



**The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
Launch of the National Policy on Sustainable Community Development
February 10th 2020 | Hilton Trinidad
Remarks by Mark Loquan | President, NGC**

Good afternoon.

It is indeed a pleasure for us at NGC to join the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts in the launch of this very timely and necessary National Policy on Sustainable Community Development.

Although it is a well-intentioned enterprise with important wins to its name, the pursuit of global development has been punctuated by a number of *unsuccessful* interventions - from aid programmes that created dependency, to long-gestating projects that outlived their usefulness, to projects that caused irreversible environmental damage and destroyed livelihoods. Connecting many of those initiatives were questions not asked – how will these interventions fare over the long term? What will their impact be down the road? Is this project a good fit for this community?

Today, entities involved in the development process **must** ask these questions. Indeed, the framework within which development is approached today hinges on the idea of sustainability - a principle which considers both needs fulfilment and long-term impact. NGC has been investing in the development of this country for over forty years, through direct treasury contributions as well as a diverse portfolio social responsibility initiatives.

NGC has supported the development of athletes and sportsmen and women for over 25 years starting with our own Right On Track programme and school and

community-based sports; to more recent support of the NAAAs and our Youth Elite Programme. We have supported the development and unification of over 30 communities with our infrastructural programmes and assistance to community NGOs such as Servol and Habitat for Humanity.

NGC has always put national contribution at the forefront of our initiatives and has over the years lent our expertise to the construction of the Brian Lara Promenade, Rivulet Road in Pt Lisas, and the estate and port development at La Brea, Brighton, Mayaro and Point Lisas. Our biggest contribution so far has been the subventions in the cost of electricity from which all citizens benefit. Many of our school education programmes have spoken to a national economy that is driven by favourable prices so that all citizens can share in the wealth of the nation.

Our more recent investments in causes such as literacy and unsponsored and fenceline steelbands give us great pride, as we see our writers excel on the world stage and our youth engaged around our national instrument. We are proud to know that our contributions have enabled growth and opened opportunities for our citizens across the spheres of youth development, tertiary and vocational education, community empowerment and preservation of our arts and culture. But we know we can do more and it is for this reason that we are here today.

In keeping with today's global focus on sustainability, and guided by the UN identified Sustainable Development Goals, we want to make our investments more effective by asking the important questions - how can we create long-term value for our communities in a way that is relevant to their needs? What projects can we invest in to achieve maximum and sustained positive impact? Should we invest in literacy or crime prevention? Agriculture or infrastructure?

Too often, development practitioners make decisions based on their own assessments, and sometimes false assumptions about the reality on the ground.

A telling example can be demonstrated by an unsuccessful project undertaken by the Norwegian government in the 1970s. The Norwegian government sought to help Kenya raise the standard of living in one of its poorest regions. The Norwegian development agency determined that abundant fish stocks in Kenya's Lake Turkana could hold the key to economic success for the region, so they set about building a fish-freezing plant and teaching the surrounding communities how to generate export income from fishing.

Though a good idea in principle, the Lake Turkana project was a massive failure. Millions were spent to complete the plant, which was shut down after a short period. Operational costs were too high, and the community residents were nomadic pastoralists with no history of catching or eating fish. What was missing from this project was consultation - involvement of the community in the decisions being made that would affect their livelihoods. Would they *want* to catch and sell fish? The project could not be sustainable without buy-in from the community.

There was also a failure to understand the local context and culture, the unique circumstances that defined life in that region. Would the community prosper with a new livelihood, or be better served with improvements that would make the existing ones more profitable?

We at NGC appreciate the importance of asking the right people the right questions. We understand the importance of partnership rather than top-down intervention. We foresee the importance of community involvement to the long-term success of any project. It is for these reasons that NGC has come on board with the MCDCA to support the implementation of this National Policy on Sustainable Community Development.

This Policy accommodates and values the participation of communities in their own development. Through the implementation process, community-based

assessments will be conducted to gather vital demographic, socioeconomic, infrastructural and institutional data that will help paint a true-to-form picture of the communities being assessed. Community groups and leaders will be involved in the process and will have a part to play in project development and delivery.

NGC is particularly interested in data about our fenceline communities with whom we have longstanding relationships. With the right data, we can make our support more targeted, much more effective and sustainable over the long term.

We are therefore extremely pleased that the MCDCA will begin their assessments in our fenceline communities.

Allow me as I close to congratulate the Ministry on spearheading this initiative and express the hope of my company that the implementation of this Policy be swift and successful. It will give much needed context and grounding not just to our community investments, but also the initiatives of the many entities across civil society and corporate Trinidad and Tobago who participate in the process of national development. On that note, we also hope to see more community stakeholders get behind this Policy, since this effort will only succeed with the necessary grassroots support.

I thank you for this opportunity, and we look forward to partnering with you in service of our communities and nation.

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