Transformation for accountability

A forward-looking review of the 10th Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago (2010-2015)

Office of the Parliament
June 10, 2015
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<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
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<td>ACP-EU</td>
<td>African, Caribbean, Pacific – European Union</td>
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<td>AG</td>
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<td>Association of Secretary Generals of Parliament</td>
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<td>CARICAD</td>
<td>Caribbean Centre for Development Administration</td>
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Foreword

The document "Transformation for accountability. A forward-looking review of the 10th Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago" has been drafted as the current term of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago draws to a close.

It provides information as factual as possible, and aims at an assessment and evaluation as fair and forward-looking as it is feasible.

The Report is intended to inform relevant stakeholders and the interested public about the roles and responsibilities, activities and performance, reforms and improvements during the 10th Parliament.

It includes guidance for the Members of Parliament and the Office of the Parliament to further and deepen the transformation of the Parliament in the years to come.

The structure of the Report follows that of the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of its four strategic objectives and the main activities under each objective.
Executive Summary

Since independence in 1962, the bicameral Parliament has been the major ruling body in Trinidad and Tobago. During the 10th Parliament, a large number of initiatives commenced in an effort to further strengthen the Parliament in carrying out its core functions and responsibilities based upon a comprehensive approach to parliamentary development. These initiatives have their foundation in the Parliament’s Strategic Development Plan, adopted in 2013.¹

This report was drafted with a view to summarizing these initiatives and evaluating their effectiveness. Based upon the structure outlined in the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, the activities and performance of the 10th Parliament are reviewed as follows.

Section 1: Strengthening the Institutional Capacity

Under the Strategic Plan’s first objective, the Parliament decided to review the Standing Orders of the HoR and Senate. The review of the Standing Orders is probably the most significant achievement in terms of improving the functioning of the Parliament. Since it was done early within the five-year period of the Strategic Plan, its effects on strengthening the legislative and oversight roles of the parliament are more deep-seated than more recent initiatives. The most significant procedural changes are the introduction of the Prime Minister’s Question time, the change to the chairmanship and operations (in public) of the Standing Finance Committee, and the establishment of new Joint Standing Committees.

During the 10th parliament, important changes to the Committee system were introduced. All committee meetings are now open to the public. Joint Select Committees are chaired by independent senators. Committee staff now request written submissions from stakeholders for the JSCs’ inquiries.

During the 10th Parliament, a JSC on Parliamentary Autonomy was established. A legislative proposal was laid in the House of Representatives and Senate. A pre-policy document on parliamentary autonomy was prepared and the JSC made a call for evidence from the general public and all interested stakeholders.

The Parliament took more decisive steps to enable Parliamentarians to exercise their function on a full-time basis. Following discussions with the Salaries Review Commission, a proposal was submitted to Cabinet.

New initiatives were taken to further develop the capacity and professional skills of MPs. The 10th Parliament started an initiative to create a Parliamentary Training Academy.

Key elements needed to strengthen the Parliament are the skills, knowledge and professionalism of parliament staff. The Office of the Parliament has an outstanding team of professionals. MPs from the ruling parties, opposition and the independent Senate bench have strong appreciation for the Parliament’s staff and for the Office of the Parliament, which functions in a politically neutral way. New initiatives were proposed aimed at strengthening the internal management of the Office of the Parliament via a Project Management Office, a Research and Development Unit and a Budget Office, which are currently making their way to the Cabinet for funding approval.

A main deliverable of the Strategic Plan is moving towards a “paperless Parliament” and deepening the use of ICT. The digitalization of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has taken firm root in the operations of Parliament, as it improved efficiency and enabled better use of resources. Through the enhanced use of social media, the Communications and ICT Departments have intensified their cooperation.

During the last five years, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago continued to actively engage in promoting and strengthening bilateral and multilateral parliamentary relations. Bilateral relations were established with other Parliaments at the regional and international levels. At the multilateral level, the Parliament

participated in the activities of international parliamentary organizations, including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, Parl Americas, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption and the African Caribbean Pacific – European Union Parliamentary Group.  
In 2011 the Parliament moved to new (temporary) premises at the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre. The Red House Restoration and Companion Building Project commenced.   
During the 10th Parliament, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago established a Joint Select Committee to prepare the legal framework for registration of political parties and for developing elections campaign financing legislation. The Committee launched a consultation process.

Section 2: Strengthening the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago
Under the second Strategic Objective, three main initiatives were realized during the 10th Parliament. In 2014, Parliament commissioned the development of a Road Map to guide the implementation of a Legislative Information Management System (LIMS). Initial discussions took place on clarifying the timetable for the legislative process with a view that an annual legislative agenda be compiled and presented to parliament.   
To deepen the scrutiny of legislation, the UNDP project recruited a senior advisor on Committees. During 2014-2015 the advisor prepared a Baseline Study on the functioning of the Committees and the legislative process, and a comprehensive Recommendations Paper on the Committee system in Trinidad and Tobago. It was recognized that, currently, committees review relatively few Bills using external input from CSOs, experts and stakeholders, and that more could be done. To assist in this, and as foreseen in the Strategic Plan, a Manual on Public Hearings was prepared.

Section 3: Strengthening the executive oversight in Trinidad and Tobago
Under the third Strategic Objective, six main initiatives were realized during the 10th Parliament. Increased executive oversight was exercised in plenary session. Over the entire 10th Parliament, more than 600 questions were filed in the HoR and more than 400 questions in the Senate. The Prime Minister's Question (PMQ) Time was introduced and 87 PMQ's were asked. It is one of the most visible signs of enhanced accountability.   
The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has three JSCs to inquire into and report to both Houses in respect of Government Ministries, Municipal Corporations, Statutory Authorities, State Enterprises and Service Commissions, in relation to their administration, the manner of exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions. The oversight work of these JSCs is to a large extent based upon the annual administrative reports received from the institutions and entities. However, in many instances, entities do not submit timely reports. For some categories of entities and ministries, as few as 20 % of the annual reports have been submitted. Committee inquiries have been conducted (1.) with the objective to review the contents of Administrative Reports, (2.) in case of failure of an entity to report to Parliament, (3.) when there were issues of public concern involving the entity, or (4.) when there were general concerns about the performance of the entity and weaknesses in the implementation of government policy. During the 10th Parliament, there was a sharp increase in the number of inquiries conducted and JSC-reports laid. Between June 2010 and May 20th, 2015, a total of 49 reports were presented to Parliament by JSC-I, JSC-II and JSC-III.   
During the 10th Parliament, six new JSCs were established: Government Assurances, Public Appropriation and Administration, National Security, Energy Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Human Rights, Diversity and
Environment and Sustainable Development. Their creation is an important milestone in strengthening of the oversight role of Parliament.

One of the main achievements of the 10th Parliament is the reform of the budget process. While up to 2013, the debate and approval of the details of the annual estimates, in committee, took place behind closed doors and over a very short time, the revised Standing Orders of the House enabled a substantial change and provided more transparency and accountability. Over a period of five days in September 2014, the Standing Finance Committee, chaired by the Speaker of the House, took up the challenge of examining the budget’s fifty heads of expenditure - often line by line. At the end of the budget review week, some 400 government officials had appeared to provide information to the public.

In order to further strengthen the on-going budget process reforms, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago took the initiative to prepare the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office.

A UNDP-recruited Parliamentary Budget Expert provided strategic advice to the Standing Finance Committee, reviewed the methodology on the 2014 budget and shared knowledge about how parliamentary budget committees can become more effective. During the 10th Parliament, the PAC and PAEC continued to play their role in scrutinizing expenditures.

As envisaged in the Strategic Plan, the Parliament started to examine the issue of parliamentary oversight over the implementation of legislation. It was suggested to develop a pilot project approach on Post Legislative Scrutiny (PLS). An ad hoc internal group has commenced the preparation of the Terms of Reference for a Committee on PLS, the methodology for this PLS exercise and possible legislations to review. Parliament took initiatives to strengthen the library & research services, through the introduction of new publications, a substantial expansion of the on-line resources, and the digitalization of parliamentary proceedings, Annual reports, Committee Reports, Government publications, and also Hansard and Bills.

Section 4: Strengthening the representation and outreach by the Parliament

Under the fourth Strategic Objective, two main initiatives were conducted.

Firstly, a comprehensive review of the system and daily functioning of the constituency offices took place. The constituency work has been assessed on four key components: casework (getting information and lodging demands on behalf of people); policy work (seeking ways to benefit constituencies through existing or proposed national programs and legislation); enabling the expression of views or concerns of constituents regarding national policy issues (this involves listening and explaining and expressing informed positions, although MPs are not obliged to agree with morally or ethically unsound views), and attending constituency events.

Secondly, during the last five years, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has made real progress in the area of communication and outreach. Its social media work is impressive. Its outreach to students and youth is much appreciated. The Parliamentary website has been transformed into a highly accessible, searchable, reliable, flexible and responsive web presence.

In summary, it can be stated that, at the start of the 10th Parliament in 2010, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago embarked upon an ambitious process of modernization and change. The institution is now at a crossroad in its development. As substantial reforms are about to be implemented, their sustainability will, to a large extent, depend upon the ability (1.) to take the next steps forward towards a fully functioning and full-time parliamentary system in Trinidad and Tobago, and (2.) to engage and commit the government in its interaction with Parliament.
Introduction to the 10th Parliament

Since its independence in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago has had a bicameral parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model. The Constitution provides for a legislature consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives. The House of Representatives has 41 members, elected for a maximum five-year term in single-seat constituencies. The Senate has 31 members: 16 Government Senators appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 Opposition Senators appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 9 so-called Independent Senators appointed by the President to represent other sectors of civil society. The Executive consists of the President and the Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister.

The last ten years saw the general capacity of the Office of Parliament and the Parliament as a whole develop at good pace. With the assistance of national and international partners, the Parliament staff has seen the development of new units and departments within the staffing organisation of the Parliament.

This report analyses the functioning and performance of the 10th Parliament, 2010-2015. The report provides both factual information on the functioning of the 10th Parliament and makes a forward-looking evaluation of the performance of the Parliament.

The following is the overview of the sittings and sessional select committees for each of the sessions in the 10th Parliament.2 (Information on the functioning of the Joint Select Committees, the PAC and PAEC and the newly created select committees will be provided further in this report.)

Box 1

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As part of the general introduction to the 10th Parliament, the election of a new President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago deserves special mentioning. The President is elected for a five-year term by an Electoral College comprising the members of both Houses of Parliament. In March 2013, the term of H.E. George Maxwell Richards came to an end. On 15 February 2013, the Parliament elected H.E Anthony Carmona, a highly respected former justice of the Supreme Court and the International Criminal Court, as the new President of the Republic. He took office on 17 March 2013.

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Another highlight of the 10th Parliament was the development of a five-year Comprehensive Strategic Plan (2013-2018). It is the first such Strategic Plan for Parliament. It outlines the objectives and activities that will guide Parliament in deepening the parliamentary and democratic culture and improving the administrative mechanisms of the institution to better serve the citizens. The plan contains a clear Vision, Mission and Core Values for the Parliament as well as a set of Strategic Objectives that Parliament will aim to achieve over this period.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has identified four specific Strategic Objectives: firstly, to increase the institutional capacity of the Parliament in general and of the Secretariat specifically; secondly, to improve the legislative process in Parliament to ensure enhanced scrutiny and quality of legislation; thirdly, to improve the capacity of Parliament to provide effective oversight; and fourthly, to develop the outreach work of Parliament and to strengthen the representative role of MPs.

Under each of these Strategic Objectives, the Parliament has outlined a total of twenty-four activity areas in which the Parliament will need to be active in order to move towards achieving the agreed Strategic Objectives for the period 2013-2018. The activity areas include structural and functional issues.

Among the structural issues is the substantial increase in the number of MPs that are fully active in Parliament and receive the appropriate remuneration for a full-time salary. This will result in more active functioning of Committees and oversight by Parliament. Enhanced autonomy of Parliament, the creation of a platform for legislative drafting and reforming the constituency offices system are the other structural issues.

Functional issues include efforts to better organize the Parliament’s schedule, initiatives to complete the transition to a "paperless parliament", studying the impact of draft legislation, scrutinizing the state's budgets and expenditures effectively, improving the library and research services, and expanding on Parliament’s communication.

It is relevant to note that whilst the comprehensive Strategic Plan outlines the general direction in which the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will develop over the coming years, it is accompanied by a detailed "Implementation Roadmap" that provides the framework and timeframe of implementation of the agreed activities.

The period of the plan means that it will span a general election; and thus aims to become the plan of all Members of the House and Senators. This will only serve to strengthen this plan for the development of the parliamentary institution because the need to strengthen and modernise the legislature remains constant regardless which political parties hold the majority. This Strategic Plan will be revised and developed when circumstances require and be followed by a new Strategic Plan in 2018. It is also important to note that the Parliament has worked closely with international partners in developing this Strategic Plan, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

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1 Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018, September 2013, 38 p.
**Strategic Objective 1: Institutional Capacity**

The structure of this Report follows the structure of the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of its four strategic objectives and main activities under each objective. Under the first objective, strengthening the institutional capacity of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, there were ten main initiatives realized during the 10th Parliament.

1.1. Reviewing the Standing Orders of the House and the Senate

As foreseen in the Strategic Plan, a comprehensive review of the Standing Orders of the HoR was conducted by a seven-member Committee of the HoR, chaired by the Speaker. The changes to the S.O. became effective in 2014. The most innovative and significant changes include:

- The introduction of the Prime Minister's question time (on a monthly basis, for 30 minutes), when questions may be put to the Prime Minister relating to current matters of national importance or on the general performance of the government and government agencies;
- The provision for a fifteen minutes period, during which Urgent Questions may be posed. Members may ask questions on urgent matters which have arisen and which the Member considers requiring immediate response in the public interest;
- The provisions on the length of speeches now provide for a maximum speaking time of 45 minutes;
- One Member from each party in opposition to the government is now allowed to ask a brief question for elucidation on statements made by Ministers;
- The three Joint Select Committees are chaired by independent senators;
- The change in the chairmanship of the Standing Finance Committee (previously chaired by the Minister of Finance, now by the Speaker) and its operations (in public and during five days);

The Senate, which introduced some new Orders in 1989, also reviewed its Standing Orders during the 10th Parliament and aligned them with the relevant new provisions in the S.O. of the HoR.

*Evaluation comment*

The review of the S.O. is probably the most significant achievement in terms of improving the functioning of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Since the review was done early on within the five-year period of the Strategic Plan, its effects on strengthening the legislative and oversight roles of the parliament will be more long-lasting.

The 11th Parliament will be advised to keep the S.O. under constant review in order to strengthen accountability. Issues to be looked at in the next parliament are, for instance, the division of work among committees (to identify areas of overlap or omission), time available to the Finance Committee scrutinizing the budget, more frequently held Prime Minister's question time, scrutiny of financial loans agreed by the executive, ratification of international treaties.

Like the Standing Orders, the issue of the Privileges of Members is due for a comprehensive review in light of the evolution of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and recent occurrences which touch and concern the privileges of Members. The existing legislation is limited and does not address several pertinent issues such as the meaning of proceedings in parliament and the difference between absolute and qualified

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4 Standing Orders of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, 2014, 90 p.
5 Standing Orders of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago, 2015, 90 p.
1.2. Strengthening the Committee system

During the 10th parliament, important changes to the functioning of the Committee system were introduced. Strengthening transparency, all committee meetings are now open to the public, in principle. At the start of the 10th parliament, it was decided that the Joint Select Committees will be chaired by independent senators. This practice has been incorporated in the revised S.O. of the HoR and Senate. The practice has contributed to more focused and technically-driven discussions in the JSCs I, II and MCSC during the 10th parliament. Three JSC press briefings were held, indicating a start in the promotion of the work of the JSCs. A new practice was introduced to ask written submissions from stakeholders for the JSCs’ inquiries. In addition, staff have regularly written to public entities to inquire on their follow-up to the findings and recommendations incorporated in the reports. Ministerial responses to JSC reports have improved, though it is an area for further progress in the 11th Parliament.

Evaluation comment

Despite the above-mentioned important changes to the functioning of the Committee system, important systemic challenges remain. The first challenge is related to the ability to conduct meetings when a number of members are not present. The experience of failed meetings due to lack of quorum requires systemic changes during the 11th Parliament. For the 11th Parliament, it is recommended (1.) reducing the overall membership of JSCs from 12 to a maximum of 8 (2.) adjusting the practice of the quorum including a lower quorum and (3.) reviewing the membership of Cabinet Ministers in JSCs. Currently, Cabinet ministers are appointed to all three JSCs. In other jurisdictions, government members are usually only allowed to participate in committee work at the request of the committee or the government. Taking into account the context in Trinidad and Tobago in which there is strong connection between the executive and legislature, it is recommended to restrict Committee membership from the side of the Government to the Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries.

As foreseen in the CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Parliaments, the 11th Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is advised to establish and follow a transparent method for selecting the chairs of Committees and members of Committees. Whips are encouraged to select members to serve on Committees based on the member’s professional background and areas of personal and political interest; and to invite members to express in writing to their whip why they are interested and qualified to participate in or chair a particular Committee.

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6 At present, certain powers privileges and immunities of the Members of Parliament are defined in the House of Representatives (Powers and Privileges) Act, Chapter 2:02. The Act seeks inter alia to secure freedom of speech in the house, regulate admittance in the precincts of Parliament. This legislation was assented to in 1953 and has only been amended once in 1963.

7 A preliminary draft of the revised legislation has been drafted by the Legal Unit with the assistance of external counsel and it is expected that the draft legislative proposal will be considered during the Eleventh Parliament.

8 De Vrieze, F., Baseline Assessment of the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, December 2014, 59 p.

9 Staddon, A., Activities on strengthening parliamentary practices in Trinidad and Tobago. Study on Parliamentary Scrutiny and Existing Parliamentary Practice, Port-of-Spain, February 2012, 70 p.

The PAC and PAEC will continue to be chaired by a Member of the Opposition (as stipulated in the Constitution) and the JSCs will continue to be chaired by Independent Senators (as stipulated in the S.O.). A second challenge is related to the planning of the work of the Committees and the Parliament as a whole. It is recommended that the 11th Parliament, in cooperation with the Executive, develops an annual parliamentary calendar at the beginning of each year or session. The parliamentary calendar will be structured based on the vision of the incrementally increasing time commitment of MPs to their responsibility in Parliament, and thus representing a substantial increase in the number of plenary sittings and Committee meetings.

To improve planning, it is worthwhile to take note of the practice of a Liaison Committee in the UK House of Commons and in other jurisdictions. For the 11th Parliament, it is recommended to establish a Committee of Chairpersons: the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate can convene a monthly meeting with all chairpersons of oversight committees and standing committees to discuss issues in relation to the functioning and agendas of Committees.

1.3. Building parliamentary autonomy

Since independence, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has effectively been an adjunct of the Executive. It is unable to freely appoint its own staff, raise the financial resources it requires, nor determine its internal governance arrangements. For such matters, it depends on the government, just as a government ministry does. But parliament is not a ministry of government. Although, according to the Constitution, Parliament is a separate arm of the state fully equal to the judiciary and the executive, the resources for the day-today operation of Parliament are in the hands of the executive. However, there is recognition that such arrangements are no longer fit for purpose.

Therefore, the Strategic Plan says: "In line with agreed "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region" as developed in the framework of the CPA and in line with principles of international best practice, the Parliament needs to move towards becoming more autonomous from the Executive in terms of taking responsibility for parliamentary staffing, its finances and work planning. The Parliament will work closely with the Executive in finalizing the process of making Parliament fully autonomous, putting in place clear and transparent roles that will ensure prudent financial management and a smooth transition process towards autonomy for Parliament." The Strategic Plan thus notes key features of the autonomy, including: a management board established comprising appropriate stakeholders; protected status for the Clerk; a staged process of implementation, co-operation on implementation with the executive branch.

In the 4th session of the 10th Parliament, a 10-members Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Autonomy was established. A Legislative Proposal, The Draft Houses of Parliament Service Authority Bill, has been laid in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The proposal seeks to achieve efficient and autonomous management and administration of the Parliament by dismantling and replacing the existing public service model with an independent non-partisan Houses of Parliament Service Authority. This Authority will be a corporate body, to be managed by a Board comprising MPs representative of the Government, the Opposition and the Independent Senate bench, and chaired by the Speaker. The Legislative Proposal was made available on the parliament website.

The Parliament, with the support of the UNDP, received the services of a senior parliamentary advisor in preparing a pre-policy document on parliamentary autonomy. Based upon this pre-policy document, the JSC made a call for evidence from the general public and all interested stakeholders.

12 Patterson J., Pre-Policy Towards An Independent Parliament – Ensuring Parliament’s Functional Autonomy, Published by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, January 2015, 6 p.
Upon guidance of the JSC, the Office of Parliament informed the parliament staff of the ongoing work and advised staff on what the changes might imply for the staff management in parliament.

*Evaluation comment*

As the desire of Parliament for autonomy in its administration goes back for almost 20 years, during the 10th Parliament significant steps were taken to achieve this goal. As the policy and legislative groundwork has been completed, the 11th Parliament is expected to finalize and approve the Legislative Proposal, alongside the required transitional measures. It is important that sufficient attention be given to put in place a change process which, in addition to institutional advantages, opens the way for the creation of a career path for the staff in Parliament.

It is thus expected that parliamentary autonomy will enhance Parliament’s capacity to undertake its basic service requirements of passing sound legislation, holding the government to account, and representing citizens. In order to achieve this result, Parliament will be expected to shoulder its formal new responsibilities in an accountable and transparent manner.

1.4. Strengthening the role and position of the Parliamentarians

"During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, Parliament will review the remuneration for MPs, in discussion with the Salaries Review Commission and the House Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate, with the aim to enable MPs to make their job in Parliament their main professional activity (counting for 95 % of their professional time allocation)."

As foreseen in the Strategic Plan, the House Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate engaged in discussions with the Salaries Review Commission. The House Committee met on December 16, 2013, and January 10, 2014 to consider the Ninety-Eighth Report of the Commission in relation to the proposed terms and conditions of service of Members of Parliament. The Committee’s overall view was that the Commission continued to hold the erroneous view that the role of a Member of Parliament was a part-time one.

Based upon extensive research, the House Committee made a proposal on parliamentary remuneration designed to achieve four aims: 1./ to provide a salary to T&T MPs that is fair and adequate having regard to their duties; 2./ to provide a level of remuneration so that no citizen is deterred from entering Parliament, regardless of his/her personal means; 3./ to safeguard the free exercise of the mandate and protect Members against pressures that might undermine the democratic system; and 4./ to ensure that Members’ expenses pertaining to the mandate are adequately offset. In its report, the House Committee expressed concern that current levels of legislative pay limit the type of people who can afford to serve to the wealthy, to those who have generous employers, to the retired, to those willing to make great financial and personal sacrifices; hence the Committee wondered if that was good for democracy.

The House Committee recognised that it is time for an overhauling of the system of compensation for Legislators, even in a preliminary way. The rationale is based on the demands to devote time to the parliamentary duties on full-time basis. The proposal of the House Committee suggests two separate components of parliamentary remuneration: a) The basic salary for an MP/Senator; b) Additional Salary for ministerial/other higher-order responsibilities. In its report, the Committee made its recommendations

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13 Patterson, J., *Preliminary report on appropriate recommendations on parliamentary autonomy*, Published by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, November 2014, 39 p.
pending the completion of a job evaluation exercise to be undertaken by the Salaries Review Commission. A Cabinet Note has been submitted.

Evaluation comment
As stated in the CPA Benchmarks, Members should not be required to place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisation that might influence them in the performance of their official duties or might give the impression of so doing. It is therefore recommended that the Salaries Review Commission and the Committees of the House and the Senate come to an agreement on the proper remuneration of the job of a full-time MP.

With an agreement on the proper remuneration of the job of full-time MPs, one can rightly expect more accountability. During the 11th Parliament, it is recommended to develop a Code of Conduct for the members of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago. The Code of Conduct will outline the high standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters, as agreed in the CPA Benchmarks. In line with the "Integrity in Public Life Act" (2000) and the work of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago\(^\text{15}\), the Code will foresee in rules on conflict of interest and the acceptance of gifts, amongst others, and will require Members of Parliament to fully disclose their financial assets and business interests (ref. CPA benchmarks).

1.5. Developing the capacity and professional skills of MPs
Following the elections for the 10th Parliament, a two-day induction program was offered to the newly elected MPs in 2010. The program offered introductions to the role of parliament, responsibilities of members, and practical information on the support offered by the Office of Parliament. The Strategic Plan envisages that Parliament will provide a more comprehensive induction programme for newly elected MPs in 2015. In addition, the Strategic Plan proposes that the Office of Parliament prepares a rolling programme of professional development for MPs.

In December 2014, when the HoR Finance Committee conducted a thorough review of the budget and called Ministry stakeholders to justify the proposed budget, the important role of the Permanent Secretaries of Ministries in timely preparing presentations for the session became evident. It might thus be useful, at the start of the new Parliament, to foresee briefing sessions to the (new) Permanent Secretaries on, for instance, the budget process, the Permanent Secretaries’ role to gather information in a timely manner, and parliamentary oversight and accountability.

As Members and staff are aware of the need for continuous learning and knowledge gathering, the 10th Parliament started an initiative to create a Parliamentary Training Academy. A UNDP parliamentary development expert drafted the policy framework for such Training Academy.\(^\text{16}\) It is envisaged as a long-term, internally-driven, professional knowledge building and capacity program for MPs and staff. The initiative is consistent with trends in other Parliaments that set up such Training Institutes: for example, India, Bangladesh, the Czech Republic, Kenya, Nigeria, Thailand and Uganda. The specific objectives will include:

- Provide a concentrated and relevant orientation program for new legislators and staff;
- Provide legislative leadership training to MPs and Staff
- Provide training and continuing parliamentary education for MPs and staff;
- Undertake research and disseminate information on democracy and good governance;
- Create and maintain a database on key issues on parliamentary democracy;

\(^{15}\) [http://integritycommission.org.tt/New/]
• Provide consultancy and advisory services on parliamentary democracy;
• Cooperate with national institutions and international organizations.

Evaluation comment
The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will gain from the establishment of a Parliamentary Training Academy, thus providing sustainability to the current reforms. The initiative for a Training Academy will fit well with the envisaged parliamentary autonomy so long as the approach is content based and works with existing infrastructure. The Parliamentary Training Academy will primarily serve elected representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, though it can have a regional function for other MPs of the Caribbean as well.

1.6. Strengthening the internal management of the Office of Parliament
During the 10th Parliament, key provisions from the Strategic Plan related to the Office of Parliament were achieved. Firstly, a Corporate Plan of the Office of Parliament was drafted in 2012, outlining the mandate and tasks of each of the Departments and Units. During the 10th Parliament, the number of staff in the Office of the Parliament increased with the implementation of the Parliament Strategic Plan 2013-2018: from 213 in 2010 to 277 in 2015.\(^{17}\) The increase is to a large extent due to the recruitment of new police officers due to the relocation of Parliament. The number of constituency staff has grown because the financial allocation to Members increased.

Box 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office of Parliament staff categories, actual filled positions</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public officers</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracted officers</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term / consultants</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily paid officers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total staff Office of Parliament, Port-of-Spain</strong></td>
<td><strong>213</strong></td>
<td><strong>277</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency Offices staff</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Office of Parliament has designed a Training Plan 2012-2016.\(^{18}\) The Plan is built upon a staff needs assessment, training objectives and training strategies. A methodology for evaluation is included. Referencing the Parliament Strategic Plan, the Parliament keeps under review the organisational structure of the Office of Parliament to ensure that the departments and units correspond to the current needs. The Legal Unit was established and the ICT Unit was restructured and additional staff approved. The Police Unit has been restructured due to the relocation of the Parliament from the Red House. The number of Police Officers at Parliament has grown from 63 persons in 2010 to 98 persons today. All Police Officers are expected to remain once the Parliament returns to its home at the Red House since the facility will be substantially larger in size and a number of security measures enhanced. The 10th Parliament was also supported by eight interns, four of which were subsequently hired via 3 year contract.

The Human Resource policy is faced with some challenges. A first challenge is the high turnover of staff. Often, civil servants working at Parliament consider the compensation package and the nature of the working

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\(^{17}\) Figures received from the Human Resources Department of Parliament, May 2015.

hours unfavourable compared to those in Ministries or other public entities. In order to be able to offer a more favourable package, Parliament hires contract staff. Hence, not all established positions are filled.

A second challenge relates to Cabinet approval to adjust the organisational structure of the Office of Parliament. In line with the Strategic Plan, a proposal for a Project Management Office (PMO) has been prepared. The primary goal of the PMO within the Office of Parliament is to standardize and follow project management policies, processes and methods. The PMO will report on project activities and requirements; ensure that the implementers and decision makers are moving towards a consistent strategic objective; and will follow up on all projects through completion. Additionally, the PMO will assist in program adjustments, reorientation and future planning. However, the required Cabinet Note although prepared in April 2014 is subject to the prior approval of the Ministry of Public Administration, an Executive Ministry whose insistence on standardization and consistency is often resolute to the point of being crippling.

In addition, the establishment of a Research and Development Unit (RDU) in the Office of the Parliament has been proposed. The functions of the RDU include, amongst others, providing MPs with oral or written information on various matters or subjects that come before the House; conducting research on international affairs; preparing background papers on any legislation introduced in Parliament; providing research services to parliamentary committees; assisting with the dissemination of information to the public on the procedures and practice of Parliament through publications of books, booklets and abstracts, and carrying out anticipatory research on topical issues at the initiative of the department or through a demand by a Member(s) of Parliament. The proposal in this regard is being finalised.

**Evaluation comment**

Key to the strengthening of Parliament is the skills, knowledge and professionalism of parliament staff. The Office of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has an outstanding team of professionals. MPs from the ruling party, opposition and the independent Senate bench are unanimous in their appraisal of the excellence of parliamentary staff. The Office of Parliament functions in a politically neutral way and has considerably contributed to the deepening respect for the institution of Parliament. The increase in the number of staff during the 10th Parliament reflects the growing acceptance of Parliament as an equal arm of the state, next to the Executive and the Judiciary.

To further streamline its operations and policies, and as foreseen in the Strategic Plan, the Office of Parliament is advised to prepare Standard Operating Procedures concerning workflow, decision making on administrative and managerial issues, and internal and external communication. Further initiatives can be taken to strengthen the knowledge of current and new staff by developing a certified course on parliamentary affairs in cooperation with Universities in Port-of-Spain.

### 1.7. Moving towards a "paperless parliament"; deepening the use of ICT

The Strategic Plan envisages that: "The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will implement a comprehensive ICT plan with a view to improve communication and delivery of documents to all MPs, provide them with a single online repository for the collection and sharing of parliamentary documents, and subsequently reduce the use of paper and thus lead to significant cost savings."

In 2013, a comprehensive ICT Strategic Plan was drafted in the framework of the project “Support to ICT Strategic Planning in the Parliaments of the Caribbean,” funded by the EU. The project was implemented by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, in partnership with the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD) and with expertise from the Canadian House of Commons.19

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19 ICT Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013, 62 p.
The ICT plan has the following objectives: (1.) All documents received or produced by the Parliament will be made available in an accepted electronic format. Paper usage will be reduced by 50 per cent by the end of 2013 compared with 2012; (2.) Hansard without verified quotations will be published online, 90 per cent of the time within 24 hours of the completion of the debate. The Hansard will be available in an open format that will be searchable and reusable by internal and external partners within the next three years; (3.) The website will contain all information needed in line with the IPU guidelines; (4.) The Parliament will adopt a standard open format for legislation shared between all Government partners within the next three years; (5.) Parliamentary applications and information will be securely accessible by authorized users from anywhere at any time within the next two years.

The World e-Parliament Conferences in Johannesburg (2010), in Rome (2012) and in Seoul (2014) were of high value to provide key ideas included in the ICT Strategic Plan and to facilitate contacts which contributed to the implementation of many ideas.

In 2013, “The Rotunda”, an application developed by the Office of Parliament to facilitate the sharing of documentation in electronic form with Members, was launched. Each MP has been issued an iPad with the Rotunda application, as well as training on how to use the application. Currently, approximately 60% of MPs regularly use it, mostly opposition MPs and independent Senators. Government MPs and Ministers mostly use the ICT infrastructure of their Ministry.

The Standing Orders have stipulated that documents are, as primary format, available in electronic format through the Rotunda while the print-copy is only a fall-back option. As foreseen in the Parliament’s Strategic Plan, the delivery of hard-copy documents at the private addresses of MPs has been phased out. In 2015 the usage of paper documents in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has been reduced by 60 % as compared to 2010. The ICT Unit has developed the digital asset management system, enhanced systems for back-up and security of data, and integrated better the system of the various ICT sub-systems and applications in use.

During the 10th Parliament, all constituency offices and sub-offices were brought on-line through high-speed Internet connection. The number of computers per office was doubled from two to four.

As proposed in the comprehensive Strategic Plan, the recording system for the Hansard has been changed. The introduction of SLIQ Technologies will allow to move towards public access of video and audio of contributions of Members of Parliament and the ParlView page to be accessed via the Parliament website.

The goal is to have the Hansard without verified quotations published online, 90% of the time within 24 hours of the completion of the debate, is currently only possible for shorter sittings, while for longer sittings (later than 6.00 p.m.) it is possible within 48 hours.

At the start of the 10th Parliament, the Hansard section used six to eight boxes of paper (5,000 papers/box) per month. Currently, that has been reduced to two boxes per month. The work on the digitalization of old Hansard continues. All Hansard records for the period of 1989 till present session have been covered and are available. The ongoing work are the Hansard of the HoR for 1966 - 1988, the Hansard of the Senate for the period 1961 - 1989; and the Legislative Council for 1918 – the 1950s.

Evaluation comment

During the time of the 10th Parliament, the human resources assigned to the ICT Department increased from four persons in 2010 to ten persons in 2015. During the 11th Parliament, there might be need to further enhance the ICT Department in line with the new projects for the further digitalization of parliament.

For implementation at the start of the 11th Parliament, the ICT Department has prepared five new deliverables in ICT services. Firstly, preparations have been made for the creation of a "Member database", bringing together all information on the parliamentary activities of MPs. Part of the information will be

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20 Interview with Head of ICT Department, April 2015.
accessible on parliament-internal Intranet, while other data will be available for public posting on the Website. Secondly, technical preparations have been conducted for an electronic registry of legislation. A Cabinet Note has been submitted and is awaiting feedback/approval. Thirdly, under the approach to work with re-usable data, the questions and answers of the Prime Minister Question Time and the ministerial questions will be foreseen from a search function and connected to the members profile database. Fourthly, preparations are on-going to bring the Parliament Library online, so citizens can verify online what electronic and hard copy resources are available at Parliament. Fifthly, initial ideas have been developed for a constituency requests management system. As staff of constituency offices insert all issues addressed to constituency offices in a database, it will be possible to generate generalized information reports per constituency and per issue, and to tabulate information for nation-wide reports. While some MPs and staff are very supportive, other MPs seem reluctant to make any data available from ‘their constituency’. Some further discussions on this issue are envisaged in the 11th Parliament.

The digitalization of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has taken firm root in its operations, allowing it to be more efficient with its use of resources and time. The reduction of usage of paper makes the Parliament more ecologically friendly as it is on the way to becoming a paperless Parliament. Through the enhanced use of social media, the Communications and ICT Departments have intensified their cooperation. The new deliverables in ICT services prepared for the 11th Parliament reflect the professional and pro-active approach of the ICT Department.

1.8. Developing and sustaining international links

The Strategic Plan envisages that: "Parliament aims to continue its close relationship with the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the European Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Conference of Presiding Officers and Clerks."

During the last five years, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago continued to actively engage in promoting and strengthening bilateral and multilateral parliamentary relations. Bilateral relations were established with other parliaments at the regional and international levels. At the multilateral level, the Parliament participated in the activities of the international parliamentary organizations.

Membership in inter-parliamentary organizations supported Trinidad and Tobago’s contribution to debate global issues, provided for engagement with the international community and the opportunity for some MPs and staff to develop professionally. It also ensured that matters of importance to Trinidad and Tobago were included on the agenda of inter-parliamentary organizations.

In February 2015, the Office of Parliament established a Unit for Inter-parliamentary Relations, consisting of three staff. An information brochure for Members on the Unit is under preparation.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is a full member of the following eight organizations:

✓ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)\(^1\) - The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has served on the regional Executive Committee of the CPA for a number of years. The Clerk of the House served as Regional Secretary for the period 2006 to 2012. During that time the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was host of the CPA regional secretariat.

✓ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)\(^2\)

✓ ParlAmericas, formerly Inter-parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)\(^3\) - Since 2014, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is part of the Board of ParlAmerica.

✓ African, Caribbean, Pacific – European Union (ACP-EU) Joint Parliamentary Assembly, and ACP PA\(^4\)

\(^1\) [http://www.cpahq.org/](http://www.cpahq.org/)

\(^2\) [http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm](http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm)


\(^4\) [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/20_01/default_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/20_01/default_en.htm)
The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was well represented by all parties/groups in Parliament at a number of inter-parliamentary gatherings abroad or hosted such events in Port-of-Spain; many of which were much-needed training workshops. This is the overview of inter-parliamentary activities in each of the five sessions of the 10th Parliament, according to ten categories:

Box 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-parliamentary activities</th>
<th>Sessions of the 10th Parliament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CPA conferences, workshops &amp; events abroad</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. IPU conferences &amp; seminars abroad</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CSPOC mtgs abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ParlAmericas meetings abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly abroad</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other conferences, training mtgs abroad</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Official and working visits abroad</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Inter-parliamentary mtgs hosted in P-o-S</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. National mtgs hosted in P-o-S</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Official delegations received in P-o-S</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total inter-parliamentary activities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two initiatives per category can be highlighted in examining the specificity and diversity of every inter-parliamentary conference.

1. **CPA conferences, workshops, events abroad**
   - CPA Seventh Annual Summer Residency Programme for Public Accounts Committees, Victoria, Australia, February 5-11, 2012
   - 39th Regional Conference for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Bridgetown, Barbados, July 25 to August 2, 2014

2. **IPU conferences and seminars abroad**
   - World e-Parliament Conferences: in Johannesburg, South Africa, October 21-22, 2010; in Italy, Rome, September 13 to 15, 2012; and in Seoul, Korea, May, 8-10, 2014
   - 130th Assembly of the IPU and ASGP meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, March 16-20, 2014: The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago becomes full member of IPU and exercised its voting rights for the first time. The Speaker of the HoR of Trinidad and Tobago was asked to chair the IPU plenary session for half a day.

3. **Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC)**

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25 http://www.asgp.co/
26 http://www.societyofclerks.org/scat_home.asp
27 http://www.commonwealth-hansard.org/
Meeting of the Standing Committee of the CSPOC, Jersey, Channel Islands, January 15-18, 2015.

4. ParliAmericas meetings abroad
- Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Inter-parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA), Mexico City, Mexico, November 16-20, 2010
- ParliAmericas Annual Gathering of Women Parliamentarians, Paramaribo, Suriname, May 16-17, 2013

5. Meetings of ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly abroad

6. Other inter-parliamentary meetings abroad
- An International Executive Program for Parliamentary Staff, Montreal, Canada, June 11-15, 2012
- Two week Course on Parliamentary Reporting in the Digital Age, London, December 03-14, 2012

7. Official parliamentary visits abroad
- Official Visit of a Parliamentary Delegation from the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the CPA to the Parliament of India, March 15-20, 2012
- Official Parliamentary Visit to China, Beijing, December 05-12, 2012

8. Inter-parliamentary meetings hosted in P-o-S
- 35th Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of CPA, July 24-30, 2010
- IPU Regional Workshop on Good practice in political representation and constituency work, November 26-27, 2012
- 21st Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth, January 7-12, 2012. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago introduced the principle of a plenary discussion between all Speakers and Presiding Officers. It was followed by a joint press conference to communicate the work of CSPOC to the general public. These two novelties have been maintained since.

9. National meetings hosted in P-o-S
- 50th Anniversary of Bicameralism of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, several events, December 2011
- Commonwealth Day, March 9, 2015

10. Official delegations received in P-o-S
- Visit of Hon. Brownwyn Bishop, Speaker of the House of the Parliament of Australia, April 4-6, 2014
- Visit by Hon. Leo Housakos, Speaker of the Senate of Canada, March 16-17, 2015

Evaluation comment
The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has become more active in inter-parliamentary activities during the 10th Parliament, as evidenced by above overview chart. In addition to participating in plenary sessions of international organizations or hosting official visits, there is a clear trend of making the international exposure beneficial for the purpose of strengthening the capacity of MPs and staff on issues such as...
oversight, legislative drafting, budget scrutiny, etc. Since the requirement to report on inter-parliamentary activities was included in the revised Standing Orders of the House, reporting such activities has improved.

The accomplishments during the 10th Parliament can be strengthened further by approving a policy document on the mid-term to long-term objectives and priorities for parliamentary cooperation in Trinidad and Tobago. It is recommended to foresee in an annual plenary debate on inter-parliamentary relations, based upon the annual report of the CPA branch as tabled in the HoR and the Senate. At the level of the Office of Parliament, a template for reporting on inter-parliamentary activities can be prepared. Currently, every inter-parliamentary activity requires Cabinet approval, resulting in over 20 Cabinet Notes per year. It is recommended to streamline this practice through Cabinet approval for one Cabinet Note per session based upon an Annual Work Plan, prepared by the Unit for Inter-parliamentary Relations.

1.9. Restoring the Red House

On March 26, 2013 during initial excavation work undertaken as part of the Restoration of the Red House, a number of skeletal remains, cultural and historical artefacts were found on the site. A composite of material comprising human bones, fragments of animal bones, shells, pottery and other artefacts were discovered and extracted from the soil in other areas at the Red House. As a result, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago assembled an Archaeological Excavation Team, headed by the (late) Mr. Peter Harris, archaeologist, along with other qualified personnel from the University of the West Indies to oversee the removal of all human skeletal remains and artefacts which date back to the years 430 AD - 1390 AD. The Archaeological Research and Rescue Excavation Team started its work on 1st July, 2013 and completed its assignment on January 31, 2015.

The Office of Parliament has continued to consult several stakeholders, in particular the First Peoples Community in order to ensure that the remains are handled and treated with the care and respect required. Additionally, the Cabinet has established a Red House Cultural Heritage Team to manage all aspects of the historical find and to ensure conformity with best practices and international protocols for such material.

During this period, the Red House Restoration Project focused on the completion of essential surveys and designs ahead of construction works. Only minor necessary works were undertaken at the Red House site. In meantime, the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Main Contractor for the Red House Restoration Project has been re-advertised both locally and internationally. Deadline for submissions is August 28, 2015. This is the third time the RFP was sent out to tender. A contract was awarded for the provision of Design Consultancy and Construction Supervision Services of the Parliamentary Complex for Administrative and Ancillary Services.

1.10. Preparing legal framework on elections campaign financing

In many countries around the world, the open and transparent funding of parties and candidates is considered crucial in the fight against corruption and to gain or maintain citizens’ trust in politics. In the 5th Session of the 10th Parliament, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago established a 12-members Joint Select Committee to prepare the legal framework for registration of political parties and for developing elections campaign financing legislation. The Committee launched a consultation process with the general public, political parties and other stakeholders such as the Law Association, Media Association (MATT), Transparency Institute, and trade unions.

30 http://www.idea.int/parties/finance/
The JSC met via video conference with officials of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation, Secretariat for Political Affairs of the Organisation of American States (OAS) Washington D.C. The Committee requested the expertise of UNDP’s Senior Parliamentary Advisor from New York, a former parliamentarian himself. Reviewing approaches implemented elsewhere, the UNDP advisor recommended that a system of registration of political parties be adopted in principle; that there be consultation with national stakeholders to determine the criteria for registration, the statutory limitations on election expenditure, and the obligations on political parties to disclose their accounts and submit their returns for public inspection.\(^{31}\) The UNDP advisor also recommended to reconsider the recommendations in the ‘Preliminary Report on Political Parties and the Law” by the Trinidad and Tobago Law Reform Commission in 2001.\(^{32}\)

**Evaluation comment**
Parliament’s initiative to develop a legal framework on elections campaign financing is to be welcomed. If properly designed, the new legal framework will help level the playing field by exposing and punishing undue influence over politicians, protecting against the infiltration of illicit money into politics, and encourage parties and candidates to adhere to the rules. In this way, Parliament’s initiative is fully in line with the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which has recognized the need for transparency in the role of money in politics. It is expected that the report of the JSC will form the basis for further legislative work during the 11th Parliament.

**Summary conclusion under first Objective**
The review of the Standing Orders is a key achievement of the 10th Parliament and the corner stone of a sustainable improvement in functioning of the Parliament. The revised S.O. will provide the guarantee that the 11th Parliament will continue with the Prime Minister’s question time, the public and in-depth debate on the state budget in the Standing Finance Committee, initial oversight through the six new Joint Standing Committees, enhanced oversight practice through the JSCs chaired by senators of the independent bench, and committee meetings which are open to the public.

During the 10th Parliament, a JSC on Parliamentary Autonomy finalized a legislative proposal and a pre-policy document on parliamentary autonomy. The 11th Parliament will be required to make decisions on this matter.

With the support of the ICT Department, one can state that the digitalization of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has taken firm root in the operations of Parliament, made it more efficient with better use of resources. However, only half of the MPs regularly make use of the ICT tools available.

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Strategic Objective 2: Legislative Process

Based upon the structure of the Strategic Plan of the Parliament, the second Objective to review is the one on strengthening the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago. Following are the three main initiatives realized during the 10th Parliament.

2.1. Constructing a platform for the legislative process

The Parliament Strategic Plan mentions: "within the proceedings of Parliament, an accessible tracking system of proposed amendments, their review and adoption or rejection will be created. Parliament will make the ICT resources for such tracking system available over the next two years."

Within Parliament it is recognized that the development of quality legislation is a long and extensive process involving multiple actors throughout the state apparatus, including policy staff in Ministries, the Law Reform Commission (LRC), the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC), researchers and parliamentarians, Office of the President and Official Gazette. Currently, the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago does not enable the tracking of changes and revisions to the same document based on one comprehensive platform.

In 2014, Parliament commissioned the development of a Road Map to guide the implementation of a Legislative Information Management System (LIMS). A senior consultant developed a comprehensive roadmap to create an accessible tracking system of proposed amendments, their review and adoption or rejection. The system will facilitate MPs to visualize the process of amending legislation as it happens during Committees meetings.33

In preparing for the LIMS proposal, the consultant collaborated with other institutions with a view to outline the activities involved in the entire legislative process. He worked with the Information Systems Manager at Parliament to undertake the design and implementation of a re-engineered solution, and identify software to support the new processes across the government agencies that interface with the legislative process. The project envisages links with Hansard and the Law Revision Commission; it takes into account hardware considerations, networking and interconnectivity and describes the needs for basic training, drafters training, consolidation training, project staff and office accommodation. The consultant noted that, while - for instance - the Canadian Parliament has extensive internal capacity for an in-house built system, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago does not have such internal resources and will have to rely on an external company to build the LIMS.

A Cabinet Note on the LIMS was submitted and is waiting for feed-back or approval, in principle, from Cabinet.

Evaluation comment

During the 10th Parliament, the groundwork for the establishment of the Legislative Information Management System has been completed. Following Cabinet approval and required ICT investments, the LIMS will substantially improve the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago and further contribute to transparency in the 11th Parliament. It will contribute to (1.) formatting of legislation, (2.) speeding up the publication of legislation, (3.) facilitating the database of various versions of bills as a historical resource for the bills; (4.) assisting with the consolidation of legislation for parliamentary debates and for purposes of revision of legislation; (5.) developing a central database of all acts and all subsidiary legislation.

In addition, the LIMS project, as supported by UNDP Trinidad and Tobago, is likely to attract interest among parliamentary assistance projects in other jurisdictions. The development of a LIMS will further strengthen

the pioneering role of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago within the Caribbean related to the use of ICT in modernizing parliament.

2.2. Clarifying the timetable for the legislative process

The Strategic Plan mentions: "the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that in order to achieve the Parliamentary Calendar, it will need to develop a legislative timetable for Parliament."

The majority of legislation considered by Parliament is introduced by the Government, though there is no annual legislative plan submitted by the Executive to the Parliament. The main communication are the Cabinet decisions resulting in a “Cabinet Notice” sent to Parliament that a Bill was approved to be introduced in Parliament.

Evaluation comment

It is recommended that an annual legislative agenda be compiled and presented to Parliament based upon information of ministries submitted to the CPC on the instruction of the Attorney General. In addition, providing to Parliament a CPC drafted, periodically updated overview on legislation under preparation will help Parliament in anticipating future workload and preparing its calendar.  

The Strategic Plan notes that, in line with international best practice, the Committees need sufficient time to scrutinise Bills, consult on the likely impact of Bills, draft Committee reports and ensure that Members have time to reflect on the Committee’s findings before Bills are voted upon on the floor of the House. The parliamentary calendar will need to manage this.

2.3. Scrutinizing bills in Committees

During each of the five sessions of the 10th Parliament, a considerable number of Bills were reviewed and voted upon, both in the House of Representatives and Senate. Following is the overview chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bills in the 10th Parliament</th>
<th>Sessions of the 10th Parliament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR bills given a first reading</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR bills lapsed</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR bills which received assent</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR bills withdraw / defeated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate bills given a first reading</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate bills lapsed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate bills which received assent</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate bills withdraw / defeated</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been noted that a considerable number of bills, which were considered in first reading, have lapsed. This reflects the revised Standing Orders of the HoR and Senate which state that a Bill shall lapse if Parliament is prorogued or dissolved before the Bill has reached its final stage in Parliament. During the 11th Parliament,

34 De Vrieze, F., Baseline Assessment of the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, December 2014, 59 p.
it might be useful to reconsider this issue, taking note of the policy direction taken at the UK House of Commons.\textsuperscript{35}

To provide the readers of this report with an insight into the nature of parliamentary work, a sample of legislation, which can be considered innovative, groundbreaking or which is of a fundamental nature to Trinidad and Tobago, has been selected.\textsuperscript{36} For each session of the 10th Parliament two bills have been identified. The text of the law, the Hansard from the parliamentary review and the summary of the content of the law as included in the "bills essentials" are accessible via the web-link in below chart.

Box 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Innovative, groundbreaking or fundamental pieces of legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In reviewing the 10th Parliament's track record in scrutinizing legislation, further examination is required of the procedures as well as the practices for external input in reviewing bills.

In Trinidad & Tobago, the full and open Parliament debate on draft legislation takes place after the second reading of the bill. The first reading is a short, more formal procedure by which the name of the Bill and the Minister in charge are read when the item is called and included in the Order Paper. The motion for the second reading is usually moved by the Minister in charge of the Bill. In support of the motion, the Minister makes a speech in which the principles and purposes of the Bill are outlined. The Minister may also indicate which consultations with stakeholders and interested parties have been conducted. After the second reading, a Bill may be referred to a Select Committee for consideration or a Joint Select Committee for an in-depth discussion. Normally however, when the Bill has been read a second time, the Minister responsible will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill “clause by clause”.

In its Strategic Plan, the Parliament recognizes that in order to provide in-depth scrutiny of proposed legislation, Bills need to be reviewed by a Committee with external input from CSOs, experts and stakeholders.

\textsuperscript{35} Since 2004, the UK House of Commons Standing Orders 80A make it possible that, where proceedings on a Public Bill have not completed within one session, the carry-over proceedings may be activated by means of a so-called carry-over motion, moved by a Minister.

\textsuperscript{36} Overview received from the Office of Parliament, May 2015.
within a specific timeframe, and that these hearings and consultations of relevant stakeholders on the draft legislation will be open to the public, announced in a timely fashion and that findings and conclusions will be made available on the Parliament website. This provision follows CPA Benchmarks and would apply to all proposed legislation in Trinidad & Tobago, unless decided otherwise by the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate or a Committee under their leadership.

However, currently, very few Bills are reviewed by a Committee with external input from CSOs, experts and stakeholders. In the last four years, this was the case - for instance - for: the Insurance Act, the Securities Bill (stock market), the Securities (Amendment) Bill, the Planning and Development of Land bill, Houses of Parliament Authority bill, etc. These were complex bills and therefore referred to select committees. Out of a total of 83 laws approved during the 10th Parliament, there were 12 bills on which evidence was sought through hearings and in-person consultations.

While there are not too many public hearings held, Bills are sent for written comments slightly more regularly: 16 bills out of a total of 83 laws approved. For instance, on the Insurance Bill there were many written comments submitted by interested persons and companies. Nevertheless, the consultation with stakeholders, civil society and the public remains largely insufficient and it is not practiced as a matter of routine.

Box 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative work of the 10th Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sessions of 10th legislature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Session 2010/2011</td>
</tr>
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<td>Second Session 2011/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Session 2012/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Session 2013/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Session 2014/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To deepen the scrutiny of legislation, the UNDP project in support of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago recruited a senior advisor on Committees. During 2014-2015 the advisor prepared a Baseline Study on the functioning of the Committees and the legislative process, and a comprehensive Recommendations paper on the Committees and Committee system in Trinidad and Tobago. As foreseen in the Strategic Plan, a practice guide or Manual on Public Hearings was prepared.

Box 7:
The Manual on Public Hearings provides practical guidance for organizing and conducting Committee public hearings at the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The Manual aims to unify and advance the procedures and practices that would enable more efficient use of hearings as an important mechanism in the work of the Select Committees and Joint Select Committees.

The Standing Orders of the House and the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago only in general terms describe the matters concerning the organization and conduct of public hearings. Therefore, the Manual provides detailed explanations related to the role of hearings, issues related to the organization and management, the role of the chairperson and Committee staff in managing the hearings, and the role of media coverage of Select Committee hearings.

The Manual is primarily intended for the Committee staff, MPs of Trinidad and Tobago, and especially for the (Joint) Select Committee chairpersons who have a key role in the organization and the management of public hearings. This Manual will also be useful for other state institutions, civil society, media, and other organizations that interact with the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, in order to better understand the role of Committee hearings. Finally, the Manual can be of use for witnesses, organizations and the general public invited to participate in a public hearing.

Based upon the findings of the Baseline Assessment, the advisor drafted recommendations to strengthen the Committees in their legislative role. Some of the main recommendations are:

1. Government to submit to parliament a cost assessment on the impact of the proposed legislation on the budget of the state and of other authorities (e.g. local governments) and to provide information on compliance of draft legislation with international policies or legal obligations.
2. Government to provide in writing which consultations with stakeholders and interested parties have been conducted on proposed legislation and related policies and their outcome.
3. Parliament to enable citizens to provide on-line comments on draft legislation posted on the parliament web-site; Parliament to collect and distribute the comments to Members; and the relevant Ministry to take a position on the public's comments.
4. Parliament to establish a formal obligation for committees to conduct a public hearing on draft legislation in cases when bills require a special majority, when the constitution is amended, and when the bill deals specifically with human rights issues.

**Evaluation Comment**

A substantial amount of work has been done by Parliament in terms of the number of laws reviewed and approved, considering the fundamental nature of the content of many laws, as indicated in the above table on groundbreaking and fundamental pieces of legislation. At the same time, possibilities for engaging external stakeholders in the review of draft legislation through public hearings are used in a limited way. During the 11th Parliament, further progress is recommended in terms of public hearings in parliament and the government's information to parliament on its legislative calendar, cost estimates of draft laws, overview of consulted stakeholders, engagement on the LIMS.

In meantime, Parliament can make further progress taking into account the recommendations provided through the UNDP project.

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37 De Vrieze, F., Public Hearing Manual of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, March 2015, 34 p.
38 De Vrieze, F., Recommendations to strengthen the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, March 2015, 12 p.
Summary conclusion under second Objective

The Baseline Study on the functioning of the Committees and the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago provides a factual account of the current state of affairs of the committees and the legislative function in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as a series of proposals for the further institutional development of the committees.

The 'Recommendations paper' on the Committees and the Committee system in Trinidad and Tobago suggests, amongst others, for every bill submitted to Parliament, the Government provides an assessment on the impact of the legislation on the budget of the State as well as of other governmental authorities' budget (e.g. local governments). It was recognized that, currently, committees review relatively few Bills using external input from CSOs, experts and stakeholders, and that more could be done.

To assist in this, a Manual on Public Hearings was prepared and is available for the 11th Parliament.
Strategic Objective 3: Executive Oversight

Based upon the structure of the Strategic Plan, the third Objective to review is the one on strengthening the executive oversight in Trinidad and Tobago. Following are the six main initiatives realized during the 10th Parliament.

3.1. Exercising oversight in plenary session

The Strategic Plan mentions that "the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, like many other parliaments around the world, has developed a number of mechanisms of subjecting the executive arm of government to accountability. Such procedures as questions, the estimates process, scrutiny of delegated legislation, private members’ motions and adjournment debates. To strengthen the practice of oversight, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will, during the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, introduce and conduct on regular basis the Prime Minister’s Question Time".

Box 8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Questions filed</td>
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<td>110</td>
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<td>Written questions</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions answered</td>
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<td>93</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions lapsed</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister Questions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Questions filed</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral questions</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>329</td>
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<tr>
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<td>32</td>
</tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the entire 10th Parliament, more than 600 questions were filed in the HoR, and 84 % were answered. In the Senate more than 400 questions were filed, and 80 % were answered. In the House, the last two sessions saw the highest numbers of questions filed, while in the Senate the highest numbers of questions were during the first two sessions. Oral questions constituted 84 % of the total number of questions in the House and 77 % of the total number of questions in the Senate.

At the end of each session, a considerable number of questions lapsed, both in the HoR (11 %) and the Senate (7 %).

Following the review of the Standing Orders in the HoR, the Prime Minister’s Question (PMQ) Time was introduced. The PMQ’s take place on a monthly basis and last for 45 minutes. During the last session, 87 PMQ's were asked. 50 % of the Members of the Opposition (7 Members) utilized PMQ's. Out of the 87 PMQ’s, 43 were asked by the Leader of the Opposition (49% of PMQ’s). The Member for Chaguanas West asked 23 PMQ’s (26%). The aforementioned two Members together asked 75 % of PMQ’s. The remaining 5 Members make up the additional 25 % of PMQ’s asked.
During the 10th Parliament, the total of government motions in the HoR was 75, and all government motions were agreed. None of the private member motions in the HoR were approved. In the Senate, the picture is slightly different. While 16 of the 18 government motions were approved, also 5 of the 15 private motions were approved in the Senate.

During the 10th Parliament, there were eight landmark motions in the HoR.
Evaluation comment
The introduction of Prime Minister Question Time is one of the most visible signs of enhanced accountability. It enables Members of the House to ask questions to the PM on a regular basis. Because it is such a high profile event, broadcasted on television, it has become a highlight in the political life of Trinidad and Tobago, and even changed the political culture of Trinidad and Tobago. For the 11th Parliament, it is recommended to increase the frequency of the Prime Minister Question Time to a two-weekly or weekly schedule, as is the case in the UK House of Commons.

3.2. Exercising oversight in Committees
Section 66 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago declares, that not later than three months after the first meeting of the House of Representatives, the Parliament shall appoint Joint Select Committees to inquire into and report to both Houses in respect of Government Ministries, Municipal Corporations, Statutory Authorities, State Enterprises and Service Commissions, in relation to their administration, the manner of exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions. Motions related to this purpose were passed in the House of Representatives and Senate on September 17, 2010 and October 12, 2010, respectively.

As foreseen in the Strategic Plan, the Parliament has worked towards improving the Committee system and the capacity to provide effective oversight. According to the Standing Order 101 of the House, the JSCs are empowered to investigate, enquire into and report on the administration, the manner of the exercise of their powers and the methods of functioning of the Ministries and the bodies which are assigned to them. The description of the powers of the JSCs in the Standing Orders are sufficiently comprehensive to allow the full exercise of the role and responsibility of the JSC, and to ensure a degree of autonomy of the committees to set their own agenda.

During the 10th Parliament, the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of JSCs was assigned to independent senators. This was the right decision, as it has enabled a political culture conducive for in-depth work at the meetings of the JSCs. At the end of the 10th Parliament, Members of the House and Senators expressed strong and unanimous appreciation for the high quality work of the staff supporting the Committees, executed in a very professional and politically neutral way.

The oversight work of the JSCs over the ministries, state companies and entities under their purview is to a large extent based upon the annual administrative reports received from these institutions. However, in many instances, Ministries, state companies and entities do not submit a regular report.48

45 http://www.ttparliament.org/chamber_business.php?mid=11&id=286
47 http://www.ttparliament.org/order_papers/oh20150424.pdf
48 Trinidad and Tobago has an unwieldy and extra-ordinarily large number of public institutions, state companies and entities. There are more than 200 entities under the purview of the PAC and 70+ entities under the purview of the PAEC. It is almost impossible for PAC and PAEC to conduct meaningful oversight over such a large number of entities. If more accountability and efficiency in the Trinidad and Tobago governance system is desired, it is recommended that the Government commission a feasibility study on the question of how to considerably reduce or merge a number of public institutions, corporations and entities as well as the required legislative changes to achieve this.
During the period from 2010 to May 20th, 2015, the Ministries resorting under JSC-I submitted their annual administrative reports in only 20.5% of cases; and the Ministries resorting under JSC-II submitted their annual administrative report in 60.9% of the cases. The other entities resorting under JSC-I and JSC-II submitted their annual administrative report in, respectively, 21.3% and 18.67% of the cases. The Service Commissions and Municipal Corporations submitted their reports in 75% and 76.79% of the cases respectively.

Box 11:

| Annual Administrative Reports to be received by entities under the purview of the three JSCs for the period 2010- May 20th, 2015 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| For period 2010-2015 | JSC - I | JSC - II | JSC - III (MCSC) |
| Ministries | Other entities | Ministries | Other entities | Service Commissions | Municipal Corporations |
| Total reports required | 68 | 540 | 64 | 492 | 16 | 56 |
| Reports received | 14 | 115 | 39 | 92 | 12 | 43 |
| Reports pending | 54 | 425 | 25 | 405 | 4 | 13 |
| % of reports received | 20.5% | 21.30% | 60.9% | 18.67% | 75% | 76.79% |

Committee inquiries have been conducted to review the contents of Administrative Reports, in case of failure of an entity to report to Parliament, when there were issues of public concern involving the entity, or when there were general concerns about the performance of the entity and weaknesses in the implementation of government policy.

To prepare for Committee inquiries, Committee staff drafted an inquiry proposal for the members and chairperson of the Committee. Having analysed a sample of IPs, they can be considered of high quality, detailed and particularly useful in the questions they suggest to the MPs.49

Preparations for committee inquiries also include selecting the entities to be examined and collecting written submissions.50 The process of eliciting public submissions from stakeholders of entities is dynamic. Therefore, the stakeholders targeted by the Committee are not fixed and depend on the nature of the entity subject to the scrutiny.

While most public hearings usually include entities and their supervising Ministry, the practice to additionally invite final beneficiaries of the Public Service companies, corporations and entities, is yet to be established. During the 10th Parliament, the practice of a site-visit has been introduced as well.

The Committees usually meet in private before the commencement of a public hearing to discuss the issues to be raised during the hearing. During the 10th Parliament, there is a sharp increase in the number of inquiries conducted and reports laid. Between June 2010 and May 20th, 2015, a total of 49 reports were presented to Parliament by JSC-I, JSC-II and JSC-MCSC.

Committee staff and chairpersons of Committees played an active role in following up to the conclusions of findings of the hearings. Committee staff have regularly verified with relevant entities and agencies on the measures taken to address the issues discussed during inquiry hearings. During the 10th Parliament, the staff undertook a number of initiatives to promote the work of the JSCs.

49 De Vrieze, F., Baseline Assessment of the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, December 2014, 59 p.
50 Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Draft Guidebook for Parliamentary Committees, Port-of-Spain 2004 - updated 2010, 32 pg.
Between June 2010 and May 20th, 2015, a total of 41 Ministerial Responses were received for the reports presented to Parliament by JSC-I, JSC-II and JSC-MCSC.

Box 12:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee reports presented to Parliament and Ministerial/Service Commission Responses received for the period June 2010 to May 20th, 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of Reports tabled</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSC-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSC-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSC-3 (MCSC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation comment

Many state companies and entities do not submit the annual administrative reports. So far, few means of pressure have been applied to ensure greater response to reporting requirements. We encourage JSCs to summon the heads of entities which do not produce reports on time, or whose reports are sub-standard. We recommend the Office of Parliament to start publishing in newspapers the names of entities that fail to submit their annual report. We recommend that the Parliament website publish and regularly update an overview table of entities which submit or fail to submit their report.

The Government’s response to JSC reports is often limited to expressing that it “takes note of” the recommendations, but there is rarely an assurance that it will take into account or review the recommendations in detail. It is recommended that the Government take on the obligation of considering the reports and their recommendations, and reports to Parliament, at least once a year, on its action in this respect. While there can be no requirement for the Government to implement committee recommendations, accountability requires the Government to consider and respond substantively to each recommendation in a timely manner. If JSC recommendations were not accepted, the Government should provide reasons as to why that is the case.51

Currently, there is no comprehensive overview of the total number of recommendations made by the three JSCs and a tracking of how many are accepted and effectively implemented.

The Parliament has undertaken several initiatives to promote the work of the JSCs. The outreach can be improved further, such as press releases announcing the tabling of Inquiry Reports; an annual and publicly accessible Committee report. In addition, we recommend enabling the general public to send questions via Twitter or email during the live broadcast of a public hearing.

3.3. Deepening oversight through new Committees

As foreseen in the 2014 revised Standing Orders of the House and the 2015 revised Standing Orders of the Senate, six new Joint Select Committees were established:

- Committee on Government Assurances which treats with the matter of assurances, promises, undertakings, given by the ministers;
- Public Appropriation and Administration Committee, which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on the budgetary expenditure and administration of the governmental agencies;
- The Committee on National Security, which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters related to national security policy of Trinidad and Tobago;

51 De Vrieze, F., *Recommendations to strengthen the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago*, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, March 2015, 12 p.
The Committee on Energy Affairs, which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters related to the expenditure, administration and policy in relation to energy affairs;

- The Committee on Foreign Affairs which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters pertaining to foreign affairs;

- The Committee on Human Rights, Diversity and Environment and Sustainable Development. This committee shall have a duty of considering and reporting on matters of compliance with human rights, social justice and equality, as well as the environment and sustainable development.

The establishment of these new Committees in 2015 is an important milestone in strengthening of the oversight role of Parliament, as the new Committees are expected to exercise their parliamentary oversight role in terms of overseeing government policy, scrutinising and initiating legislation as appropriate (Strategic Plan). Following are a number of data on the new Committees' work during the first half of 2015.

Box 13:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Committee</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Number of members</th>
<th>Number of mtgs in 2015</th>
<th>Public hearing / public mtg</th>
<th>Reports tabled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Government Assurances</td>
<td>President of the Senate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Public Appropriation and Administration</td>
<td>Speaker of the House</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. National Security</td>
<td>Independent Senator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Energy Affairs</td>
<td>independent Senator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Independent Senator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Human Rights, Diversity and Environment and Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Independent Senator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The JSC Public Administration and Appropriations organized one hearing on the system of contract employment in the public service. A lot of written submissions were sent to Parliament. A valuable question is how to keep the external contributions available and valuable for the new PAAC in case that it wishes to deal with the issue again. One can make the case that it is important, as the 10th Parliament comes to an end, not to lose the external contributions submitted by interested stakeholders upon the request of parliament.

The JSC National Security has discussed the interpretation of the Committee’s mandate – whether the Committee can consider policy only or engage in the oversight of the operations of National Security; whether legislation relating to National Security will come to the Committee; and how issues of confidentiality and secrecy will be dealt with, and the lack of Official Secrets legislation.

The JSC Committee on Energy Affairs conducted a meeting with Officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Extractive Industries.

The JSC Committee on Foreign Affairs organized a public meeting on the treaties and agreements entered into with States of the Central and South American region.

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52 Data received from the Office of Parliament, May 2015.
The JSC Human Rights, Diversity and Environment and Sustainable Development determined its work programme and prioritized domestic violence as the first issue to be considered by the Committee. The Committee also met with a representative of Parliamentarians for Global Action to discuss issues of human rights, non-discrimination and sexual orientation in Trinidad & Tobago.

**Evaluation comment**

To take a realistic approach to the effective functioning of the new Committees, the Parliament took the decision to lower the quorum to 10 persons. This is a positive development, in line with the vision of the Strategic Plan.

Taking note of the practice in the UK House of Commons and in other jurisdictions, it is recommended to establish a Committee of Chairpersons, where the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate discuss with all chairpersons of oversight committees and standing committees issues in relation to the functioning and agendas of Committees.

### 3.4. Scrutinizing budgets and expenditures effectively

The Parliament Strategic Plan mentions that "a key responsibility of Parliament is to approve the annual state budget following effective financial scrutiny of budget plans, and to exercise oversight and ensure accountability of public expenditure. During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will encourage the Executive to table a Pre-Budget Report to be debated in plenary and/or examined by the Finance Committee and JSCs, as appropriate. In case of absence of a Pre-Budget Report, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will seek to take other initiatives to increase their own and the public’s participation in the budget preparation phase."

One of the main achievements of the 10th Parliament is the reform of the budget process in Parliament. While so far the debate and approval of the annual debate was behind closed doors and didn’t last longer than five hours, the revised Standing Orders of the House enabled a substantial change and provided more transparency and accountability. For the first time in September 2014 and over a period of five days, the Standing Finance Committee, chaired by the Speaker of the House, took up the challenge of examining the budget’s fifty heads of expenditure - often line by line. The House embarked on analysing the budget in great detail, while the Opposition had the opportunity to determine the sequencing of questioning of Government ministers and accounting officials. Though the budget review was conducted in camera before, following the review of the Standing Orders the Finance Committee conducted the hearings in public, broadcasted live. At the end of the budget review week, some 400 government officials had appeared to provide information to the public.

In order to further strengthen the on-going budget process reforms, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago took the initiative to establish a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). Through the UNDP project, a senior budget expert was recruited, who prepared the policy framework for the PBO. It is envisaged that the PBO will provide high quality research that is independent of the Executive in order to assist Members of Parliament and Committees of the House. The PBO will engage in providing services for the conduct of independent expert analysis of policy measures, including the scrutiny of the annual Budget estimates, international agreements and other documents introduced in the House.

Based upon the policy work conducted in 2014-2015, the establishment of the PBO, during the 11th Parliament, will add value in helping Parliament to navigate the budget and to provide independent analysis and forecasts of the economy and public finances in an understandable format. The policy framework

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53 Draman, R., *Concept Note for the Establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago*, February 2015, 10 p.
prepared so far foresees developing an organizational structure, a Scheme of Service, a Training Plan and Working Procedures for the PBO. A Note for Cabinet was prepared for PMCD in May 2015. It foresees the establishment of three positions in the PBO, expected to be operational by mid 2016, prior to the 2017 budget discussions.

The UNDP-recruited Parliamentary Budget Expert provided strategic advice to the Standing Finance and the Public Administration and Appropriation Committees, reviewed the revised methodology on the 2014 budget, and shared knowledge about how parliamentary budget committees can become more efficient and effective, in line with international standards for parliamentary committee work and democratic legislatures.54

During the 10th Parliament, PAC and PAEC continued to play an important role in scrutinizing expenditures. Both the Constitution, section 119, and the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives state that the PAC in Trinidad and Tobago shall consist of not less than six, and not more than ten members inclusive of the Chairperson. Currently, there are 10 members in both PAC and PAEC. The composition of the PAC/PAEC is proportionate to the party membership in the House and there is representation from the Senate foreseen. Similarly to JSCs, the composition of the PAC & PAEC has a profound impact on their functioning. As a best practice, Cabinet ministers should not be member of the PAC due to its crucial oversight role. It is advisable to restrict government membership of PAC/PAEC to Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries, rather than Cabinet ministers.55

As is the case in many jurisdictions in the Commonwealth and as foreseen in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, the chairpersons of the PAC and PAEC belong to the opposition. As of the next Parliament, it is recommended that the PAC and PAEC appoint a deputy chairperson.56

The revised Standing Orders have strengthened the powers of the PAC and PAEC. In particular, Standing order 99(2) and 100(2) empower both Committees to consider whether policy is carried out efficiently, effectively and economically and whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it. This is directly in line with the value for money audits. Hence, in theory both Committees can consider issues of efficiency and economy of program implementation.57 Yet the practice of performance auditing and review of effectiveness of policies and implementation is only starting to be addressed in Trinidad and Tobago.

The below two tables provide information on the number of meetings conducted by the PAC and PAEC during the 10th legislature. PAC conducted 21 meetings, while PAEC conducted 30 meetings. Both PAC and PAEC consider and report on only a couple of audited financial statements a year. This is a result of the large number of institutions and entities under their purview, the low frequency of meetings and its practice to rely almost exclusively on in-person hearings with entities prior to finalizing a report. The latter has been changed by PAEC, which now relies to an extent on written submissions.58

It is recommended that, as of the 11th Parliament, the number of PAC and PAEC meetings be increased significantly.59 It is worth reiterating that the Strategic Plan determined that “the Parliament aims at regular meetings [of the PAC], possibly leading to a schedule of two-weekly or weekly meetings.”

54 Draman, R., Report on Technical Assistance to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago on the Budget Process, February 2015, p. 36 p.
55 Staddon, A., Activities on strengthening parliamentary practices in Trinidad and Tobago. Study on Parliamentary Scrutiny and Existing Parliamentary Practice, Port-of-Spain, February 2012, 70 p.
56 De Vrieze, F., Recommendations to strengthen the Committees in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, March 2015, 12 p.
58 Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, PA(E)C Work Programme, prepared by PAEC Secretariat, 9 December 2013, 4 p.
59 Staddon, A., Activities on strengthening parliamentary practices in Trinidad and Tobago. Activity Report, Port-of-Spain, June 2013, 13 p.
### Box 14:

**Work conducted by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) during 10th Parliament**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions of 10th legislature</th>
<th>Number of meetings</th>
<th>Entities examined</th>
<th>Reports laid</th>
<th>Reports outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Session 2010/2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Session 2011/2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Session 2012/2013</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Session 2013/2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Session 2014/2015</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Box 15:

**Work conducted by the Public Accounts Enterprises Committee (PAEC) during 10th Parliament**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions of 10th legislature</th>
<th>Number of meetings</th>
<th>Entities examined</th>
<th>Reports laid</th>
<th>Reports outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Session 2010/2011</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Session 2011/2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Session 2012/2013</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Session 2013/2014</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 (incl. 1 cont.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Session 2014/2015</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The PAC and PAEC can undertake self-initiated inquiries, as is the practice elsewhere in other jurisdictions. The Trinidad and Tobago PACs can refer matters to the Auditor General (AG) for investigation and examine the AG’s performance and compliance reports. As with most other jurisdictions the PAC has unrestricted access to examine their AGs’ reports.

The Office of the Auditor General is currently still "at arm’s length" from the work of the PAC/PAEC -- although the Auditor General is an "Officer of Parliament". It is recommended that the Auditor General employ a full-time Senior Policy Officer to work with Parliament, PAC and PAEC on a daily basis. In the intermediate term, it is recommended that the Auditor General appoint a liaison person with Parliament.

The PAEC has more than 70 entities under its purview to examine. Private audit companies often audit the financial statements of the entities. While the Auditor General is empowered to audit state owned enterprises, the tendency is for these entities to be audited by private audit firms because of the resource constraints on the AG. Therefore the AG does not have much contact with the PAEC. The audited financial accounts of the state owned enterprises are laid in parliament and referred to the PAEC for consideration and report.
The previous work approach of the PAEC entailed that the Committee would select a limited number of entities and invite them for an in-person hearing before the Committee. The new work approach to also rely on written submissions, introduced during the 10th Parliament, has enabled the PAEC to work more efficiently, examine an increased number of entities, identify trends across entities and sectors, conduct more focused hearings, reduce the number of times and the length of time that the committee is required to meet with an entity in public, and allows for a general call for evidence to be issued, allowing interested persons and stakeholders to submit evidence that may be useful for the Committee’s inquiry. Under the 2014 revised Standing Orders, ministerial responses to reports of the PAC and the PAEC are now mandatory. A Minister responsible for a Ministry or body under review is required to present a paper to Parliament responding to any recommendations or comments contained in the report, which are addressed to it. The Minister needs to present the paper within 60 days after a report related to the Ministry or body under review has been laid in Parliament.

Evaluation comment
An institutionalized mechanism to monitor and follow-up the implementation of government responses to PAC/PAEC recommendations is yet to be established. As of the 11th Parliament, it would be useful to consider at least one annual plenary debate on the work of the PAC and PAEC. In specific circumstances, chairpersons of PAC / PAEC can take the initiative to request a debate or move a motion on specific reports during the course of one session.

3.5. Reviewing the implementation of legislation
The Parliament Strategic Plan mentions: "One of the key aspects of parliamentary oversight relates to implementation of legislation. To strengthen its effective oversight role, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims at developing a systematic approach in reviewing implementation of selected legislation." It is understood that legislative evaluation is an effort to analyse and assess the effects of legislation in a clear, systematic and objective way and that its main purpose is to contribute to the knowledge about legislation by making causal relations between the law and its effects explicit, using all available information in the course of preparation of legislation and testing the accuracy of assumptions underlying legislation after its enactment.60

With the support of UNDP, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago decided to prepare for an enhanced role of parliament in Post Legislative Scrutiny. In doing so, practical questions were considered, such as (1.) what form it should take; (2.) what priority should it have; (3.) when should it be used.61 In considering these questions, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and UNDP organized a round table on Post Legislative Scrutiny, where it was suggested to develop a pilot project approach by which the Parliament examines the implementation of a limited set of laws (two to three) over a period of e.g. one year, followed by an evaluation and lessons learned identified for a more generalized and institutionalized approach.

It was therefore decided to establish an ad hoc Committee to determine the Committee that could undertake this exercise, Terms of Reference for the Committee, Methodology for this Post Legislative Scrutiny exercise, possible legislations to review, and a date to report on the Process recommended. The Scrutiny Unit of the UK House of Commons has agreed to continue to provide advice to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago on this matter.

3.6. Increasing oversight capacity through improved library & research services

The Strategic Plan mentions: "the Parliament will focus the development of the library on providing an effective e-library of up to date documents and resources for Members, bringing its full catalogue on line."

During the 10th Parliament, several initiatives were taken to develop the library and provide an effective e-library (see above chapter on ICT in parliament). A Heavy Duty Scanner has been installed to facilitate digitization of parliamentary proceedings, Annual reports, Committee Reports, Government publications, and other documents of historical value. Numerous reports have been digitized with a view to enhancing online access and ease dissemination. The digitalization of Hansard and Bills got Cabinet approval, and is currently being implemented with the support of one additional librarian. In 2012, several Library publications were introduced: Readers Alert, Book News, Research tip of the month. The backlog in cataloguing has been reduced by 75 %. A "Disaster Preparedness Plan" for Library, Archives and Hansard has been put in place. The online resources have been expanded. To the already existing Westlaw, the Library added a number of other subscribed on-line databases namely LexisNexis, EBSCO Host, TTCASE, OED online. Cooperation with the National Library intensified through database access. Next step will be to have a catalogue of resources put on-line, through the on-line library project.

During the 10th Parliament, Hansard and Library staff attended international conferences, which contributed to their professional development as a result of the exposure to other parliaments. There was a Hansard training at the UK Parliament (December 2012), LEGCOMM Conference on communications advances in Commonwealth Parliaments in Canada (July 2014), and a US National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) Convention and EXPO (San Francisco, July/August 2014). In 2011, Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Commonwealth Hansard Editors Association.62

Summary conclusion under third Objective

The Prime Minister’s Question (PMQ) Time has become one of the most visible signs of enhanced accountability during the 10th Parliament. Trinidad and Tobago thus follows best practices in oversight from other jurisdictions. The frequency of the PMQ’s could be increased during the 11th Parliament.

The three JSCs that oversee the administration and functioning of Government Ministries, Municipal Corporations, Statutory Authorities, State Enterprises and Service Commissions have substantially increased the number of inquiries conducted and reports laid. To make the transformation to accountability more effective, it is reasonable to expect that the Government will consider the JSCs' reports and their recommendations, and report to Parliament on its action in this respect. While there can be no requirement for the Government to implement committee recommendations, accountability requires the Government to consider and respond substantively to each recommendation in a timely manner.

One of the main achievements of the 10th Parliament is the reform of the budget process. In September 2014, the Standing Finance Committee, chaired by the Speaker of the House, took up the challenge of examining the budget’s fifty heads of expenditure. In the coming years, this examination will gain further traction when the budget is submitted to Parliament more in advance, when Ministers and heads of expenditure prepare in more detail so they can respond to all questions at the meeting, and when the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago can count on the technical expertise of a Parliamentary Budget Office (currently under preparation). Such initiatives will contribute to the effectiveness of the budget examination as started in 2014.

During the 10th Parliament, the PAC and PAEC continued to play their role in scrutinizing expenditures, though more regular meetings would be advisable.

62 http://www.ttparliament.org/publications.php?mid=36&id=mr1E3F02
Strategic Objective 4: Representation and Outreach

Under the fourth Strategic Objective, strengthening the representation and outreach by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, two main initiatives were addressed during the 10th Parliament.

4.1. Reformating the functioning of Constituency Relations Offices

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has a consolidated constituency relations network with a substantial number of offices, staff and dedicated budget. Currently, there are 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices. The workings and operations of the constituency offices are governed by the Constituency Operations Manual, approved in 2010 for the 10th Parliament. The support by the Office of the Parliament is provided through Administration Officers, while for some specific issues Constituency office personnel liaise with ICT staff, internal audit and the Office of the Marshal.

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament envisaged a comprehensive review of the system and daily functioning of the constituency offices during the time of implementation of the Plan. The review, conducted by a UNDP-recruited international consultant in 2014, indicated that in order for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to fulfil its representative role through efficient constituency offices, the service delivery to citizens and streamlining improvements should not be centred only on the Office of the Parliament but rather in a holistic review of the system of governance that underpins the service delivery to citizens.

The constituency work has been assessed on four key components: casework (getting information and lodging demands on behalf of people), policy work (seeking ways to benefit constituencies through existing or proposed national programs and legislation), voicing out views or concerns of constituents regarding national policy issues (listening and explaining and expressing informed positions, although MPs are not obliged to agree with morally or ethically unsound views), and attending constituency events (particularly important in for diverse constituencies as a key means of maintaining close personal ties with their constituents).

In recent years, the scope of the constituency work has increased and has become more demanding and complex in nature. MPs dedicate more time to constituency work, which is not necessarily performed only at Constituency offices. For several MPs, face-to-face communication, walks in communities and cottage meetings remain a widely-used form of communication and interaction with constituents outside of the Constituency office.

The assessment revealed that there were instances when some MPs conducted political promotion works in their constituency offices, though such activities are prohibited by the Constituency Operations Manual (COM). Therefore, consideration needs to be given to drafting new guidelines by the Parliament to assure across the board implementation of the COM provisions.

A key challenge facing the MPs and their constituency office staff is that there is no standardized way of registering and tracking the progress for individual requests received from constituents. Currently, each MP has developed his/her own rudimentary mechanism for registering and tracking progress, which are not reported or shared with the Office of Parliament. There are opportunities at hand for the collected information being used to strategically guide Parliament’s outreach and communication efforts. The 11th Parliament will be advised to introduce a constituency requests tracking mechanism.

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63 Vela, B., Constituency Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, September 2014, 29 p.
65 Trinidad and Tobago constituency map can be found at: http://www.ttparliament.org/members.php?mid=27
The review of the functioning of the constituency offices provided recommendations for their future development, including a program of capacity building for constituency office staff.

In follow-up to the assessment report, the Office of Parliament has submitted a Cabinet Note with the aim to ensure better oversight from the side of the parliament administration on the functioning of the constituency offices. The Cabinet Note is currently in the stage of being approved and receiving feedback. Staff of the Office of Parliament has started to prepare the implementation of some of the recommendations, by revising the Manual and developing an up-dated policy document on the constituency offices.

Evaluation comment
For many citizens, Constituency Offices are the most visible demonstration of the democratic system in their immediate neighbourhood. The Office of the Parliament has embarked upon a complex task to improve the service delivery by the constituency offices, even though the staff of these offices do not resort under the Office of the Parliament, because it is political staff selected by MPs. It is of vital importance that the proposed measures -- more detailed guidance on the role and operations of the Offices, introducing a constituency services requests tracking system and more consistency in the Job Descriptions and remunerations of the staff of the Constituency offices -- are implemented at the start of the 11th Parliament, when the new MPs recruit their staff for the constituency offices.

4.2. Expanding Parliamentary Communications and Outreach
The Strategic Plan stipulates: "The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to substantially increasing its outreach and communication. A comprehensive communication and outreach strategy will be developed and adopted, incorporating existing initiatives in terms of media outreach and ICT. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will further develop a schools outreach programme. Parliament will also work with the Minister of Education to develop curriculum materials for schools of both primary and secondary level on the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and systems of parliamentary democracy. The Parliament will continue to provide a live broadcast of plenary and Committee meetings on its radio and television."

At the start of the 10th Parliament, the Corporate Communications Department developed the ‘Connect. Communicate. Converge’ plan (2010 – 2012). It is an operational plan that recognized the growing use of new media technologies among the public as a way for the Office of the Parliament to better promote the value of parliamentary democracy in Trinidad and Tobago. The plan focused on improving the governance structure and the decision-making process in terms of ICT and corporate communication, enhancing the use of IT to deepen linkages with stakeholders, developing a communications strategy to grow brand awareness, instituting a comprehensive data management system, and diversifying the range of programs offered on existing media platforms.

The operational plan ‘Connect. Communicate. Converge’ (2010 – 2012) was guided by six key performance areas and establishes a new operational framework and targets for the monitoring and evaluation of the units. The essential features of the new approach are grounded in a Human Resource framework and include the following areas; excellence and innovation, continuous learning and training of staff and interns, organisational governance and decision-making, service and quality assurance, corporate differentiation and branding, and technology as an accelerator for growth.

As a result of this operation plan, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has now strong ICT communication tools in place, such as the parliamentary website, television broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, radio broadcasting and wide range of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

During 2014, the Corporate Communications Department prepared a new Parliament communication strategy. Through the UNDP project with parliament, a parliamentary communications expert reviewed the
new strategy and offered comments and suggestions for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago be more proactive and strategic in communicating and engaging with the public. The novelties and best practices in the past were reinforced with new initiatives and services.66

During the 10th Parliament, an extensive "Public Outreach" program was developed. It included a Parliamentary Education Programme (targeting different groups in society with focus on youth). The education activities take place on-site and off-site of the seat of the Parliament. The school outreach programme and the annual youth parliament have been instituted as means to engage with youth. During the 10th Parliament, the main focus was on secondary schools. The primary objectives of our Schools’ Outreach campaign are: (1.) to build awareness of the role and importance of the Parliament in sustaining democracy and promoting good governance; (2.) to encourage youth participation and partnership in the decision-making process; (3.) to develop a sense of civic pride among young persons. At these outreach events, the Presiding Officers, the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House, address students and answer questions on matters related to Parliament and democracy. These discussions are recorded and subsequently aired on the Parliament Channel. In 2013, 29 schools/groups were visited. In 2014, 43 schools/groups were visited. In 2015, 18 schools/groups were visited (until 28 April 2015).67 For the 11th Parliament, there will be attention to primary schools as well; though it seems important to continue outreach to secondary schools as well.

Over the last years, Parliament created a Visitors’ Programme which comprises a public tour, attending parliamentary business (chambers), and a parliamentary education programme.

The parliamentary communications are dealing with, firstly, the relations with media. During the 10th Parliament, the Corporate Communications Department has led a proactive and responsive approach in the delivery of parliamentary media service. Journalists in Trinidad and Tobago, accredited to parliament, are very positive about the Parliament’s website as a key source of timely information during the preparation of their media reports on parliamentary proceedings.

Over the last four years, the Parliament has been successful in transforming its website into a highly accessible, searchable, reliable, flexible and responsive web presence. Parliament’s website remains the most customer-focused and user friendly website of any institution in Trinidad and Tobago. The web is an integral part of Parliament’s comprehensive communications through: (1.) Providing public with information, education, publishing service; (2.) Serving as an instant point of access to the parliamentary business, and (3.) Acting as a tool for feedback, consultation and engagement. For instance, the web site has some interactive features, allowing citizens to vote on a bill under consideration in Parliament.

During the 10th Parliament, the Corporate Communications Department achieved a substantial increase in the press coverage of the proceedings of parliament. The Corporate Communications Department regularly monitors the media coverage that is inaccurate or misleading and has been proactive in taking all appropriate steps to correct the public record.

During the 10th Parliament, the use of social media by Parliament has increased substantially. Since 2010, there has been a very substantial increase of social media followers on Facebook and Twitter. The Parliament’s Facebook likes increased from 408 in July 2011 to 7,469 in May 2015. The number of followers of the Parliament’s Twitter account has increased from 2,611 in December 2012 to 8,479 in May 2015. The Parliament’s current social media service incorporates Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Flickr.

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66 Vela, B., Framework for developing the outreach and communication strategy of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Published by UNDP and Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago, November 2014, 47 p.
67 Some press articles on the schools outreach program:
http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2013-03-14/mark-urges-students-be-more-productive
http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,178147.html
http://www.news.gov.tt/content/speaker-house-speaks-parliament-schools-outreach-programme#.VUjySPD09P8
Already in 2005, it was decided to provide in live transmission of the debates of both Houses of Parliament. During the 10th parliament, the establishment of televised transmission and audio-visual web casts via the Internet and AM and FM radio frequencies were achieved as well. Parliament also publishes a set of parliamentary publications: parlbuzz, parlnews, crosstalk. CrossTalk is geared towards external stakeholders (Quarterly) – 5,000 copies68. ParlBuzz is geared towards internal (staff) stakeholders and written more informally (Quarterly) – sent via the Parliament’s intranet. ParlNews is a weekly publication in each of the daily newspapers (Fridays) of the Parliament’s agenda, produced in conjunction with content from the Parliament Secretariat. The Photography Services cover all parliamentary events, courtesy calls, visiting delegations in addition to sittings of the Houses and Committees.

The Parliament Channel69 began with a live broadcast of a Sitting of the House of Representatives on August 18, 2006 during the 8th Parliament. In November of 2007, the Parliament began broadcasting its proceedings via FM Radio on a dedicated frequency (105.5FM). The channel broadcasts programming 24hours daily. Programming comprises a mix of live broadcasts and recorded programs. Live broadcasts include all Sittings of the House of Representatives and Senate as well as a variety of committee meetings (JSCs; PAC ad PAEC); The Plenary Sessions; Youth Parliament and media conferences. The channel also broadcasts documentaries, features, lectures, News and Current Affairs Programmes; Reality Shows; Quiz Shows. The live broadcasts, Reality Shows, News and Current Affairs programs are produced by an in-house team comprising a Productions Coordinator; a Scriptwriter; two Video Editors and six Broadcast Technicians. Most of the other features and documentaries are contracted to external production houses with coordination carried out by the Productions Coordinator.

In January 2015, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago became a full member of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union70, a grouping of regional broadcasters. Trinidad and Tobago is the first Parliament in the region to be a member of the CBU. This can be the impetus for us to assist other Parliaments in setting up broadcasting units, and also in having the Trinidad and Tobago programming seen throughout the region at CBU-member stations through its Media-Share FTP Portal and entered for regional awards. Some of the benefits of membership in the CBU include free participation in CBU training for managers and staff, participation in the Caribbean Broadcasting Awards, advocacy and technical advice and bursaries for attendance at the Annual General Meeting.

Initial plans for the 11th Parliament include continuation of live broadcast of the annual National Youth Parliament, introduction of Week of Parliament, broadcasting of three original documentaries already in production (on Caricom, Tobago House of Assembly, and West Indies at War), in-house videos on Parliamentary Personalities, Behind the Scenes – Sittings and the Work of the Various Departments, Red House Restoration mini documentaries, etc.

Evaluation comment
The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has made impressive progress during the past five years in the area of communication and outreach. Its social media work is impressive. Its outreach to students and youth is much appreciated. The 11th Parliament can encourage continued professional coverage by journalists on its proceedings by supporting the creation of a ‘Parliamentary Reporters Association’, as foreseen in the Strategic Plan. It is recommended to foresee in the renovated Red House appropriate facilities for media by creating a media lounge. In addition, more work can be done in organizing radio and TV interviews for Members. Currently citizens can vote on line about a bill that is considered in parliament. In addition, one can foresee the possibility for citizens to express their opinion by voting on a particular question related to

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68 http://www.ttparliament.org/publications.php?mid=85
69 http://www.ttparliament.org/broadcasts.php?mid=7
70 http://caribroadcastunion.org/membership/member-organisations/
the parliamentary agenda. The "Week of Parliament", proposed by the UNDP parliamentary communications expert, will create a galvanizing moment around the parliament's work for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Summary conclusion under fourth Objective

The comprehensive review of the system and functioning of the constituency offices has generated sound recommendations for the 11th Parliament. To provide more effectiveness to the constituency offices' work, it is important that recommendations on consistency in the Job Descriptions and remunerations of the staff are implemented at the start of the 11th Parliament, when the new MPs recruit their staff for the constituency offices.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has established an impressive series of actions in the area of communication and outreach. The Corporate Communications Department can strengthen the sustainability of the outreach further through a policy of embedding it in a structural cooperation with a ‘Parliamentary Reporters Association’ or an annually scheduled "Week of Parliament".
General Conclusion

At the start of the 10th Parliament in 2010, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago embarked upon an ambitious process of modernization and change. Profound questions guided the discussions informing the first-ever comprehensive Strategic Plan of Parliament, which became the basis for the process of modernization and change, such as: Is the modernisation of Parliament about governments being able to progress business more efficiently, or is it about strengthening Parliament’s scrutiny? Is it about being concerned with improving Parliament’s capacity to produce better legislation by enabling members (and the public) to more effectively hold the executive to account? Is it about restoring public confidence in politics and closing the apparent abyss between Parliament and the public? Is the modernisation of Parliament about making Parliament more accessible? What would an “accessible” Parliament look like? Is accessibility about the public’s ability to participate in, and influence, parliamentary proceedings and outcomes? Is modernisation about improving the image of Parliament in an attempt to address the perceived problem of declining public confidence in the political process?

"Champions of change" have been leading the transformation process in Parliament. Throughout the past five years they are, in particular, the Presiding Officers of the House and Senate, the Clerk of Parliament and key staff in the Office of Parliament. A strong impetus for the change process is the realization that the status quo of doing business as usual is not sustainable, due to the increased workload for MPs, the rising expectations of the general public for more accountability in the governance system and the mounting complexity of legislation and policies. Complementary to its own knowledgeable and skilled staff, the Office of Parliament commissioned parliamentary development expertise through the UNDP support project in parliament.

Hence, during the 10th Parliament, a number of initiatives commenced with the aim to strengthen the Parliament in carrying out its core functions and responsibilities. These initiatives included the completion of a comprehensive Strategic Plan, strengthening the legislative functioning of Parliament, strengthening the outreach and communication of Parliament and developing structures to move forward with establishing Parliament to become functionally autonomous.

The on-going transformation process has been shaped based upon identified goals and strategies, a clear sequence of steps, and organizational changes. The critical aspect in the transformation is the Parliament’s ability to win the buy-in of all stakeholders: Parliamentarians, staff, government Ministers and external interlocutors.

As the 10th Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is drawing to a close, it is clear that the institution is at a crossroads in its development. As substantial reforms are about to be implemented, their sustainability will, to a large extent, depend upon the ability (1.) to take the next steps forward towards a fully functioning and full-time parliamentary system in Trinidad and Tobago, and (2.) to nurture a parliamentary culture throughout - both - the legislature and the executive, which results in a higher responsiveness by the government on key issues of parliamentary life, such as parliamentary questions, annual reports to parliament, feed-back/approval of Cabinet Notes, and a resolution on the long-awaited step forward to recognizing the full-time nature of the function of Parliamentarian.

It is strongly recommended that the path of transformation of the Parliament resumes in the 11th Parliament and that initiatives continue to strengthen accountability in Trinidad and Tobago.

Although improving the performance of Parliament and initiating parliamentary reforms are rarely a headline-grabbing topic, the current transformation of Parliament is taking shape in a context in which the skills and knowledge of Members and parliamentary staff continue to bring huge value to the institution.
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