

# Keynote Address

Commonwealth Local Government Forum

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

Radisson Hotel

8:30 a.m.

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Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. I'd like to warmly welcome all our Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) partners here today. Especially those of you who are visiting Trinidad and Tobago for this event, I welcome you. If this is your first visit, I hope that you have some sightseeing planned after the conference and that you can maximize your time here, seeing all our beautiful country has to offer.

As the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, it is my great pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with you today. Because I'm proud of the strides that we are making in local government here in Trinidad.

Since our independence in 1962, reforming our local government system has been on the agenda, and we have made numerous steps towards the shape that we want local government to take – for our people. We are lucky with the scheduling of this conference, because you are here right as we are about to make a giant leap forward with local government

reform, as we are in the last stages of finalizing the legislation which will empower our fourteen Municipal Corporations, and provide them a greater level of autonomy to make the decisions that will directly affect them and their burgesses.

Our intention with local government reform is to bring the goods and services provided by the government, closer to every family across the island. We took lessons from the Tobago House of Assembly, from Jamaica and from the United Kingdom in building this idea, and most importantly, we listened to the people. And after 15 public consultations (one in each Municipality and one in Tobago), we were able to create a draft policy that has informed the legislation that we will soon be bringing before the Parliament.

What we've tried to do with this legislation is create a more direct linkage between the Municipal Corporations and the Central Government, particularly our Ministry of Finance. By cutting out the Ministry of Local Government as a middle step, Actors at the Local level can appeal directly to the Ministry of Finance for their fiscal allocations and releases. We are also aiming to create an avenue for the Municipal Corporations to retain certain taxes, so that they have another secure line of funding that they can use to supplement their development agenda.

While we've been awaiting this legislation, the Corporations, of course, have not been inactive. They have been preparing themselves by deepening their civil society ties. Last year each of the fourteen Municipalities created a volunteer network, with which they can engage their burgesses for community building projects and activities. Many of these volunteers have gone through Community Emergency Response Team (or CERT) training, and can now be called on to assist in times of disaster - which is very important for us because Disaster Management is a key function of local government. And we recently saw just how important that function was with the floods that took place over these past two months in North Eastern, Central and South Trinidad. We have also had volunteers coming out to undertake beautification projects or social projects to assist the homeless, and all these initiatives have helped them to get to know their elected local representatives, their neighbours, elders, and the various Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups in their municipality so that they know where they can get involved.

Throughout my career in local government, I've found that people do want to become involved in their communities, and they want guided, meaningful ways to give back. Mostly the problem is that they don't know how. So by deepening the ties between the Municipal Corporations and the people, we have provided that avenue for them.

In that broad way, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has been pushing the creation of partnerships - with residents and with businesses in every community - which does three things. It falls in line with Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it fits into our National Development Strategy Vision 2030, and it creates a stronger foundation for the local government reform that we want to take shape.

### **CLGF in Trinidad and Tobago**

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) is one of those unique partnerships for us; in that it is an international forum that embraces State agencies (like line Ministries) as well as the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities (TTALGA) (national associations) and also makes provisions for individual councils.

Here in Trinidad, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) has really been an instrumental partner in projects to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities (TTALGA) and with funding from the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) has partnered with three Municipal Corporations for three major projects. In the Sangre

Grande Regional Corporation, it is a local tourism app - which launched in August and I encourage all of you all to download it, as it really shows us what the region has to offer, and provides a wealth of information. It ties in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 9, 14 and 15 - as through innovation, they are highlighting their life below water and on land, and the reward that comes from interacting with these resources in a sustainable way.

In Port of Spain it has been the proposal for a walkability project within the downtown business district in partnership with the Blind Welfare Association and the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities. They have been able to chart an accessible path from the Blind Welfare Association on the corner of Edward and Duke Streets to Frederick Street by building ramps for trolleys, strollers and wheelchairs; and installing tactile services so the visually impaired can gain and maintain their bearings while using these ramps and crossing intersections. This project of course speaks to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 - Reduced Inequalities.

At the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, the project has been to work towards the development of a land information system that identifies expansive soils, which are generally clay-based soils that can expand and contract. Looking at the local soil composition, the workshop revealed

that the region is particularly susceptible to land movements resulting from expansive soil, such as building cracks etc. So this project aims to identify these soil types with a view to provide informed decisions for the construction of buildings. Out of this project we hope to create information for building guidelines that will be specific to the area which will guide burgesses on how they should plan and construct their homes and businesses. This project finds relevance in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11 and 16 which involves creating sustainable cities and communities, and building strong institutions.

## **Conclusion**

So here in Trinidad and with the partnership of Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), we continue to work towards localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, while we push our agenda for local government reform so that every citizen can have better representation, better standards in their communities and an overall better quality of life. We aim to empower our local government bodies and elected representatives so that they can continue to Put People First, and be the strongest advocates for and agents of, development at the local level. We are thankful for the continued partnership with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) as we work towards these goals, and

we look forward to the continued progress that we can make to improve local government at home and across the Commonwealth.

Thank you.