

## 18. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# BUILDING A NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

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### INTRODUCTION

Trinidad and Tobago is a small but rapidly developing country. It is generally considered as the financial capital of the Caribbean region. A cursory glance at the economic stability of the twin-island state shows that from 2011 to 2012, gross domestic product stood at \$13,632 million. Foreign Direct Investment now totals approximately \$1,110 million, and unemployment is below 5 percent.<sup>76</sup> However, over the last decade, there has been increasing concern among citizens, stakeholders and international financial and donors agencies about the efficiency and effectiveness of public-sector performance. For citizens, the issue is one of accountability and transparency as it relates to government expenditure of public funds and, of course, value for money. Though Trinidad and Tobago does not receive foreign aid, for international financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the concern is focused on whether loan agreements (and in some cases, grant funding) are being used to achieve the objectives and outcomes for which they were intended.

The government, and by extension the public sector, is being challenged to become more effective in providing services such that there are positive impacts on the lives of citizens. In order to ensure this, the government's performance must be measured. In this regard, there has been the recognition that there is a need for developing a national M&E system with a clear understanding of the benefits it brings. There is also a general consensus as to the

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76 Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012.

crucial role of an effective and efficient public sector in facilitating economic growth, sustainable development and the well-being of all citizens.

However, in order to ensure effective service delivery, performance must be managed. Therefore, the M&E approach not only focuses on measuring performance, but also seeks to build a culture of performance management in public service that will be evidenced by good governance, transparency, efficiency in government operations and accountability for public spending. These outcomes, if managed properly, are expected to contribute to improved public-sector service delivery and greater stakeholder satisfaction.

Since 2005, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been involved in creating the infrastructure for a results-based performance management system in the public sector. The move towards M&E began in 1992, with capacity building in project cycle management and the use of logical frameworks, which became a requirement for submitting and approving capital projects for funding.

In 2008, as support and buy-in for M&E increased, the cabinet agreed to establish M&E units in all government ministries and relevant departments in order to provide support for evidence-based decision- and policymaking. In 2010, the cabinet further agreed to a re-designating the then Vision 2020 Office (the office with oversight for reporting on the implementation of the then National Strategic Plan of Trinidad and Tobago, *Vision 2020*). The Office was re-designated as the National Transformation Unit, now responsible for national M&E policy and oversight of M&E practice in the public service, and was tasked to provide general guidance to M&E units in line ministries. It is important to note that this unit has always been placed within the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development.

In 2010, the government introduced a new policy direction: Prosperity for All, Manifesto 2010. This document was translated into the Medium Term Policy Framework 2011–2014 and is meant to bring focus to government work from 2011 to 2014. The framework identifies the following five priority areas: crime and law and order; agriculture and food security; health care services and hospitals; economic growth, job creation, competitiveness and innovation; and poverty reduction and human capital development.

## MAIN CONTENTS

Based on this policy document, a measurement strategy was developed in 2012. The National Performance Framework 2012–2015 outlined the measurement strategy for assessing and evaluating the implementation of the Medium Term Policy Framework. The performance framework document is the first of its kind in Trinidad and Tobago and represents a significantly new approach to planning and a distinct shift in thinking and policy, in that it incorporates the element of measurement.

It is common to develop extensive policies and plans, but translating these into actions that achieve results is a new experience for the country. The National Performance Framework shifts the focus from reporting on activities and outputs to the actual impacts of government interventions on the lives of our citizens. The National Performance Framework has outlined a results chain for each priority area, inclusive of outcomes and impacts, and

will serve as a measurement tool to track the achievement of the goals and targets that have been outlined in the Medium Term Policy Framework 2011-2014. It is also important to note that the National Performance Framework was developed using an extensive collaborative approach with all ministries and relevant departments and agencies.

Essentially, the National Performance Framework has detailed eight key result areas, 23 national outcomes and 52 national indicators in order to assess the Medium Term Policy Framework. Based on this new performance measurement framework, the first report on performance was produced in 2012. It is expected that the report will be produced annually by the National Transformation Unit and will report against the national outcomes by tracking national indicators. Both the National Performance Framework and the Annual Report on Performance 2012 were officially launched in February 2013 and subsequently laid in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

To further gain support for M&E in the public sector and to strengthen the network of local M&E practitioners, the Development Evaluation Forum was initiated in 2011. This is a two-part initiative. The first part is an annual conference to exchange information in the area of local M&E, to motivate and to build a community of practitioners. The first meeting was held in November 2011; consultant Robert Lahey delivered the keynote address on using M&E in Trinidad and Tobago. The second annual meeting was held in November 2012, and featured a keynote address by Professor Christo de Coning, Board Member of the South African M&E Association, where he shared the 28 Lessons Learned from the South Africa Experience. Attendees were also updated on the year's local M&E-related activities.

The second part of the initiative is an online forum that was established to improve communication among the local, regional and international community of development evaluation practitioners. The forum seeks to expand the dialogue on the use, practice and benefits of development evaluation, particularly as it relates to the Caribbean and local contexts.

Trinidad and Tobago is also in the process of developing its first national policy on monitoring and evaluation. This policy will: assist in setting the infrastructure for an evidence-based decision-making culture in Trinidad and Tobago; facilitate the improvement of an integrated, all-inclusive participatory M&E system that has the capacity to carry out development studies; and aid Trinidad and Tobago's development stakeholders in acquiring timely and strategically focused national performance-based information for evidence-based decision-making.

## BUILDING CAPACITY

In 2009, Trinidad and Tobago developed a medium-term action plan for building M&E capability. The plan's agenda for effective M&E development included: establishing an M&E centre in the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development to support the development and operation of results measurement and reporting; building M&E capability in all ministries through training and development; and producing and investing in a data-development strategy.

Despite these efforts, M&E capacities remain weak. At present, about 75 percent of all ministries (30) have established M&E units, based on the cabinets' decision in 2008. However, staffing of these units continues to be a challenge as a result of an insufficient number of M&E practitioners. Building capacity, particularly in evaluation, continues to be slow. Without the expertise available through local or regional institutions, ministries often have to look towards international training institutions to provide training to public officers. Nevertheless, the government remains committed to finding a solution to this dilemma. Dialogue continues with the regional bodies, such as the Caribbean Development Bank, as well as international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, to develop a comprehensive training programme—not only for Trinidad and Tobago, but for the Caribbean region at large.

## CONCLUSIONS

The usefulness of any M&E system depends upon the credibility, utility and timeliness of data. Data management in Trinidad and Tobago is officially coordinated by the Central Statistical Office, which is currently undergoing a strategic restructuring in order to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in delivering its mandate. It is expected that this office will provide the requisite support for the emerging M&E system in Trinidad and Tobago. Insufficient data is a significant problem, particularly as it relates to building a robust and sustainable M&E system.

Another constraint, though one that does not present a significant challenge at this time, is the independence of the National Transformation Unit, which essentially serves as the centre for monitoring and evaluating the government's performance. As the national system is advanced, consideration may have to be given to making this unit a statutory body or an independent authority that reports to either the president or the parliament.

Trinidad and Tobago is at the point of moving towards an advanced national M&E system that provides timely reports. This system will influence decision-making, which will in turn determine how national budgetary allocations are made. To this end, an integrated public management framework is being worked out that incorporates national policy, strategic planning, reporting, budgeting and M&E. Moreover, it is anticipated that over the next three years, the system will be fully integrated within an information technology platform, with all the necessary user requirements and access defined.

As of 2013, Trinidad and Tobago is well on its way to becoming a leader in developing a results-based M&E system at the national level. Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago recognizes the value in M&E and continues to work towards building an environment that values measurement, performance and service delivery.