment, and in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors are also cause for concern; and we recognize that these vulnerabilities need to be addressed to ensure sustained development in the event of a decline in the energy sector. The current global crisis has certainly made that point abundantly clear.

The oil and gas sectors have created many jobs; however sustainable employment for the majority of the population has to be generated from the development of all of its human resources. In this regard, the GoTT has given priority to human resource development via a range of social programmes that seek to increase people’s access to information, education, skills development, employment opportunities and health services.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION - REDUCED INEQUALITY

The Poverty Reduction Programme (PRP) under the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the National Poverty Reduction Strategy. The PRP is responsible for improving the delivery of poverty reduction services via the decentralization of poverty interventions through Regional Social and Human Development Councils (RSHDCs); strengthening the institutional framework for poverty reduction through the establishment of the Network of Civil Society Organisations; and strengthening the information base on poverty and poverty reduction programmes through the conduct of Surveys and Poverty Profiles.

Strategies aimed at poverty alleviation and reduced inequality, include:

- *The Micro-Enterprise Training Development Grant* – which enables clients of the Ministry of Social Development to access grants that will assist them in undertaking small business ventures or skills training. The programme targets victims of domestic violence, welfare recipients and probationers; and has fostered the introduction of shop keepers, farmers, landscapers, graphic artists, writers, seamstresses, nuts vendors, beauticians, photographers, musicians, designers and caterers into the national economy.
- *The Micro-Enterprise Loan (MEL) Facility* provides micro-loans and support to micro-entrepreneurs, including business training and after-loan services and business support. Applicants who qualify for the facility are unemployed, impoverished and/or in receipt of public assistance. Community- Based Organizations (CBOs) are trained and facilitated to serve as micro-lending and support agencies to target needy persons in communities. The programme which is managed under the Poverty Reduction Programme, currently operates in seven (7) communities in T&T.
- *The Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Program (TCCTP)* – introduced as a measure for dealing with the impact of rising food prices, attempts to provide food security and training mechanisms to the vulnerable.

- The establishment of Regional Social and Human Development Councils (RSHDCs) in communities was intended to improve the delivery of poverty reduction services and address the developmental needs of vulnerable citizens and communities. The RSHDCs conduct outreach activities throughout their regions and also promote the social programmes of other agencies/Ministries.

- The Regional Micro Project Fund- RMPF - allows each Regional Social and Human Development Council (RSHDC), to recommend financing for projects that will meet the social needs of the most vulnerable regions in Trinidad and Tobago. This fund assists NGOs and CBOs to implement projects that will meet the needs of the most vulnerable persons in communities. At the end of fiscal 2008, 285 micro-projects were approved and completed through the Fund in fifteen regions in Trinidad and Tobago at a cost of \$8.5M. The range of projects for which funding has been made available, include Home Work Centres, Computer Literacy, Anger Management for youth and Grow Box initiatives

- Social Assistance Grants - A range of financial assistance/grants are disbursed to persons in need through the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Development. They include:
 - Senior Citizen's Grant (SCG) - The grant targets all persons over the age of 65 years whose income does not exceed the prescribed income ceiling and who have been resident in Trinidad and Tobago for at least twenty (20) years prior to application.

 - Disability Assistance Grant- Provides financial assistance to individuals who are unable to earn a living because of injury or illness. In fiscal 2004/2005 the quantum of the grant was \$650.00 per month and the age criteria for qualifying for the grant was adjusted to cover persons in the age bracket 18 to 64 years. It

was previously paid to persons 40 years and older; the effect was that the grant became available to a greater number of persons.

- *Public Assistance Grant* - Provides financial assistance to individuals who are unable to earn a living because of injury or illness.
- *General Assistance Grants* - Formally called the Emergency Cases Fund, the facility seeks to provide assistance to:
 - persons/households traumatized and rendered needy as a result of natural/other disasters such as hurricanes, fires, floods and landslides; and
 - individuals/families living in poverty and to clients of the Social Welfare Division and other delivery units in the Ministry of Social Development who cannot otherwise provide for themselves.

These grants are accessed following needs assessments conducted by social workers; and include: Housing Assistance; Household Articles; Medical Equipment; Home Help; Dietary Grant; Clothing Grant; Funeral Grant; Education Grant; Special Child Grant; Pharmaceutical Grant; House Rent; School Supplies Grant; Urgent Temporary Assistance (Emergency assistance). In fiscal 2009, the Ministry of Finance made budgetary provision for increases in these grants amounting to an estimated sum of \$2M.

- *The Multi-Purpose Community Based Tele-centre* initiative provides citizens with the opportunity of access and training in the use of computers and the internet. While school children are the major beneficiaries of the service, persons over fifty (50) and those in rural communities are amongst the users.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

In addressing social integration, initiatives include:

- Support for Socially Displaced Persons:

- The Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers – The Piparo Empowerment Centre seeks to rehabilitate and provide skills training for male substance abusers who are also socially displaced.
- The Establishment of a Facility for Older Socially Displaced Persons, at Hernandez Place in Arima - intended to increase the capacity of care and treatment services for older socially displaced persons.
- An Integrated National Approach to the Problem of Street Dwelling in the short and medium to long term - an initiative approved by Cabinet in 2008, involves the efforts of key stakeholders as the Ministries of Health, Local Government, National Security, Public Administration, and Planning, Housing and the Environment. In the short term, it seeks to remove, relocate and rehabilitate street dwellers within the context of the Mental Health Act and the Summary Offences Act (pending amendment and proclamation of the Social Displacement Act of 2000, which provides for the assessment, care and rehabilitation of socially displaced persons).

The strategy involves the establishment of various types of Social Displacement facilities. One such facility is the new residential rehabilitation facility constructed at Piparo to allow, inter alia, for referral and relocation of those persons who, upon assessment have been sent via the Court for further treatment and rehabilitation. The New Horizons Centre, as it is called, became operational in April 2009, when twenty-one (21) persons were relocated from the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons facility in Port-of -Spain. The facility provides 12-18 months of residential, rehabilitative care, involving psychiatric and medical assessments and a range of psycho-social rehabilitation programmes; including self-esteem development, HIV/AIDS counseling and preparation for independent living. The provision of these services is expected to provide the clients with sufficient activity within the centre so as to diminish the lure of the streets.

Government recognises that increased consideration must be given to assisting socially displaced persons with permanent housing and is in the process of treating with this particular issue.

- Services for Deported Persons - are provided by staff of the SDU with support from the Trinidad and Tobago Police. Through the Rehabilitation and Accommodation Programme for Deportees, clients benefit from social interventions; and NGOs receive Government assistance to support their care, where necessary.
- Establishment of a Home for Young Female Offenders - The Remand Home for Young Female Offenders is intended to accommodate females under 18 years who are first time offenders and on remand.
- Establishment of a Remand Home for Young Male Offenders
This facility would provide a place of safety and custody for young men on remand. It would also ensure that residents are introduced to basic life skills, which would assist them in becoming productive members of society; and facilitate the proper assessment of residents with a view to assisting the Court in its sentencing process. The engagement of a service provider is currently being pursued.

The Family, Its Roles, Rights, Composition and Structure

Functional families and strong communities are cornerstones of social development and are expected to provide the nurturing, caring and supportive environment that will create the strong foundation for society. The policy and programme initiatives undertaken by the T&T Government assist families and communities by encouraging and reinforcing the need for parental and family commitment and stability, as well as the need for positive social values and behaviours.

Early Child Care Education (ECCE):

Empirical data derived from research conducted worldwide has shown that early childhood care education is important to the foundation of the child, thus supporting the investment in Early

Child Care Education (ECCE). Government wants to provide universal access to early child care services and has embarked upon a massive construction programme to build ECCE centres in order to provide these services to families. To date 23 ECCE centres have been established. 50 more have been awarded for construction to be delivered by December 2009.

The National Family Services Division under the Ministry of Social Development provides a range of programmes and services that promote healthy family functioning. The services include managing cases with children; providing individual, group and family counselling; developing and conducting public education programmes including sensitization on Child Rights; networking and collaborating with local, regional and international agencies to promote healthy functioning families; and providing job training opportunities for young persons.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago became signatory to the 1990 World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. These actions obligated the country to the formulation and implementation of a National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children; and to taking all the steps necessary to implement the CRC. The National Plan of Action for Children was finalised and approved by Cabinet in August 2006. The Plan addresses areas that are pertinent to promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS.

The NPA (2006-2010) is being implemented through the joint efforts of ministries and agencies in the government, non-governmental sectors, and with the support of international agencies such of UNICEF and the Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN).

The enactment of new children's legislation and the establishment of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago are essential to the protection of children and progress has been made in these areas. The Children's Authority (Amendment) Act 2008, the Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries (Amendment) Act 2008 and The International Child Abduction Act 2008 have been passed in Parliament. The latter has also been proclaimed, which has led to the establishment of the Civil Abduction Authority which is housed at the Ministry of the Attorney General and will facilitate implementation of the Act. The Children's Authority

(Amendment) Act was partially proclaimed. This has allowed for the appointment of members of the Children's Authority Board. It is expected that during the next fiscal period other Bills comprising the Children's Legislative Package will be laid in Parliament.

At present, steps are being taken to put the relevant infrastructure in place to facilitate the implementation of the Children's Authority. The Authority will be the new agency responsible for coordinating several social services relevant to the protection of the nation's children, including regulation of the operations of all children's homes and residences, monitoring of foster care and adoption services and provision of legal representation for children within the court system.

With the establishment of the Family Court in Trinidad and Tobago, a centralized environment has been provided where family members and children could benefit from a team of expert social service providers as they seek to resolve conflicts in the family. At the Family Court, services to children are administered using child-friendly approaches, in a child-friendly environment.

The Ministry of Social Development continues to ensure that child protection systems facilitate family, community and social environments that are free from violence and abuse and promote comprehensive development of the child, adolescent and the family environment through the delivery of its services.

The National Family Services (NFS) Division of the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for managing programmes and providing services aimed at promoting healthy family functioning. These either serve children directly, or inevitably redound to the benefit of our nation's children. The Division addresses issues that impact on the well-being of families such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, drug abuse and crime as well as investigates court referred cases. It undertakes the rehabilitation of families, individuals and children through the provision of free counseling, training and placement. During fiscal 2008, the National Family Services Division engaged in sensitization Workshops in seven regional corporations across Trinidad and Tobago on: Parenting and the family, Family Violence, Life Skills and Adolescents.

The nation's children have also been able to benefit from the establishment of Community Mediation Services under the Ministry of Social Development. Mediation Centres have been

established in number of areas throughout the country. This service provides an alternative to litigation as attempts are made to resolve conflicts in the society. Parental Support Groups, the formation of which is encouraged by the Community Mediation Programme, aim at improving familial relationships by providing a mechanism to enhance the capacity of parents to manage difficult child relations. In fiscal 2008, parenting support groups were in operation at various parts of the country.

The Adolescent Mothers Programme, managed by the Child Welfare League on behalf of GoTT, is designed to provide an adequate support system to teenage/adolescent mothers to enable them to improve their socio-economic position, thereby increasing their capacity to become independent, productive citizens and to increase the life chances of their children.

There has been a progressive shift in Government's policy towards the outsourcing of service delivery, as reflected in the increased partnering initiatives between Governmental and Non-Governmental organisations including community and faith-based organisations. As at the end of fiscal 2007/2008, the Ministry of Social Development was committed to disbursing annual subventions to fourteen (14) Children's Homes and four (4) Homes that provide services in Family Life and Counselling.

In general, GoTT provides financial support to NGOs to assist them in meeting the recurrent expenditure associated with the provision of social services. Provision of subventions to NGOs is primarily to address issues pertaining to youth, family, children, health (including sexual and reproductive health), ex-prisoners and persons with disabilities. The support is channeled to the NGOs from the following key social sector Ministries: Ministries of Education, Health, Sport and Youth Affairs, Community Development and the Ministry of Social Development. The Tobago House of Assembly's Department of Health and Social Services also provides financial support to NGOs. In fiscal 2007, Government continued to provide critical financial support to the NGO sector. Budgeted allocations to the sector rose from \$118,396,239.67 in fiscal 2006 to \$175,507,136.11 in fiscal 2007. This represents an increase of \$57,110,896.44 or 48% from the

2006 figure. Some organizations also received substantial increases in funding from Government which enabled them to implement social sector programmes.

In addition, Cabinet has also approved the establishment of a Decentralised Social Services Delivery System which will facilitate the delivery of social services in fourteen (14) regions. These are intended to facilitate early intervention and improved access to social services, reduce time, and improve the overall experience of clients (including children) seeking social services. The first of these offices is due to be opened in Sangre Grande in mid 2009. The others are expected to be rolled out over the rest of Trinidad and Tobago over the next four (4) years.

Population Growth and Structure

The GoTT is committed to strengthening formal and informal safety nets for the elderly, which includes elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against them.

The Policy on Ageing was approved in fiscal 2007. The Policy seeks to create an environment which would facilitate the meaningful participation and involvement of older persons in society. The Policy is consistent with the priority areas identified in the United Nations Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002). These priority areas are with respect to older persons and development, advancing health and Well Being into Old Age and Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments.

As part of the process of building strong families and strong communities, Government continued the establishment of senior centres through the Ministry of Social Development, that would address the social, emotional and health needs of older persons in the society by encouraging their personal growth and independence.

The National Policy on Person with Disabilities is a framework for integrating persons with disabilities in society. The Policy, which incorporated an Action Plan, was approved by Cabinet in December 2005 and formally launched in June 2006.

The Government continued to provide support for persons with disabilities through various programmes. These included the promotion of policy guidelines to enable them to lead a normal

life. The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the implementation of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities which articulates a holistic framework for achieving the goals of social inclusion and equality of opportunity for all citizens with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago.

The primary objective of this policy is to create a social and physical environment favouring accessibility, integration and full participation of persons with disabilities. In order to promote the creation of an accessible environment, the Ministry of Social Development launched a Public Awareness and Sensitization Campaign through its Newsletter “Access”, the purpose of which is to educate the general public on the varying types of disabilities, and to highlight the potential of persons with disabilities and their ability to contribute to society.

The Ministry of Social Development also conducted workshops on the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities. The purpose of these meetings has been to encourage Ministries to commit to implementation of actions outlined in the National Policy relevant to their mandate.

The Standardisation of Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language involves the creation of a dictionary that will contain both American and Trinidadian signs. Standardisation is expected to create consistency and uniformity in the use of the locally created signs by the Deaf and hearing impaired community; and lay a foundation for the introduction of a certified course to teach sign language. The text, once incorporated in the school system, will aid in the education of the Deaf and greatly improve their ability to live productive and self-sufficient lives. After reviewing over 1500 local signs and an equivalent number of American signs, in September 2007, an historic 1st edition of the Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago signs and an accompanying DVD, were completed and handed over to the Ministry of Education and relevant NGOs for review.

With regard to housing, Government’s policy included 5% of housing stock under the Government’s housing programme being allocated for vulnerable persons with disabilities and the aged.

Health, Morbidity and Mortality

The HIV / AIDS epidemic is a reality that Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean as a region is facing and has one of the highest incidence of HIV infections, especially among females between the ages of 15 and 24. However in Trinidad and Tobago, the annual reported death rate due to AIDS has declined by about 50% since 2001. The number of annual AIDS cases has declined by over 60% since 2001, and there has been a 17% annual decline in new HIV cases from 2003 to 2006. As we seek to empower those living with HIV / AIDS and educate others about the disease, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has engaged in several programmes and initiatives to deal with the challenges of this epidemic.

The HIV/AIDS Coordinating Units have been established as a strategy towards strengthening the role of the public sector in the HIV response. To achieve this objective, full-time HIV Coordinators were hired from a range of Government Ministries to ensure its success. Coordinators have been recruited in the Ministries of Tourism; Education; Local Government; Health; Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs; Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development; Sport and Youth Affairs , National Security and Social Development.

The HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit under the Ministry of Health replaced the National AIDS Programme and Rapport, and incorporates the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Programme. The Unit commenced operations in December 2006 and the main objectives are, to decrease the incidence of HIV / AIDS and to mitigate the negative impact of HIV / AIDS on persons infected and affected in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry focused on policy issues and included the development of a National HIV Testing Policy which is in the final stages, review of the current Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) Manual and the expansion of VCT training and sites.

Gender equality and empowerment of women

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has the mandate to specifically address all forms of gender inequality in the country. The Gender Affairs Division manages a Domestic Violence Hotline and administers about 8 drop-in (counseling) services at centres in communities across the country. Clients who are victims of violence, particularly domestic violence, may be referred by those services to: places of safety supported by the

Ministry of Social Development (such as shelters, hostels, rape crisis centres); and/or services delivered by the Ministry of Social Development such as those under the divisions of the National Family Services and Social Welfare.

The GoTT has established the Gender Equity Institute of the Gender Affairs Division that has responsibility for the implementation of programmes and projects to advance gender equity. The Institute has gender related training and institutional strengthening programmes for various NGOs, CBOs and the general public. There are also programmes such as the Women in Harmony and The Women Non-Traditional Skills Training Programme that equip women with skills that give them earning potential. Additionally, there is access to free education right up to the tertiary level for both men and women. Gender Affairs Division provides day care facilities for women in their programmes in order to enable them to attend the training programmes being offered and Life skills facilitators to assist women in developing much needed life skills.

Response to Challenges:

It is noteworthy that several of the strategies mentioned have been implemented despite challenges that include: bureaucracy, difficulties experienced by clients in accessing social services, lack of adequate research to inform policies and programming; and cutbacks, particularly in light of the global financial crisis. The response to such problems include, inter alia:

- decentralization of social services delivery
- partnering with and harnessing the resources of NGOs and CBOs;
- strengthening research and monitoring and evaluation capabilities
- strengthening the nexus between research and policy, in all areas
- digging into pockets and coffers to support much needed social interventions; and
- strengthened political will and commitment.