



*Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities,
Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA)*

**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

Held on Wednesday, 24th January 2024, from 10:15 a.m. to 12:42 p.m.

Venue: Virtual via Zoom Video Conferencing platform

Subject Matter: An inquiry into the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly in relation to Job Creation, Value Chain Development and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development

Objectives of the Inquiry

The objectives of the inquiry are as follows:

1. To determine the status of initiatives/projects to improve value chain development in Tobago.
2. To assess the job creation initiatives of the THA.
3. To examine the THA's strategies for developing Micro, Small and Medium Entrepreneurship or business opportunities.

Committee Members

The following Members were present:

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|-----------------------------------|----------|
| • Ms. Sunity Maharaj | Chairman |
| • Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP | Member |
| • Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP | Member |
| • Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP | Member |
| • Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal | Member |
| • Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial | Member |
| • Mr. Laurence Hislop | Member |

The following Members were excused / absent:

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| • Mr. Esmond Forde, MP | Vice - Chairman |
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Witnesses Who Appeared

The following officials appeared before the Committee:

Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport

- Ms. Shelly Trim Administrator (Ag.)
- Ms. Ann Marie de Gazon Youth Development Director
- Ms. Michelle Burris Community Development Coordinator
- Mrs. Melissa James-Guy Assistant Director, YES Programme

Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy

- Ms. Nikisha Ottley Administrator (Ag.)
- Mr. Anselm Richards Chief Technical Advisor
- Ms. Shelly Ann Baptiste Manager, Business Development Unit
- Ms. Tricia Beckles Manager, Strategic Business Development

Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development

- Ms. Karen Shaw Agro-Investment Specialist
- Mrs. Tamika Seales-Mansano Director, Food Crop Production
- Ms. Marcia Carter Planning Officer
- Mr. Ricardo Alfred Chairman, TADCO

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development**:



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Food Security

- i. Tobago currently produces 20% of what it consumes, therefore, the Division is exploring initiatives to create greater self-sufficiency in other commodities.
- ii. Tobago currently consumes 260,000 chickens, both imported and local, every month, and 60,000 chickens were purchased through TADCO over a nine-month period.

The Agricultural Sector in Tobago

- iii. The Division instituted a COVID-19 grant program for business persons who were negatively affected by COVID-19, including farmers, and 40% of the grant funding disbursed went to the agricultural sector.
- iv. As of 2024, there are currently 4037 registered farmers in Tobago, of which 343 are active farmers. One key reason for the small number of active farmers is that farmers must have access to their own land or a letter of permission to use a particular parcel of land prior to becoming registered to access state land for farming.
- v. There is a need to improve the quality standards for the items produced in the agricultural sector.
- vi. There is a culture of part-time farming as opposed to full-time farmers; 40% of the farmers are full-time.
- vii. The Division intends to encourage women to re-enter the farming and agricultural sector through initiatives such as the Home Gardening Initiative.
- viii. The private business sector must be encouraged to support the agro-sector in Tobago through investments, such as in the slaughtering sector. TADO has undertaken some initiatives to encourage the provision of specific services, a most recent example being the poultry initiative, which aims to increase slaughtering from 500 to 1000 chickens per day.

Tobago Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO)

- ix. TADCO has its strategic plan but also uses the executive mandate of the Division as a guiding framework to develop its strategic direction.



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- x. A TADCO human resource audit revealed gaps in the qualifications of its employees; hence, it was necessary to embark on hiring persons with sufficient qualifications for the relevant positions.
- xi. There are currently 50 persons on staff at TADCO out of 62 persons.
- xii. The contracts for some workers ended in 2023, and 40 persons were re-engaged.

The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy (FTE)**:

Collaboration

- i. The Division collaborates with exporTT, invesTT and CARIRI to promote Tobago-owned businesses and products.

Employment and Unemployment Statistics

- ii. At the end of the third quarter of 2023, the unemployment figure in Tobago was 3.8%. A breakdown of the unemployment figures between several age groups are as follows:
 - 20-24 years – 2.6%
 - 25-29 years – 7.2%
 - 30-34 years – 0.0%
- iii. Unemployment and employment in Tobago are influenced by the level of spending and the resources available to the Tobago House of Assembly through the Parliamentary budgetary process.
- iv. Approximately 45-50% are employed directly by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).
- v. Approximately 60-70% are employed indirectly by the THA.
- vi. The spending of the THA drives the funding for Tobago and contributes 4.6% to the GDP.
- vii. The THA has plans to improve Tobago's economy and remove the country's reliance on the THA.



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Grants/Programmes

- viii. The access to credit from the financial services sector for business development in Tobago is challenging. This prompted the development of programmes to kick-start and provide seed capital for the microenterprise sector.
- ix. 2,361 persons have applied for the grants provided by the Division, of which 1,836 persons were approved. Additionally, 65% of persons who applied for the grants were between 18 and 35.
- x. The funds that persons can access through the Enterprise Assistance Grant Programme are being increased from \$25,000 to \$50,000 in the fiscal year 2023/2024.
- xi. Loan Guarantee Programme:
 - The programme will be executed in collaboration with the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (BATT);
 - Parliament allocated \$4 million to fund the start-up of the programme;
 - 80% of the loan will be guaranteed;
 - Businesses must meet the bank's lending criteria;
 - Businesses must be registered in Tobago;
 - All statutory obligations must be paid, i.e. NIS; and
 - The programme is intended for larger businesses affected by COVID-19, not small and micro businesses.
- xii. The Enterprise Assistance Fund Programme is a loan programme for small and micro-enterprises that offers:
 - \$250,000 maximum funding, which can be increased to \$500,000; and
 - 5% interest with a maximum of five years to repay the loan.

Tobago Development Bank

- xiii. The technical Committee for establishing a Tobago Development Bank has been approved and appointed.
- xiv. The Committee is collaborating with multilateral organisations and international agencies, such as the IDB, to ensure the establishment of a robust institution.
- xv. The committee has met continuously during the last 7-8 months.
- xvi. There is an intention to hold stakeholder consultations on the rollout of the Tobago Development Bank.



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- xvii. There are currently no youth representatives on the Committee.

Advertising

- xviii. The Division promotes the grants provided through the Account Support Officers who assist in advertising.
- xix. Additionally, promotions are conducted via Community Caravans, in person, house-to-house visits and business-to-business – and via civil organisations such as, churches and community groups.

The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport:**

Entrepreneurship Opportunities

- i. The Division, in conjunction with the Business Development Unit, provides bookkeeping and recording training to persons interested in transitioning from training to becoming entrepreneurs.
- ii. The following communities were the focus of the Division regarding youth entrepreneurship opportunities in Tobago:
 - a. The rural communities at the North Eastern and Eastern ends;
 - b. Pockets in inland areas such as Plymouth and Buccoo; and
 - c. Other outlying communities.

Vocational Skills Training Programme

- iii. The vocational skills training programme is a community development programme the Division provides.
- iv. The programme includes courses in barbering, digital marketing, woodworking and upholstery, which are often offered based on the demand identified by Village Councils and other community-based organisations.
- v. The 2024 cycle of the programme will be launched in January to March and intends to target approximately 1000 young persons.
- vi. Participation in the programme has increased since classes are now offered virtually in addition to in-person classes.



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M.A.C.H.O. programme

- vii. The acronym M.A.C.H.O. highlights the intended achievement for programme participants - Multifaceted, Assertive, Caring, Healthy and, Outstanding.
- viii. It is a mentorship programme geared toward young men, ages 10 to 35, that targets communities with increased crime levels.

Comprehensive Entrepreneurship Education Programme

- ix. The programme will commence with various youth development approaches, such as a 3D Career fair, which will be hosted by the 3rd week of March 2024.
- x. The fair will focus on giving persons ages 10 to 35 an experimental learning opportunity through workshops.

Definition of Unemployment:

- xi. Most youth between the ages 15-19 years and 30-34 years are actively seeking employment.

Youth Empowerment Strategy

- xii. The Executive Council approved the youth empowerment strategy developed by the Department of Youth Development on August 30, 2023.
- xiii. The strategy has five development pillars focused on creating an enabling environment for positive youth development, co-creating Tobago's sustainable future, prioritising the economic participation and empowerment of youth, and creating safer spaces, peaceful communities and environments.
- xiv. The Division will embark on using a digital platform, SPARC, a singular portal for creating/reigniting change in communities. The portal will allow for the mass registration of young people in Tobago, which will assist in understanding their current status and aspirations. It also allows for the capacity to conduct pointed assessments in different areas and provide information on how to tailor the initiatives targeted for young people.
- xv. The registration drive will commence after the Carnival 2024 season.



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The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOvTHujn-H0&list=PL-SY0ndJDfa7Xk5P6XghJoEtIC0wCw8yN&index=18>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jsclasasc@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. [2277/2627/2282](#)

Committees Unit

February 20th, 2024