



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

MINISTER OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2023 NATIONAL

BUDGET DEBATE

“TENACITY AND STABILITY IN THE FACE OF

GLOBAL CHALLENGES”

Madame Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address this Honourable House and to make my contribution as Minister of Planning and Development towards the 2022/2023 National Budget Debate. I take this opportunity to extend congratulations and emphasise my support to the Honourable Minister of Finance and the staff of the Ministry of Finance, as well as all other Ministers and their Ministries for their invaluable contributions towards this National Budget.

Madame Speaker, the theme of this year's budget "Tenacity and stability in the face of global challenges" is quite apt, as it resounds the commitment of Government to face the several challenges encountered mainly from the COVID-19 pandemic, which gravely contributed to the world economic downturn.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Madame Speaker, my confidence in our ability to continue bringing Trinidad and Tobago forward is not based on conjecture, but on solid objectives, backed by a National Development Strategy and other policy frameworks, driving our plans, programmes and projects.

The Ministry of Planning and Development is the national planning agency facilitating Trinidad and Tobago's strategic planning processes via the National Development Strategy (NDS), also known as Vision

2030. All Ministries, Statutory Bodies and Agencies align their work programmes to achieve our nation's national development goals and objectives. Madame Speaker, we are currently in the second phase of Vision 2030's planning horizon (2021-2025) and the Planning and Development Ministry has prepared a draft Revised NDS which reflects progress made in the first planning horizon and accommodates the recommendations of the Roadmap to Recovery Committee's Phase I and Phase II Reports and the Community Recovery Report.

It also incorporates the principles and objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the integration and prioritisation of all 17 SDGs across the National Development Strategy's five (5) thematic areas.

Madame Speaker, in keeping with the Government's commitment to fully adopt the Roadmap to Recovery Reports and the Community Recovery Report as core policy documents over the medium term, we at the Ministry of Planning and Development, will continue to do our job, placing emphasis on implementing national development projects and initiatives largely through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), which stands at **six point one billion dollars** (\$6.1643 billion) for fiscal 2023.

Further, the Ministry of Planning and Development has developed a draft Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to monitor and measure the performance of the national development initiatives to be implemented across Government, and to track their progress towards ensuring recovery and transformation for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago post COVID-19. It is anticipated that the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will be completed and published by January 2023.

I say all of this to bring home the point that this is a Government with a plan for Trinidad and Tobago, contrary to what the Opposition is saying. This plan, Ladies and Gentlemen and Members of this Honourable House, is bolstered by policy and backed by action that will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that we keep Trinidad and Tobago on a trajectory of progress.

This Government is serious about addressing our development issues such as poverty, unemployment, business creation, infrastructural development, social cohesion and environmental risk, while concurrently creating solutions for the newer challenges arising from the COVID-19 and other potential pandemics, conflict in Europe, food and fuel price increases, and other global occurrences.

TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY

With an eye on our goal of economic transformation, we all know, or ought to know the maxim, “*what is not measured, does not get done*”. Understanding that the implementation of our plans and programmes must be backed by solid data, this government is ensuring that we are meeting citizens’ needs, while at the same time ensuring that data on progress and results are recorded. Therefore, a reliable functioning National Statistical System is a major priority, and we are building on this.

National Statistics

The Central Statistical Office (CSO) continues to work assiduously in the collection and dissemination of data in areas such as GDP estimates, price indices and inflation, labour force, trade, social statistics and more recently, environmental statistics.

Understanding that the availability of timely, relevant data is critical to assess the economic status of the country and inform decision making, The Ministry of Planning and Development, which serves as the line Ministry for the CSO, is providing the support necessary. I commend the staff of the Central Statistical Office for their hard work in the provision of up-to-date data and the planning and execution of national surveys and censuses.

Madame Speaker, this government takes statistics very seriously, and is very aware of what can go wrong when a body like the CSO does not receive the support it deserves. In fact, Madame Speaker, more than anyone else, the Leader of the Opposition ought to be aware of the pitfalls of neglecting national statistics.

As she entertained herself with selective memories during her presentation, I could not help but recall an article published on August second, 2015, in the Sunday Guardian, titled, “Finding a home for CSO”, which explained some of the consequences of the neglect of the CSO by her administration. And I quote, Madame Speaker:

This state of homelessness must have had a devastating impact on the morale of the CSO staff. It certainly had a deleterious consequence for the output of the CSO to the point that the "inadequate provision of vital macro-economic data" was itemised as one of the drivers of the decision by the Moody's rating agency to downgrade T&T in April this year.

Even more humiliatingly for the CSO staff and its minister was the fact that the Government was publicly excoriated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its 2014 Article IV consultation report on T&T.

"The CSO," the IMF stated in June 2014, "has yet to move into suitable quarters and remains woefully under-staffed and under-resourced. The production of critical data (including GDP, trade, and labour, as well as tourism statistics) continues to fall further behind, grinding to a halt in critical areas and rendering the conduct of surveillance ever harder."

End of Quote.

Madame Speaker, that was from the golden years that the Leader of the Opposition waxed lyrically about, just a few days ago, while seeking to project a moral authority that she does not have, AND with the audacity to call for early elections, already having been rejected TWICE in succession by the people of Trinidad and Tobago!

We have ensured that the current accommodation space is sufficient for the number of staff currently available to the CSO, with a focus on the future need for expanded accommodation, as the CSO transitions to the National Statistical Institute. We are raising staff numbers to ensure a full complement of qualified personnel in full-time and contract positions, with attention to building capacity through training opportunities and technology, via cooperation with our multilateral partners. Thus, CSO personnel have benefitted immensely from participation in training programmes run by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Food and Agriculture

Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and Statistics Canada.

Madame Speaker, all of this exposure and training has greatly enhanced the CSO's capacity to research, produce and disseminate additional social indicators or measurements on subject areas such as education, health, gender, children and youth, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, among others.

As I continue, Madame Speaker, I wish to reiterate to this House that through the undeterred drive of the Ministry of Planning and Development to support the institutional strengthening of the Statistical Office, the CSO does a phenomenal amount of work and provides accurate and up-to-date statistics to help guide the formulation of policies that benefit all our citizens. And this includes:

The *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)* - a household survey in collaboration with UNICEF.

The *Joint Household Budget Survey/Survey of Living Conditions (HBS/SLC)* to obtain data on income, expenditure and the socio-economic status of citizens, is also a weekly, ongoing exercise of the CSO.

Madame Speaker, the CSO is also making significant progress regarding the national *Population and Housing Census* – This is expected to be undertaken in 2023.

The Management of the CSO has confirmed that a draft census proposal has been prepared, and the draft Census survey instrument completed. Work is ongoing to ensure that we collect the most accurate data on our population available.

Another activity is *Rebasing of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Trinidad and Tobago* - this is designed to obtain price and volume indicators necessary to rebase the GDP to more accurately reflect economic output. Madame Speaker, the rebasing project will allow for more accurate allocation of scarce economic resources by government's economic planners, and greater accuracy in economic forecasting.

In addition to these major surveys and the Population and Housing Census, the CSO has continued to produce its core statistical products, including the production and dissemination of quarterly GDP data for Trinidad and Tobago. The CSO has also recently upgraded its website to allow for easier querying of data, including time series data, and is

currently working with the IDB to implement an Open Data Policy for the dissemination of statistical products.

Madame Speaker, on a regular basis, our colleagues on the opposite bench have made comments regarding the data provided by the CSO. There is definitely a need to further enhance our national statistical infrastructure to parity with international standards, and all the support and work done by the Ministry and the CSO are in preparation for the upgrade to our national statistical infrastructure that will come when the CSO transitions to the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago. But yet, they hesitate to support the transition of the CSO to the NSI. Madame Speaker, this transformation is an important step towards the full autonomy of the current National Statistical System. It is in keeping with international best practice, and deserves the full support of this House. The NSITT Bill will be reintroduced in this Honourable House at the earliest possible opportunity, Madame Speaker, and I do hope, for the sake of our collective good as a nation, that my colleagues in the Opposition can get behind this crucial Bill, which benefits ALL of Trinidad and Tobago. In the interim, this government remains committed to evidence-based decision making, through a strong statistical system driving our policy direction.

Digitisation

The Town and Country Planning Division (TCPD) is at the forefront of this initiative, and has embarked on a Digitisation Project aimed at a complete digital shift in the management and storage of the TCPD's legacy data, in order to facilitate easy incorporation into the DevelopTT platform. This initiative is also in keeping with the Roadmap to Recovery's recommendation to, quote, "adopt modern technology nationally, beginning with the digitalisation of the public service" and "enhancing the ease of doing business," End quote.

This Project is being implemented on a phased basis. Phase I, focused on digitising **one hundred thousand, two hundred and eighty-eight** (100,288) files and application documents covering the North Regional and South Regional Offices, has been completed. This achievement also involved the digital conversion of **one thousand, five hundred and twenty-four** (1,524) plotting maps; **two thousand, nine hundred and thirty-five** (2,935) subdivision layouts; and **ninety-five thousand, eight hundred and twenty-nine** (95,829) green file applications.

The Division is currently undertaking preparatory work for Phase II of the project, which will focus on digitising records of the East and Tobago Offices of the TCPD.

Madame Speaker, we have heard the many cries of the various sectors, especially the construction sector, regarding the delays experienced in obtaining the requisite approvals to conduct business in Trinidad and Tobago. To address this issue, we have looked at our internal processes, to identify gaps and weaknesses, with the aim of strengthening those areas. Madame Speaker, the Automated Construction Permitting System, commonly referred to as DevelopTT, is one such avenue administered by the TCPD, to facilitate the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago.

The System allows for the electronic submission, tracking and processing of applications for construction permits and other regulatory approvals. In essence, developers can potentially move from application to building phase in less time, saving time and money.

This initiative is being implemented by the TCPD in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and is also aligned with the Roadmap to Recovery recommendations: “adopting modern technology nationally, beginning with the digitalisation of the public service” and “enhancing the ease of doing business”.

The system commenced in 2020 with the North Regional Office, and has since expanded to include all four (4) TCPD Regional Offices and all fourteen (14) Municipal Corporations. Madame Speaker, I am happy to

state that as at September 2022, a total of **nine thousand, eight hundred and eleven** (9,811) applications had been received via DevelopTT for processing.

I am pleased to inform you that in September 2022, Liquor Licence Correspondence and Customs Bonded Correspondence were launched at all four (4) TCPD Regional Offices, and manual submissions will no longer be accepted.

Madame Speaker, apart from contributing to our digitisation and digitalisation goals, DevelopTT is also vital to ensuring that the overall objectives of climate change mitigation, disaster risk planning, citizen safety, the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, and many more areas are met and surpassed. I would also like to say the WASA will join the DevelopTT platform by the end of October for Plumbing and Development Approval.

Innovation

Madame Speaker, this Government recognises the important role of innovation in providing more effective, open and inclusive services to the public.

Innovative solutions are providing new ways to positively impact the lives of our citizens, and through CARIRI, the mandate is to support the development of the industrial sector in Trinidad and Tobago. It has become one of the leading agencies in innovation and entrepreneurship through its Centre for Enterprise Development (CED).

Here is a snippet of what we have been doing in this field:

- **The Democratising Innovation in the Americas (DIA) Programme** - In partnership with the Trust of the Americas, over **one hundred** (100) vulnerable youth from rural and disadvantaged communities participated in this programme to further understand entrepreneurship and aspects of Information Technology.
- **Coding for Students** - Madame Speaker, coding provides our youth with the opportunity to tap into a global multi-billion dollar industry that includes the film industry, the gaming industry, high-tech applications in the workforce, and entrepreneurship. Learning to code, teaches our young ones important skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Through a Republic Bank Limited (RBL) sponsorship worth **four hundred thousand dollars** (TT\$400,000), close to **two thousand** (2,000) students were exposed to basic concepts of coding.

- **The Idea Advisory Service (IAS)** – this project directly benefits a mix of individuals from targeted groups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), with the expressed need and willingness to innovate. Individuals and enterprises have access to the full suite of IAS technical/advisory support to achieve "Innovation Literacy". Over the last three (3) years, over **one hundred** (100) persons benefitted from this project, and over the last year, **fifty** (50) SMEs received grant funding to improve their products and services.
- ***The Business Hatchery Programme (BHP)*** – Madame Speaker, this ongoing Programme addresses the business development support needs of start-ups and early-stage businesses, affording them the opportunity to test the market viability of their products, services or technology solutions. In the last two (2), years over **two hundred** (200) persons have graduated from this programme.

Through the Ministry of Planning and Development, Madame Speaker, this Government is currently executing, in collaboration with the European Union (EU) and the Inter-American Development Bank Lab, a project titled “Shaping the Future of Innovation in Trinidad and Tobago”, aimed at catalysing an increase in innovation activity to drive business-led economic growth and jobs.

Madame Speaker, I'm happy to report that in July 2022 the first fifteen grants, totalling **fourteen million TT dollars** (TT\$14 million) were approved.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Madame Speaker, the Planning and Development continues its diligent work to ensure that protection and sustainable management are at the “Centre of economic and Social Development”, which is one of five goals outlined in Trinidad and Tobago’s National Development Strategy, Vision 2030. This is also supported by the National Environmental Policy, as well as our work to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 - Climate Action; SDG 14 – Life Below Water; and SDG 15 – Life On Land. The protection of our environmental heritage is a matter of life and death, and failure to act now, will have devastating consequences.

To this end, our government is taking environmental action through the following:

The National Climate Change Policy

The National Climate Change Policy is being updated to incorporate the decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Renewable Energy

Madame Speaker, the Government has prioritised renewable energy as part of its diversification strategy for the promotion of a clean and sustainable source of power generation. We remain committed to meeting the targets for renewable energy penetration, with a recommended minimum target being **thirty per cent** (30%) of demand by 2030. One of the initiatives being undertaken is the installation of a commercial-scale solar panel system, via a solar park at the Piarco International Airport. This is a project funded through the European Union's Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Programme. The sod-turning took place in July 2022.

Madame Speaker, another initiative recently implemented by this Government in collaboration with the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is the grant of solar photovoltaic panels to **twelve** (12) recipient organisations and communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Commissioning has commenced with installations at Matura.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (MEEI) is designing an implementation plan for the Feed-in-Tariff Policy (FIT), which will offer residential and commercial consumers opportunities to contribute to the renewable energy mix on the national grid, while affording cost savings.

It should also be noted that this overall project will complement the larger utility-scale solar farm being led by the Energy Ministry.

Smart Transportation Strategies and Systems

Madame Speaker, this Government is forging ahead with its aim to increase the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) in Trinidad and Tobago. In collaboration with the Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT), we are developing an e-mobility policy aimed at facilitating greater penetration of electric vehicles in the transportation mix. Further technical analyses regarding barriers are in the final stages, and the results, along with policy recommendations to overcoming these barriers, will be incorporated into the policy. This is expected to be completed before the end of this year.

Madame Speaker, introducing electric mobility by shifting to EVs will reduce our dependence on fuel imports. Given the high energy efficiency of EVs and an increase in the percentage of renewable energy in the energy mix, Trinidad and Tobago's overall energy import bill will be significantly reduced, along with our greenhouse gas emissions. This will also augur well for our Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, where Trinidad and Tobago has committed to reducing cumulative greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation, power

generation and industrial sectors by **fifteen per cent** (15%) relative to a business-as-usual baseline, by 2030.

Tracking Greenhouse Gas Emissions

To achieve our commitments under the Paris Agreement we need to assess our greenhouse gas emissions. Again, Madame Speaker, we cannot manage what we cannot measure. To this end, we have designed and tested a measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) system, which allows for entities that emit such gases to submit their inventory to the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) as the host of the MRV system. After a successful pilot-testing of the MRV system, emitting entities are currently voluntarily submitting data to the EMA.

As part of the national monitoring, reporting and verification framework to track progress of the NDC, a professional certification programme for greenhouse gas inventorying is being undertaken in collaboration with the UNDP, through a consultancy with The University of the West Indies (UWI).

Promotion of the Circular Economy

The Recyclable Solid Waste Collection Project, better known as iCARE, is one of the successful initiatives which forms part of the development of

the circular economy, creating value from waste, and generating employment and income from environmentally-beneficial activity.

Managed by the Environmental Management Authority, this programme has to be celebrated Madame Speaker. It is an essential element that aligns with Theme Five of Vision 2030, placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development. As at August 2022, approximately **three million, eighty-seven thousand** (3,087,000) bags of recyclable material had been collected from **eight hundred and twenty-two** (822) deposit sites across the country. The material is processed into bales and flakes of PET plastics, aluminium cans, tetrapaks, and glass, for further integration at international recycling facilities.

In addition, several beverage brands have signalled their intention to adopt and integrate sustainable principles into their local business models. We know that the glass feedstock is an example of re-integration into new bottles by Carib Glassworks Limited and is representative of promoting a circular value chain.

Madame Speaker, the 2021 Waste Management Rules (WMR) were finalised and gazetted in June 2021.

The harmful effects of electronic waste on our environment are also on our radar. We aim to eliminate and bring national attention to this problem through our support for a project developed by the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for the Caribbean (BCRC-Caribbean), called the "Demonstration of the Environmentally Sound Management of Used and end-of-life Mobile Phones in Trinidad and Tobago". The project aims to increase public awareness of the environmentally sound management of used and end-of-life (EOL) mobile phones locally, and to stop old phones from entering our landfills, where they can poison our groundwater.

Climate Change Impact on the Agricultural Sector

Madame Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is embarking on an **eighteen-month** (18-month) project in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), which focuses on building climate change resilience in the agricultural sector through the following activities:

- Developing a framework for collection and analysis of agricultural and associated activity data;
- Building the capacity of key stakeholders; and
- Piloting of an agriculture database system.

Building Climate Resilience in Trinidad and Tobago's Healthcare System

Madame Speaker, this Government is also undertaking a **twenty-four-month** (24-month) project with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, which aims to build resilience of the health sector to cope with increased incidence and intensity of climate-induced disaster and extreme weather events and associated risks.

Development and Implementation of a Sustainable Management Mechanism for Persistent Organic Pollutants in the Caribbean

Trinidad and Tobago is one of **eight** (8) Caribbean territories involved in this initiative that aims to develop the mechanisms for the environmentally sound management of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), and to reduce and eliminate the threat they pose to regional health.

Ozone Depletion Management

Madame Speaker, the Planning Ministry has continued its work under the Montreal Protocol to phase out ozone-depleting substances through numerous projects and programmes involving the various sectors that use these chemicals, particularly the refrigeration and air conditioning sector.

I would also like to inform this Honourable House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that I have been in close communication with my

Honourable Cabinet Colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, and urgent attention is being given to the Beverage Container Bill. Consultations on the Bill have been completed with the private sector and all parties involved. There has been a revision of the Draft, and we intend to produce the Bill soon, and I implore my colleagues on the other side to bestow their full support for the Bill for Trinidad and Tobago.

The preservation of built and natural heritage

Madame Speaker, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago posits that there can be no national development without an understanding of the significance and richness of Trinidad and Tobago's built and natural heritage. As a responsible government, we agree, and continue to support the development of our national heritage resources, taking into consideration current issues such as climate change and renewable energy.

The National Trust has successfully integrated Sustainable Eco-Development on Nelson Island, a place of enormous national historical significance, through the use of solar power for the electrical and water purification needs of the island.

This project is perhaps the best example of sustainability through renewable energy in Trinidad and Tobago today, Madame Speaker, as it also results in savings in electricity and transportation costs, since the

Trust previously had to transport water and other essentials from the mainland.

This project is also in keeping with our commitments under the Paris Agreement, as laid down in our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), as well as in the achievement of the national policy target to increase the total amount of energy generated from renewable energy sources.

Madame Speaker, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago is also the recipient of a **two hundred thousand US-dollar** (US\$200,000) grant from the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). The project, titled a "Collaborative Investigation of Climate Change Solutions for Endangered Cultural Heritage in Trinidad and Tobago," is in partnership with the University of Florida's Historic Preservation Program.

It will gather data in Downtown Port of Spain and on Nelson Island, using 3D lidar scanning and photogrammetry tools to digitally map the landscape and heritage structures, and produce a vulnerability assessment report that will include conservation management plans, and strategies for enhancing resilience within Trinidad and Tobago's national heritage sector.

Ecotourism

Madame Speaker, the Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA) is working assiduously to realise its Vision as the premier provider of the ultimate customer experience in a world-class, ecotourism destination, business and entertainment venue. With the support of the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Authority is enhancing the wide array of product offerings in the North West Peninsula, which also includes five islets.

The CDA is also working to provide more quality options for persons with outdoor lifestyles, by upgrading the breath-taking and picturesque nature trails for cycling and hiking on the peninsula. Boat tours are also available to Gasparee Caves and the other islands, for historical and educational visits, and prime venues for events and recreation.

FINANCING THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECONOMY

Madame Speaker, Government's priorities and plans for economic growth, sustained development and increased resilience have been supported through a comprehensive programme of loans, grants and other financial and technical assistance initiatives from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Trinidad and Tobago has benefitted from the IDB and the CDB in a number of key areas, inclusive of financial sector regulation and

supervision, climate change, public sector management, education, energy, social protection, water and sanitation, citizen security and housing and urban development.

The Caribbean Development Bank

Madame Speaker, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) continues to provide critical support to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago towards the achievement of its development agenda and in accordance with the Country Strategy Paper. Key priority areas for possible support are being explored, which include: Digital Transformation; Climate Change and Adaptation; Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency; and Enhancing the CDB's engagement with the Private Sector.

Projects funded under the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement and CARICOM Single Market and Economy Standby Facility

Cabinet has agreed to the signing of **three (3)** Grant Agreements between the Government and the CDB for the following Projects:

- Building a Quality Culture in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Establishment of a Trade Facilitation Enquiry Point for Trinidad and Tobago; and

- Developing the Export Readiness of Trinidad and Tobago Companies for the European Market, (Fit for Europe II).

Madame Speaker, I am happy to report that as a Governor on the Board of Governors of the CDB, I signed the Grant Agreements for these projects. It is noteworthy that two (2) of the three (3) projects namely *Establishment of a Trade Facilitation Enquiry Point for Trinidad and Tobago, and Developing the Export Readiness of Trinidad and Tobago Companies for the European Market, (Fit for Europe II)* were launched on May 27, 2022.

Inter-American Development Bank

Madame Speaker, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been an instrumental source of multilateral financing for this country's development efforts since Trinidad and Tobago became a member in 1967. The work of the IDB, through a comprehensive programme of loans, grants, and other financial and technical assistance initiatives, has always been aligned to the Government's policy and priorities for economic transformation. The Ministry of Planning and Development has the responsibility for oversight of all governance and operational matters in relation to the Bank.

Cabinet approval of IDB Group Country Strategy with Trinidad and Tobago, 2021–2025

Madame Speaker, in March 2022, Cabinet granted approval to the IDB Group Country Strategy (CS) with Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2021 – 2025, and the pipeline of IDB loans and national TC Projects. The Country Strategy provides the strategic framework for the Bank’s interventions in the country, and supports the programming of resources from the Bank’s various facilities, for both loan and TC grants. During this Country Strategy period, the Bank will emphasise its efforts on the promotion of digitalisation to support economic transformation, beginning with the digitalisation of public services and the adaptation of modern technology.

Pipeline of Loan Operations for Trinidad & Tobago

With respect to the pipeline of loan operations for Trinidad and Tobago, Cabinet has granted approval for the MPU (Ministry of Public Utilities) to continue engaging in discussions with the IDB for the following three (3) projects:

- (i) Water Supply Improvement Programme – **sixty million US dollars** (US\$60 million) - This Programme is designed to help the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) achieve a **twenty-four/seven** (24/7) water supply, reduce the unacceptable levels of

non-revenue water, and support the short, intermediate and medium-term actions to transform WASA into a performance-based organisation;

(ii) Digital Transformation – **thirty million US dollars** (US\$30 million) - The IDB has had discussions with key stakeholders in the information and communication technology sector in Trinidad and Tobago, regarding the challenges affecting the sector and the areas of potential support that the Bank can provide to the country; and

(iii) Fiscal Policy and Management – **forty-five million US dollars** (US\$45 million) - In 2020, the Government received **one hundred million US dollars** (US\$100 million) via Tranche I, from the IDB, to provide budgetary support to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of public policy and fiscal management, in response to the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19.

Madame Speaker, the Technical Cooperation portfolio of the IDB contributes significantly to our nation's development agenda, especially in the area of technical expertise and knowledge transfer. The IDB is

committed to building the Technical Cooperation portfolio and has identified a number of national projects inclusive of:

- Training Women for Non-Traditional Occupations in Key Economic Sectors;
- Promoting Business Productivity and Economic Diversification for Recovery;
- Strengthening Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) public policy and governance in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Support for Restructuring of the Export and Investment Architecture in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Support to Civil Service Reforms for the Digital Transformation

European Development Fund

Madame Speaker, the European Development Fund (EDF) is managed by the Ministry of Planning and Development's European Development Fund Unit. The Unit's main focus is to ensure the full and efficient utilisation of grant funds from the EU, by facilitating the implementation of the programmes and projects under the National Indicative Programme and all other programmes funded by the EU. The Unit also coordinates all aspects of implementation, specifically, the authorisation of expenditure within the limits of the fund, procurement and contracting of short-term,

technical assistance, as well as the monitoring and appraisal of programmes and projects.

11th European Development Fund – “Support to a Competitive and Innovative Economy in Trinidad & Tobago”

In 2015 the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the European Commission signed the National Indicative Programme under the 11th EDF with a financial envelope of **nine point seven million Euro** (€9.7 million), of which, **eight million Euros** (€8 million) was allocated for the focal area “Support for Building a Competitive and Innovative Economy in Trinidad and Tobago”.

THE CONSTITUENCY OF ARIMA

Madame Speaker, I am on record, everywhere I go, as saying that I have the good fortune to represent the best and most beautiful constituency in our nation. Obviously, every member of this esteemed house will feel differently, and there is nothing wrong with that, even though I am right. I am indeed blessed and thankful for the trust placed in me by the good people of the Constituency of Arima, whom I have served and continue to serve with every fibre of my being.

Madame Speaker, Arima is the home Constituency of our First People, the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community, which occupies **twenty-five**

(25) acres of leased State land on the Arima - Blanchisseuse Road, for the purposes of establishing a Traditional Village and Living Museum, and the cultivation of traditional plants and crops. In furtherance of our commitment to our First People, the site will receive pipe-borne water for the first time, under WASA's Community Water Improvement Programme (CWIP). This project will be commissioned in **three (3)** weeks. The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) is currently working on a plan to supply the site with electricity, even as the Ministry of Public Utilities is looking to install solar-powered lights at the site – Madame Speaker, I see brighter days ahead for our First People.

There are also wetter days ahead, Madame Speaker for taps in the Constituency, as WASA completes its refurbishment, installation, repair and upgrade works at different points, so that water pressure and supply frequency increase, all the way to constant **twenty-four-seven (24)** presence in homes and businesses across the Constituency.

Madame Speaker, in the **twenty-first (21st)** century, digital technology is opening up the world in ways that we could not have imagined a couple of decades ago. Digital connectivity enables personal, economic and administrative interactions that enable people to live safer and better lives, interacting with one another and their environment through interconnected digital platforms. Connect Arima, Madame Speaker, is the

pilot project designed to bring everyday living to the digital realm in Arima, as a test bed for a national rollout. Citizens will be able to experience all the benefits of digital connectivity as they make their way around Arima, with access to information from transport hubs and transporters, merchants and vendors, and municipal authorities to inform and guide their choices and activities around the Borough. Madame Speaker, a new day is coming to Arima, and we are at the forefront of these exciting times.

CONCLUSION

Madame Speaker, everything we do; every project and programme we conceptualise and implement; we do with the improvement of the welfare of our people in mind. Our critics may not want to admit this, but we utilise every available avenue, in our quest to create a better a better life for current and future generations in Trinidad and Tobago. Madame Speaker, I have provided this Honourable House with the good work that has been and will continue to be done by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with our people in mind.

Madame Speaker, I cannot close without extending my appreciation to my staff at the Ministry of Planning and Development. I joined the Ministry six (6) months ago and I must thank everyone for the tremendous work accomplished over the fiscal year, which was in train under the

leadership of my predecessor, the Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis. We have faced many challenges, and I can tell you without a shadow of doubt, that Trinidad and Tobago is blessed to have among its number, the hard-working, professional, dedicated and competent men and women of the Ministry of Planning and Development. We remain committed to meeting our goals and objectives, which will ultimately benefit every citizen of this our beloved nation.

I thank you, Madame Speaker.