

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Sustainable Recovery and Resilience towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Tuesday 22 March 9-12 am (AST, EST)

Organizers:

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG)**

**United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean**

**in close coordination with:
United Nations Resident Coordinator Office (UNRCO) and United Nations Country Team (UNCT)**

in partnership with the Government of TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

CONCEPT NOTE

Background:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody the strategic vision and aspirations of all countries for the future of development. Its implementation will require comprehensive actions at the global, regional, and national levels, as indicated in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, a new emphasis is placed on how policy coherence and better integrated planning mechanisms can help countries strengthen their planning processes, develop holistic development frameworks reflecting global, regional and special commitments, such as the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS, and achieve their national development objectives in a more effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable way, ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic crisis where the world faced an unprecedented fast-changing scenario for which developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) had limited capacity, the relevance of strong, integrated policies and policy coherence was reinforced.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started out as a severe and acute public health emergency, has since become a socioeconomic crisis of immense proportion that has had significant impacts on social and economic systems, threatening many of the development gains made across countries. The primary cost of the pandemic globally has been the loss of many lives although the secondary effects of the pandemic on the economy, livelihoods and sustainable development prospects are just as alarming. In the context of global contraction, Latin America and the Caribbean sub region has been one of the hardest hit areas by the crisis stemming from COVID-19.

External challenges specific to the Caribbean subregion included the near total shutdown of air and cruise travel, significantly impacting the tourism sector which is the backbone of many of the economies in the Caribbean; stress in related supply chains (agriculture, construction, hotels, restaurants, entertainment and the culture, cultural and creative industries or the purple economy); a sharp contraction in larger economies, a downturn in commodities prices, the contraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and remittances; disruption in transportation and global supply chains; risk aversion for external investors, and restrictions on foreign exchange availability.

Trinidad and Tobago is in a better position as compared to other small island developing states SIDS, largely because of its hydrocarbon industry, which while positive also exposes the country to shocks related to price fluctuations of oil and gas and exposes its significant dependence on this sector. Like other SIDS the twin-island republic is highly susceptible to several other exogenous shocks such as climate change.

Since Trinidad and Tobago recorded its first COVID-19 case on 12th March 2020, the country responded quickly to put in place a range of policy responses to help contain the spread of the virus, protect lives and livelihoods, paving the way for a strong recovery. Some of the measures included social distancing mandates, closure of the country's borders to air and sea travel, cancellation of mass gathering events, including carnival festivities, states of emergency, curfews and restricting activities to only essential services.

As a result of these measures, economic activity slowed significantly and in some cases was brought to a halt. For 2020, GDP declined by about 7.8 per cent mainly reflecting the impact of the measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, declines in global demand and falling prices in the energy sector.¹ The decline in economic activity and the knock-on effect of increases in unemployment, reduction in working hours, lower income generation and consumption demand posed serious socioeconomic challenges for the country.

For fiscal year 2020 the fiscal deficit is estimated to have increased relative to fiscal year 2019 due mainly to the costs associated with the measures undertaken by the Government to assist citizens and businesses in mitigating the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme of support from the government, covered financial and economic support measures such as a Salary Relief Grant (up to maximum of

¹ Budget 2021 Core Date, presented by Minister of Finance, September 28, 2020, at the Spotlight on the Budget and Economy

\$1,500.00 per month for a period of 3 months²) to NIS contributors who were temporarily unemployed; income support to 46, 533 persons³ who were identified as retrenched/terminated/income-reduced persons; and income tax refunds totaling \$240.0 million⁴ to approximately 25,000 individuals to clear off all outstanding income tax refunds among others. Additionally, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago accelerated payment of Value Added Tax (VAT) refunds to businesses, including 1,388 SMEs, and issued VAT Bonds to provide the business sector with financial liquidity to stay afloat and maintain their workforce. As at the end of fiscal 2021, VAT Refunds and VAT Bonds had totalled TT\$3.8 Billion of assistance to the private sector.⁵

With respect to the labour force, a Joint Survey conducted by the TTCSI and TTMA (April 2020⁶), which represents responses from 394 businesses indicates that due to the implementation of the national COVID-19 mitigation measures, businesses within their membership terminated 36 to 55 per cent of full time and part time/contractual employees, respectively. The survey also showed that these terminations were mainly in the arts, entertainment and recreation, tourism, manufacturing, food processing and drinks and construction sectors. For companies that did not terminate staff, they chose to either furlough employees or reduce wages.

The economic fallout has disproportionately disrupted the livelihoods of various groups, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), farm workers, tourism workers and those employed in the energy sector. In addition to the health and economic impacts, there are significant social impacts, particularly on the most vulnerable in the society. The closure of education institutions disrupted learning outcomes as well as children who benefitted from meal or subsidy programmes.

To build back better post-COVID, the country's long term national strategy "Vision 2030" is a good entry point for enabling integrated planning to support sustained recovery. United Nations' Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19: Assessment and Framework for Trinidad and Tobago which provided a rapid assessment of the situation and the identification of gaps was a good foundation for advancing the integrated recovery approach and leverage points for transformative change. This process has been taken a step further through the development of an integrated recovery approach in the form of the Government's Roadmap to Recovery Plan.

Objective:

The National Consultation represents Phase II of the UN DESA and ECLAC cooperation with Trinidad and Tobago that aims at strengthening the integrated recovery planning and decision-making capacity of the national stakeholders in **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO** and the participating Caribbean States involved in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19

² 2021 COVID-19 Relief Measures. Ministry of Finance, May 19, 2021

³ Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Review of the Economy, 2020, Resetting the Economy for Growth and Innovation

⁴ 2020 Supplementary Appropriation and Mid-Year Review Statement by Minister of Finance, news.gov.tt

⁵ Budget Statement 2022 presented by the Honourable Colm Imbert, MP, Minister of Finance, October 4 2021, page 20

⁶ <https://www.ttcsi.org/economic-impact-assessment-of-covid-19-on-services-manufacturing-sectors-may-2020>

pandemic and building back better towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's).

The National Consultation aims at discussing the progress in formulating and implementing sustainable recovery plans in Trinidad and Tobago and receiving input and concrete recommendations on building back better and accelerating the implementation of the national development goals and the SDGs.

Target Audience

The National Consultation will bring together a wide range of Government, Civil Society Organizations, academia and private sector representatives engaged in national implementation of the COVID-19 recovery plans, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs along with relevant UN Country Team in Trinidad and Tobago and UN System partners. Some possible organizations that could be targeted for the consultation include:

Public Sector	Civil Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Finance • Ministry of Planning and Development • Ministry of Community Development, Culture, and the Arts • Ministry of Education • Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs) • Ministry of Labour • Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government (MRDLG) • Ministry of Health • Tobago House of Assembly • Ministry of Social Development and Family Services • Local Authorities and specifically their committees with responsibility for social welfare and disaster relief • Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries • Ministry of Tourism • Tobago Regional Health Authority • Tobago Tourism Agency Limited • Trinidad Tourism Limited • Invest TT • Road to Recovery Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women • Institute for Gender and Development Studies UWI • National Centre for Persons with Disabilities • Caribbean Natural Resources Institute • The Cropper Foundation • Habitat for Humanity • Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross • Living Water Community
Private Sector	Academia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chambers of Commerce • Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association • Supermarkets Association • Massy Stores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University of the West Indies: Department of Economics; Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social & Economic Studies; Institute for Gender and Development Studies; Department of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digicel 	Agriculture, Economics and Extension; Department of Food Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Trinidad and Tobago
Development Partners and Regional Organizations	Youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP • ECLAC • ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean • UNICEF • Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO • Association of Caribbean States • United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) • Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) • World Food Programme (WFP) • UN Women • IOM • UNHCR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago

Strategy UNDESA and ECLAC Cooperation (Target Group/ main activities/ approach/methodology)

The National Webinar is included under Phase II of UNDESA and ECLAC cooperation in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Region that includes:

Phase 1:

- Provision of advisory support to **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO** with focus on researching the COVID-19 pandemic, its impacts and evaluating the progress in recovery planning measures and methodologies in the Caribbean Region in general and in **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO** in particular. The technical support is provided through regional and national experts.

Phase 2:

- Organizing national consultation webinars in the participating pilot countries, including **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**, aimed at discussing the progress in formulating and implementing integrated recovery plans and strategies that are intended to accelerate the implementation of their national development plans as well as the sustainable development goals.

Phase 3:

- Offering national training on site (Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence towards the SDGs) upon official request by **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**. The training will include a cooperation by ECLAC, UNDESA and United Nations

Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) in partnership with the Government. The target audience for this facilitated training are senior policy makers from planning ministries, line ministries, civil society organizations, academia, and private sector representatives.

Phase 4:

Organizing a regional workshop in **Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago** as soon as travel restrictions are lifted during the first half of 2022, bringing together representatives from the project's participating countries to share their experiences and strengthen their cooperation in building back better towards the SDGs.

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Tuesday 22 March 9 am-12 noon (AST, EST)
Programme / Agenda

Welcome and opening (15 Minutes)

Remarks by (Government and UN Agencies)

Session 1 (40 Minutes): Assessment of the Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago

Brief Description

The session will include two brief presentations. One by UNDESA on the main findings of the research paper, “Impact of COVID-19 on 5 Caribbean SIDS... *Evaluating Progress in Recovery Planning, Emerging Policy Options, Best Practices and Lessons Learned*”, with specific reference to Trinidad and Tobago and focussed on impacts of COVID-19. The other would include a joint presentation involving Central Statistics Office and ECLAC on the COVID-19 Socio-economic Assessment Survey.

This will be followed by inputs from key stakeholders from the public sector, private sector, academia, youth and civil society organizations sharing in 90 seconds each, the main impacts, including data on a single sector based on the guiding questions below that they are most engaged in. *Participants could also include responses to the questions in the Zoom chat or in the Google Doc that will be made available throughout the consultation.*

Guiding Questions for Stakeholders

What has been the experience and impact of COVID 19 in Trinidad and Tobago:

- a. Impacts on the Economy
- b. Impacts on the Labour Market
- c. Impacts on Education
- d. Impacts on Population Health (outside of COVID-19 but with focus on NCDS, HIV/AIDS and other diseases)
- e. Impacts on Tourism and MSMEs – the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Restaurant Association will be invited to share their perspective on the real-time effects of the pandemic their businesses and what the strategies they are incorporating post-pandemic
- f. Impacts on Livelihoods, Food Security and Access to Markets – The Supermarkets Association will be invited to provide a perspective from the supply side related to food inflation and distribution
- g. Other Socio-Economic Impacts
- h. Impacts on vulnerable and migrant groups - IOM and UNHCR will share on the impacts

of the pandemic on vulnerable groups and how the wider community levelled up to provide support

Session 2 (40 Minutes): Stakeholders' Engagement and Capacities to Implement Recovery Plans Post COVID-19:

Brief Description

This session will explore the importance and role of stakeholder involvement and engagement, political commitment and building consensus and ownership for recovery planning post COVID-19. The session also will explore the importance of policy coherence and policy coordination mechanisms. The session will begin with a brief presentation from the Ministry of Planning and Development and address the following questions:

- How has the COVID-19 affected the implementation of Vision 2030?
- How has COVID-19 affected the progress towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Trinidad and Tobago?
- What have been some of the immediate actions to reduce the overall socio-economic impacts on the population and the economy?
- What steps have been taken, and techniques applied at the country level in stakeholder selection, mapping and analysis (reference to be made of the stakeholder consultation process in the preparation of Trinidad and Tobago's VNR 2020)?

Guiding Questions for Stakeholders – (Using a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 being the best possible outcome and 1 being the least favourable outcome).

- How effective do you think the immediate actions were in reducing the overall socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on people, economic sectors?
- How important do you believe robust and inclusive stakeholder engagement is for a sustainable recovery process?
- How much of a role do you see for national stakeholders – public and private sectors, civil society organizations and academia in the recovery planning process and implementation efforts?
- How important is political commitment to the sustainable recovery process?
- How strong do you believe current policy coherence and policy coherence mechanisms are in Trinidad and Tobago?

Participants would include responses to the questions in the Google Doc that will be made available throughout the consultation or via Mentimeter for this session.

Session 3 (40 Minutes): Building Forward Stronger Post COVID-19... The Road to a Resilient Recovery... Selected Options for Consideration in Trinidad and Tobago

Brief Description

This session will begin with a short presentation from UN DESA on Proposed Strategies and Transformative Initiatives for Consideration in Building Back Better, Building Forward Stronger, Fairer and Equal Post COVID-19. Initiatives that are aligned to the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) and the SDGs and which emerged from the research paper, "Impact of COVID-19 on 5 Caribbean SIDS... *Evaluating Progress in Recovery Planning, Emerging Policy Options, Best Practices and Lessons Learned*". Other brief presentations

will include:

- Policy initiatives that are jointly being developed to guide the tourism sector post-pandemic - The Trinidad Tourism Limited and Ministry of Tourism
- Overview of findings and progress from the Road to Recovery committee

Following these presentations, participants will engage in a brainstorming exercise.

Brainstorming Exercise

Participants will be asked to brainstorm using *Polling* to assess how they view each of the proposed initiatives presented. Using *Polling*, each participant will review the proposed initiatives and vote for the top 3 they believe are most critical for Trinidad and Tobago as the twin-island Republic seeks to build back stronger and to achieve a more resilient and sustainable recovery. The responses will then be collated and the top 5 priority areas for Trinidad and Tobago, based on the consensus of all groups will be shared. The analysis could also be further broken down to show top priority areas based on stakeholder groupings – e.g. public sector, private sector etc.

Session 4: (35 Minutes): Financing for Sustainable Recovery and Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond

Brief Description

The session will take the form of a panel consisting of UN representatives and other development partners involved in the recovery process in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. In an interactive format, these panellists will be asked to share perspectives on financing for development beyond COVID-19; and innovative financing instruments/tools and other resources available for advancing onto the road to a resilient recovery. Other panellists will be asked to join in and provide their perspectives as the conversation unfolds.

This session will therefore take stock of the financial resources required and progress made so far to take the Caribbean Region and more specifically Trinidad and Tobago from vulnerability to resilient development; and from economic peril to sustainable recovery and dynamic growth, all within the thrust of 'leaving no one behind'. Panellists will respond to the following questions:

- What are the COVID-19 related debt and liquidity challenges facing the Caribbean Region and, specifically Trinidad and Tobago and possible measures to address them?
- How do we mitigate the impacts on key economic sectors, including MSMEs?
- How do we engage private creditors, international and regional development banks in accessing concessional funding and attaining debt-swaps?
- What are the non-traditional forms of financing that could be explored (e.g. international philanthropic organizations, foundations, public-private partnerships etc.)?
- How do we promote economic diversification and green and blue investments for resilience building in the Caribbean Region?
- What are some of the innovative financing tools available to Caribbean countries and how can they be applied (e.g. blended financing, debt swaps, green and blue bonds etc.)?
- How can countries capitalize on the Addis Ababa Financing for Development Agenda which adopted a renewed global financing architecture to support the Sustainable Development Goals?
- What is the role of UN agencies to support countries in their thrust towards building back better with equity?

Proposed Speakers

- UN RCO
- UNDP
- ECLAC
- UNDESA
- ILO
- CDB

Closing Remarks and Next Steps (10:00 Minutes)

Government of Trinidad and Tobago

UN Agencies