

MINISTERIAL RESPONSE

SIXTEENTH REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE (FOOD SECURITY IN ALIGNMENT WITH SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER)

Status of National Surveys

Recommendation

The MPD should submit a report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the reasons for the delay in the conduct of the HBS and SLC and the mechanisms implemented to ensure that the surveys are conducted in a more timely manner that better reflects the changing financial and social circumstances of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Response

Ideally, the Household Budget Survey (HBS) and Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) should be conducted at a maximum of 10 years between surveys, or (government funds permitting) every 5 years. The previous HBS was conducted over the period 2008/2009 and the previous SLC was conducted in 2014. The current combined HBS/SLC was to be undertaken in April of 2020. Thus, in keeping with the 10-year minimum requirement, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was on track to adhere to international requirements. The training of field staff began in March of 2020 in preparation for the survey, however, COVID-19 forced the postponement of the conduct of the survey.

The HBS, in particular, collects data on income and expenditure which are used, among other objectives, to determine expenditure weights for the Index of Retail Prices (RPI) used to calculate inflation rates. However, any income and expenditure data captured during the period of COVID-19 would have been highly skewed resulting in inappropriate weights as income and expenditure patterns gradually returned to normalcy. Meetings were held with technical price experts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) who advised that the CSO should delay the conduct of the HBS/SLC until expenditure patterns returned to a settled normalcy. The intentional decision to delay the conduct of the HBS/SLC until February 2023 was made to more accurately reflect post-pandemic expenditure patterns. Therefore, the decision for the delay was made for purely technical reasons in the interest of accuracy and relevancy.

It is the intention of the CSO to adhere to international recommendations by conducting the Household Budget Survey and Survey of Living Conditions every 10 years moving forward. For a small country such as Trinidad and Tobago, the 10-year gap may represent the optimum compromise between costs incurred and benefits to be derived. Once the funding is made available, the CSO will be quite willing to undertake major surveys including household-based surveys more frequently.

Operationalisation Mechanisms to Track the Implementation, Progress and Report on SDGs

Recommendation

The MPD should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024, a status update on the operationalisation of the Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs including the finalisation of its Terms of Reference and the progress of any works done.

Response

The Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD) is in the process of re-structuring the Technical Coordinating Secretariat (TCS) to support the expanded work of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) portfolio. The TCS does not have the requisite number of human resources to support the demands.

However, when the additional human resources are recruited, the Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs will be convened and the Terms of Reference finalized.

Recommendation

The MPD should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024 a status update on the seven activities related to SDG 2.

Response

The seven activities related to the SDG 2 are being implemented jointly by the UN System and the respective line Ministries, under the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UN MSDCF), operationalized by a Country Implementation Plan for Trinidad and Tobago (CIP-TT).

Reporting on the implementation of initiatives that form part of the UN MSDCF and the CIP-TT, is the responsibility of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. Any progress to date, will be published in their annual country results report in the following year for 2023.

Recommendation

The MPD should submit to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 a status update on the filling of the vacant positions in the SDG TCS.

Response

The SDG Unit is entirely staffed through contract employment. All of the positions in the SDG Unit were created for a period of one (1) year. The following table illustrates the status of the positions created in the Unit:

Position	Status	Remarks
Project Manager	Filled	Period of contract – 01/06/23 to 31/05/24
Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist	Vacant	Position has been advertised. Applications are to be shortlisted and interviews are to be conducted in January 2024
Research and Policy Specialist	Position was filled from 05/10/22 to 04/10/23	Life of position has expired
Statistical Analyst	Vacant - Position was filled from 01/05/23 to 05/12/23	Incumbent resigned with effect from 06/12/23 – Balance of life in position is less than 1 year. As a consequence, the position cannot be utilized.
Project Support Officer	Filled	Period of contract – 01/12/23 to 30/11/24
Project Support Officer	Position was filled from 01/12/22 to 30/11/23	Life of position has expired.

As indicated above, the only vacant position that can be filled is that of the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist which has been advertised and interviews will be conducted in January 2024.

The MPD is in the process of drafting a Note to Cabinet requesting the renewal and establishment of contract positions for the preparation of Trinidad and Tobago's second Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the implementation of the SDGs in 2026, the management of the SDGs Data Repository online platform and the implementation of accelerated actions to achieve the goals by 2030, staff will be recruited to the SDGs Technical Coordinating Secretariat, for a period of two (2) consecutive three-year terms with effect from the date of assumption of duty, on terms and conditions to be determined by the Chief Personnel Officer and approved by the Minister of Planning and Development.

The institutional arrangements to include:

(a) renewal of the following positions comprising:

- One (1) Project Manager
- One (1) Research and Policy Specialist
- One (1) Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist
- One (1) Statistical Analyst
- Two (2) Project Support Officers

(b) establishment of the following positions comprising:

- One (1) Programme Manager
- One (1) Operations Manager
- One (1) Data Analyst
- One (1) Communication and Outreach Specialist

Recommendation

The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on:

- *its plans and strategies for its use of the work conducted and recommendations proposed by the UN consultant on the remaining 9 SDGs which were not included in the VNR; and*
- *a status update on the creation of the SDG Data Repository and the establishment of a Big Data Centre of Excellence.*

Response

The consultant's work on the remaining 9 SDGs that were completed but not included in the VNR was for the benefit of the UN, not the Ministry of Planning and Development. In this regard, the data collected by the consultant was utilized in the population of the SDG Data Repository to form part of the baseline data to demonstrate the navigation of the online platform.

The SDG Data Repository has been created and a training demo was conducted with key technical divisions in the Ministry of Planning and Development on Monday 20th November, 2023 by developers.

The development of a mechanism for establishing a Big Data Centre of Excellence is an initiative of the UN and not a collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Recommendation

The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the compilation of SDG Indicators for Trinidad and Tobago and whether this mechanism was a feasible input for the online SDGs data repository which is being developed through the UN's joint SDGs fund.

Response

A critical aspect to any SDG performance measure is the availability and accuracy of the data behind the indicators. The compilation of SDG indicators depends on a mix of quantitative and qualitative collection methods drawing on a combination of primary and secondary data gathering techniques. A review of the SDG indicators points to roughly fifty four (54) primary data-type indicators for which information will need to be captured consistently.

The consistent capturing of data for the SDG indicators are hindered by the following challenges that continue to affect compilation in a timely and consistent manner:

- Limited capacity of the National Statistical System (NSS) to collect, compile and disseminate data on all SDGs;
- Overreliance on data from international agencies as opposed to official national statistics;
- Periodicity of critical sample surveys not formally institutionalized;
- Ongoing surveys are not SDG compliant; and
- Inefficient management and sharing of administrative data required for compiling SDG indicators.

In light of the above, the HEU, Centre for Health Economics (HEU/UWI) designed an approach that seeks to address the gaps in reporting on a number of SDG indicators for Trinidad and Tobago. This initiative aims to develop a framework for SDG reporting which involves:

- the compilation of all relevant SDG indicators identified in the UN framework, that are relevant to Trinidad and Tobago, on an annual basis;
- designing and operationalizing an omnibus survey that will facilitate the production of all indicators that can be produced from national surveys, using a structured questionnaire;
- designing and operationalizing a secondary data gathering strategy that is geared towards the compilation of administrative-based SDG indicators to accompany those compiled via the survey route;
- producing an annual SDG indicators report, using data from the omnibus survey as well as other available administrative data sources; and
- building national capacity in monitoring the SDGs through collaboration with key stakeholders and activities designed to promote knowledge transfer.

In order for the online SDG Data Repository to report on the status of Trinidad and Tobago's progress in implementing the SDGs (at any given point), it requires inputs of data being captured on a timely and consistent basis. While the project is not expected to have a duration to the year 2030, it was deemed a feasible input to the Repository for an initial two years. This will address, in the immediate to short-term, the availability of data for reporting and also fill the gaps in the NSS until the commissioning of the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally, the compilation of SDG Indicators for Trinidad and Tobago project is undergoing further discussions with development partners to pursue the possibility of counterpart funding for planning and execution.

Recommendation

The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on its intended initiatives and strategies to:

- *encourage societal SDG reporting; and*
- *promote internal and external ministry/departmental/institutional collaboration on SDG implementation.*

Response

The Ministry of Planning and Development is in the process of re-structuring the Technical Coordinating Secretariat to support the expanded work of the SDG portfolio.

There are plans to recruit a Communications Specialist whose main focus would be on developing communication strategies to engage stakeholders, promote the use of the SDG Data Repository among potential users and contributors, and design and disseminate infographic reports showing progress on the 17 SDGs.

Through the re-structuring of the TCS, additional resources would be brought on board to coordinate and provide oversight for the work of the Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs.

Recommendation

The MPD should submit a report to Parliament by January 29, 2024:

- *identify a target date by which the Ministry will be in position to comprehensively track the implementation and progress of and report on SDGs (ii) sets out any potential challenges, threats and/or risks which may hinder the attainment of the target date.*

Response

As stated by the UN (A/RES 71/313, item 6)¹, “official statistics and data from national statistical systems constitute the basis needed for the global indicator framework”. It is recommended “that national statistical systems explore ways to integrate new data sources into their systems to satisfy new data needs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as appropriate, and also [stressed] the role of national statistical offices as the coordinator of the national statistical system”.

Therefore, the comprehensive tracking and reporting of the implementation and progress of the SDGs are dependent on the efficient and effective operations of the national statistical system in accordance with the UN resolution (71/313). Further, it is anticipated that the establishment of the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT), with a modernized national statistical system, would create the environment for the production of official statistics which is required for SDG reporting.

However, in the interim, the Ministry of Planning and Development with support from the UN through the Joint SDG Fund will launch an SDG Data Repository online platform in early 2024.

Voluntary National Report on SDGs

Recommendation

The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, the processes that would be followed to create a VNR that will assess the progress on the implementation of SDG 2 including the timelines that have been proposed for the finalisation of each process to facilitate its inclusion in the VNR by 2025.

Response

The Ministry of Planning and Development after consideration has decided to conduct a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the implementation of the SDGs in July 2026. This Report would

¹ General Assembly resolution 71/313, Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/71/313 (6 July 2017), available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/207/63/PDF/N1720763.pdf?OpenElement>

include a baseline review of SDGs 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14 and 15, and a performance review of SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.

The reason for reporting in 2026 is to facilitate the re-structuring of the Technical Coordinating Secretariat and recruiting of the additional human resources needed to support the expanded work portfolio. Additionally, it is anticipated that within this timeframe, the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT) would be commissioned which would realise the incorporation of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS) into the legal framework for data and statistics. This legal framework ultimately guides reporting on the SDGs.

In 2019 – 2020, the development and management of the VNR project were primarily guided by the Handbook for the Preparation of the VNRs, 2020 edition, issued by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). This handbook guided from the communication of the intent to conduct a VNR to the presentation at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) inclusive of a preparation checklist. This document informed the preparation of the project schedule with modifications tailored to the local context.

Institutional arrangements for the preparation of the VNR report and its presentation included the establishment of the Ministry of Planning and Development SDGs VNR Steering Committee to provide oversight to the VNR process. The Steering Committee was the internal review mechanism for the Main Messages and the VNR report. It was supported by a core team responsible for managing the VNR project and associated activities.

The project was managed by a core team (known as the VNR Team) operating within the Technical Cooperation Unit (TCU). The VNR Team received implementation support from the staff of the TCU, the Divisions in the Ministry of Planning and Development, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the UN Country Team and the Permanent Mission Office in New York. The preparation of the VNR documents was executed by consultants provided by the UN Economic Commission in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The work of the VNR Team was directed by a schedule that detailed the structural breakdown of the work for the project. The schedule covered the initial preparation organizational requirements, the stakeholder engagement, data management, the report preparation, participation at and presentation to the HLPF and post-VNR activities.

Trinidad and Tobago's VNR report preparation and presentation in 2026 will follow a similar methodology as stated above.