

Signing of MOU with Ministry of Sport and Community Development

National Policy on Sustainable Community Development

Remarks by Mark Loquan | NGC President

July 20th 2021

SALUTATIONS

- The Honourable Shamfa Ashaki Cudjoe, Minister of Sport and Community Development
- The Honourable Marslyn Melville Jack, Secretary for the Division of Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour, Tobago House of Assembly
- Mrs. Angela Edwards, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sport and Community Development
- Ms. Beverly Reid-Samuel, Deputy Permanent Secretary and Chair of the National Committee on Sustainable Community Development
- Gwyneth Alexander, Director, Community Development Division, Ministry of Sport and Community Development
- Mr. Kevon Swan, Director, Legal Services Unit, Ministry of Sport and Community Development
- Mr. Derek Bosland, Administrator, of the Division of Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour, Tobago House of Assembly
- Ms. Penny Gomez, Chief Executive Officer of Digicel Foundation
- Ms. Michelle Burris, Coordinator of Community Development in the Division of Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour, Tobago House of Assembly
- Dr. Donna-Mae Knights, Policy Coordinator, Ministry of Sport and Community Development
- Community Development Supervisors and Chairs of the Municipal Committees on Sustainable Community Development
- Chairs of the Community Committees on Sustainable Community Development
- Members of the media

Good morning.

It is a pleasure for us at NGC to formally commit our support to the rollout of the National Policy on Sustainable Community Development with the Ministry of Sport and Community Development.

At the heart of most development programmes is a desire to improve – to help a group or target population move from a baseline point A, to a better point B. This is a noble goal. Consultation and community involvement are critical to the success of any development programme, along with understanding of the needs and priorities of the people you are trying to support.

When the Ministry of Sport and Community Development reached out to NGC for support in the implementation of the National Policy we immediately saw the value. The idea of giving voice, choice and agency to community groups, and empowering them to participate in the process of designing their own future, resonated with us.

Who would better understand the needs and aspirations of the people than the people themselves? Who would better understand the resources that can be leveraged, the potential that can be developed?

We at NGC have seen firsthand the merit of close collaboration with communities in the execution of projects. One of our earliest community interventions – the Marine Environmental Awareness Programme – was implemented to train residents of coastal communities in boat building and repair; engine repair; and fishing net manufacture and repair. Prior to this training the fishermen would

need to send their boats to other towns to get them fixed, so this training was welcomed with open arms. After this programme, residents could treat with these issues on their own, saving valuable time and money. This programme was also extended to include skills development in food processing; fish preservation by salting and smoking, and food preparation using items found on the coasts. These programmes allowed residents to launch small businesses, becoming entrepreneurs, which also gave rise to cooperatives that played a big part in community life and development long after NGC's programme was concluded.

Since then, NGC has sought to engage in other sustainability initiatives with the communities in which we operate to leverage their microcultures and skillsets to create new and lucrative opportunities. We have supported steelbands in our fenceline communities, exposing them to music literacy, pan making and tuning, wealth generation and financial planning.

As part of our environmental preservation we engaged in a reforestation programme where we reforested 315 hectares in several sites across Trinidad. We utilized forestry workers from the communities and exposed them to financial literacy and cooperative planning, giving them opportunities for income generation once the programme is completed.

This is precisely the intent of the Ministry's approach to community development. It seeks to leverage the strengths and assets of each community, finding the competitive advantages that could give entrepreneurs a market edge; or development of local skills and resources that could directly address community problems. It also recognises the importance of giving the community direct input into the programmes being introduced in their areas. This ensures stakeholder

buy-in and collaboration and improves the chances of success relative to top-down programmes.

Today, we are pleased to join the Ministry in the formalisation of a partnership that will focus on the community of La Brea in the first instance. La Brea has a close historical relationship with the energy sector, and NGC's subsidiaries LABIDCO and National Energy have operations in the community. NGC has invested in La Brea over the years and currently has an ongoing sponsorship arrangement with the La Brea Nightingales steelband and the La Brea Police Youth Club. National Energy continues to support youth through partnerships with NESC. The opportunity to work even more closely with people on the ground through this MOU, to arrive at best-fit and sustainable solutions to prevalent problems, will allow us to now focus our investments for greater impact.

As I close, I want to thank the Ministry for the opportunity to collaborate in the rollout of this policy. We commit to support the execution of the community-based assessment, and the creation of a framework for sustainable development that honours the wishes and needs of the people. We have high hopes that this approach will yield positive results. We look forward to seeing the community of La Brea – and all others that will fall under this programme - grow from strength to strength in the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.