

**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO DELEGATE
TO THE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION 9TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING
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The twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago is very diverse in its population composition of 1.3 million people – a diversity, which is also reflected among its elderly. At present, 11% (or 143,000 persons) of the total population is aged 60 years and over, and they represent the fastest growing category, of which the majority are the “young-old” (i.e., aged between 60-74 years) and are largely women. This number of older persons is expected to reach 20% of the total population by 2025. The percentage increase within this sub-group will be about 91% in just 20 years as compared with an estimated 27% growth in the overall population for the same period. Life expectancy is 78 years for males and 81 years for females.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is therefore concerned, like so many other developing and developed countries, about how it will prepare for a “Society for all ages,” and how it will address the major issues agreed upon in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Regional Strategy for the Implementation of the Plan of Action, which was subsequently adopted in Chile. The Division of Ageing, which was established in 2003, in the Ministry of Social Development as an umbrella agency, to coordinate ageing initiatives and focus ageing issues in Trinidad and Tobago, is responsible, *inter alia*, for the coordination of the implementation of the National Ageing Policy, which was launched in July 2007 for public distribution. The objectives of the policy are:

- To create an enabling environment for meaningful participation of the elderly
- To ensure the provision of adequate community-based services for seniors
- To promote and preserve the dignity and independence of the elderly
- To encourage and promote education and public awareness on ageing issues
- To encourage and promote greater collaboration among stakeholders for ageing
- To facilitate, encourage and support research on ageing issues
- To promote greater access to more affordable healthcare for older persons
- To facilitate greater access to recreational facilities by older persons
- To improve the availability to housing that is affordable, safe and accessible to seniors
- To improve the availability of reliable, safe and accessible scheduled transportation to seniors
- To create disaster and emergency plans to treat older persons with equal importance during evacuation and recovery operations

In accordance with the Action Plan of the National Policy on Ageing, the Division of Ageing has also embarked on designing and developing several programmes, projects and policies specifically geared for older persons. By collaborating with other relevant Ministries, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), schools, the media, academicians and international agencies, the Division coordinates the implementation of these programmes, policies and projects on a phased basis, to form part of the National Plan of Action on Ageing (NPAA). The framework for the NPAA is in the process of being formulated and developed.

In accordance with the *Regional Strategy for the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*, the following specific targets have been identified, to be met under each of the objectives contained in the strategy, together with mechanisms for the follow-up of the policies and programmes they implement:

LEGISLATION

- The Homes for Older Persons Act of 2000 and Regulations for Homes for Older Persons were revoked and replaced by the Homes for Older Persons Bill of 2007 and Regulations for Homes for Older Persons 2007. The new legislation provides for the licensing, regulation and control of Homes for Older Persons through the establishment of an Inspectorate (in the Division of Ageing) and a Facility Review Team, which also report to the Minister. The Homes for Older Persons Act No. 20 of 2007, which was passed by the Parliament in September 2007 (and is to be proclaimed), also provides the legal framework for the protection of the rights of older persons in institutions, which provide long-term care.

POLICIES

- The National Policy on Ageing (and Action Plan) was approved by Cabinet in September 2006, and launched in July 2007 for public distribution. The policy identifies twelve (12) priority areas for action – social security; income security; social inclusion; healthcare; housing; education; recreation; dignity and respect; legislation; research; transportation; and disaster preparedness. The implementation of the National Policy on Ageing is to be coordinated by the Division of Ageing.
- The Draft National Gender Policy is being finalized, which addresses the role of women as de facto caregivers of older persons, and health and economic issues affecting older women.

- The National Policy on the Family is being formulated to address the elderly within the context of the family, since 95% of older persons reside in the community and between 3% - 5% reside in institutions.

PROGRAMMES

- The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), which was established in 2001, helps to bridge the intergenerational gap between young people aged 17-35 years and older persons, through training and provision of homecare service in geriatric care. There was a positive impact on 90% of those older persons who received care from trainees, and a corresponding sensitization of 90% of the trainees who completed the course.
- The Ministry of Housing launched its housing policy in 2002, which provided homeownership to persons 55 years and over with mortgage loan repayments in post-retirement years. Also, Rent-to-buy arrangements were made for low-income earners (including Granny Suites for pensioners) to own affordable houses, payments for which could extend to the homeowner's next-of-kin. The Ministry constructs 8000 housing units annually, of which 5% are allocated to seniors. Reverse mortgage arrangements by unmarried and widowed elderly persons with financial institutions in the private sector are also on the increase.
- A Continuum of Health and Social Support Services for Older Persons was approved in September 2004. A Cabinet-appointed Inter-Ministerial Committee provides oversight for the Continuum, which is coordinated by the Division of Ageing to provide a range of health and social services to seniors who are least dependent to those who are most dependent. The services which are implemented on a phased basis include Senior Centres, Homecare, and Meals-on-Wheels programmes, Transport Escort and Assisted Living Facilities (which are being developed for implementation in Fiscal Year 2009), Adult Day Centres, Companion Care, and Retirement Homes/Communities.
- Surveys of living conditions among older persons were conducted by the Ministry of Social Development, which identified loneliness as one of the problems experienced by the elderly. In response, Senior Activities Centres were established in 2006, to act as multi-service facilities for healthy, able-bodied seniors aged 55 years and over. The Centres (6), which are operated by NGOs/CBOs/FBOs in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development, provide computer-literacy courses; aqua therapy sessions; yoga, Tai Chi, and aerobic exercise classes; gardening; dancing; outings and field trips; and lectures by presenters on topical ageing issues. The Senior Centre initiative won the prestigious Prime Minister's Innovating for Service Excellence Award 2006 –

“Making a Difference to People: Social Inclusion” category. Five (5) additional Senior Centres will be established in 2009.

- The Ministry of Social Development collaborates with and engages ageing interest groups, NGOs, and the public and private sectors, in developing and hosting social and cultural programmes, and events to foster intergenerational integration and honour elders in the community. One such programme is the International Day of Older Persons, which is commemorated annually in October with Sports and recreational, or cultural and festive events for seniors aged 55 years and over. This year, an Intergenerational Fiesta is proposed, the theme of which is “Bridging the Gap.” The Trinidad and Tobago Association of Retired Persons (TTARP) is the largest ageing interest group, which is comprised of 29,000 persons aged 50 years and over.
- An Annual Amateur Talent Show for Seniors was launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Social Development, to encourage older persons nationwide to showcase their talents in various categories such as song, dance, instrumental, and dramatic presentations; and to generate a positive imaging of ageing. Cultural icons aged 60 years and over also participate as guest artistes. DVDs of the Show were produced and aired on various local television stations, which are mandated to allocate slots during primetime viewing, for government programmes.
- Hernandez Place Sanctuary was established in 2007 to house the homeless elderly. Two (2) more properties have been acquired by the Government and are being refurbished to house other elderly street dwellers.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

- The Older Persons Information Centre was established as a Help Desk in the Division of Ageing in August 2005, to serve as an information referral facility for the general public on how, when, and where to access support systems, products and services for older persons in Trinidad and Tobago.
- A radio series entitled “Ageing Gratefully,” which attracts listeners aged 35-65 years, was launched in 2005, to provide both educational and general information on ageing and age-related topics of interest. Radio and television talk shows have proliferated on numerous local stations over the past four years, and the Division of Ageing maximizes these programmes to raise public awareness on ageing, at no cost.
- The Ministry of Social Development, through the Division of Ageing, launched an annual Public Open Forum for Older Persons in 2006, as part of its nationwide

public education campaign on ageing. Eighteen (18) Fora were held between 2006 and 2008 in various communities in Trinidad and Tobago, to allow older persons to share their issues and ideas directly with government officials, who in turn provided access to information which was relevant to their needs. The issues raised and government's responses are subsequently compiled for publication in the daily newspapers.

- Retirement Planning Seminars in public/private sectors have proliferated during 2004 and 2008, to sensitize workers to the tenets of healthy ageing and provide strategies in contingency planning for post-retirement years.
- The Government is in the process of converting its manual administrative systems to technologically-driven ones, thus advancing easier access to and dissemination of information on healthy ageing at the national and community levels via a government website with links to all Ministries.
- The University of the West Indies in Trinidad introduced in August 2004 Social Gerontology as an elective course in its Social Work, Sociology, and Social Policy programmes. Attendance has grown from 8 students to 70 in 2007 and continues to be oversubscribed.
- The Government, through the Ministry of Social Development, established an Education and Communications Unit. The Division of Ageing, in collaboration with the Unit, directs much of its media broadcasts on promoting positive images of ageing, highlighting the cultural diversity of seniors, and any areas of competence among older persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

EMPLOYMENT

- The Senior Citizens Bureau, which was established by the Government in 1996, serves as a skills bank and placement agency for retirees to secure jobs in the community. The Division of Ageing was designated to provide oversight for the Bureau's operations, which are being reviewed to explore employment opportunities in the Caribbean region.
- The Retirees Adolescent Association Partnership Programme (RAPP) is being developed to recruit highly-functioning and skilled retirees to mentor youths in the community.
- More contractual arrangements and part-time jobs are being fostered in the public and private sectors, in keeping with labour-market demands, and retired seniors are also eligible to apply for the positions.

- In developing its homecare and accredited training programmes for care providers to meet legislative requirements (i.e., the Home for Older Persons Act of 2007 referred to earlier), the Division of Ageing proposes the involvement of existing healthcare professionals (including retirees) in specialized training in gerontology and geriatrics, to be contracted as trainers.

PENSIONS/GRANTS

- Non-contributory pensions were increased in 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2007, while the Government currently addresses pension reform to regularize the pension benefits of the National Insurance Scheme and Old Age Pension. The following amounts were disbursed by the Government for Old Age Pension:

2002 -	USD 11,604,665.00
2003 -	" 11,770,405.00
2004 -	" 12,374,939.00
2005 -	" 13,985,198.00
2006 -	" 14,106,868.00

- As part of the Poverty Reduction Programme, Social Welfare Grants to persons aged 60 years and over provide for: (i) free eye-glasses; (ii) free hearing aids; (iii) free bus passes; (iv) house repairs to the value of USD 5,000.00; and (v) burial of a pensioner to the value of USD 500.00.
- The Socio-Economic Policy Frameworks of 2002-2004; 2005-2007; and 2008-2010 have included population ageing in its comprehensive poverty reduction strategies.
- In January 2008, the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago revealed the findings of a Financial Literacy Survey, which the bank conducted in 2007, and which highlighted that retirees were experiencing hard financial times. This resulted in one of the leading insurance companies partnering with the Ministry of Social Development to conduct panel discussions (mainly to sensitize/educate their branch managers and policy-holders) on the theme "Are You Ready to Retire?" in various communities. The Central Bank is also conducting nationwide lunchtime seminars on financial literacy and retirement planning.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

- Trinidad and Tobago's macroeconomic policies include the government's commitments to its senior citizens.
- The Government established partnerships with international agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), and Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), to build local capacity through technical support to develop the infrastructure for community care services for older persons.
- Regional summits are hosted by CARICOM, at which Trinidad and Tobago participates, and this platform could be used to promote intergovernmental collaboration on the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Regional Implementation Plan.
- International agencies (such as UNDESA, ECLAC and those listed above) will be approached, as appropriate, to provide some of the technical and financial support needed in designing suitable instruments to measure the scope and dimensions of population ageing in Trinidad and Tobago.

RESEARCH

- At present, data on persons aged 60 years and over in Trinidad and Tobago are compiled mainly by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), which is to upgrade and expand available information disaggregated by age and gender in particular. More health-related data on older persons are compiled by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), both based in Trinidad.
- The more comprehensive Government Information System (GIS) database is being developed at present for multi-purpose usage by all government Ministries, and will be a useful source of information for programmes, policies, services and resources being offered by the government for older persons in Trinidad and Tobago.
- A survey of Homes for Older Persons (which total 131) in Trinidad and Tobago was completed in 2006. It provided data to update databases and registries on the number and contact information of establishments offering long-term care to seniors, which would facilitate the categorizing of various kinds of facilities that offer long-term care services.

- In conducting its workshops for developing an implementation plan for the National Ageing Policy with various stakeholders from the public and private sectors, NGOs, research units and academic institutions, the Division of Ageing proposes the inclusion of ageing issues on national research agendas.
- The Faculty of Social Sciences at The University of the West Indies in Trinidad developed a collaborative relationship in 2004 with The Center on Ageing, Florida International University, to share gerontological research interests.
- A three-day Ageing Symposium, hosted in part by The University of the West Indies in Trinidad, was held in Trinidad in November 2004, and various countries from the region participated. Contemporary research papers (including those from developed countries to show established best practices for ageing issues/older persons) were presented at the Symposium, the outcome of which produced topical ageing issues for a national research agenda.
- A team of local psychiatrists are currently conducting a Government-funded research project to detect and measure the prevalence rate of Alzheimer's disease among seniors in Trinidad and Tobago.

HEALTHCARE

- A Joint Working Group, comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Social Development and Health, was established in June 2007 to coordinate the establishment of a National Community Health Care Unit. The Unit is geared to develop models of care facilities in the community for older persons, adults and children, thus fostering a "society for all ages."
- The Ministry of Health has embarked on an extensive Health Sector Reform programme to upgrade the quality of healthcare delivery systems in Trinidad and Tobago, which address, *inter alia*, the promotion of universal coverage for older persons to healthcare services, and the improvement of the functions of the decentralized Regional Health Authorities.
- In addition to the development of standards of care for older persons, the Ministries of Health and Social Development, through the Division of Ageing, propose to coordinate training and sensitization workshops in geriatric care in 2009, for care providers and healthcare workers.
- The Ministry of Social Development is about to roll out the strategic plan of the Decentralized Integrated Social Services Delivery Model (adopted from the Chilean model due to its cultural compatibility), which addresses the health and

psycho-social needs of poor families in the community, and thus responds to the care needs of those affected older persons within the context of the family situation.

- The Government hosted a conference in Trinidad with regional Heads of Government, in September 2007, to highlight the proliferation of chronic non-communicable diseases, particularly among the older persons. Taxes on tobacco and alcohol were subsequently increased in Trinidad and Tobago, to encourage persons to adopt healthy lifestyle practices. A second regional conference on managing chronic non-communicable diseases in the elderly, which was co-hosted by PAHO/WHO and Duke University, was held in Barbados in October 2007, to develop a strategic plan to prevent/combat the high incidence of the diseases in the region.
- The Ministry of Health provides a Chronic Disease Assistance Plan, which provides free prescription drugs, via participating pharmacies, to patients with specific chronic diseases such as: Diabetes; Asthma; Hypertension; Arthritis; Glaucoma; Cancer of the Prostate; Mental Depression; Cardiac-related diseases; and Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia, once they are diagnosed at any public or private health care institution with any of the diseases stated above.

ELDER ABUSE

- In commemoration of the inaugural observation of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, 2006, a Proclamation was signed by His Worship the Mayor of the City of Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to reinforce that combating abuse of older persons will help improve the quality of life for all seniors and will allow seniors to continue to live as independent, important and active members of the community.
- Enforcement of the laws and regulations (referred to earlier), which govern quality and standards of care for older persons, is one of the mechanisms designed to protect older persons from all forms of abuse.
- An NGO – Stop Elderly Abuse Now (SEAN) was established in Trinidad in 2002, to provide a forum for redress, to assist in curtailing the incidences of abuse meted out to older persons in the community and in Homes for older persons.
- One of the roles of the Older Persons Information Centre (mentioned earlier) in the Division of Ageing is to provide referrals to persons who report cases of elderly abuse.

- The Ministry of Social Development, through the Division of Ageing and in collaboration with key stakeholders, commemorated the 1st and 2nd Annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, to bring greater recognition of mistreatment of older persons as an intergenerational concern and human rights issue, and to highlight the need for appropriate action.

The Divisions of Ageing and Monitoring and Evaluation in the Ministry of Social Development will be monitoring, *inter alia*, the existing and planned social programmes for older persons, in order to assess/measure the effectiveness and efficiency of those programmes for future planning.

In conclusion, Trinidad and Tobago is poised to position its ageing in both regional and international contexts and, as a result, stands to benefit from gaining insights into best practices that could be adopted to advance and enhance the improved quality of care for its older persons.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

- Present staffing is inadequate to meet the new demands of the Public Sector Reform Programme, resulting in elements of resistance to change to the proposed Output Business Plan Model
- Instability/uncertainty of tenure due to high turnover of technical officers who are on contract positions – changes in the Executive Management may mean changes in direction and loss of institutional knowledge
- Non-Governmental Organizations need capacity building and institutional strengthening
- Inadequate Information Technology (IT) infrastructure for effective communication and delivery at the level of the support systems
- Migration of trained caregivers to developed countries
- Poor internal communications (vertically & laterally) and ineffective bureaucracy
- The plurality of the society and the cultural differences between Trinidad and Tobago
- Change in political directive

- Dichotomy between the Ministries of Health and Social Development in their responses to healthcare, resulting in duplicating and overlapping of systems and programmes
- Absence of succession planning/visioning for the future – loss of institutional memory
- Provision of adequate homecare services for the intellectual seniors

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