



**Remarks for opening ceremony of
NGC/IAMovement 'Green Infrastructure in the Caribbean' Conference
October 25th, 2022
Mr Ramesh Harrylal, VP Operations, NGC**

SALUTATIONS

Good morning.

It is my singular honour to bring remarks on behalf of The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC), as we join with IAMovement to open this inaugural 'Green Infrastructure in the Caribbean' Conference.

NGC's decision to partner in the delivery of this timely conference was an easy one to make. In recent years, our company has shifted focus to sustainability, guided by an extensive Green Agenda. Our mission is to support national and regional efforts to build a more sustainable future for our planet, by focusing on mechanisms to reduce our carbon footprint and enable positive social change. Education and public awareness are central to that mission, and this Green Infrastructure Conference fits squarely within our agenda.

The term 'green infrastructure' may not be familiar to all, but the concept is by no means a novel one. Throughout the history of urban planning and development, efforts have been made to integrate nature into built environments. Public parks, community gardens and urban landscaping are all examples of attempts to make cities greener, and to reap the health and aesthetic benefits of building around nature. Trees provide shade and visual reprieve in 'concrete jungles'; parks and open spaces are retreats for recreation and family outings; gardens provide opportunities for communal agriculture and building food security; and in general, greenery helps filter pollutants and improve air quality. These services are critical, but they represent just a fraction of the value that nature can add to our infrastructure.

Of late, we have seen the increasing need to adapt our built environment to our changing climate and intensifying weather events. In the Caribbean region alone, countries have suffered

billions of dollars in losses over the past few years due to destructive hurricanes and flooding. Buildings have been levelled; roads and other infrastructure have been undermined due to land slippage; damage to public utility systems has disrupted water and power supply to consumers. These challenges are projected to become more acute over the coming years, which means as a region we need to focus on strengthening the resilience of our built environment.

If we look closely, we will find that nature is brimming with ingenious engineering solutions that we can leverage to build more sustainable and efficient structures, towns and cities. A prime example can be found in the fibrous root system of the vetiver grass, which supports soil stabilisation and helps create natural retaining walls. Integrating this grass into landscaping is one way that building designers are harnessing nature to engineer infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of climate change. The vetiver case study is a central axis of this inaugural conference and we will learn more about it over the sessions to follow.

Of course, climate adaptation goes beyond weather-proofing our buildings and infrastructure. We need to build more thoughtfully; to proactively steward our critical resources such as water, arable lands, soils, coastal zones, and environmentally sensitive areas and species. This requires proper planning, and investment in sustainable building materials and technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is this context that makes IAMovement's Caribbean Green Infrastructure Conference such a timely and important event. This conference has brought together leading industry experts to share insights and guidance around green infrastructure and financing in the region. Over the next two days, real-world case studies will illustrate effective methods for integrating nature into our built environment. We will learn how to design more resilient structures, and how to align planning and development with global sustainability goals. We will also learn about opportunities to access funding for such projects.

As we have seen with other conferences of this kind, the exchange of knowledge and ideas through platforms like these goes a long way to building capacity. The more we know and the more we learn vicariously, the more we can innovate and find solutions to address our endemic challenges. These conferences also give us invaluable networking opportunities, so we can connect with others across the region who might have answers to our problems.

We at NGC are thrilled to support this initiative and help facilitate the meeting of minds around these topical issues. It is our sincere hope that all attendees will leave this conference motivated and better equipped to take on the challenge of sustainable nation-building.

On behalf of NGC, I wish to thank our partners at IAMovement for their dedication to the cause of sustainability. It is extremely heartening to see young people championing environmental activism – your voices are powerful; your work has impact. We at NGC are happy to work alongside stakeholders like yourselves to propagate climate conversations, to connect our people with information, and to lobby for action at all levels of society.

All the best for a successful conference, and we look forward to learning from you.

I thank you.