HRED

PARLIAMENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

SECOND REPORT OF THE

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

FIRST SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT (2015/2016)
on the

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities

with

Specific Focus on Access to Services and Employment

Ordered To Be Printed

Committee Mandate

The Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity was established under House of Representatives Standing Order 106 and Senate Standing Order 96 and shall have the duty of considering, from time to time, and reporting whenever necessary, on all matters related to:

(a) compatibility of Acts of Parliament with human rights, and any matters relating to human rights in Trinidad and Tobago (but excluding consideration of individual cases);
(b) Government compliance with national and international human rights instruments to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party;
(c) the promotion of measures designed to enhance the equalization of opportunities and improvement in the quality of life and status of all peoples including marginalized groups on the basis of gender, age (elderly, youth, children) disability and the creation of an inclusive and more equitable society through greater social justice and sustainable human development within Trinidad and Tobago."

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Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 8
2. INTRODUCTION 11
Human Rights and Persons with Disabilities 11
Consortium of Disability Organisations 12
Disability Affairs Unit, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services 12
National Policy on Persons with Disabilities 13
Objective of the Inquiry 13
Conduct of the Inquiry 14
3. EVIDENCE 16
Objective 1: Challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to, Transport, Education (primary, secondary and tertiary) Facilities, Health and Licensing Office 16
Transportation 16
Elderly and Differently Abled Mobile (ELDAMO) Service 16
Stakeholder Challenges 17
Stakeholder Recommendations 18
Education 18
Ministry of Education 18
Stakeholder Recommendations 19
Facilities 19
National Standard TTS/ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities 20
Access to Restaurants and Retail Outlets 20
Access to Government Buildings 20
Health 21
Stakeholder Recommendations 22
Other Services 22
Housing 22
Stakeholder Recommendations 22
Objective 2: Challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago 23

Employment Opportunities 23
Prevention of Discriminatory hiring practices/policies 24
Employment Challenges 24
Employer Awareness Training 25
Stakeholder Recommendations 26
Objective 3: Current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities 27
Objective 4: Status of Stakeholder Consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities 28
Objective 5: Legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities 29
Amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 29
Amendments to the Motor Vehicle Legislation 29
Legislation required to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 30
Objective 6: Fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues 32
Fiscal Frameworks 32
Ministry of Education 33
Ministry of Works and Transport 33
Equal Opportunity Commission 33
Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development 34
4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 35
Findings – Objective 1 35
To understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to Transport, Education (primary, secondary and tertiary), Facilities, Health and Licensing Office 35
Recommendations 37
Findings – Objective 2 39
To understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago 39
Recommendations 40
Findings – Objective 3 40

To examine the current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities 40
Recommendation 41
Findings – Objective 4 41
To determine the status of stakeholder consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities 41
Recommendation 41
Findings – Objective 5 41
To determine the legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities 41
Recommendations 42
Findings – Objective 6 42
To understand the fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues 42
Recommendations 44
Appendix I 47
Minutes 47
Appendix II 52
Verbatim Notes 52
Appendix III 78
Stakeholder Transportation Recommendations 78
Appendix IV 80
Stakeholder Education Recommendations 80
Appendix V 84
Stakeholder Facilities Recommendations 84
Appendix VI 86
Stakeholder Health Recommendations 86
Appendix VII 88
Stakeholder Recommendations 88
on 88
Other Services 88
Appendix VIII 91

Stakeholder Employment 91
Recommendations 91
Appendix IX 94
Stakeholder Proposed Amendments 94
Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 94
Appendix X 97
Stakeholder Proposed Amendments 97
Motor Vehicle Legislation 97

ABBREVIATIONS

Autism Spectrum Disorder	ASD
Trinidad and Tobago of Bureau of Standards	TTBS
Consortium of Disability Organisations	CODO
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	DHH
Disabilities Affairs Unit	DAU
Elderly and Differently-Abled Mobile Service	ELDAMO
Equal Opportunity Commission	EOC
International Labour Organization	ILO
Ministry of Education	MOE
Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development	MLSED
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services	MSDFS
National Centre for Persons with Disabilities	NCPD
National Employment Service	NES
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
Sexual Reproductive Health	SRH
Student Support Services Division	SSSD
Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language	TTSL
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	PAVI
Persons with disabilities	PWDs
Public Transportation Service Corporation	PTSC
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	UNCRPD
United Nations	UN

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Committee resolved at its Fifth Meeting held on Wednesday April 27, 2016 to inquire the challenges faced by persons with disabilities with specific focus on access to services and employment and agreed that the following three (3) objectives would guide the inquiry:

- **to understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to:**
  Facilities
  Transport
  Employment
  Education (primary, secondary and tertiary)
  Health
  Licensing Office
- **to understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **to examine the current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities;**
- **to determine the status of stakeholder consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities;**
- **to determine the legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities; and**
- **to understand the fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues**

1.2. The Committee agreed that officials from the following agencies would be invited to a public hearing on Monday June 06, 2016:

- The Consortium of Disability Organisations; and
- Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

1.3. The Committee obtained both oral and written evidence based on the objectives listed above. The written evidence highlighted issues such as the 2011 Census indicated there are approximately 52,244 Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago and there are eight (8) principles to the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

(a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
(b) Non-discrimination;
(c) *Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;*
(d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
(e) Equality of opportunity;
(f) Accessibility;
(g) Equality between men and women;
(h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

1.4. Given the written evidence received, the Committee was concerned that during 2010 to 2015:

- the Equal Opportunity Commission received 49 complaints based on unfair treatment of persons with disabilities with respect to employment (32), education (6) and provision of goods and services (11); and
- the Ombudsman received 149 complaints against the National Insurance Board with respect to claims for the invalidity benefit.

1.5. Some of the significant issues raised during the public hearing were:

✓ Education challenges at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels such as:
  - lack of Teacher and Student Aides and Sign Language Interpreters;
  - computers do not have the software to assist the students;
  - frequent bullying of students within the Secondary school system;
  - lack of awareness and sensitization of teachers, students and the general public;
  - lack of training for teachers to deal with PWDs in a regular classroom setting;
  - shortage of Special Education Teachers; and
  - lack of technical assistance for teachers and students within the classroom.

✓ Public transportation challenges such as:
  - difficulties to access public transportation hubs, e.g. City Gate and bus stops;
  - unable to utilise the Water Taxi Service without a personal aide; and
  - ELDAMO buses were purchased for persons with disabilities without consultation by the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Public Service Transportation Corporation.

- ✓ Recommended initiatives to address issues faced by persons with disabilities were:
  - awareness and sensitization;
  - building and strengthening the capacity of persons of Special Education Teachers and Sign Language Interpreters;
  - comprehensive review of the legal framework;
  - attitudinal and physical access; and
  - accurate collection of statistics.

1.6. The Committee submits its findings and recommendations with respect to the challenges faced by persons with disabilities with specific focus on access to services and employment in Chapter 4.

2. INTRODUCTION

Human Rights and Persons with Disabilities

2.1. Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago[1] states that one of the fundamental human rights and freedoms is, "the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law" and "the right of the individual to equality of treatment from any public authority in the exercise of any functions."

2.2. Trinidad and Tobago ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol on June 25, 2015. The purpose of the Convention is "to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity."

2.3. A "Disability" is defined in the Convention as, *"persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."*

2.4. The Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 protects against discrimination for persons with a disability and also defines "disability" as, *"total or partial loss of a bodily function; total or partial loss of a part of the body; malfunction of a part of the body including a mental or psychological disease or disorder; or malformation or disfigurement of part of the body."*

2.5. The 2011 Trinidad and Tobago Population and Housing Census indicated that there are approximately 52,244 persons living with a disability, which is equivalent to 4% of the total population of 1,328,019. The most common types of disabilities identified through the

[1] Section 4(b) and (d) of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

Census were walking (32%), visual (28%), and speaking (14%). In addition, it was also highlighted that approximately 24,111 persons are recipients of the Disability Assistance Grant ($1,800 per month).

Consortium of Disability Organisations

2.6. Consortium of Disability Organisations (CODO) is an umbrella organization representing over forty (40) organizations involved in the work for persons with disabilities. It was established to assist in the promotion, training and advocacy for PWDs.

Disability Affairs Unit, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

2.7. The Disabilities Affairs Unit, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services advocates for the rights, protection and equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities living in Trinidad and Tobago by monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the National Policy of Persons with Disabilities. The Unit is managed by a Director and its core roles and functions are:

- To co-ordinate and monitor implementation of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities;
- To provide technical support and referrals for persons with disabilities, their families and all other persons interested in learning about disabilities;
- To evaluate requests for assistance from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and individuals;
- To network with pertinent NGOs, mass media and international organizations to collect information and increase public awareness of issues pertaining to persons with disabilities.

National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

2.8. The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2005) is an integrated framework for inclusion, equitable opportunity and the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. In fiscal 2015, the Disabilities Affairs Unit (DAU) initiated a project to update the existing policy framework that guides the inclusion of persons with disabilities in accordance with international best practice, evolving disability-related tenets and growth of the domestic community of persons with disabilities.

2.9. A draft proposal to review the Policy was developed and amended by the Disability Affairs Unit in September 2015 after discussions with the International Labour Organisation. According to the Social Sector Investment Programme 2016, the actual Policy review exercise is expected to commence in fiscal 2015/2016.

Objective of the Inquiry

2.10. At a meeting held on Wednesday April 27, 2016 the Committee agreed that the objectives of the inquiry were:

- **To understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to:**
  Facilities
  Transport
  Employment
  Education (primary, secondary and tertiary)
  Health
  Licensing Office

- **To understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago;**

- **To examine the current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities;**

- **To determine the status of stakeholder consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities;**

- **To determine the legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities; and**

- **To understand the fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues.**

Conduct of the Inquiry

2.11. On Monday June 03, 2016 a public hearing was held with representatives of:

- ✓ Consortium of Disability Organisations (CODO); and
- ✓ Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS).

2.12. At which time the Committee questioned the officials on the various matters based on the inquiry objectives. Prior to the public hearing, notice was given as to the general objectives of the inquiry and in response, written submissions were received from the CODO and MSDFS. These responses provided a frame of reference for the supplementary questions pursued at the hearing.

2.13. The CODO was represented by the following six (6) officials:

✓ Mr. Bhawani Persad	President
✓ Ms. Sharda Ramlakhan	Representative, Physically Challenged
✓ Ms. Nichol Alves	Autistic Society of Trinidad & Tobago
✓ Ms. Nicole Cowie	Representative, Mental Health
✓ Ms. Niobe Rodriguez	Interpreting Officer

2.14. The MSDFS was represented by the following six (6) officials:

✓ Ms. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
✓ Mr. Dennis Williams	Deputy Permanent Secretary
✓ Mr. Vijay Gangapersad	Chief Technical Officer (Ag.), Disability Affairs Unit
✓ Mr. Michael Reid	Senior Research Officer, Disability Affairs Unit
✓ Ms. Catherine Ferreira	Research Officer I, Disability Affairs Unit
✓ Ms. Tessa Pascal	Research Assistant, Disability Affairs Unit

2.15. The Committee also sought responses from fifteen (15) stakeholders. However, written comments were received from thirteen (13) stakeholders:

- ✓ Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development;
- ✓ Ministry of Works and Transport;
- ✓ Office of the Ombudsman;
- ✓ Persons Associated with Visual Impairment;
- ✓ Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association;
- ✓ United Nations (UN) agencies in Trinidad and Tobago[2]; and
- ✓ Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children;
- ✓ Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago;
- ✓ Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC);
- ✓ Squeaky Wheels;
- ✓ Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired;
- ✓ Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards; and
- ✓ Ministry of Education.

2.16. The Minutes and Verbatim Notes are attached as Appendix I and Appendix II respectively.

2.17. The Second Report was approved at the Eighth Meeting of the Committee held on June 22, 2016.

[2] United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago includes ILO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNIC, UNICEF, ECLAC and UNOHCHR.

3. EVIDENCE

Objective 1: Challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to, Transport, Education (primary, secondary and tertiary) Facilities, Health and Licensing Office

Transportation

Elderly and Differently Abled Mobile (ELDAMO) Service

3.1. The Elderly and Differently-Abled Mobile (ELDAMO) Service was launched on October 21, 2012 and are equipped with a rear-loaded wheelchair hydraulic ramp, wheelchair restraint systems and passenger chair restraint systems. The service was designed and developed through the collaboration of primary stakeholders such as the MSDFS, PTSC and the Rotary Club.

3.2. In order to utilize the service, clients are required to call-in to create a booking at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance or "Dial-a-Ride" via the free hotline number '800-7433' or to other designated regional depot Public Transportation Service Corporation (PTSC) locations to make transportation arrangements. There are twenty-four (24) buses, each has a capacity of 8 seats and 3 wheelchairs. The PTSC "Dial a ride" service is available from 4:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

3.3. PTSC has not conducted a structured evaluation of the ELDAMO Service, but indicated that clients and stakeholders are continuously engaged to provide feedback. It was submitted that the following challenges are faced by the persons who utilise the ELDAMO Service:

- Lack of a clear definition of the nature of the service offered;
- Lack of a system of prioritizing clients' needs;
- High risk of exposure experienced by the Para Transit Unit and by extension the PTSC under the current structure;
- Lack of a legal framework governing the operations of service;
- Demand has outstripped the ability to supply the service;
- Urgent need for Para Transit Assistants to be present on each trip;
- Hesitancy by drivers to access areas deemed as "crime hot spots";
- Frequent usage of the buses mitigates against their continued road worthiness; and
- Some clients misrepresent the nature of the requests in order to manipulate the use of the system for personal convenience.

Stakeholder Challenges

3.1. Stakeholder transportation challenges are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Stakeholder Transportation Challenges

Stakeholder	Challenge
Consortium of Disability Organisations	Limited number of buses which cater for 8 people in total, 4 wheelchairs and 4 regular seats. There are not enough buses at present to cater to all the needs of the communities, especially the country areas. Dial-A-Ride system is a private operation seems to be better managed despite the complaints concerning the high cost. In the short term, more ELDAMO buses could be made available. More efficient manning of the office where the request for bookings is made would improve the service. In the long-term, Government's aim should be to eventually have ALL buses accessible to everyone, including Persons with Disabilities.
Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago	Persons with autism do not usually require special buses. However, there should be sensitization training of transport personnel both public and private, so that they can be more understanding towards individuals on the autism spectrum.
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	Users are unable to access the service for a number of reasons, for instance, most of the buses are under repairs and it takes time for the buses to be recommissioned into the service, thus negatively impacting transportation needs for persons with visual impairment. Service is sometimes very late causing undue stress to our members who are visually impaired. Our members have been forced to wait hours to access the ELDAMO Buses, thus resulting in their late arrivals to their

	appointments. Clients are left waiting for the service for hours, after confirmation by PTSC that the Bus will pick them up. This is due to the fact that our clients do not even receive a telephone call to indicate that the Bus will no longer be transporting them. Refurbishments on the Buses are not of a suitable standard, which has resulted in low quality
T&T Association for Retarded Children	Insufficient buses, need to be available on weekends, not on time and unreliable schedule. Staff working in this area need to be trained to interact with all types of persons with a disability. This service does not adequately meet the needs of our agency.
UN agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	Service does not reach rural areas, causing difficulties especially for students who cannot attend their academic institutions. Limited capacity for larger groups, especially if differently abled persons within the group has more than three wheelchairs.

Stakeholder Recommendations

3.2. Stakeholder recommendations on transportation are summarized in Appendix III.

Education

Ministry of Education

3.3. In 2004, the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), Ministry of Education was established to provide multidisciplinary support services inclusive of special education and in 2009, the Ministry of Education developed an Inclusive Education Policy. This policy articulated that Ministry provide support and services to all learners by taking appropriate steps to make education available, accessible and adaptable.

3.4. Although aides are provided to students referred to SSSD who are eligible due to a diagnosed condition, the Ministry has received other types of complaints about the lack of ramps, accessible washrooms and multistoried schools which have created challenges for PWDs. MOE's current school construction programme has targeted forty

(40) primary and eight (8) secondary schools which will have facilities to accommodate PWDs. At present, PWDs can currently assess education at:

- fifty (50) out of four hundred and twenty-seven (427) primary schools;
- thirty-three (33) out of one hundred and one (101) secondary schools; and
- thirty-two (32) out of forty-five (45) tertiary schools.

3.5. A Special Education Teacher I must possess a Bachelors Degree in Education with a specialisation in exceptionalities/special education, three (3) to five (3) years' experience working with special needs students. Thereafter, training is provided annually to Special Education Teachers. However, there are a number of challenges for private and public schools that cater solely for PWDs such as staff shortages due to shortage of persons trained in some areas of special education and staff shortages due to attrition and lack of replacements.

3.6. The Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago stated there is a general lack of training in the field of ASD in the mainstream educational system. Teachers are mostly unaware of the characteristics and special educational needs of children with ASD. For example, disruptive behaviours are dealt with in a punitive manner which has proven not to work with children with ASD.

Stakeholder Recommendations

3.7. Stakeholder recommendations on education are summarized in Appendix IV.

Facilities

3.8. Initiatives by the MSDFS to ensure that all Government buildings are accessible to PWDs are:

- Extensive consultations with NGOs, implementing Ministries and public sector agencies with responsibilities for physical access. These consultations and workshops for the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities made recommendations for access to the built environment including public buildings, sidewalks, parks, public sporting and recreational facilities.

- Legislative Policy Brief prepared and forwarded to the Chief Parliamentary Council in June, 2015 for drafting appropriate legislation. This policy document includes the provision for legislation in the area of physical and infrastructural access; and

- Extensive advocacy, moral suasion and persuasion efforts by the DAU in collaboration with the community of NGOs.

National Standard TTS/ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities

3.9. The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) declared the National Standard TTS/ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities in 2014 and formally launched the same standard in July 2015 at the Hyatt Regency. This standard is a voluntary one and as such can only be enforced if adopted by a Ministry and/or agency as a regulatory document.

Access to Restaurants and Retail Outlets

3.10. The regulation of buildings (design, construction, amenities, etc.) including restaurants and retail outlets is governed by the Town and Country Planning Division, Ministry of Planning and Development and Regional/Borough/City Corporations under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. TTBS has a responsibility to develop or facilitate the development of appropriate National Codes/Standards which are to be used by the appropriate state agency in their regulatory functions.

3.11. The challenges to access international food franchises include the lack of ramps for wheelchairs, railings and accessibility to bathrooms.

Access to Government Buildings

3.12. Common challenges identified to access government buildings were:

Enter/Exit

- Lack of access to persons in wheelchairs in many government buildings;
- Ramps are too high and do not meet the standards;
- Lack of physical access;
- Poor retro-fitting and design of systems which inadvertently exclude PWDs;
- Lack of ramps and/or grab rails,
- Lack of expanded aisle width, command entrance and exit doors;
- Noses of steps are not clearly identified and persons who are low vision sometimes find it difficult to navigate.
- Rails should be painted in yellow for easy identification by low vision persons. Yellow is the most identifiable colour to the human eye.
- Corridors should also be properly lit for easy navigation by the low vision person and to prevent accidents.

Elevators

- Some elevators are too small for wheelchair access and a 360-degree turn;
- Lack of brail or audible signals to inform the person who is blind what floor they are embarking on;
- Lack of standardization of the control panel on elevators, thus preventing persons with visual impairment to effectively use the elevators when accessing Government Buildings; and

Bathrooms

- Lack of braille on bathrooms to distinguish between male and female.

3.13. Stakeholder recommendations on accessibility to facilities and layout are summarized in Appendix V.

Health

3.14. There are challenges for PWDs, particularly adolescents, to access Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services. The sexual and reproductive health of PWDs has been overlooked by both the disability community and those working on SRH. This leaves persons with disabilities especially adolescent girls among the most marginalized groups and at high risk of unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection when it comes to SRH services.

3.15. PWDs may actually have greater needs for SRH education and care than persons without disabilities due to their increased vulnerability to abuse and limited access to information and services. This situation is further exacerbated by the limited and poor quality of SRH services offered to young people in the public sector.

Stakeholder Recommendations

3.16. Stakeholder recommendations on health are summarized in Appendix VI.

Other Services

Housing

3.17. The Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago identified that there is an urgent need to provide suitable housing for persons with autism. For example, Respite Care Facilities, Transitional Care Facilities, Supported Living, Supervised Living, Group homes (supported and supervised), Intermediate Care Facilities and Agricultural Autism Community/Farmstead Programmes (Supported and Supervised). Some adults are currently housed at the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital and homes for the aged.

Stakeholder Recommendations

3.18. Stakeholder recommendations on other services are summarized in Appendix VII.

Objective 2: Challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago

Employment Opportunities

3.19. The Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (MLSED) could not provide information on employment opportunities/programmes within the public service as it seeks to mainstream issues related to PWDs and gender in its policies and programmes. However, the 2011 Population and Housing Census indicated that 8,479 PWDs had a job and worked and 470 had a job but did not work.

3.20. MSDFS indicated that On the Job Training Programme, the Re-Training Programme, the Multi- Sector Skills Training Programme and the National Employment Service provide employment opportunities for PWDs. In addition the Ministry has:

- Collaborated with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development through the National Employment Service (NES) initiative to place several persons with disabilities in the Public Sector; and
- Several Ministries contract the services of disability-related NGOs resulting in the creation of substantial job opportunities for persons with disabilities such as the San Fernando Hospital Cafeteria and Naparima Bowl.

3.21. In 2013, National Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) launched an annual tracer system to monitor the access of its graduates to viable employment upon exiting the Centre's programs. Thirty eight (38) out of the seventy five (75) persons that graduated from the NCPD training programmes gained employment.

3.22. NCPD also offers job placement services with a wide network of private organisations including medical, air-conditioning and catering. In addition, Goodwill Industries also provides employment opportunities in the areas of woodworking, food preparation and catering, book binding, screen printing and preserves.

Prevention of Discriminatory hiring practices/policies

3.23. The Committee noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities were expected to address the issues of discriminatory hiring practices both in the private and public sectors, as well as, make recommendations for suitable workplace infrastructure for persons with disabilities.

Employment Challenges

3.24. Stakeholders identified a number of employment challenges:

- Attitudes of persons towards persons with disabilities;
- Lack of accessibility within the work place;
- Lack of fair job interviews, employers in both the public and private sector are reluctant to give persons with visual impairment an opportunity to showcase their skills and capabilities;
- Lack of provision of assistive equipment to perform their job effectively, thus resulting in an inability to perform job duties.
- Lack of equitable compensation in relation to their sighted counterparts;
- Lack of employment when a person becomes visually impaired. In most cases, that individual loses his/her job;
- Lack of Access to the Built Environment
- Lack of willingness to provide Accommodations;
- Poor knowledge of disability issues;
- Absence of disability etiquette by general public including employers;
- Absence of proper legislation to ensure PWDs fulfill their right to work;
- Employment of persons with disabilities within the Public Service is nonexistent for Persons with intellectual disabilities;
- Workplaces are hesitant to hire disabled persons. There is a lack of understanding and acceptance of the intellectually impaired by the general public resulting their being stigmatized and devalued in society. The attitude of employers not very welcoming;
- Lack of equal opportunity in the application process;
- Inability of the employee to perform an essential function of a job;
- Failure to provide the employee with equal benefits and privileges of employment;
- Inability to communicate without a sign language interpreter;

- Unavailability of assistive listening devices.

Employer Awareness Training

3.25. The MLSED does not provide sensitization and training of employers who work with persons with disabilities. However, in 2014, the National Employment Service (NES), MLSED embarked on an exercise to collect data from institutions, inclusive of the NCPD and schools on employable persons with disabilities which included a draft questionnaire was conducted to survey and to target ninety (90) employers from various industries. One of the findings of the survey was indication of willingness of some employers to employ persons with disabilities whilst others were open to possibilities if a tax incentive/relief was offered.

3.26. MSDFS indicated that in 2010 a series of stakeholder sensitization workshops regarding employment were conducted and in 2011 specific sensitization workshops were held for recruitment agencies in the private sector to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities.

3.27. Stakeholders identified the need for employer training in the following areas:

- Awareness and sensitization;
- Advocacy;
- Human rights;
- Legal rights;
- Training in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Pre-Employment training to develop appropriate policies and procedures for the recruitment of DHH employees including access to information and communication;
- New Employee Orientation to develop orientation materials that are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) friendly, for example training and orientation videos with closed captioning, written information, and visual print collateral such as an organisational chart etc; and

- On the Job to develop strategies, systems and techniques for the full involvement of the DHH employee/s in the workplace and equip the environment with DHH appropriate tools and equipment for greater integration.

Stakeholder Recommendations

3.28. Stakeholder recommendations on employment are summarized in Appendix VIII.

Objective 3: Current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

3.29. The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities was approved in 2005 by Cabinet and was accompanied by a seven (7) year action plan which expired in 2012. Efforts are currently being made to review and revise the policy. However, the subsequent monitoring and coordinating of the revised Policy to be undertaken by the DAU requires an appropriate compliment and composition of staff.

3.30. Confirmation was received from MSDFS that the following issues were currently being considered in the review process, in consultation with the community of persons with disabilities:

- Physical infrastructural issues in buildings, such as accessible parking, easy ramp entryways, wheelchair-friendly bathrooms;
- Physical access on roadways, such as roadside pavements and walkways;
- Access to information in various formats, such as sign language and braille; and
- Creation of embedded identifiable features in paper dollar bills to enable PWDs to identify different denominations and conduct financial transactions independently.

3.31. The following revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities Policy were submitted by stakeholders:

- Replacement of the policy with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). However, Article 1 on 'Purpose' should be amended to reflect the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, including in the definition of 'disability' produced as a result of consultation with disability community and further developed by Disability Affairs Unit;
- Recall the existing National Policy on Persons with Disabilities; and
- Establishment of a National Registry.

Objective 4: Status of Stakeholder Consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

3.32. Since 2010 there have not been external stakeholder meetings held on the Policy on Persons with Disabilities. However, in February 2016, intra-ministerial meetings commenced with various divisions towards reviewing and revising the Policy. The Disabilities Affairs Unit is preparing to have external consultations with key stakeholders. The time frame for the review, revision and completion of the documents is approximately one (1) year.

3.33. Stakeholders such as the MOE, MOLSED, EOC, Persons with Visual Impairment, Squeaky Wheels, Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children, Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards also confirmed that they have neither been invited nor met with the MSDFS to participate in the review process for the draft proposal.

Objective 5: Legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities

Amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03

3.34. Section 27(1) of the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 states that one of the Equal Opportunity Commission's functions is the keep the working of the Act under review and to where necessary prepare and submit proposals for amendments to the relevant Minister. On February 26, 2014, EOC submitted proposals to the Attorney General to recommending the expansion of the protection given to PWDs such as:

- Amending the definition of "disability" under the Act does not accord with international legislation and instruments;
- Including certain medical conditions as disabilities and excluding some medical conditions;
- Creating an obligation for an employer to make reasonable accommodation.

3.35. Stakeholder proposed amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 are summarized in Appendix IX.

Amendments to the Motor Vehicle Legislation

3.36. Section 48(1), (5) and (6) of the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 states:

> *(1)The Transport Officer shall not issue a driving permit to any person unless he has personally satisfied himself that the vision, hearing and bodily and mental fitness of the applicant are such as to warrant the issue of a driving permit and that the applicant is of good character;*
> *(5)A person referred to in subsection (1) who notwithstanding his disability wishes to drive may claim to be subjected to a test as to his fitness to drive as is contemplated by subsection (1);*
> *(6)A person who passes a test under this section shall be issued a driving permit or provisional permit, as the case may be, subject to such terms and conditions of the Transport Officer may impose, and a permit so issued may be for a period of one year.*

3.37. Based on these provisions, driving permits have been issued to persons with disabilities at the discretion of the Transport Officer. However, there is no existing

legislation that specifically speaks to issuance of driving permits for persons with disabilities.

3.38. Current requirements of the Licensing Authority states that PWDs who are seeking a driver's permit must:

- ✓ Have a car registered in the disabled person's name and only his name;
- ✓ Car must be equipped with the necessary driving apparatus/hand controls;
- ✓ Disabled person must be a holder of car insurance for this vehicle in his name only; and
- ✓ Only the disabled person is allowed to drive this vehicle from then onward.

3.39. CODO indicated that the annual renewal of drivers permits for PWDs and having to purchase a car prior to doing the test are discriminatory. Stakeholder proposed amendments to motor vehicle legislation are summarized in Appendix X.

Legislation required to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

3.40. In June 2015, the DAU, MSDFS developed and forwarded a Legislative Policy Brief to the Ministry of the Attorney General to inform the drafting of legislation required to give effect to the Convention. Stakeholders identified that legislative amendments are also required:

- To provide equal access to education, employment, transportation and accessibility;
- To ensure a safe and easily accessible environment;
- To obtain redress for persons who have been injured in the physical environment;
- To provide for safe crossing for persons with visual impairment;
- To provide for a disabilities education act, which ensures that all children with disabilities are provided an appropriate free public education that would meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;

- To establish an institute which would manage Special Education and Rehabilitative Services under the new legislation with enforcement authority including conducting compliance reviews, provision of technical assistance to schools, parents and/or advocates, complaints management and provisions for legal restitution and a creation of enabling environments for as much independent living as possible; and
- To declare and recognize Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL) as an official foreign language.

Objective 6: Fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues

Fiscal Frameworks

3.41. The eleven (11) NGOs that receive government subvention on a quarterly basis are Persons Associated with Visual Impairment ($520,500), Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired ($8,000,000), Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association ($9,000,000), Goodwill Industries ($564,413), National Centre for Persons with Disabilities ($799,360), Cheshire Foundation Home ($50,000), Touch of Christ, W.R. Torres Foundation, Grace Community Complex, Sunrise Mission Foundation and Deaf Empowerment Centre.

3.42. Stakeholders identified a number of fiscal frameworks and procedures that can be utilised to engage NGOs and the private sector to partner with the public sector:

- Government Subvention for NGOs to provide funding to carry out the work on behalf of the Government;
- Tax incentives for private sector organizations to influence these organizations to fund project proposals from NGOs;
- A mentorship program by organizations to effectively support the government and PWDs;
- Consultations with business community e.g. chambers to provide awareness of convention and role of public and private sector; and
- Collaborate and build private sector relationships to mitigate against discrimination.

3.43. Stakeholders such as CODO, PAVI, Squeaky Wheels, Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children and Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired identified the Ministries that communicate regularly on the topic of PWDs:

- Ministry of Social Development and Family Services;
- Ministry of Education;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Development;
- Ministry of Communications;

- Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; and
- Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Ministry of Education

3.44. There are three (3) methods of collaboration with PWDs.

- Establishment of Joint Committees
  Representatives are invited from various agencies/ministries to provide project feedback. For example, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Security and the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago have provided feedback on policies and protocols.

- National Consultation on Special Education
  Various agencies and organisations are invited to share issues, concerns and recommend solutions.

- Establishment of National Councils
  The President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago appointed representatives from various Ministries to legally constituted Councils to provide support and input.

Ministry of Works and Transport

3.45. MOWT facilitates requests for meetings with non-governmental organisations to discuss issues and identify possible solutions. In addition, the needs of PWDs are taken into consideration by projects initiated by the Coastal Protection Unit, Highways Division, Accessible Pedestrian Signals, the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Equal Opportunity Commission

3.46. EOC is currently engaged in an aggressive public awareness campaign that reaches public and private sectors to sensitize agencies on discrimination in relation to disability and other statuses.

Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development

3.47. MLSED collaborates including the NCPD, Goodwill Industries Limited, TTBWA and the Lady Hochoy Vocational Centre to develop programmes which facilitate access to employment for persons with disabilities. In addition, discussions were held with NGOs on Trinidad and Tobago's implementation of the ILO Convention No. 159 of 1983 - Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention.

4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings – Objective 1

To understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago included but not limited to Transport, Education (primary, secondary and tertiary), Facilities, Health and Licensing Office

4.1. The Committee is concerned that the ELDAMO service has a current roster of approximately 850 persons and a waiting list for applicants desirous of utilizing the service. Therefore, this service which was introduced and designed without consultation from PWDs currently facilitates only 1.6 percent of the 52,244 persons eligible to utilize the service.

4.2. The Ministry of Works and Transport indicated in its written submissions that there is the absence of a legal framework and a clear definition of the ELDAMO service and a structured evaluation for the ELDAMO Service. The Committee correlated these shortcomings to stakeholder complaints submitted in Table 1 and that twenty-four (24) fleet ELDAMO service does not reach rural areas, has an unreliable schedule, late service and limited capacity for larger groups.

4.3. The Committee was informed of other public transportation challenges faced by PWDs including difficulties to access public transportation at City Gate, bus terminals and bus stops as well as the policy that PWDs in a motorised wheelchair can only utilize the Water Taxi Service with a personal aide. This reinforced the point made by CODO representatives that PWDs are currently treated as objects as opposed to subjects, although the Ministry of Works and Transport has future plans to adopt a mainstream approach of inclusive transportation and universal design for all new bus purchases.

4.4. The Committee noted that the Ministry of Education had an Inclusive Education Policy since 2009, based on the comments by the CODO, students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools are plagued with a number of issues which impact the choice of institute to be enrolled. Further, limited access to education creates a trickle-down effect on the level of employment for a PWD. In the schools there were a few teacher aides, student aides, special education teachers and sign language interpreters. In addition, there is an absence of either a disability policy or a liaison unit to assist with PWDs within many tertiary institutions.

4.5. The Committee was informed that there was little technical assistance for blind students, although the schools were equipped with computers the schools were not provided with the requisite software. In particular, there is concern that the braille embosser has not been functional since 2007 and alternative measures such as the use of CDs is slow due to lack of the appropriate scanners and computers with JAWS software. These problems occur mainly due to the fact that there is a lack of awareness and sensitization of teachers, students and the general public on PWDs. CODO also highlighted the fact that if more was done by the state to increase public awareness it would assist in reducing the number of students that are bullied at schools.

4.6. It was also noted that although persons with autism are excluded from mainstream education and special schools, the Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago has collaborated with schools along the East-West Corridor to provide teacher training on strategies to be used for autistic students. Representatives also highlighted the absence of early intervention programmes for autistic students within the education system.

4.7. The Committee noted the National Standard TTS/ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards

(TTBS) is a voluntary standard. This correlates with common challenges to access government buildings outlined at item 3.12.

4.8. In terms of access to health services, the Committee noted that there is a medicine supply challenges for persons with mental health issues, unavailability and high priced eye-drops for visually-impaired persons and access to sexual reproductive health services. The Committee discussed the need for preventative care and officials agreed that there is a need for the assessment, screening and early diagnosis of children with disabilities as well as vulnerable and high risk groups. The need for continuous public education was also highlighted to mitigate disabilities as a result of lifestyle diseases.

Recommendations

4.9. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Works and Transport evaluate the ELDAMO service and seek client feedback in order to improve, create a definition and a policy framework for the service. The Ministry of Works and Transport should review the stakeholder recommendations in Appendix III.**

4.10. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Works and Transport consider purchasing regular buses that are outfitted for PWDs, since the current demand for the ELDAMO service exceeds the capacity of the current fleet.**

4.11. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Works and Transport redesign City Gate, bus stops and bus terminals to improve the level of access to PWDs.**

4.12. **The Committee proposes that a Disability Affairs Unit be established within each tertiary institution to assist students and the administration in resolving keys issues at the particular school.**

4.13. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education conduct an assessment of the equipment/technology and positions required to strengthen the Inclusive Education Policy and submit a proposal on the need for scholarships and equipment/technology in these areas. The Ministry of Education should note that the current cadre of Special Education Teacher I, Teacher Aides, Student Aides and Sign Language Interpreters are inadequate to serve the needs of PWDs and teachers. The Ministry of Education should review the stakeholder education recommendations in Appendix IV.**

4.14. **The Committee recommends training for all teachers (primary, secondary, tertiary) in special education inclusive of autism.**

4.15. **The Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should review the stakeholder facilities and infrastructural access recommendations in Appendix V.**

4.16. **The Committee recommends that the National Standard TTS/ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities is adopted by the Ministry of Planning and Development as an enforceable regulatory document. This would mitigate against building access challenges faced by PWDs.**

4.17. **The Ministry of Health should review the stakeholder health recommendations in Appendix VI.**

4.18. **The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services should review the stakeholder education recommendations in Appendix I to VII.**

Findings – Objective 2

To understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago

4.19. The Committee noted the employment challenges for PWDs at item 3.24 and that the unemployment rate is 7.4%, approximately 3% higher than the unemployment rate for non-PWDs. It was observed that PWDs are predominantly hired in the hospitality, food and catering, supermarkets and wood work crafts.

4.20. The Ministry of Labour and Enterprise Development does not collect data on the number of PWDs that are employed in the public or private sector nor provides sensitization training for employers who work with PWDs. The Ministry utilises the statistics provided by the 2011 census.

4.21. The Committee noted that the lack of access to facilities also impedes PWDs from attaining and retaining employment. It was expressed that the work environment for PWDs requires that adjustments be made to accommodations at (average US$100 per PWD) and adaptive technologies be installed. In addition, the use of job coaching may be required to provide supported employment to PWDs who may need assistance to transition to the work environment. The need for employer training in a number of areas was provided in 3.27.

4.22. It was also noted that persons in receipt of the Disability Assistance Grant may be demotivated to seek employment as the Grant can only be accessed by unemployed PWDs. The Committee noted that the application duration to receive a Disability Grant is six (6) months.

Recommendations

4.23. **The Committee recommends that MSDFS in collaboration with the MOLED conduct research on PWDs and employment.**

4.24. **The Committee recommends that the DAU, MOLED and MPA collaborate to establish a disabilities register/database of PWDs to allow for ease of access by employers and to provide for data collection and monitoring of the number of PWDs employed in the private and public sector between national census dates.**

4.25. **The Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development collaborate with the MSDFS to provide employer training related to PWDs with specific focus on accommodation adjustments, job coaching and areas itemized in 3.27. This would alleviate the number of complaints submitted to Equal Opportunity Commission by PWDs.**

4.26. **The Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development should review the stakeholder employment recommendations in Appendix VIII.**

Findings – Objective 3

To examine the current revisions to the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

4.27. The Committee were advised that the MSDFS has only initiated an internal review (within the Ministry) of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities. CODO representatives proposed that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities be adopted as the national policy. MSDFS indicated the feasibility of CODO's proposal would be considered and within three (3) weeks the Ministry will make a decision on the matter.

Recommendation

4.28. **The Committee recommended that the Ministry should urgently consider CODO's proposal and prepare a revised policy document within the next two (2) months for public consultation.**

Findings – Objective 4

To determine the status of stakeholder consultation with respect to the review of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

4.29. The Committee was advised that stakeholder consultation have not commenced for National Policy on Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendation

4.30. **The Committee recommends the development of a stakeholder consultation plan to include all disability NGOs and Ministries over a six month period.**

Findings – Objective 5

To determine the legislative framework required to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities

4.31. The Committee noted that the MSDFS developed and submitted to the Ministry of the Attorney General in June, 2015, a Legislative Policy Brief to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which incorporated legislation from other jurisdictions.

4.32. Based on the submissions from a number of stakeholders, other pieces of legislation such as the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03, the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 and other motor vehicle legislation have to be amended for parity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

4.33. The Committee agrees with stakeholders that there is a need for omnibus legislation to address the rights of PWDs in the areas of discrimination, employment, education, health care, accommodation and transportation.

Recommendations

4.34. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs collaborate with the MSDFS and the Equal Opportunity Commission to ensure the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disabilities) Amendment Bill (listed on the Legislative Agenda[3] during September 2017 to 2019) is tabled. The proposed legislative amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act and motor vehicle legislation in Appendix IX and X should be reviewed.**

4.35. **The Committee recommends legislation which mitigates against discriminatory hiring practices by employers and the employment challenges itemized at 3.24.**

4.36. **The Ministry of Works and Transport review proposed legislative amendments to motor vehicle legislation in Appendix X.**

Findings – Objective 6

To understand the fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on differently abled issues

4.37. The MSDFS provides quarterly subventions to a number of NGOs of approximately $5 billion, totalling about half of the Ministry's annual budgetary

[3] Legislative Agenda for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago 2015 to 2020. http://www.ttparliament.org/documents/2346.pdf

allocation. In order to receive a quarterly subvention, each NGO is required to submit expenditure details from the previous subvention and expenditure plans for the next subvention. The DAU received $1Million for annual expenses. These subventions are administered, monitored and quarterly audited by the NGO Unit.

4.38. The Committee was informed that although MSDFS plays an advocacy role for PWDs and has served as a mediator amongst NGOs, there is an absence of primary data collection on PWDs and only census figures are utilized. Two (2) years ago attempts were made to collect data via a registry project, however, due to divergent views the project was stymied.

4.39. The Committee was informed that 24,111 persons received the Disability Assistance Grant and 1,078 persons received the Special Child Grant ($1,150) at the end of fiscal 2015. In addition, the Ministry has a programme to provide assistive devices which 419 persons received wheelchairs, 40 persons received walkers, 40 persons received canes and 25 persons were fitted with prosthetics during fiscal 2015. Further, there are Dietary Grants, Pharmaceutical Grants and a National Social Development Programme to redesign a home for PWDs.

4.40. The Committee noted that there are two (2) committees for the operations of the Disabilities Affairs Unit. One (1) committee monitors the implementation plans for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the second committee makes implementation plans for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The second committee is also expected to conduct sensitization training for Ministries and agencies.

4.41. The Committee expressed great concern when MSDFS indicated that there is one (1) member of staff in the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and the absence of a Director and a strategic plan for the Disabilities Affairs Unit. The Committee was informed that

human resource constraints have impacted the performance of the Disabilities Affairs Unit and Ministry's ability to assessments of programmes and divisions for a number of years. In the absence of a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, the Ministry has noted output assessments based on achievement reports received and project indicators determined by the Social Investigations Division. It was stated that within the next two to three months that vacancies within the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit are expected to be filled.

4.42. The Committee noted that during 2010 to 2015 the Ombudsman received 149 complaints against National Insurance Board with respect to claims for the invalidity benefits. The Division of Social Welfare, MSDFS collaborates with the Ombudsman and a meeting held in March/April 2016 resulted in the creation of a shared email in order to resolve issues that arise.

4.43. The Committee was informed that is a need for more public-private partnerships with disability non-governmental organisations.

Recommendations

4.44. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry should prioritise the recruitment of staff for the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and the Disabilities Affairs Unit. One of the first mandates of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit is the review of the eligibility requirements to receive the Disabilities Assistance Grant in light of stakeholder complaints received by the Committee.**

4.45. **The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services conduct regular Sensitisation and Awareness Programmes on PWDs with specific target groups including, teachers and students, Ministry of Health**

employees and Public Service Transportation Corporation, public servants and the general public.

4.46. **The Committee recommends that there should be regular meetings amongst the stakeholders mainly the DAU, CODO and other NGOs to improve collaboration on matters affecting PWDs and to provide a platform for increased public-private partnerships.**

Your Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of Parliament.

Sgd.
Dr. Nyan Gadsby Dolly, MP
Chairman

Sgd.
Ms. Sarah Budhu
Vice-Chairman

Sgd.
Mr. Randall Mitchell, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Dennis Moses
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Rodger Samuel
Member

Sgd.
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul
Member

June 22, 2016

Appendix I

Minutes

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY, HELD IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN ON MONDAY JUNE 06, 2016

Present

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP	Chairman
Ms. Sarah Budhu	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP	Member
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	Member
Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, MP	Member
Mr. Rodger Samuel	Member
Mr. Dennis Moses	Member

Not Present

Mr. Randall Mitchell, MP	Member (Excused)

Secretariat

Ms. Candice Skerrette	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Ms. Isele Robinson-Cooper	Programme Officer, Poverty, Social Policy and Governance
Ms. Sharla Elcock	Programme Assistant, Poverty, Social Policy and Governance

CONSORTIUM OF DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Bhawani Persad	President
Ms. Niobe Rodrigues	Interpreting Officer, Deaf
Ms. Sharda Ramlakhan	Representative for the Physically Disabled
Ms. Nichol Alves	Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago
Ms. Nicole Cowie	Representative for Mental Health

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ms. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Dennis Williams	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. Vijay Gangapersad	Chief Technical Officer (Ag.)
Mr. Michael Reid	Senior Research Officer
Ms. Catherine Ferreira	Research Officer I
Ms. Tessa Pascal	Research Assistant

Public hearing with Officials of the Consortium of Disability Organizations (CODO)

1.1 The meeting resumed at 2:10 p.m. in public, in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room.

1.2 The Chairman welcomed and thanked the officials from the Consortium of Disability Organisations for attending. Introductions were made.

1.3 The Chairman provided a contextual background on the inquiry topic and reminded all present of the objectives of the hearing.

1.4 The Chairman acknowledged receipt of fourteen (14) stakeholder submissions form various Ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the responsibility for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

1.5 The Chairman invited President, CODO to make a brief opening statement. Mr. Persad provided a brief history, overview and membership of the organization.

1.6 The following issues arose during discussions with CODO:

i. Challenges faced by students with disabilities in the education system at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels include:

a. lack of Teacher and Student Aides and Sign Language Interpreters;
b. lack of software for school computers to assist hearing and visually impaired students;
c. frequent bullying of students within the Secondary school system, especially those with autism;
d. lack of awareness and sensitization of teachers, students and the general public;
e. lack of training for teachers to deal with PWDs in a regular classroom setting;
f. shortage of Special Education Teachers; and
g. lack of technical assistance for teachers and students within the classroom.

ii. Challenges faced by PWDs for public transportation include:

a. difficulty to access public transportation hubs, e.g. City Gate and bus stops;
b. inability to utilise the Water Taxi Service without a personal aide; and
c. ELDAMO buses were purchased for PWDs without consultation by the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Public Service Transportation Corporation.

iii. The organization recommended initiatives that may address issues faced by PWDs such as:

a. awareness and sensitization;
b. building and strengthening the capacity of persons of Special Education Teachers and Sign Language Interpreters;
c. comprehensive review of the legal framework;
d. attitudinal and physical access; and
e. accurate collection of statistics.

1.7 The Chairman suspended the meeting at 3:23 p.m.

Public hearing with Officials of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

2.1 The meeting resumed at 3:31 p.m. in public, in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room.

2.2 The Chairman welcomed and thanked the officials from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for attending. Introductions were made.

2.3 The Permanent Secretary, MSDFS made a brief opening statement.

2.4 Key issues discussed with the MSDFS were:

i. reasons for the delay in the Review of the National Policy on Persons With Disabilities;
ii. possibility of discussions between the Ministry and PWDs to adopt the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the national policy rather than commence the review on the current Policy;
iii. mandate of the Disability Affairs Unit (DAU);
iv. inability of PWDs to access some of the offices of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services;
v. high cost of drugs for persons suffering with mental illness;
vi. review of the provisions for the Disability Grant;
vii. difficulties to define the word "disability"; and
viii. lack of a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at the Ministry to follow-up with all non-governmental organizations that receive Government grants and subventions;

ix. the budgetary allocation of the Ministry of $10 Billion and the percentage that is utilised for grants;
x. lack of consultation between the Ministry, DAU and the non-governmental organizations.

Adjournment

3.1 The meeting was adjourned at 4:42 p.m.

I certify that the Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

June 21, 2016

Appendix II

Verbatim Notes

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY HELD IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM (MEZZANINE FLOOR) (IN PUBLIC), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON MONDAY, JUNE 06, 2016 AT 2.10 P.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP	Chairman
Miss Sarah Budhu	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith,	Member
Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh	Member
Mr. Dennis Moses	Member
Mr. Rodger Samuel	Member
Miss Jennifer Raffoul	Member
Miss Candice Skerrette	Secretary
Miss Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary

ABSENT

Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member

OFFICIALS FROM THE CONSORTIUM OF DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Bhawani Persad	President
Ms. Sharda Ramlakhan	Representative for the physically challenged
Ms. Nichol Alves	Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago
Ms. Nicole Cowie	Representative for Mental Health
Ms. Niobe Rodrigues	Interpreting Officer - Deaf

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon, everyone. It is a pleasure to reconvene our meeting, seventh meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity and I would like to welcome the members of the Consortium of Disability Organizations who are here with us today. I would like to introduce myself, Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, the Chairman of this Committee and I would like to ask the other members of the Committee, please, to introduce themselves starting with the Vice-Chair.

[*Introductions made by the members of the Committee*]

Madam Chairman: So now that the members of the viewing and listening audience know who we are, we would like the members of the Consortium to introduce themselves as well.

[*Introductions made by the officials*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you, again, to all the members for being here with us. This afternoon, we are here to discuss the issues of the differently-abled with specific access to employment and services, education and so on. We understand that there are approximately 52,000 members of our society in Trinidad and Tobago who are differently-abled—4 per cent of our population and that is, maybe, a low count.

Now recently, Trinidad and Tobago ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that was in June 2015 and we did this to ensure that we reaffirmed our Government's commitment and the commitment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensuring proper rights for the differently-abled.

That convention has eight general principles which I would just like to touch very briefly on:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices and independence of persons;
- Non-discrimination;
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Accessibility;
- Equality between men and women;
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

So those were the eight principles of the general convention. And there were three fundamental concepts:

- Changing the definition of disability;
- A paradigm shift involving focusing on the ability rather than the disability; and
- The right to full inclusion in society, with a slogan of No One Left Behind.

We have recently heard about a UNDP conference that sought to find the way forward for meeting the goals of the convention as just espoused, incorporating persons with disabilities into the labour force and formulating a national register of persons with disabilities. And out of this convention or this conference came a number of recommendations as to how these objectives could be met.

And it is against this background that this Committee found it very important to address this whole issue of how we are treating with persons with disabilities in our society; how we are exposing the plight of a lot of these persons and how as a society, we are intending to deal with it and what progress we have made having ratified the convention on all of that.

So we are here this afternoon to examine this, and I will tell you that I have seen some interest in this topic coming on the social media. I will tell you also that I have received phone calls because people are very interested in finding out how or what we expose here today, what we look at and, therefore, the recommendations that we make to ensure that we advance the cause of persons with disabilities.

The objectives of this enquiry are:

- To understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago including but not limited to facilities, transport, employment, education—primary, secondary and tertiary—health;
- To understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago;
- To examine the current revisions to the national policy and persons with disabilities;
- To determine the status of stakeholder consultations with respect to the review of the national policy on persons with disabilities;

- To determine the legislative framework required to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities; and
- To understand the physical framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the public sector on persons with disabilities issues.

At this point, I would like to indicate that this hearing is being broadcast live on Parliament Channel 11, Parliament Radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel ParlView. Viewers and listeners can send the Committee questions related to the today's topic via email and that is parl101@ttparliament.org, on facebook at facebook.com./ttparliament and on Twitter@ttparliament. So we invite our viewers and listeners to be a part of this discussion.

I would like to acknowledge receipt by the Committee of 14 written submissions and these were requested and received from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Consortium of Disability Organizations, Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, Ministry of Works and Transport, Office of the Ombudsman, Persons Associated with Visual Impairment, Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association, United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children, Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, Equal Opportunity Commission, Squeaky Wheels, Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards and the Ministry of Education. I want to thank all of the organizations for submitting their reports and allowing us to have their view of things to deliberate on.

At this point, I would like to invite Mr. Bhawani Persad, President of the Consortium of Disability Organizations to deliver brief opening remarks.

Mr. Persad: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Let me on behalf of CODO extend our sincere thanks to this Committee for having us here this afternoon. It is a golden opportunity to have this dialogue to share with the public and those out there and those of the Committee, what our views are, what our thoughts are on persons with disabilities. I note that you said differently-abled at the beginning but the correct terminology is persons with disabilities.

CODO is an umbrella organization representing over 40 organizations involved in the work of and for persons with disabilities. It was established almost 15 years ago to help in the promotion, in the training, in the advocacy and in general to keep in line with what is international customs and traditions in terms of getting feedback on subject areas like we are having here today.

Over the last five years, CODO moved from just being an organization running out of people's homes to establishing our own office and we want to express our sincere thanks to Ms. Ramlakhan who is here this afternoon because it was her driving force that transformed CODO from a suitcase operation to an office-type development. Through her initiative as well, CODO has been, over the last couple of years, involved in a music festival for children in special schools and this year, we were pleased to, just on Friday, have 18 special schools undertake the music festival for 2016 here in Trinidad. Tobago is not left out. Since we started the project in Tobago in 2014, we have gotten from two to three, the number of special schools involved and their session will be on Friday.

Another initiative of CODO was the leadership academy. Time was when organizations were made up in the main of persons who are "normal" but who had a vested interest, one way or the other, to see how they could help persons with disabilities. Today, that dynamic has changed a little bit. We are seeing organizations where persons with disabilities are becoming more and more involved in the leadership of these organizations. One of the workshops we have held or one of the activities we have held over the last couple of years was a leadership academy, where we identify persons with disability with leadership potential, bring them for training and then allow them to develop in their own organization setting. So that they will continue the process from here on in.

Those are two of the activities that we have focused on over the last five years in particular, but we always held training programmes for our members in capacity-building, project writing and, you know, these things can be ongoing. So we are not going to let up here because we recognize that every year, we have new persons to train, new activities to become involved in, and CODO urges all other organizations who are not yet members, who are

working in the interest of and for persons with disabilities, to stand up and be counted, because, you know, stats play an important role in justifying what we need.

As the Chairman said, we have over 52,000 persons with disabilities, which may be more because of the fact that this is just a rough sample. You know, stats has been one of our burning problems. But I think I have said enough for now, so Madam Chair, it is back to you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Persad. At this time, I would like to invite questions from the Committee to the representatives of CODO. Just reminding that all questions come through the Chair and if I can start the ball a rolling. I would like to ask a question, anyone can address it. Between 2010 and 2015, the Equal Opportunity Commission received 49 complaints based on the status of disability and six of them focusing on education. And the question I would like to ask is about the education challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Are those challenges more prevalent in the primary, the secondary or the tertiary sector and have there been changes? Have there been improvements? And with specific focus on the tertiary sector, because I know sometimes there may be focus on the primary and secondary, is there more of a problem in the tertiary sector? So I guess I am asking a question that is a bit wide-ranging. What are the challenges? Are there more in one sector than the other and have there been improvements to the challenges that are being faced?

Mr. Persad: Basically, there have not—all challenges are equal whether they be primary, secondary or tertiary education. Whilst it is true to say that over the last, perhaps, two decades, we have made strides in education, we still have some work to do. For example, teachers' aides, students' aides, equipment. You have a lot of students now being integrated into schools, whether it be primary, secondary or tertiary, but yet, you do not have, in some instances or in most instances, the backup equipment. You have computer labs in schools and these computer labs do not even have one computer with a screen-reading device or a software screen-reading device that will show equal participation by both the visually impaired and other users of the service or "normal" students and that is just one. The students' aides situation, interpreters, all of these things. There has been some improvement but still a long way to go. I do not know if any other members of the committee will have any other additions.

Ms. Alves: I can add. I speak on behalf of the Autistic Society. We have had many complaints of persons being denied education alongside their regular peers. Even within special schools, persons with autism are not included. So there is that denial of different and appropriate and of course, we meet a lot of the early intervention, so that is primary, secondary school age. Apart from that, there is a lot of bullying in the secondary school.

As a part of the Autistic Society, we have joined with some schools along the East-West Corridor in terms of training, going in speaking with teachers, speaking with students. Apart from that, there is the lack of training of teachers on strategies used for persons with disabilities. The strategies that we use for persons with autism can be used right across the board for all children with disabilities. This includes a highly visual approach. Many teachers are not trained so that what we propose is all teachers are trained to work with persons with disabilities right across the board, from early intervention right up to tertiary levels.

The inclusion of children in the ordinary schools cannot be effective without properly trained personnel, including the teachers' aides, as Mr. Persad stated before. There is no one size fits all so that interventions are highly individualized so that there is not a curriculum that you can come up with and say that this is a special ed curriculum. It is highly individualized—individualized educational programmes for each child who identifies with a disability. Some children have co-morbid diagnosis which need very specialized approaches, so apart from the visual methods, they may need communication devices and technical support. And so there is not a model that you can say this curriculum can serve all persons with disabilities, it is highly individualized and parent inclusion in that process is paramount.

Ms. Cowie: I can speak to the tertiary part of the question. In UWI right now, there is the disability affairs liaison unit. Well now, the Student Life and Development Unit that seeks to help students with disability—tertiary level students with disabilities access university education, it is very effective. I am a graduate so I know. It is very effective; however, that is not sector wide, so that in all the other major institutions, they still have left to be a student disability policy and to have—because more and more increasing levels of students with disabilities are going on to tertiary level education, but it is not sector wide in terms of having a policy and having the supportive

services needed for tertiary level students with disabilities.

Ms. Rodrigues: I would like to speak specifically on deafness. When a deaf person enters deaf school, they do not have too much of an issue because they are in a deaf school, most times surrounded with teachers who may know sign language and they are in a community of themselves. But when things change is when they have to go off to secondary school and in secondary school, there is a very big challenge of lack of interpreters. Now, it may seem that one interpreter might be able to work with a number of deaf students in a school but if we are logical, the idea is you have new deaf students coming into a school every single year, and many schools are serviced for the most by one or two interpreters, which is really very challenging for a deaf student also for the interpreter because the interpreter needs to have a break between classes and the deaf student is not well served by the fact that there is not enough people to serve them at school.

This, of course, plays a role in them being able to pass their exams to go on to tertiary level education. Most deaf people are not qualified to go on to tertiary level education because they do not get their CXC passes, they are not able to access A level exams and these are the requirements that they need to go on to tertiary level education. Whereas even if, let us say, a regular person would like to not go on to UWI but go on to SBCS or any other tertiary level education, this is a very limited option for deaf persons because if they do apply, they ask them: Do you have an interpreter who will work with you? Who is going to pay for the interpreter?—and all of these things affect their education and it affects the rest of their life, employment, et cetera.

Ms. Ramlakhan: I would like to speak on a model that was developed by CODO which will serve to enhance, not just the education system but to enhance all the other services that the State is meant to provide, not just for persons with disabilities but for all in society And there are five core things that need to addressed. When we address these five core things, then you will find that all the other substantive clauses of the UN Convention—not just education but also health, rehabilitation, employment—all the other articles will be fulfilled.

One of the five things, the first one is awareness in sensitization. We need to have a proper awareness in sensitization project done, not just for the public service but for our wider community. The awareness in sensitization should include a high degree of experiential learning. We have come to the realization that experiential learning is very effective in disability sensitization. A high element of contrast where you show dos and don'ts. For instance, in accessibility, if we are highlighting accessibility, we would like to show the proper way of doing a ramp, for instance, as opposed to the improper way of doing a ramp and therefore, the "ah-ha" moment is achieved just by highlighting that. So awareness in sensitization is one. Awareness needs to be done across the socio-economic ladder in society, then across all ages and across all geographic spaces as well.

Another thing, the second one I would like to highlight, is tertiary education and training. Tertiary education and training will provide the manpower requirement to drive a sustainable disability sector. That will enable the State to fulfil its obligations to persons with disabilities and by that, I mean investing in manpower, not just of persons with disabilities. It is not just about educating persons with disabilities but educating our mainstream population to fill jobs. So, for instance, we mentioned that there is a lack of sign language interpreters. We need a lot more sign language interpreters, we need CAT Reporters, we need access auditors, kinesthesiologists. There are a wide range of fields that we need to start issuing scholarships for in Trinidad and Tobago. All of the therapies: occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech language therapy. All of these professions, we have a shortage of in Trinidad and Tobago. So tertiary education and training is the second one.

The third one is the legal aspect. We need to have that legal support. Our legal framework needs to be reviewed. Many pieces of our legislation need to be reviewed to ensure that persons with disabilities can benefit from the services of the State. The third one is accessibility and accessibility is a vast field. One of the prongs of accessibility is access to the built-in environment, then we have access to information. Attitudinal access is where awareness will come in. Institutional access is where the systems within the public service are reengineered to facilitate persons with disabilities.

And the last one that I would like to deal with is statistics. Without proper statistics that are comparable at international level, we would not be able to get the empirical evidence that can influence policy and that will drive budget, that will attract ourselves the budget. So if we address these five things, then education as well as

employment and all the other articles of the UN Convention will be easily implemented. CODO developed this. We did not think that these articles are more important but we thought if we implement these first, then the others will be easier for us.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. I will open the floor for any other member of the Committee.

Miss Raffoul: Hi everyone. I have a question about educational facilities in particular. My interest is in fiscal framework. So how we can improve services for the population by having a greater number of partnership opportunities for the private sector and the NGO sector to be involved, and in particular to help them so that they do not have to be fundraising constantly but so that they can get funding from the Government.

So my question is about the existing fiscal framework, the challenges. And in particular, what is working? What can be scaled up? What can be improved? And what you, in your experience, directly on a day-to-day basis, see as being positives and what you see as being opportunities for growth? I know it is a very broad question so if you want, I can refine—my particular interest is education.

I have spoken with persons who have said that they have children that are autistic or special needs or persons that run schools and they say that there are on paper, throughout legislation, funding opportunities but they are extremely difficult to access. So private schools that are run that are available are expensive, and can only really cater to persons who have very high-paying jobs and therefore, a lot of children from lower income families are not able to access any services at all. So my question is then, what is working, what is not and what can we do better?

Mr. Persad: Over the last couple of years, in terms of the built environment and education, a number of the new schools or all of the new schools have been fitted with proper ramps, et cetera, so which is making the built environment a little more user friendly now. True enough, we have a number of schools and institutions that still have this situation where children, students cannot go upstairs to classes because there is no elevator or the likes, but I think we have seen some improvement in that. However, as you quite rightly pointed out, we still need to make sure that all schools, and probably this is part of the legislative agenda too, that all buildings, be it education and/or otherwise, be accommodating and user friendly for all persons with disabilities.

And not just all persons, but we now have things like service animals to be used by persons with disabilities, and that is another topic area. But in terms of education, earlier it was pointed out, some of the challenges, but I think that with more emphasis on education and inclusion and mainstreaming, we are going to see a greater degree of participation by persons with disabilities.

2.40 p.m.
Ms. Cowie: The questions that you were asking about with the fiscal framework, I believe that there needs to be—first of all, the awareness part needs to be a key part of it. Because I think, especially in terms of educational and also employment opportunities, oftentimes the private sector—and it is getting better with the private sector—but both the private and the public sector you find that attitudinal barriers reach across all sectors, all areas in society. So that, because of your attitude you put your money where your interests lie. And so with the fiscal framework I believe that there has to be a more concerted effort for both public and private to partner together with the NGO sector and that it has to be NGO- and disability-sector-led, in terms of the persons with disabilities helping to make and shape the choices that shape the fiscal framework.

In addition as well, a possible proposal might be that you might have a vote within each Ministry for disability access and for disability-related issues. Because disability is cross-cutting and it is not just the particular general, not just education or health or these other main drivers of the disability sector. Disability is for justice, for all these other Ministries. So, if you have a line, a vote, across all Ministries for disability-related issues, I think that fiscal framework could possibly be an answer.

Ms. Ramlakhan: And that approach has been recommended by many of our international bodies and we have seen it working for the Australians in particular. New Zealand, as well, has actually included in its pro forma for a Cabinet Note where they have a clause in each Cabinet Note, the pro forma, that needs to be filled in by someone as to the impact of that Note, whatever it is, on the disability community, in terms of is it an equal opportunity job, you

know. All those things need to be addressed and someone needs to fill out that clause in every Cabinet Note. But that is moving forward. That is what we can do from now going forward.

Then we have the issue of addressing the public service as it is. So that takes—that is something called mainstreaming, what we refer to as mainstreaming; and mainstreaming includes reengineering of the entire public service in a manner that all persons with all abilities will be facilitated in a way that it is not special or it is not something that is out of the ordinary. An average person with a disability, a person with a wheelchair, should be able to go into any public service, into any school, into the Ministry of Education, and be accommodated properly. Hope I answered your question.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Madam Chair, I want to refer particularly to a transportation issue and I want to quote from a letter that was sent from the Public Transport Service Corporation. And I know that the PTSC provides services through the dial-a-ride.

Mr. Persad: ELDAMO.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: ELDAMO. But I want to refer a situation which exists, where drivers are demanding that trained caregivers be assigned to the buses to guarantee safety of commuters. I know for a fact, in the rural communities, for example the community of Valencia, for example, and Sangre Grande, buses are not leaving because there is an absence of caregivers. Can you say who is responsible for caregivers and what we can do to ensure that the buses are equipped with caregivers; caregivers are present in those buses? Can you enlighten this Committee as to the present status? Because I know for a fact that in that area there is the problem of the absence of caregivers to ensure the buses leave the terminal. Are you aware of that circumstance?

Mr. Persad: I am not aware of the caregivers' circumstance. It varies from disability to disability. For example, I use the ELDAMO service from time to time and I certainly do not need a caregiver to accompany me. Well I know that the buses also have marshals on them who show you to your seat, et cetera, and with a little more training I think they could do a lot more. But in terms of actual caregiver services, I think most times I have observed where, if a person who is severely disabled needs to get out or get around that they are accompanied by somebody, either a family member or somebody who works as a caregiver in their specific instance. So that it could vary based on the degree of disability that this is required. But I do not think generally we could just spend time putting caregivers on all the buses when, perhaps, they may not be needed.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: If I may enlighten you a bit more. What is happening at present with buses, the buses are not leaving. Now, I am referring specifically to children going to schools, children who are from the disabled community. They are left behind or the buses are not leaving. It is happening at this point in time where buses are not leaving because an issue was picked up with the Public Transport Service Corporation where the drivers were demanding that these marshals be assigned to the buses to guarantee the safety, because they are saying something happened previously where the PTSC was called to account for these persons who we describe as persons with disability on these buses. But are you aware at all of any community being left behind or not picked up because of this particular situation?

Ms. Ramlakhan: To start with, that is a serious human rights issue. Systems should be designed to accommodate persons to live an independent life. The issue we have—let me speak to the ELDAMO service to begin with—the design of that service was done without the consultation of persons with disabilities. To the end, when the service was about to be launched, persons with disabilities got to know that these buses had already arrived in the country. We had no say as to what the design of those buses was; whether universal-designed principles were used on those buses. The design of the system itself, the ELDAMO system, that as well is questionable. So the whole ELDAMO service needs to be reengineered. That service needs to work. It is not an inclusive service to begin with. It does not promote inclusion of persons with disabilities. It treats persons with disabilities as objects, as opposed to subjects and that is a grave concern and it is a human rights issue.

Likewise, the water taxi service has taken the same approach recently, where they are stating that persons who use motorized wheelchairs need to bring an individual to help them get on to the water taxi service, get on to the vessel itself. That is another grave concern. That goes against the very grain of the UN Convention and it is something that we need to look into. I have made complaints on that issue. They are now telling me that it is a

policy of the water taxi service that persons who use motorized wheelchairs bring someone with them. That just does not make sense. The attitude needs to shift where the entire system, including the environment and the physical space is so designed to accommodate persons of all abilities. And by that I mean using universal-designed principles.

With respect to the buses in the PTSC service, PTSC does realize that every single bus coming into the country from now on must have disability access and the ELDAMO service or what is currently known as the ELDAMO service should be limited to first-mile and last-mile services, because that is the most difficult link in the travel chain for an individual with a disability—getting from their home to a bus depot and then getting on to a mainstream service with every other person. So that is a challenge, but PTSC is aware of it and they have given the commitment that every single bus coming into the country now will have wheelchair access on it.

It is my recommendation that the ELDAMO service, or that school service that provides transportation for children with disabilities, that should be integrated in the mainstream school service, where children with disabilities use transport service just like any other child. That is equality. That is in line with the UN Convention, and I really do not promote picking up individuals from one place and transporting them to another as objects, and that is what the ELDAMO service is, unfortunately. And it is all because of lack of a participatory design.

Mr. Samuel: Based on what you have just said, Ms. Ramlakhan, what happens with the people living with disability who depend upon the public service transport because alternative means of transportation are not available and suited for people living with disability, certain types of disabilities—

what happens if the public service transport goes on a strike? Are you saying that all of these folks that depend on the public service are now shut down? Which is a sad state, because people who, well I consider the average person with some disability somewhere along the line, but some more than some. But what we are saying is that if the public transport is not readily available, then people living with disability have no alternative means of transportation because the maxi-taxi systems and other alternative aspects of transportation are not suited for people living with certain types of disabilities. How do we deal with that and how do you deal with that and what recommendations do you have?

Ms. Ramlakhan: Okay, yes, transportation is a very important link including persons with disabilities in our society. When it comes to the maxi-taxi service, incentives need to be—because they are private sector run. They need to be incentivized, some manner of being incentivized to redesign their maxi-taxi buses so that, on a phased basis, you will get maxi-taxis, particularly the bigger maxi-taxis, to accommodate persons of all abilities, including wheelchair users. And I understand that concessions were given to the Maxi-Taxi Association when it came to converting their maxi-taxis using the CNG fuel. Disability could have been added into that, had we been consulted. It would have been easy because the buses are now going to be redesigned and any supplier or any maker of a bus, internationally, will use universal-designed principles, which means that they will ask you, do you want wheelchair access on that bus? And it is very easy to say: no we do not want it because it is not a requirement in Trinidad. But had we been consulted at that point in time, then yes all our maxi-taxis, over a phased basis, would have had proper accessibility.

When it comes to the built environment, so we are looking at things like bus terminals, bus stops, and so, sidewalks is another one. But bus stops and terminals in particular, I think those were included in the national standard for accessible buildings, which Trinidad and Tobago did launch, the Bureau of Standards launched, last year. So that, in theory, the work has been done for that. It is just getting the finances to commit to redesigning our bus stops and bus terminals.

Mr. Persad: I am glad Sharda mentioned about redesigning bus stops and bus terminals, because of the fact that if you walk down to City Gate now and you have to go for a maxi even if you are using two crutches, it borders on ridiculousness. Because if you do not go up the steps and get around and you have to walk through the yard between all the maxis, that in itself creates its own problems. So I think we need to begin at home to put things in place so that we begin to create an impression to start with, that look, we want to make changes that will see an inclusive society rather than a segregated society.

Madam Chairman: If I can move to a different topic. I would like to discuss the issue of health. So disabled or

persons with disabilities who are using medications, are these medications available by CDAP? Are they available throughout the country? Are there any issues with quality of the medications that are being supplied? I do not know who would like to address this issue.

Ms. Cowie: I believe that there are issues with CDAP. I know that there are some supply issues. I can cite a particular problem within the mental health sector. On two occasions, I think, in the last two years, there have been serious shortages of medicines or delays in terms of the supply chain of getting the medicine to the pharmacies and the user. One I know in particular was the Prozac recall. So, in terms of getting medications, there have been issues and it is commendable on the Government's part that they have started with the health card so that streamlining and the collection of data, and so on, for refill prescriptions, and so on, will help in the long term, but in the shortterm there needs to be a better system in place for the supply chain so that it can get, especially, to mental health end users who must have their medication.

Mr. Persad: It is not only—well, added to the mental health situation there are those who have to use sometimes two or three eye drops and sometimes they may not be available, sometimes they are very high priced. Because based on what a person is getting, whether they are living on just the grant or public assistance and they have to get these drops for eyes and/or other parts of the body, it can be very expensive and sometimes you have to go without food in order to get the drops and to maintain what you have rather than lose it totally and completely.

Madam Chairman: One other issue to touch on health. With respect to preventative care, is there enough or is it robust enough to prevent someone who is having a problem from ending up—let us just use an example, if you are visually impaired—totally blind and that kind of thing? Is there enough of that? And we could also stretch that to the primary school system where there is the testing and so on. Is there enough being done to prevent disability in our country where possible?

Mr. Persad: Well, the more we get is the more we should have, in terms of these things. Public education is going to be crucial to that, but again it is people's lifestyle and people's attitude that help to contribute towards how we behave and the kind of results we get in the end. Because Trinidadians believe that God is a Trinidadian and they are not supposed to get sick. So I think public education, continuous public education, and not just accept the fact that look, this cannot happen to me. That, to me is paramount importance, the whole education on prevention rather than cure.

Ms. Ramlakhan: Can I just comment here on the importance of early intervention? And by that I mean assessment and screening of children with disabilities, particularly vulnerable groups and groups that are at high risk. The earlier we get it, the earlier we are aware of it and the earlier a child has an assessment, that increases the likelihood of the child being able to overcome whatever condition it is and also to be mainstreamed and included in society. So, yes, that is on one hand.

On the other hand, for persons with existing disabilities, for instance a person who is blind, the lack of opportunity and the lack of accessibility in our society also causes a barrier and, therefore, rippling health issues will occur. So by that I mean a person is limited to staying in their homes because of the environment being so acidic or less welcoming. And by that you get the onset of depression. You get an onset of diabetes because persons tend to eat a lot more. They will sit in front of a television, not exercise properly, not go out in the environment, not interact with people. So you have all those secondary issues that come out of a disability. Not to mention things like amputations, because once you get diabetes, you have to be very careful. So lifestyle diseases, there will be an onset or an increase in the probability of that person getting a lifestyle disease.

Ms. Rodrigues: I would just like to add to about there is a lot of public information being disseminated on the government information channels, feeds, things about Zika, et cetera, and all of this information is only packaged to serve a hearing community. We are at our association went off to Government Information Services to work with them to work with interpreters in providing sign language interpretation for all government information for deaf persons and persons who may not be able to receive the information just by hearing it.

This, of course, would have a ripple effect as to deaf adults. If a deaf adult is not aware that their child, who may be hearing, is sick and they would not be able to identify certain things that are wrong with their child.

Their child may be able to acquire disability as well because the parent is not aware that something is wrong with my child, something is going on. So the lack of information for a deaf person, and there are many deaf adults, will, of course, affect all the members of their family because they are not able to access the information only by hearing it.

The things that you see is insufficient information. We prepared a website with medical information for deaf persons. We asked persons to approve it for us so that we would be able to say okay this is approved by the Ministry of Health. It is taking some time and this website has been on for two or three years now, with assistance from the US Embassy. All these things are what affect the lives of others. You may think that disability is just for the person who has the disability but it affects all their family members as well.

Miss Budhu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Would you say that not having equal access to facilities impede persons with disabilities from joining the labour force, and what are your recommendations as persons with disabilities may have different learning difficulties?

Mr. Persad: Okay. Just to say that the whole question of accessibility is major. And, of course, it will impact on persons being able to participate in anything, including employment. But also, there is the other side of it where attitude of employers need to change. Attitude of co-workers need to change. And one of the recommendations is that, one, incentives are provided to employers who genuinely employ persons with disabilities. I say "genuinely" because my past experience has taught me: well, look, I am going to take this person on board but if he comes and he just puts his head on the desk we would pay him for the day. You know, a charity-based approach, which we want to get out of.

Secondly, it may take just a little alteration, a little adjustment, to make the work environment more comfortable for persons with disabilities, and you now do not, nowadays, have to dismiss someone because they have acquired a disability. They can still function using adaptive technology, using these things. So it does not mean you have to send home somebody. So there are ways and means of getting around the problem.

But also there is a big issue right now with persons who receive disability grants. A lot of persons are educated, they received an education but because, again, of the attitude they cannot find a job in the open market ordinarily so, and they would be afraid to lose their grant once it is found out that they are working. We think that we could use the grant as a part payment and whoever is employing them, whether it be in the public or private sector, that we come up with a base rate that will make the persons utilize their skills, the education that they have benefited from, and still be a contributor to society, rather than just being a recipient.

Ms. Cowie: In terms of the access to education, which also Niobe would speak about, especially for the deaf, that lack of access to proper education impedes employment particularly to varying degrees according to the disability. Because if you have no education, no qualification; no qualification, no employment.

And stigma is also a big part. Employers, as you know, do not want to face—are afraid of not only what they think about what they would do with a person with a disability but they are also afraid of liability issues, with regard to persons with disabilities.

Employers may also be fearful of the cost of accommodations and it has been proven by the ILO that the cost of accommodation is minimal. I think for the average person with disability maybe about US $100, which is pretty minimal in a decent-size private sector establishment and very minimal for the public service. So lack of access is a big problem.

The Government really is, I think, the one to be the driver for that and it is not that we want to rest everything on the Government. But because the Government is the largest employer and the most influential employer within the Caribbean, not just Trinidad and Tobago, I think the Government being the one, especially to lead the charge, in terms of not only employing persons with disabilities, but the awareness and the educational part as well as the legislative part of it, because we have—I think there are issues across the board, everybody has issues, with the equal opportunity legislation as it stands because it is not really fully meeting the needs of the disability community. So, I mean, all of those issues combined are what makes for lack of access to employment and, you

know, one possible suggestion also is supported employment.
3.10 p.m.

For example, in the case, I can use particularly in my case, but also in all disabilities, that you have supported employment environments where you have vocational training alongside whatever support services that may be needed, in order—and vocational rehabilitation, in order for persons with disabilities to then, either access employment on open the market, along with the incentives that would be provided to the open market, but also access in supported environments for certain levels of disability in workshops, for certain levels of disability. It might be, for example, the OJT Programme might be appropriate as a measure in terms of vocational training, but there are a wide range of solutions that can be employed, but the first lack of access besides transport, has to be the attitudinal barriers towards employing persons with disabilities.

Ms. Alves: I just want to add that job coaching is a new field, and it certainly helps. Works through the sheltered workshops for persons who have severe intellectual disabilities, they can contribute to the private sector, or even to the Government through their sheltered workshops. So that whole concept of supported employment, is continued with job coaching. Persons may need assistance in transitions in the workplace, help with socializing issues, and the job coach can work with them through those processes. So that is just an addition.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I would like to perhaps take you to another level, and we speak about participation, but when we talk about participation, I am interested in—perhaps with your own family. How or what challenges do you all face when looking for a partner or a spouse? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Persad: Do you really want me to answer that? [*Laughter*] Well, I could speak of my own experience. When you do it once and you get a good response, you "kinda" do it twice to feel extra nice. No, in all seriousness, [*Laughter*] I am happily married. I did not face any major challenges with my family. I am my own being, free to choose who I want to choose to get married. Right now, well, I am visually impaired. My wife has a physical disability, but we are a combined team, and love is what you make it. Life is how you live it.

Ms. Cowie: I am also happily married. I am a person with bipolar disorder. The issues that I have had are the normal everyday ups and downs of marriage, and life and everything else.

I would say it depends just as with everything else in the private sphere, it really depends on the persons involved and so on. Granted, because of the fact that there are stigma and attitudinal barriers, there are some people who will face challenges. We are not the representative sample; Bhawani and I, you know, [*Laughter*] and Niobe who is married to a deaf man—are not necessarily the representative sample.

So there are challenges, but that does not necessarily preclude you from finding a spouse, getting married, having a family life. What would preclude you from family life are the other things that impede on us. For example, employment, transport, all the other things in public access and public life that are in the environment, would definitely preclude you from or impede you from having the fullest level of family possible.

Ms. Rodrigues: Just to say, I have been married to my husband for 11 years this year. We have three children who are all hearing, and they all sign. They must sign because at home I am not paid for signing. [*Laughter*] We have the regular challenges, although I must say when I have an argument with my husband, I almost never win, because if he turns his head like this, [*Turns to her right*] conversation is over. [*Laughter*] But what Nicole says is really true, if there is an issue with all the things that will be lead up to the quality of our family life, which is employment, education, et cetera.

If there is a PTA meeting at school, my husband cannot attend in my stead. I must be there because I am the person that will receive the information. If he goes, there is no interpreter there to service him. I might have to hire somebody to go with him to the PTA meeting, and these things are not things that when a child is registering at school, that the school would notice. They would not notice until you register the child, and they want to call the parent to speak to them about something. How am I going to call this parent? How am I going to contact? Where is the interpreter who will interpret to the parent?

Again too, to speak about the issue that Mr. Bhawani raised about the grant that deaf persons get or persons with disabilities get. Persons with disabilities sometimes hold on to that to their own determent. They really are afraid sometimes to go out to get a job, because this is sure money, right? —and if they step out of the bound to get a job, they cut it like that. And it is six months and is interview and you have to beg to get the money to come back here.

There is a deaf person that I know. She has three or four children. They all had public assistance for the children. She had a grant for herself, but, of course, this money cannot mind children. She went off to get a job; all money cut. What is she going to see about her children with now? The father of the children does not pay. The disability grant is good, but Government needs to flex a little bit, in saying: "Okay, you make this certain amount of income, disability grant should be standard. Wherever, you are a person with disability this is standard." We cannot change having a disability, fine. It will not disappear. She is not going to become a hearing person overnight, and start doing what I do, interpret for persons. You keep that grant for the rest of your life. When your children come off of disability, off of the public assistance, let them go and work. We need to be a little bit more compassionate in why the person has the grant, and if they need extra income, please allow them to have extra income, and not let it be a cutthroat business, where you go out to work? Fine, that is the end of it, yes?

Mr. Persad: Just to add a—very quickly I know we are running out of time. Regarding the grant, I have suggested to various Ministers that all persons with legitimate disability claims, should be given the grant, because it costs us more to live. For example, I mean, I do not drive, so if I have to get from point A to point B, whilst I am very mobile, not everybody is. It costs me because sometimes I may not be able to do it alone, I may have to hire somebody. Generally, the cost of equipment, the cost of technology, everything is a lot higher than the average individual. The average individual can go out there if he finishes his normal day work, and as they say, run taxi or cut a lawn or whatever. But as persons with disabilities, we have more challenges when it comes to the cost of living.

Ms. Cowie: I would also like to add to that issue with the grant, a lot of people hold on to the grant because what can happen, and what often happens is, okay, you have gotten a job as a person with disability, but retaining the job is a problem, because in many cases you may face discrimination or exploitation on the job.

So you get off the grant, you go and you get the job, you retain it for six months or a year, and then you are off the job. What is your issue now? So it creates what is known as a benefit trap. Where it is better to stay on the grant and remain living below minimum wage standard, where it is sure, than to go and chance on the open employment market, where you might lose your job.

Ms. Alves: My comment was in reference to Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh's question. Very often, as it is, there are no programmes or services available for adults with intellectual disabilities. There is no alternative for them for staying at home. For those who cannot work in technical and vocational schools and have access, so that very often the burden of care and responsibility falls on parents.

There are very good early intervention programmes and should we get inclusion in mainstreaming in place, persons will be cared for up until high school level even into tertiary in terms of their education. For those persons who cannot benefit from programmes like that, who may have profound and severe disabilities, there needs to be consideration of their needs. Day programmes and services that go beyond the age of 18 that serve them, and give them an opportunity to meet friends and meet people.

Very often persons with multiple and severe disabilities are looked upon as asexual and as they should not have a partner. This is absolutely incorrect, and should they be afforded the opportunities through day programmes and programmes like that, they have the ability to come out of their homes, meet people, you know, interact and socialize which is another really important thing, to avoid the other issues that Sharda had mentioned before.

Madam Chairman: All right. Thank you. Sen. Moses?

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As stakeholders, what initiatives have you all taken on your own accord to be involved in any review of the national policy on persons with disabilities?

Mr. Persad: Okay. We understand that there is a review. We are supposed to be consulted as stakeholders. That has not been done as yet, but when the Ministry is ready, we are anxiously awaiting for that.

Madam Chairman: Well, our time has—Sen. Moses?

Mr. Moses: I just want to make a point by way follow up. So I take it that it is in a rather passive way if not called upon, you would not make any effort, so as to ensure that your point of view/position be advocated and be represented in the fullest sense?

Ms. Ramlakhan: So the current policy that is now expired closely resembles the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that we have recently ratified. Our recommendation is that the new policy—and we have made this recommendation to the Disability Affairs Unit—that the new policy closely resembles the CRPD, and does not stray too far from it. In fact, if we were to take the CRPD and adopt that as policy, we will be very happy with that approach. Because it is rights based, it is in keeping with international trend. So it will save us a lot of time in discussion and allows us to move forward a lot faster.

Madam Chairman: Well, I want to thank the representatives from the Consortium of Disability Organizations, for being with us and for sharing with us. I think we have a much amplified idea of what are the situations surrounding health, surrounding education access, and we do have some very good recommendations coming out, both in your written submission, as well as what came out today in the oral submission. So I thank you very much for sharing that with us, and we look forward to our report, where we can make recommendations that will advance the cause of persons with disabilities.

At this point we would like to suspend the meeting until 3.30 p.m., where we will meet with the representatives of the Disability Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Thank you.

3.23 p.m.: *Meeting suspended.*

3.32 p.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

REPRESENTATIVES OF MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SRVICES

Ms. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Dennis Williams	Acting Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mr. Vijay Gangapersad	Acting Chief Technical Officer
Mr. Michael Reid	Senior Research Officer
Ms. Catherine Ferreira	Research Officer I
Ms. Tessa Pascal	Research Assistant

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon again, everyone. A special good afternoon to our new panel who are with us, from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I would like to introduce myself, Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Chairman of this Joint Select Committee. I would ask the members of the Committee who are here with us to introduce themselves, beginning with the Vice-Chairman.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: If I could ask now, for the representatives from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to introduce themselves.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you all for being present with us this afternoon. Earlier in this session we would have met with representatives of the Consortium of Disability Organizations. We are meeting with you with the same objectives and these objectives of this enquiry are:

- to understand the challenges to access services faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and

Tobago,
included but not limited to facilities, transport, employment, education, primary, secondary and tertiary, health;

- to understand the challenges to access employment faced by persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago;
- to examine the current division, so the national policy on persons with disabilities;
- to determine the status of stakeholder consultation with respect to the review of the national policy on persons with disabilities;
- to determine the legislative framework required to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities; and
- to understand the fiscal framework and procedures to engage non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to partner with the public sector on persons with disability issues.

I would now like to invite Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers to give brief opening remarks.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you very much, Chair. As the lead Ministry charged with the mandate of attaining the goals and objectives of Government's social development agenda, we are very pleased as a Ministry, to have been invited to attend and to contribute to this enquiry.

Indeed it is an important one for us. It focuses on the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, ranging, of course, from employment opportunities as you said, to segregation, isolation. We heard a number of those words which are all social barriers to access for this target group.

Madam Chair, a most comprehensive combination of measures, to address the concerns of persons with disabilities, have been undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services over the past years. Primarily the establishment of the Disability Affairs Unit in 1999, and you will hear much more about this Unit, and why it was established, but certainly the intent was to serve as a coordinating agency, an agency for advocacy, for creating the linkages, for networking with the agencies that would enable that inclusion to take place.

As we dialogue in this session, you will hear much more, Chair, about the initiatives of the Unit and some of our priority projects. The NGO's which we give subventions to, in order to assist persons with disabilities, and also where we are with respect to the review of the policy on persons with disabilities, and the convention which we recently ratified in June 2015

Madam Chair, the Ministry has made considerable strides towards improving access. However, we appreciate that to comprehensively and holistically address the challenges faced by this group to access services and gainful employment, action is required by all stakeholders.

We recognize that Government will not, and cannot do it alone. We are happy that the agencies for and of persons with disabilities, were also part of this enquiry. In terms of our role and responsibility, we recognize that we have other Ministries with key responsibilities, and we continue to have that role to engage them to ensure that this target group, they are fully included into society and they are able to access those services which they need to improve and ensure a quality of life.

Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Mrs. Bailey-Sobers. I would like now to open the floor for questions from the Committee, for the members of the panel who are here with us. I would like to begin by asking a question.

There was mention of the number of groups that get subventions from the Ministry, to assist with their mandates and to assist with helping persons living with disabilities. A number of the groups have—or there has been some sentiment with respect to the governance of these groups, the use of the funds and that type of question has been coming up;

So what want I want ask is this, what support is available from the Ministry, the Disabilities Affairs Unit, for the groups to whom subventions are given? And what measures are taken to ensure that the subventions that are given to them, are used for the greater good of their constituency, that group that they are supposed to serve?

3.40 p.m.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair. In the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services we do have a unit called the NGO unit, which has the responsibility for the grant of the subventions which is the administration and also the monitoring of the subventions that are granted. So that responsibility is not in the remit of the Disability Affairs Unit. That unit, the NGO unit, is staffed with persons who will actually go out to the NGOs and examine their books and so on, and ensure that the funding that is provided by the Ministry is actually spent on what it is supposed to have been spent on. We also have the audit role. We have an internal audit function and an auditor who also—as part of their work plan in the division—would go out to the NGOs on a quarterly basis and review their books to ensure that the proper recording and accounting are in place.

Madam Chairman: Just a quick follow-up. Are the auditors up to date with the groups?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: The NGO unit, I would say they are up to date, because the way that the subventions are processed, they are actually granted elements of the subvention every quarter, on a quarterly basis, and in order to receive the funding for each quarter, they must send in certain documentation that will highlight what the previous quarter allocation would have been spent on and what they plan to spend the next allocation on. So that unit would be more up to date than the auditors, which would usually do—because of the number of subventions that we give from the Ministry, they will usually allocate certain organizations, probably one organization would be reviewed by the auditor once for the fiscal or probably twice, because of the number of organizations and the resources in the audit division.

Mr. Samuel: For me to understand the task that the Ministry has ahead of it and has been facing for the years gone-by, can the Ministry enlighten me or the Committee as to the categories of people living with disabilities that access the services of the Ministry? If they are categorized, I would love to hear a list of the categories—people who are impaired, visually, hearing or whatever—and what is the quantity of people accessing the services of the Ministry and the budget allocations, if it is sufficient from that standpoint.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you. I will begin by indicating that through the subventions we would actually provide for some of those categories of persons with disabilities through their organizations. However, we also provide services, again, through DRETCHI for the persons who are hearing impaired, for example, and then we have the disability assistance grant, the special child grant.

Recently, that is at the end of the last fiscal, we would have had, through the URP Social, a grant for parents with children with cerebral palsy, but that has gone over to the Ministry of Works and Transport. Those are primarily the persons who we would provide grants to from the Ministry. We also have the CTO here who was previously, in recent time, responsible for the Social Welfare Division, so he could give a sense of numbers and figures in terms of the special child grant, the disability grant and also some of the services that they provide in terms of equipment for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Gangapersad: Thank you. Good afternoon, again. I would start off firstly with the disability assistance grant. As of last fiscal, end of last fiscal, we had 24,111 persons receiving the Disability Assistance Grant. The expenditure as at the end of last fiscal was $535,729,187. We also have the Special Child Grant. Currently, we have 1,078 children receiving the Special Child Grant under the Public Assistance Programme.

Between fiscal 2011 to 2015 and, more so 2015, there is a programme where we give assistive devices. These are like walkers, special beds and equipment like that, 418 persons got it in 2015. We gave out 419 wheelchairs in 2015, 40 walkers, 40 canes. We outfitted 25 persons with prosthetic. Persons also access dietary grants and also pharmaceuticals.

The quantum as it relates to the special child is $1,150, and that I indicated before was 1,078 persons. For persons who are forced to stay home and take care of a special child, a single parent, they are also included in the

grant. Those figures I do not have right now, but they are also provided with assistance under the Public Assistance Programme.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: If I may just add, we also provide a service through the National Social Development Programme where we will redesign a home if there is person with a disability in that home so that person would be able to have greater accessibility, but I do not have the figures in terms of how many of those homes were redesigned over the past two or three years.

Mr. Samuel: My question is based on—I am not too sure I should be asking you this or the Ministry of Health, but I think it falls within your ambit because you are responsible for grants on that standpoint. Quite a number of children are born prematurely in the country. I am not too sure of the figures, but I understand it is quite a bit. There seems to be no mechanism in place for assessment of those children at that age to be able to detect abnormalities in their growth. If they are detected early then solutions can be found quickly and the cost down the road can be alleviated. I can tell you that because I have a grandson that was born prematurely, but he lives abroad and the mechanism abroad was fantastic, because the fact that he was born prematurely, early o'clock they sent therapist at the house and people to check the child on a weekly basis and to see if they could pick up any abnormalities, and then he was sent to a special school that dealt with children that were born prematurely to ensure that the development process is there. Has the Ministry been looking into such avenues and such areas working in tandem with the Ministry of Health? Are there any plans of such nature? Because if you can detect these things at the early age it would cost us less to remedy it than if the child grows up with an abnormality, and then we have to continue the process of grants and stuff like that down the road.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I will ask Mr. Reid who was previously acting as the head of the Disability Affairs Unit to respond. Mr. Reid.

Mr. Reid: Good afternoon again. I am not aware that we have actually engaged the Ministry of Health to treat with that issue. However, I do see the need for early diagnosis whether it is the remit of this Ministry, certainly the dialogue could take place between the Ministries to bring that about. But there is value in early detection so that any remedial measures could be put in place to avoid whatever disability that is being more debilitating later on in life. So to answer your question, I do not recall us ever having that conversation with the Ministry of Health.

Madam Chairman: If I may ask on this same issue of consultation and the same issue of links, former links: is there a formal channel of communication between the Disability Affairs Unit and say the Ministry of Education that looks at how the disabled, the persons or children with disabilities are dealt with in the education system? Is there a formal link? If this is the unit that deals with ensuring that the principles of the convention and so on are held to, what types of formal links are there with that very important stakeholder which would be the Ministry of Education?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, to answer that, the mechanisms we have in place right now include two committees: one committee which monitors the implementation of the policy and persons with disabilities, and one committee which is looking into the convention which we just ratified, and the implementation of that convention. We have representatives from the key stakeholder agencies—education, health—on those committees and that is how the information is brought to bear on the Disability Affairs Unit and their work.

Miss Budhu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, gaining employment seems to be a major problem for persons with disabilities. Has the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services ever considered an employment database for people with disabilities so that they could advertise their capabilities and competencies so that employers can now select persons for the job?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thanks for that question. I am aware that we link with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. We do not have a database of our own, but we do link and we have had discussions with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development with respect to their employment exchange and providing information for us, but I do not think we have followed up with it, because in trying to get information for this enquiry we were not able to get a sense of how many persons are employed in the public service, you know, or even in the private sector who have a disability.

Miss Budhu: Another question is that, has there been any sensitization and training of employers, whether private and public, by the Ministry for the employment of disabled employees so that that barrier can somewhat break.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Mr. Williams, you want to probably respond to that in terms of your—

Mr. Williams: Good afternoon, Committee. The PS referred a while ago to a committee to implement the UN Convention. As part of the work of that committee, we have proposed to do sensitization with all of the Ministries and agencies, and this sensitization would involve issues related to what the member has raised.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: When addressing disabilities the first thing we really have to look at is really a definition—a quantification or prioritization of it—and before we can do that we have to identify what it is before we can find solutions and before we could allocate resources. So my question is: do we as a person or do we as people understand disabilities through its definition, and to perhaps the national level what do we mean by disabilities with respect to prioritization?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I would commence the response, but I would ask some of the other members. I am aware that in our policy we do have a definition, and since we have also ratified the convention there is also in the convention the delineation of the different types of disabilities. So since we have ratified we would have embraced and adopted those designations, the definitions of disability, yes. But I would also ask, we have Tessa here who would have done a lot of work too in the disability unit and who would also probably be able to give some sense of that definition and any other member here with us who might be able to give some light on that.

Ms. Pascal: Good afternoon, again. In terms of the definition for "disability", one of the issues we are having with that is a definition needs to be broad enough to encompass both disabilities that you are able to see, such as physical, visual, hearing versus those that you are unable to see, such as mental, developmental, behavioural, emotional and so forth.

Our best definition so far is—and it is an evolving definition because disability is an evolving field and it will continue to evolve—the definition that we put together for the legislative policy document we would have done for the AG office, and that definition would have encompassed all those aforementioned disabilities. It would also have defined temporary versus long-term disabilities, because some disabilities such as a broken leg, a broken ankle, even in terms of mental illness they are sometimes temporary. You may cope with it for your entire life, but the effects are temporary and, therefore, the accommodations may need to be temporary and, therefore, we did a broad-based definition for the legislative policy in which we combined the national policy definition along with the UNCRPD, the Convention's definition and the WHO, the World Health Organization, their definitions for disability to encompass all aspects of disabilities.

Mr. Reid: If I may add, trying to pin a definition for disability is very difficult. I think the definition depends on the context. Sometimes you need to be broad with the definition, and then there are other times that you need to be a little more narrow. It is a challenge not only for us in Trinidad and Tobago, but even the UN system, there is not a universal definition that you could pick up and use. So it depends on the context. For example, if you are using it for grants, it may be different from if you are using it for say access. So it depends on the context in a lot of instances.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I asked a question to a previous group, and I would repeat that question because I realize it was not totally answered. I see here where your Ministry has a continuing relationship with the Public Transport Service Corporation, but I know that a problem exists especially with children, the transportation of children to these schools where the PTSC is refusing to take their children, pick up those children in the absence of a guide, or we call it a marshal. Can you say if you are aware of that situation and what could be done to solve the problems existing there?

I can say as recent as last week I had communication with the Public Transport Service Corporation trying to address that situation, and they said that the bus must have a marshal to pick up those children to and from school. So I see you have a relationship with the PTSC. Can your agency look into this situation?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We are not aware, but we could look into it. We have a relationship because we do have the ELDAMO buses, and we know that it provides a very valuable service for persons with disabilities, but I think that is primarily the adults. So we would have to look into the issues with the children. Usually the children are at facilities where they have their own transport. So I guess we would need to really look into this and see how the Ministry could assist. We are not aware.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to ask a follow-up question. Your Ministry sees about policy and principles and policy direction. How broad is your consultation group? Do you include persons from the Consortium?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: As far as I am aware, we always include the organizations of and for persons with disabilities in all our policy development since we have been given the remit for disability in this Ministry. I am aware we always bring them in for consultation, but I could also ask Mr. Williams to speak, because he has been on most of these committees where we have had these organizations contributing.

Mr. Williams: So the short answer is yes, Committee, that we have always consulted with the stakeholders and, in fact, the chair of the Consortium is a member of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Well, in this instance, maybe I could ask a question and it deals more broadly with advocacy, because there obviously is a problem in some areas. For example, we were told by the Consortium, just earlier, that with respect to the transportation there views may not have been elicited when the type of bus that was brought in, that decision was taken. So I have a broader question. Is your agency involved in advocacy for the persons with disabilities? Do you, as a matter of course, if there is an issue, for example, there are also issues with the governance of the groups—even though there is the NGO unit and there is the audit and so on—there is a problem with governance in some of these groups, and to whom do they turn? To whom do they report these problems? If there are other agencies that are doing things for persons with disabilities, are you the agency that would be the advocate that would coordinate and so that you would move as a mediator between the persons with disabilities and their needs and whoever is trying to do things for them. Is that one of the functions you serve?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes, Chair, this is one of the responsibilities of the Ministry in terms of advocacy, and there are a number of issues where the Ministry has had to serve as mediator with some of these organizations. Sometimes we have had success and sometimes because these agencies are autonomous agencies also, there is so much that we could do in terms of mediating and the final decisions really remain with the organizations. In terms of governance though, once they are getting a subvention, we do have a contract with these organizations and, therefore, we could go in and ensure that whatever funding we provide—because many of these organizations they also have other funding that they get—we ensure that the funding that we provide that it is managed and it is monitored.

I could also ask other members to speak to the advocacy issue and the sensitization and education. In terms of the issue with the transport, sometimes we also have issues in terms of what the Ministry is proposing and what the community may want. There may be issues too of cost and therein lies some decisions that might be taken that may not be in keeping with what would have been proposed by the agencies.

Mr. Reid: I would just like to say something about the Eldamo service. There was a committee, a stakeholder committee, that developed the proposal for the buses and on that committee were persons with disabilities. It may not have been the Consortium of Disability Organizations, but there was a disability representative on the committee. However, the purchase of the buses was not done in consultation with the committee or with the disability communities. So there was consultation in the form of the committee, but it was not the Consortium of Disability Organizations on that committee.

Mr. Moses: Thank you, Chair. Have you all taken any initiatives or extended invitations to local stakeholders as opposed to international organizations in any possible review of the national policy, reviewing the national policy on persons with disabilities?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We have not started the consultations as yet. We plan to do so in probably the next month or so. However, we have also, as we listened, heard the Consortium indicate that they are happy to embrace the convention as the policy, and we are willing to look at that consideration to see whether it is something that we could adopt, because as was mentioned it would take much less time, and it is also a standing policy. So we are thinking that we will go back and reconsider this proposition to see whether it is something feasible and practical for us to accept.

Mr. Moses: So to the extent that international organizations might have had consultations with the Ministry that would have been a response, a proactive approach on the part of such organizations and they would have made the approach to the Ministry. Am I correct?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We have had some consultations with international agencies, but primarily on particular projects. So if we are developing, for example, the new centre at Carlsen Field, we would have had some discussions with an international agency which manages a facility like that one in terms of how we should move with the project, and how we should actually design it and so on. In the past, we have had those kinds of discussions with particular projects.

Madam Chairman: A question about data. As an institution and as a Ministry that deals with policies and so on, you must gather data on different things. Could I ask what type of data with respect to persons with disabilities is gathered and to what use is that put and what type of analysis is done within the Ministry using that data that is fed into your policy formation?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I would ask the members from the unit and Mr. Reid who is also part of our social investigations division, which collects data in the Ministry, to respond to that question.

Mr. Reid: In terms of data collection, primary data collection, the unit, as far as I could recall, has not embarked on primary data collection. There was an attempt to establish a disability registry which would have given a better idea of the number of persons with disabilities, and the various types of disabilities, where they live and their need for services and so on. I cannot speak to where that project has reached. However, we rely heavily on the data from CSO in the National Housing and Population Census to inform decisions when it comes to persons with disabilities.

Ms. Ferreira: Yes, I could tell you the status of that project. We are at present, the registry project, the unit is at present meeting with other units and stakeholders within the Ministry to try and have it restarted. It was started about two years ago, but the method we are going to use would be a new method, and we will be able to gather information on types, location of the person with disabilities and the services that they require.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: If I may, Chair, I just need to also say that I know with this particular project the registry that the community of persons with disabilities, there are some differing views in terms of this project and whether it is something that should be done. So we have had that discourse over the years in terms of, you know, those that really believe there should be a registry and those that believe that there really should not be one, and if there is one how it should be managed. So I think that has sort of stymied the project over the years too in terms of that determination.

4.10 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Samuel.

Mr. Samuel: My question is directed to Mr. Reid. Mr. Reid, you said that there were consultations with regard to the standards and the type of buses that should have been brought into the country at the time it was being brought in, but that the buses that were brought in were not to the specified request of the people that were living with disability or the Consortium. And I want to know, why have consultations and then not adhere to the request of the people who are to use the facilities? It is a waste of time. If we are just going to do what we want to do, why have consultations? And if that is the case, what would happen in the future to avoid the same situations happening? Because we have had the people from the Consortium here and they spoke tremendously about the type of vehicles that were brought in and that what they requested and suggested were not adhered to. Why are we giving people

what we feel they should get as opposed to what they requested? I am much disturbed by that, and I do not believe we should ever have consultations and then just give people what we feel they should get. So what are we going to do to make sure it does not happen again?

Mr. Reid: Mr. Samuel, I agree with you 100 per cent. The committee would not have given technical specifications, that was the remit of PTSC, and the procuring of the buses was the responsibility of PTSC. In terms of the actual process of acquiring the buses, I am not aware of the process that was used. We know that we had meetings, we would have discussed what the programme would require, but the buses, a team would have gone to view the buses that did not involve members of the committee. So there was a disconnect in terms of what the committee would have recommended and what was actually acquired, and I do not know if anybody here has ever travelled in one of those buses; I have, and it is not a nice ride.

Mr. Samuel: It is a mess.

Mr. Reid: It is a very rough ride, and I have seen persons in wheelchair twisting on their seats to adjust for the rough ride. But I had listened a bit to what the Consortium had said earlier and I agree that—and I think PTSC would agree too that in going forward what is required more is universal access to buses, so that the buses, the fleet that PTSC acquires in the future should all be wheelchair accessible so that persons with disabilities could stay at the side of the road at a bus stop and get onto a bus like anybody else. There is a need for special services like ELDAMO, however, for a majority of persons with disabilities they are able to stand at the side of the road in their wheelchair and get on to buses.

Mr. Samuel: I will make a statement on that, ask another question, then you are saying to me and to all of us here that while you attempted to offer a service for the people living with disability you offered a disservice for the people because of the types of buses. What I can tell you about the ride, it is terrible. So it means that in the future how are we to alleviate the issue and not have the same problem reoccur? Is the Ministry intending to put its foot down to ensure—because they will not blame PTSC, they would blame the Ministry—that put its foot down and say, look, these are the kind of stuff that is necessary, these are the standards that are requested and required, and that you must find some kind of collaboration with both the Ministry and the Consortium, as well as PTSC, to ensure that a disservice is not offered in the future. What is the plan?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: If I could answer, because we continue to collaborate on issues, and I think what is very clear is that there is the sign-off, because I think we could have discussions and people go away with the understanding but there are no written agreements in terms of what has been agreed on by both parties, and I think this is where we may miss it sometimes, and where we have agreed that moving forward we must have these written agreements. This is what we have both agreed on in terms of how this facility should be built, what are the specifications for the equipment, or the buses, whatever it is, that everybody has signed off in terms of this is what we agree on. I think that is the missing link.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Raffoul.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you, Chair, I have a few questions, first, from a fiscal perspective, what is the total budget of the Ministry? I know it changes year to year, but on average for the last few years what is the general budget of the Ministry?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Well, because we have the senior citizens grant, and those types of services in our Ministry, it is usually in the billions. So I think, generally, it is about $10 billion or more that the Ministry, its budget would be in terms of both the development programme and the recurrent expenditure.

Miss Raffoul: And a follow-up question, out of that total approximately $10 billion, how much goes into grants?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: It will most likely be 90 per cent, or so, yes.

Miss Raffoul: And those are grants to individuals or to NGOs?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: This is the all-round grants, both to individuals and NGOs, about 90 per cent. If you are also looking at the expenditure for salaries, and so on, that may take up quite a bit, so together with both of them it might be about 90 per cent, but grants alone might be half of that, so about 50, 45 per cent.

Miss Raffoul: I am not sure if I understand, 50 per cent of the total $10 billion would be grants and the other 40 per cent of the 90 per cent would be salaries?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Okay, 90 per cent will be recurrent expenditure which would include grants and salaries, and so on, so of that 90 per cent probably half will be the grants of the Ministry.

Miss Raffoul: And the other 10 per cent would be capital expenditure? Okay. Regarding funding to NGOs, the document that you all submitted said that 11 NGOs were listed for receiving funds from the Ministry, but then the follow-up question—this is on page 16 of the document—the follow-up question only listed six with the actual values that they were granted year to year, so what about the other five NGOs?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes, there was a disparity because there were some NGOs that their period for receiving a subvention would have ended and was up for review, so that would have been the disparity. So right now we have about eight NGOs, I believe, that are receiving, and there are three whose subventions are under review.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. This list on page 16 only has six of them so the other two that are missing are?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: You just have six, so I have here, I am not sure which ones are the ones missing, but it would be organizations such as—well you have Cheshire, you have Goodwill, so it would probably be Autism Services of Trinidad and Tobago, International Institute for Healthcare and Human Development, and PAVI, the Persons Associated With Visual Impairment.

Miss Raffoul: Those three are listed, so the ones that are missing, those are what I was asking.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: All right, so I have here Touch of Christ, Torres Foundation, Grace Community, Sunrise Mission, Deaf Empowerment. Now some of these organizations may be given subventions but not by our Ministry. It could be the Ministry of Education or another Ministry.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. So they were listed because they had to do with disabilities but not through your Ministry directly?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Right. So we wanted to give a sense of subventions to all NGOs that provide services with disabilities beyond our Ministry also.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. And those are probably funded through which Ministry?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Education and Health.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. And if one wanted to find out the values of how much they had received, how does one do so?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: You mean those others or the ones that we give?

Miss Raffoul: The ones that were not listed in the section.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Were not listed, I am not sure. I do not think I have the information here, but we do have it in one of our documents, the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, but we do not have it with us to give you that information, sorry.

Miss Raffoul: What feedback would you give for the impact and the effectiveness of the NGOs that are carrying out work within the disability field? Would you say that they are working collaboratively with the Ministry and are being impactful, there are measured results, they are achieving their objectives?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We will say that they are doing well, but in terms of the data to indicate because it would mean that we would have indicators, and so on, to be able to evaluate. However, through the NGO unit, that is the only way we monitor, which is really an output monitoring rather than an impact evaluation of what they do. So that more comprehensive type of evaluation and assessment, we have not reached to that place with the organizations.

Miss Raffoul: Are there plans to do so?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We do have plans across the board with all our programmes to do the evaluation, however, we do have a resource constraint. We have an M&E Division in the Ministry but it is just resourced by one person right now because there is a dearth of M&E, really qualified M&E persons across the sector, and you will find that in the Ministries you just have a few of them. But we are working at the macro level to address that in terms of getting training from external agencies, bringing in that training, and collaborating with UWI to have a programme of M&E at that level.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. I also have a question about the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, I understand it is currently being reviewed but the timeline, it has been taking longer than anticipated. Is there any reason for that?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I indicated that we had not started the review as yet, we are doing it internally first in terms of our divisions and looking at what needs to be done in coming up with a plan, but I also mentioned that having heard from the Consortium a while ago that they are happy to embrace the convention as the existing policy because we have ratified it, that as a Ministry we are willing to go back and look at that proposal and determine whether it is an approach we could agree on.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. What is the anticipated timeline for completion?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Once we review this proposal, I would imagine within the next three weeks or so we could make a determination on whether we would want to go that way.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: If I can just ask, drawing on what you said just now that you heard a particular point of view being put across just now and so it impacts what you would do, so this brings me to ask, is there—I know that there was mention of two committees, and that there is representation from persons with disabilities on those committees. Is it your view that there is adequate collaboration between the Disability Affairs Unit and the organizations which deal with persons with disabilities? And is it adequate? Is it robust? And that is where it ties in also to the whole issue of advocacy. Is this unit a unit to which those organizations can turn if there is a problem with governance within the organizations, if there is a problem that they need to get across that will impact the actions? Because they have given, the Consortium has given us some recommendations that could be quick wins, and I would like to know, are those things that are being taken into consideration, not only from the Consortium but there may be other suggestions by other disability organizations, is there a forum for those things to be captured and acted upon? Is there enough collaboration, in your view, between this unit and the disability organizations that exist in the country?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Madam Chair, I believe there is collaboration. In terms of how effective the collaboration is, I would not be able to say in terms of a measure, but I am aware that the disability unit collaborates with these organizations. I am aware that they come to the unit if they want particular activities to be undertaken. If they have issues they would go to the NGO unit, which is a more recently established unit, and because they get their subvention from there, I think they will go to the NGO unit. But I think they remain committed to bringing their issues to the Disability Affairs Unit, and probably someone from the Disability Affairs Unit could speak to this.

Ms. Ferreira: Advocacy is one of the functions of the unit. I have been at the unit for three months and within that time, I would have said, I have met with at least eight organizations of and for persons with disabilities. The members come in and if they have any problems we discuss it. Sometimes they even bring proposals to the unit that they would like, you know, that would assist the community, or it would assist their organizations, themselves. So there is collaboration and there is work being done, and in the future the unit intends to visit all of the organizations

of and for persons with disabilities.

Madam Chairman: I am not sure if Ms. Pascal wants to contribute.

Ms. Pascal: The Disability Affairs Unit tends to collaborate with the community regularly because we do not make a move without the community, even before the ratification of the convention because of one of the general principles is the anatomy of decision-making in that persons with disability need to have a say in what takes place in their lives, and the decisions that are made for and on their behalf we always tend to collaborate with everything we do with the community. We always consult, whether it is actually a formal consultation or phone calls to all the organizations, or emails, we always consult with them and get their feedback before we make a decision, before we move forward on anything.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Samuel.

Mr. Samuel: I am quite disturbed by the fact that it is because of our sitting today that we are hearing that the Ministry is now willing to look into the policy situation, as being suggested by the Consortium, to accept it. I am quite disturbed about that. It tells me that the collaboration is not the way it should be.

Secondly, with regard to the Disability Affairs Unit, what is the mandate of the Disability Affairs Unit? What is the strength of the unit, the capacity of the unit, and what is the quality of the unit? Can the people of the Consortium and the organizations that utilize the unit depend on the unit for the kind of support? Can they readily say that things are getting better? Or is it just a unit that they access for funds and grants, and whatever? What are the plans of the unit? How do you assess the performance of the unit from year to year to ensure and to see if things are getting better, not from the unit's standpoint but from the people who are accessing it standpoint? Because we can say we are doing a better job but the people who are accessing it are not saying that. What mechanism of assessment is being done on an annual basis to determine the effectiveness of the unit? And who is saying that? What is the strength of the unit, the capacity of the unit, the quality of the unit? I would love to find that out.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Sure. Just for clarification, I indicated that the Ministry is willing to consider the recommendation that I heard as I sat here, from the Consortium. Now I heard it here, I am not privy to what goes on at the level of the committee that is looking at the review of the policy or the implementation of the convention. Probably it came up there and they have discussed it but I am saying that I am hearing it now. So probably they made that recommendation and it would have come up to me at some point, but I heard it readily here. And I am saying, you know, in terms of the value that we could have in speeding up the process, I think it is a recommendation that we need to give consideration to. So it may have been coming to me, but I heard it readily, and I am saying that is something I think we could quickly consider, just for clarification.

In terms of the quality of the Disability Affairs Unit, we have some resource issues in terms of we do not have a head of the unit right now. We have not had a head for a little while. We did not have some key personnel that had been recommended for the unit for some time, so that would have inhibited what the unit could have done and how the unit would have performed in terms of how we look at what the unit does. As I indicated, most of what we do are output measured in terms of how much money goes into it and what comes out. At the end of every year we do achievement reports. We do have work plans that we work with every year, each unit would come up with their work plan in terms of what they expect to do for the fiscal year, and that is how we measure in terms of all the divisions of the Ministry. When we had an M&E Division, however, we would have evaluations done of divisions and of programmes, and it was a little more robust then, but, as I said, we do not have the M&E unit again so we have not had assessments of programmes or divisions for a number of years; we are working towards rectifying that.

Mr. Samuel: So it means that reviewing policy, policies are being reviewed void of any mechanisms or assessing the operations. It means that anything that you are going to do now you have no mechanism of determining if it is going to work because you have not been assessing, you have no M&E department, there is no monitoring and evaluation of anything, what guides you to bring about change?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: It is not that we are not doing any M&Es, it is not as robust as it should be. This is what I indicated, because in some divisions, for example, how they would monitor in the absence of the M&E they will ensure that the programming at the beginning it is done so that the indicators are there and some kind of monitoring

could be done, but in programmes which have already started a few years aback where we probably did not do the logical framework as we should, the indicators are not there and then we would just do the output base kind of assessment. But in recent times the programmes that we are doing, we are ensuring that the logical framework is there, and while we do not have the M&E unit there are some indicators that either the Social Investigations Division or the M&E person resident in the division could do some kind of, not major but a bit of assessment as to how the programme is doing. So it is not as robust as it should be, I am saying, but there is some monitoring that is being done in some of the programmes in some of the divisions, but not pervasive.

Madam Chairman: Mrs. Smith.
Mrs. Jennings-Smith: During 2010 to 2015, Ombudsman received 149 complaints against NIB with respect to claims for the invalidity benefit, is your agency or is your Ministry—do you have a collaborative agreement with the Ombudsman that complaints received by that department is channeled to your Ministry for intervention, collaboration, advocacy?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes, we do have some collaboration. The way we do it is through a unit where we deal with issues, issues resolution. We have a division that is set up to deal with issues, not only for the Ministry but for other Ministries, and one of the ways that they monitor what is happening, so that they are aware of where the major issues are across the public service, is through the Ombudsman report that they would get every year. They also collaborate through the year with the Ombudsman because a lot of issues come related to the Ministry, so that is how the collaboration takes place. In terms of the issues with the NIB, Mr. Gangapersad is here and he may be able to tell you, because the Division of Social Welfare treats directly with the NIB so those issues that are related to the NIB may be connected to us too because we have some similar clients.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Can we say out of those 149 complaints how many were attended to?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I am not sure the nature of the complaints going to the NIB; you said it would have been to NIB, yes?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Yes, the Ombudsman received those complaints.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Concerning matters related to the NIB, so the NIB is not under our remit but we do have some collaboration with them, but Mr. Gangapersad may be able to give some light on this.

Mr. Gangapersad: I am not certain—NIB does not fall under the Ministry, and I am wondering here whether there is a distinction between the Disability Assistance Grant, which is the responsibility of this Ministry and the Invalidity Benefit which is NIB.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Yes, it has to do with that, yes.

Mr. Gangapersad: All right. So what we would be treating with is the Disability Assistance Grant, and maybe the report is treating with that. Yes, we receive a lot of reports from the Ombudsman office concerning persons who may be aggrieved, one way or the other with their application for disability assistance. In the past we have a very open relationship with the Ombudsman office. In fact, at least around three months ago we had a meeting with them, convened a meeting with them to discuss the whole issue of how we are going to share information, especially as it relates to resolving these issues that come before them, and we have a shared email where the matters could now be sent straight to us. They have also been visiting our offices directly throughout the country. Rather than having to come or to send a piece of correspondences they can come into our offices, treat with the matter by speaking to the relevant supervisors. These issues in terms of numbers and how much have been resolved, I would not be able to tell you the exact numbers, I can get that information to you, but a lot of these issues as they come up they have been resolved. It is not as if matters are there which have not been resolved.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Raffoul.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you, Chair. I just have a question that was similar to Sen. Samuel's, it is about the M&E unit, you said that there was a lack of resources, but going back to the numbers you provided before $10 billion is the

annual budget, approximately half of that goes into recurrent expenditure, so that is $5 billion in total. So, I could be wrong, I ask, my interpretation is that it may not be a matter of lack of resources but a lack of priority, and my personal view is not to say, well, why has it not been changed, I know things happen, but when is it going to change? When is it going to be prioritized? And when can we expect to see things better managed, especially when it comes to M&E in particular?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: When I said resources I meant the human aspect because we do have the financial, I mean, in some areas we are still not adequate, but it is the human resource to really go out there and do the M&E, and probably within the next two to three months, if I should say, we would have the M&E back on stream, because we have already proposed advertising those positions.
4.40 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Maybe in closing I can ask the team from the Ministry to tell us, along with the resuscitation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, which is admittedly very important and critical, could you give us at least two other initiatives which you are aiming to achieve, and could you tell us the time frame and tell us the importance of those initiatives and why they are your first and second priorities to ensure that the unit really lives up to its mandate?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, if I may. We certainly will be looking into resourcing the unit at least to the point of what we have as an approved structure right now to ensure that it is fully resourced. We also propose to ensure that it is resourced in terms of adequate funding as we go as prepared right now our budget.

We also propose to ensure that in terms of access we look at our Ministry facilities to ensure that it is at least 75 per cent accessible. Right now it is about 53 or 54 per cent accessible in terms of our locations.

We also commit to looking at this issue of the policy and the approval review of the policy or the acceptance of the convention as the policy, which would take us forward to begin to finalise the legislation which is also a critical project or a critical factor in providing the services that we need to provide for persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities living the life that is due to them in Trinidad and Tobago.

So I think those are the major commitments that we would make at this point.

Madam Chairman: I want to thank the persons who have appeared before us from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services on behalf of the Committee. I think we have touched on a number of very important issues, and we take your commitment to doing some of those major things very seriously, because we have at least 52,000 of our population who are depending on that. So we want to thank you and to thank the members of the listening and viewing audience and those who would have sent in their comments and questions as well on the social media. We thank you so much for your participation and we look forward to the report and the recommendations, which would help us in advancing the agenda in dealing with persons with disabilities, ensuring that they have the same rights and privileges as all of us do. So we thank you.

The meeting is now adjourned.

4.42 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*

Appendix III

Stakeholder Transportation Recommendations

Stakeholder	Transportation Recommendations
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	More working ELDAMO buses are required to adequately serve the population of persons with visual impairment. Within regular Buses, there should be assigned seating in the first two rows in the Bus for persons with visual impairment to enable them to easily enter and exit the Bus.
Squeaky Wheels	Ensure that Universal Design features including wheelchair access be included in each PTSC bus being procured in the future. Discontinue the current Eldamo service and Re- engineer the existing Eldamo service to facilitate 'First Mile, Last Mile' services. Re-engineering should take place before the service is discontinued to facilitate smooth transition and least disruption to passengers. Include NSAB in maintenance of transport facilities. Include pupils of Special School in the PTSC's School Bus Service.
T&T Association for Hearing Impaired	A care-giver/sign language interpreter is required to ensure communicate with the student/s. The bus schedule is irregular as it relates to pick up time for the student/students. Rarely are the student/s picked up at 2.00 pm (school closing time). The student/s remain on the bus until the standard bus schedule is completed and are then taken to their destinations.
T&T Blind Welfare Association	The public transport system is not reliable and also does not run on time. Certain seats on the bus should be allocated to the blind and visually impaired. Vouchers could be given to persons who are blind to be presented to other forms of transportation to assist in reducing the cost of transportation for persons who are blind and visually impaired.

Appendix IV

Stakeholder Education Recommendations

Stakeholder	Education Recommendations
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	At least one Primary and one Secondary school in each district is specifically equipped with personnel and resources to accommodate the needs of persons with visual impairment. Provision of all examinations in Braille /Large Print such as National tests and class tests thus assisting them to achieve success in all examinations. Teachers training to teach students with visual impairment. Often, students with visual impairment are not directly taught by teachers in the classroom. Student Aides provided for the students who are visually impaired where necessary, thereby facilitating students who are unable to access blackboard notes in classes, assignments and tactile diagrams. Access to Low Vision Aids and other devices, to assist them in accessing print and other materials. Students to receive sufficient time to do examinations; currently 25 percent of extra time is given. It is recommended based on international standards up to 100% extra time is given, based on the proficiency and speed of the reader. Students are only allowed to use the computer to do CXC, CAPE and Tertiary examinations. It is recommended that students be allowed to use the computer to do all National Examinations, such as (SEA). Currently, there is no braille unit set up by the Ministry of Education. It has been dysfunctional and the braille embosser has been down since 2007. The unit alternatively provided books on CD however, this service is slow and one can wait 6-8 months for materials. Also, due to the lack of appropriate and working scanners and computers with JAWS software staff was unable to provide adequate service. Provisions should be made for students who have lost vision during the school years; the child should not be removed from the school. Rehabilitation services such as braille and mobility should be provided by the school curriculum as stipulated by the guidelines. It is recommended that Special Education teachers trained in working with persons who are visually impaired, should be assigned to work with the student.
Squeaky Wheels	Do a manpower assessment for our population size. Determine the jobs and positions necessary in the Disability Sector. Eg. Sign Language Interpreters, Access Auditors, Occupational, Speech Language, Physio Therapists, Anthropometrists. Issue Scholarships for such programs

	Do career guidance seminars targeting secondary school students on the disability sector. Ensure all Education Institutions, public and private, Tertiary, Secondary, Primary, Vocational are equipped with a Student Support Unit and a Disability Policy aligned to a National Action Plan.
T&T Association for Retarded Children	Early Intervention evaluation of children–The need for an efficient Student Support Service. Appointment of New position of Teacher Aide in Classroom. A Behavioral Psychiatrist, Education Psychiatrist, and Speech and Occupational Therapist need to be attached to District and Special Schools. INCLUSION –"Inclusive education of disabled and non-disabled children and young people learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities, with appropriate networks of support."
T&T Association for Hearing Impaired	The use of sign language in education is supported by article 24, paragraph 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that countries should "[ensure] that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Blind or Deaf Blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development." Appropriate educational placement for a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child
T&T Blind Welfare Association	Visually impaired students in the regular school system are finding it difficult to attend classes because the Ministry of Education is not providing student aids for the classroom. Students who are blind and visually impaired should be provided with accessible text books. That is Braille, large print and digital format so that their text to speech software would be able to convert the text on their computer to synthesize speech. Students should be provided with brailers that could present both brail and print at the same time. This could also be used when students are writing exams. Teachers should be trained properly on modern day techniques on how to teach children who are blind and visually impaired.(Page 15)
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	Hard and Soft accommodation for PWDs should be instituted in schools to ensure that PWDs are not barred access from education. These include assistive technologies, trained teachers, teaching assistants in classrooms with PWDs and other personnel who contribute to a more inclusive learning environment.

	Accessibility to school facilities, such as the classrooms, laboratories and bathrooms should be addressed. New schools should be built in accordance with universal design principles. Older school buildings should be renovated to ensure access. NGOs, particularly schools which address the needs of children with disabilities should be consulted as they are experienced in understanding the requirements of educating PWDs. Collaboration/partnerships between Public, Private, civil society and international organizations should be fostered to source funding for the assistive technologies and Investment into research and development on disability rights in Trinidad and Tobago.

Appendix V

Stakeholder Facilities Recommendations

Stakeholder	Facilities (Infrastructural Access) Recommendations
Consortium of Disability Organisations	Sensitizing and training our population on the "Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the CRDP will be an extremely important part of this exercise.
Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago	Parents or caregivers of children and young people with autism should be entitled to one or more benefits such as Caregiver"s Allowance, Housing and Tax Benefits, and Income Support. A plan should be in place within all communities to assist families who have a child/adult with a disability.
Squeaky Wheels	Use of tax incentives as a mechanism to have private sector building owners comply with National Standard for Accessible Buildings.
T&T Blind Welfare Association	Law required to compel all sectors in the community to ensure that all new buildings meet the national building code and international standards to accommodate persons with a disability.
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	Data on the accessibility of both public and commercial buildings, as well as the transportation system should be collected and analysed. This analysis would inform public policy if it is determined that access to facilities and transport services impede PWDs from joining the labour force.

Appendix VI

Stakeholder Health Recommendations

Stakeholder	Health Recommendations
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	Visual Eligibility is a requirement and is determined by a diagnostic eye examination. Many of our clients have seen vision specialists, privately or in health clinics and hospitals, including low vision clinics. However, very few have received any written reports and attempts to get these from any source is very problematic. Adjustment to Blindness benefits are of paramount importance to persons who are visually impaired as well as individuals with progressive or permanent vision loss to prepare them with the necessary skills to adjust to vision loss. A referral system through the clinics and hospitals. Many students attend the school for Blind Children for years but are asked repeatedly for proof of blindness and visual impairment by other Government departments and schools. An identification system or statement of legal blindness (if vision loss is deemed severe or permanent) is necessary to prevent this, as many clients cannot afford the high cost of specialist visits and are unable to get this from clinics and hospitals. Subsidies or grants for diagnostic tests are necessary, especially for children in lower primary classes, and older unemployed persons, who are often referred to PAVI where functional vision assessments are conducted, however these cannot always determine diagnosis, which helps in planning and implementing a rehabilitation plan. Cost of medication is extremely expensive for individuals whose only source of income is a Disability Grant. Many go blind due to lack of sight saving medication. Insufficient medication in stock at health care facilities.
T&T Association for Retarded Children	More professionals /specialists needed in the health care system. This will also reduce the long waiting time.
T&T Blind Welfare Association	Implement programs to reduce the cataract waiting list to no more than 3 months. There should also be regular testing for glaucoma and diabetes.
Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago	Medical personnel must be sensitized to persons with autism while they are being trained as students.

Appendix VII

Stakeholder Recommendations on Other Services

Stakeholder	Other Services - Recommendations
Consortium of Disability Organisations	Collecting information on knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about disability can help identify gaps in public understanding that can be bridged through education and public information. Governments, voluntary organizations, and professional associations should consider running social marketing campaigns that change attitudes on stigmatized issues such as HIV, mental illness, and leprosy. Involving the media is vital to the success of these campaigns and to ensuring the dissemination of positive stories about persons with disabilities and their families. Disability Etiquette is essential for all Government offices and also the Protective Services. Need to promote education and training on the CRPD.
Ombudsman	Access to information not available in format, for example sign language or braille. Absence of embedded identifiable features in paper dollar bills to conduct financial transactions independently.
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	PAVI recommends that Awareness and Sensitization programmes to be conducted in Government agencies. Such training programmes will include sessions in "People First Language", understanding blindness and levels of blindness as well as low vision, training in "Sighted Guide" and staff training in Government agencies at a National Level to facilitate the interaction with employees and persons with disabilities. PAVI recommended revision of the eligibility requirements for persons with disabilities to receive the TT Card. This is due to the fact that if a person with a disability is living in a household where members are earning a combined income of more than $6,000.00, that person will not be eligible to receive the TT Card. However, in most cases the person with a disability is not directly benefiting from the income in the household. TT Card should be distributed based on the individual status of the person with a disability. PAVI recommends the eligibility requirements to receive the Disability Grant be reviewed, this is due to the fact that an individual will no longer be eligible to receive the Grant if his/her total combined income exceeds one thousand dollars on a monthly basis. It is recommended that the distribution of the Disability Grant should be based on a Means Test, to enable persons with visual impairment the opportunity to lead meaningful lives.
Squeaky Wheels	Awareness and Sensitization training is necessary to understand persons of all abilities as both clients and employees in government offices.
	Training in the use of Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language and an introduction to DHH culture are essential.
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	Staff at government offices to understand and accommodate differently abled persons, sensitization workshops would be most useful.

	Materials in braille also need to be provided and when presentations are being made, provisions should be made for sign language interpreters.

Appendix VIII

Stakeholder Employment Recommendations

Stakeholder	Employment Recommendations
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	There should be an employment database of PWDs, advertising their capacities and competencies so that employers can select persons for jobs. Publishing job vacancies in an accessible format. Sensitising other workers and employers on the rights of PWDs. Advocating disability management strategies. Improving accessibility to workplace. An active Equal Opportunity Commission. Private companies receive Tax incentives for hiring PWDs. Government to employ % as they are the largest employer. Continue to provide scholarships for PWDs every year. Increase the disability award scholarship amount. The Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development should work with the social partners (employers' and workers' representatives) to encourage the organizations break the barriers to employment of persons with disabilities through the following ways: *Employer's representatives:* Advocate for promotion of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities Provide information and advisory services to employers Work in cooperation with competent authorities *Worker's Representatives:* Promote policies of equal opportunities Advocate for employment and training opportunities Actively represent the interest of persons with disabilities Support self-employment policies for persons with disabilities Sensitize & train members on disability issues (increase employers' awareness, work with other interest groups & promote disability management). *Competent authorities:* Advocate for disability management strategies Periodically review employment regulations Set criteria for reasonable accommodation Participate in awareness raising Monitor and evaluate effectiveness of incentives Consider measures to promote employment & self-employment

	Strategy for Job retention: Support and advisory services Adjustment, workplace adaptation
Consortium of Disability Organisations	*Prevention of Discriminatory Hiring Practices* Proper legislation on employment practices, awareness programmes for, not only, employers and employees but also for Trade unions about the ability and capability of PWD's.
Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago	Community-based job opportunities should be provided. Job coaches may need to assist persons with autism transition to the workplace. Some persons may need permanent job coaches, while others may just need access to their coach at certain times.
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	*Prevention of Discriminatory Hiring Practices* Legislation that is enforced to prevent discriminatory practices and to ensure that when persons with visual impairment are employed in an organization, they are provided with the necessary infrastructure such as hand railings, stairs, adequate lighting, assistive technology and more importantly, a safe and secure environment to perform their job effectively. Pressure from Government agencies on the private sector to follow through their Social Responsibility to employ persons. Tax incentives from the Government for Private organizations that employ a stipulated quota of persons with visual impairment. This will encourage Private organizations to employ persons with visual impairment by offsetting the cost to purchase specialised equipment for persons with visual impairment through the realisation of Tax Breaks. Awareness and sensitization training seminars for employers and their staff to educate them on the skills and capabilities of persons with visual impairment in an effort to remove prejudices.
Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children	Continuous Public Education and awareness to the public via radio, TV and the media of these persons to highlight their capabilities and special needs. The work environment should be physically adapted to accommodate persons with disabilities.
Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired	*Prevention of Discriminatory Hiring Practices* The enactment of laws, regulations and/or guidelines is necessary in order to stabilise and regulate labour/industrial relations and workplace infrastructure for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In particular these will include the main general recommendation including: a. when an employer may ask an applicant or employee questions about his hearing impairment and how it should treat voluntary disclosures; b. what types of reasonable workplace accommodations employees with hearing disabilities may need; c. how an employer should handle safety concerns about applicants and employees with hearing disabilities; and d. how an employer can ensure that no employee is harassed because of a hearing disability or any other disability.

Appendix IX

Stakeholder Proposed Amendments

Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03

Stakeholder	Equal Opportunity Act – Proposed Amendments
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	The definition of "disability" must be revised. While the CRPD does not define disability, national definitions of disability must recognize that disability is a result of an interaction between individual and societal factors. Such a definition must first recognise the various types of disabilities such as mental, intellectual, sensory or physical impairments. The revised definition must also recognize that there are physical, social, attitudinal and accessibility barriers that must be removed. Equality and elimination of discrimination ought to be the goal of the definition, rather than merely categorizing persons with disabilities. The EOA allows for a catchall exclusion, "unjustifiable hardship," from the prohibition on discrimination in cases of employment, education and the provision of good s and services. "Unjustifiable hardship" is a much lower standard than that set out in the CRPD which is one of "reasonable accommodation" for person with disabilities. For example, under the EOA, if a person's disability prevents them from carrying out the specific requirements of a particular job, an employer can refuse to hire that person without the necessary attempt to make a "reasonable accommodation." Enforce a mandatory quota for the hiring of PWDs. Communicate with AG Office to provide support to reform the Equal Opportunity Commission's work plan to enforce rights of PWDs on the job. Introduce policies to integrate PWDs in work force and inform laws to enforce their rights e.g. the Occupational Safety and Health Act to ensure that PWDs are carefully considered in case of emergency evacuation. Mandate through legislation or public policy that all Government buildings must have access for persons with disabilities and building codes must be enforced. Comprehensive review of the civil service regulations to ensure that the regulations do not exclude PWDs.
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	PAVI recommends that the Employers provide provisions for persons with disabilities to be retrained to enable them to gain the skills and abilities to function effectively in their jobs, this will facilitate persons with disabilities to retain their jobs. PAVI revision of the Equal Opportunity Act to be on par with Article 27 (Work and Employment) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired	Deafness and hearing loss pose challenges to both the workers with the impairments and their employers. Hearing loss can interfere with communication among employees, the ability to receive training and emergency instructions, and it poses safety concerns when Deaf employees work around machinery. The process of even securing

	employment can be affected negatively by the failure of the employer to provide a Sign Language interpreter at the interview. Proposed amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act Chapter 22:03 Employers should include requirements to provide employees with disabilities with appropriate accommodations to perform their jobs, such as sign language interpretation. Though employers should not discriminate when hiring, many employers still resist hiring deaf workers because of the costs associated with special equipment such as text telephone equipment, vibrating pagers and captioned training and messaging videos. Also, employees who lose their hearing while on the job also face challenges in getting employers to provide special accommodations so they can keep their jobs.
Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association	Sections 8 to 10 that "Employers shall not discriminate against a person in the arrangements he makes for the purpose of determining who should be offered employment;" access to promotions; and employment training." But Section 14 states, "Sections 8 to 10 shall not apply to the employment of a person with a disability." The EOA then stipulates that if in order to carry out the requirements of a job disabled individuals "…require services or facilities that are not required by persons without a disability and the provision of which would impose an unjustifiable hardship;" the employer is not required to accommodate that disabled employee. The language does not even entertain the notion of reasonable accommodation of a person with a disability. The Equal Opportunity Act leaves the disabled naked and unprotected from unrestrained discrimination. Section 18 of Act also permits discrimination against persons with disabilities in education. The same hardship language from Section 14 is used to justify disability discrimination in the education section as well.

Appendix X

Stakeholder Proposed Amendments Motor Vehicle Legislation

Stakeholder	Motor Vehicle Legislation – Proposed Amendments
United Nations agencies in Trinidad and Tobago	Provisions for accessible parking zone permits and plates. The establishment of a Medical Advisory Committee to provide information, recommendations and opinions concerning a person's medication condition, medical report or visual screening with respect to the person's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle and/or necessary adjustments to the vehicle to accommodate the disability. Mobility Aid Accessible Taxi Standards established for vehicles that are made for transporting persons with disabilities.
Consortium of Disability Organisations	Allow persons with disabilities the same accommodation as others. Motor Vehicles act must standardize the hand controls always keeping in mind the new technology being discovered daily. Interpreters for the Deaf community should be part of the staff to accommodate those who need it.
Persons Associated with Visual Impairment	Persons with Visual Impairment should be allowed to own a vehicle in their own name for business purposes and otherwise.
Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired	Issuance of driving permits to Deaf persons in addition to Hard of Hearing persons (persons with residual hearing loss who require hearing aids). Currently, only Hard of Hearing persons can legally be issued driver's permits. Renewal of driving permits for both Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons should maintain a three (3) year duration.