



STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 2013-2018

30-9-2013



Table of Contents

	Acronyms	3
I.	Introduction	4
II.	Preface	5
III.	Executive Summary	6
IV.	Guiding Principles: Vision, Mission, Core Values	7
V.	Strategic Objectives	8
	Strategic Objective 1: Institutional Capacity	9
	1.1. Building parliamentary autonomy	9
	1.2. Strengthening the role and position of the parliamentarians	10
	1.3. Organizing the parliament's schedule	11
	1.4. Strengthening the Committee system	12
	1.5. Developing the capacity and professional skills of MPs	13
	1.6. Reviewing the Standing Orders	13
	1.7. Strengthening the internal management of the Office of Parliament	14
	1.8. Moving towards a "paperless parliament"; deepening the use of ICT	15
	1.9. Developing and sustaining international links	16
	Strategic Objective 2: Legislative Process	17
	2.1. Constructing a platform for the legislative process	17
	2.2. Clarifying the timetable for the legislative process	17
	2.3. Scrutinizing bills in Committees	18
	2.4. Studying the impact of draft legislation	19
	2.5. Enhancing the capacity of all Members in the legislative process	19
	Strategic Objective 3: Executive Oversight	20
	3.1. Exercising oversight in plenary session	20
	3.2. Exercising oversight in Committees	20
	3.3. Deepening oversight through two new Committees	21
	3.4. Scrutinizing budgets and expenditures effectively	22
	3.5. Reviewing the implementation of legislation	24
	3.6. Increasing oversight capacity through improved library & research services	24
	3.7. Strengthening the interaction between Parliament and Ombudsperson	25
	3.8. Working collaboratively with independent oversight institutions	25
	Strategic Objective 4: Representation and Outreach	26
	4.1. Reformatting the functioning of Constituency Relations Offices	26
	4.2. Expanding Parliamentary Communications	28
VI.	Preconditions and opportunities to achieve a successful Strategic Plan	29
VII.	Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation	30



Annex: Implementation Roadmap



Acronyms

AWP	Annual Work Plan
CPA	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
CPC	Chief Parliamentary Counsel
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DMS	Document Management System
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
EU	European Union
FPOC	Forum of Presiding Officers and Clerks
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JSC	Joint Select Committee
LRC	Law Reform Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PAEC	Public Accounts and Enterprises Committee
PIMEU	Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UTT	University of Trinidad and Tobago
UWI	University of West Indies



I. Introduction

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, it is an honour and a privilege to present the **Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018**.

Since the foundation of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as an independent nation in 1962, we have seen the Parliament take many important steps on the road towards becoming an increasingly efficient and modernised legislature that serves the people of Trinidad and Tobago effectively. The development of the first comprehensive Parliament Strategic Plan is another important step along this road to maturity and the institutionalisation of the legislature.

The Constitution, which came into effect on 1 August 1976, provides for a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model with three arms of government: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The constitution and the Standing Orders of the Parliament clearly outline the role, function and powers of the Legislature in terms of composition, the legislative process, oversight of the Government and representation of the people.

The Parliament continues to play a central role in the governance system of Trinidad and Tobago and we have no doubt that the Parliament will continue to do so over the coming years. It is our belief that an increasingly effective Parliament can only be of benefit to improving governance and development in Trinidad and Tobago. The clarity gained through this ambitious but realistic Strategic Plan will play an integral role in this strengthening and development process.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018 outlines the objectives and activities that will guide us in deepening our parliamentary culture and improving the administrative mechanisms of our institution to better serve our citizens. The plan contains a clear Vision, Mission and Core Values for the Parliament as well as a set of Strategic Objectives that Parliament will aim to achieve over the period.

Although this Strategic Plan is for the Parliament, it belongs not only to the parliamentarians but is also owned by all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The period of the plan means that it will span a general election; and thus aims to become the plan of all Members of the House and Senators. This will only serve to strengthen this plan for the development of the parliamentary institution because the need to strengthen and modernise the legislature remains constant regardless which political parties hold the majority. This Strategic Plan will be revised and developed when circumstances require and be followed by a new Strategic Plan in 2018.

It is also important to note that the Parliament has worked closely with international partners in developing this Strategic Plan. The Parliament would like to thank in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their close and continued partnership and we hope that this cooperation will continue as we move to implement the Strategic Plan in the period 2013-2018.

We invite all the branches of Government, all citizens, Civil Society Organisations, the private sector and international partners to work in partnership with the Parliament to further develop and deepen democracy in Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of all.

Hon. Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House

Hon. Timothy Hamel Smith, Senator
President of the Senate





II. Preface

During the period 2010-2012 the Office of Parliament developed a Corporate Plan, the implementation of which is now in process. The plan covers the role of Parliament staff in providing effective services to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, in order to allow the Members of Parliament to fulfil their legislative, oversight and representation functions effectively.

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

Whilst the Corporate Plan focussed on the role and functioning of the Office of Parliament, this Strategic Plan recognises that a more integrated approach to developing and strengthening Parliament as a whole is needed - in order to strengthen the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago over the next 5 years. This overarching approach to building the structures and systems in the Parliament and the capacity of Staff and Members can only be of benefit to the Parliament as an institution.

The Strategic Plan will be of particular benefit to Office of Parliament staff as it provides us with a clear framework for our own development and outlines the expectations of Parliament as a whole of the Office of Parliament. We recognise that the staffing needs of the Parliament will need to evolve to respond to the changing nature of work within the legislature in general and specifically in order to continue the strengthening of the Parliament in terms of its legislation, oversight and representation functions.

This Strategic Plan is accompanied by an Implementation Roadmap that outlines in greater detail the way in which the Office of Parliament will lead the process of implementing the activities outlined in this plan and agreed by Parliament. The Office of Parliament is committed to using this broad implementation framework to develop realistic annual work plans for the Office of Parliament as a whole as well as specific annual departmental work plans. The "Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit" (PIMEU) will ensure that the pace of strategy implementation is maintained based on the timetable Parliament has agreed.

As Clerk of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and on behalf of all staff serving the Office of Parliament it is my honour to commend the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018.

***Ms. Jacqui Sampson,
Clerk of Parliament***



III. Executive Summary

This is the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago first Strategic Plan and is an important step on the road towards maturity and the institutionalisation of the legislature. This Strategic Plan outlines a framework for the development of Parliament as a whole and recognises that the capacity of the Office of Parliament staff and elected Members needs to be developed in the period 2013-2018 in addition to modernising the systems and processes used in Parliament.

In this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago outlines its vision: *"By 2018, to be a modern Parliament that fulfils its constitutional duties to its fullest extent, and effectively serves the people of Trinidad & Tobago."* The Mission Statement of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago states that *"As the national legislature of Trinidad & Tobago, our mission is to ensure that Parliament exercises its legislative, oversight, representation and outreach duties effectively and that Parliament remains the main forum for national political debate. "*

During the period 2013-2018 the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will have four specific Strategic Objectives: firstly, to increase the institutional capacity of the Parliament in general and of the Secretariat specifically; secondly, to improve the legislative process in Parliament to ensure enhanced scrutiny and quality of legislation; thirdly, to improve the capacity of Parliament to provide effective oversight; and fourthly, to develop the outreach work of Parliament and to strengthen the representative role of MPs.

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

Among the structural issues is the substantial increase in the number of MPs which are fully active in parliament and receive the appropriate remuneration for a full-time salary. This will result in more active functioning of Committees and the oversight by parliament. Structural issues are the more enhanced autonomy of parliament, the creation of a platform for legislation drafting and reformatting the constituency offices system.

Among the functional issues are the efforts to better organize the parliament's schedule, the initiatives to move towards a "paperless parliament", studying the impact of draft legislation, scrutinizing the state's budgets and expenditures effectively, improving the library and research services, and expanding on parliament communication.

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

Finally, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018 contains a section that outlines who takes overall responsibility for implementation of the plan and the mechanisms that the Parliament will use to monitor and evaluate the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan.



IV. Guiding Principles

In order to develop an effective Strategic Plan for the period 2013-2018 and in order to provide the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago with a framework for development, the first step for the Parliament is to clarify the guiding principles of the Legislature. Before moving into outlining specific Strategic Objectives and activities for the period, the Parliament recognises that these Objectives should be within the overall framework that outlines the Vision, Mission and Core Values of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago.

Our Vision

This Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago Vision outlines our constant aim of where we believe the Parliament should be in the future and all our actions and activities should be within the context of reaching this Vision. We believe that our Vision is one which all sections of society and individuals of all political persuasions can unite behind. The Vision of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is:

By 2018, to be a modern Parliament that fulfils its constitutional duties to its fullest extent, and effectively serves the people of Trinidad & Tobago.

Our Mission

In order to work towards achieving our Vision for the legislature, we have developed a Mission Statement for the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago. When developing our Mission Statement we drew on the views gathered from Members within the House and the Senate, Senior staff and the mission adopted by other parliaments within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Our Mission Statement provides the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago with a starting point on the road towards realising our Vision. The Mission Statement of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago for the period 2013-2018 is:

As the national legislature of Trinidad & Tobago, our mission is to ensure that Parliament exercises its legislative, oversight, representation and outreach duties effectively and that Parliament remains the main forum for national political debate.

Our Core Values

Whilst moving towards achieving the Vision and Mission of the Legislature, the Parliament as a whole, including members of the House, the Senate and the Office of Parliament staff, must be guided by the Core Values of the Parliament. As a democratically elected and legitimate Parliament, we recognise that we are here to serve the people and we must hold and follow the highest ethics and values in order to serve the people of Trinidad & Tobago. The Core Values of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago are:

Independence

We safeguard the independence of Parliament in all our acts

Integrity

We demonstrate high ethical standards in our activities

Openness

We communicate in an open and inclusive way

Professionalism

We strive to act on the basis of sound and established rules of procedure, facts, insight and experience



Concern

Our endeavours are guided by concern for the wellbeing of all women and men, girls and boys of Trinidad & Tobago

V. The Parliament's Strategic Objectives for the period 2013-2018

During the period 2013-2018 the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will have specific Strategic Objectives in order to allow the Parliament to follow a systematic approach in developing a comprehensive and long-term development strategy for the Parliament. The activities that the Parliament will implement during this period are designed with the aim of ensuring that the Parliament moves towards achieving its Objectives during the period 2013-2018.

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018 will have four specific Strategic Objectives. These Objectives will be based on the need to develop the Parliament as an institution and also to ensure that the Parliament continues to enhance its capacity in terms of legislating, providing oversight and ensuring effective representation and outreach.

In deciding on the key Strategic Objectives, the Parliament undertook an analysis of the current workings of Parliament and made a comparison to the agreed "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region" that have been developed by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).¹ During this analysis process particular areas of growth and areas where development is needed in the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago were highlighted. The initiatives under the Strategic Objectives for the period 2013-2018 stem from this analysis.

Therefore, during the period 2013-2018, the four Strategic Objectives of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago are:

- 1. To increase the institutional capacity of the Parliament in general and of the Secretariat specifically**
- 2. To improve the legislative process in Parliament to ensure enhanced scrutiny and quality of legislation**
- 3. To improve the capacity of Parliament to provide effective oversight**
- 4. To develop the outreach work of Parliament and to strengthen the representative role of MPs**

In the Strategic Plan, under each Strategic Objective the Parliament outlines specific activities that will be implemented by the Parliament during the lifetime of the plan in order to move towards achieving the Strategic Objective. Whilst this Strategic Plan will briefly outline the intended activities, the details and proposed timeframe for the implementation of specific activities will be included in an Implementation Roadmap that has been developed in conjunction with this Strategic Plan.

¹ http://www.cpa-caaregion.org/media/get_media.php?mediaid=caa4fafb-a31



Objective 1: To increase institutional capacity of Parliament in general and of the Secretariat specifically

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that in order to deliver the agreed Vision and Mission of the legislature, the Parliament needs to ensure that parliamentary business proceeds smoothly and Members of Parliament receive high level of support when carrying out their duties.

The Parliament recognizes that its institutional capacity and structures need to be strengthened and that the Office of Parliament, as the secretariat support services of both Chambers of parliament, needs to remain strong, independent and at full capacity. In order to implement the Strategic Plan and to ensure that the legislative, oversight and representation functions of the Parliament are achieved, the institutional capacity of the Parliament as a whole and of the Secretariat Services needs to continue to develop, evolve and adjust to changing needs and challenges.

In addition, there is recognition that the Parliament's infrastructure and facilities need to continue to modernise in order to ensure that the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago remains a modern and therefore effective Parliament.

Therefore, the first Strategic Objective of the Parliament Strategic Plan for the period 2013-2018 is to increase the institutional capacity of the Parliament in general and of the Secretariat specifically. Specific areas of activity needed to achieve this Strategic Objective are outlined below.

1.1. Building parliamentary autonomy

A key issue in terms of enabling Parliament to develop and become increasingly self-sustaining over the next five years will be ensuring that Parliament is in a position to become increasingly autonomous from the Executive. In line with agreed "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region" as developed in the framework of the CPA and in line with principles of international best practice, the Parliament needs to move towards becoming more autonomous from the Executive in terms of taking responsibility for parliamentary staffing, its finances and work planning.

In Trinidad and Tobago², substantial research has been conducted on the establishment of a *Parliamentary Service*; legislation to provide for the establishment of a *Parliamentary Management Board*; and the way how the administrative and operational expenses of the Parliament be charged on the Consolidated State Budget. A draft "Parliamentary Service Authority Act" is in the process of preparation.³

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament will implement a staged process of moving toward parliamentary autonomy. In line with the CPA Benchmarks (5.4.1) the

² In 2000 a Working Paper of the Law Commission on the reform of the management structure of the Parliament was laid before both Houses of Parliament and referred to a Joint Select Committee. The Joint Select Committee unanimously recommended the establishment of an independent administrative structure to include such features as a Parliament Management Board and a Commission. Both Houses of Parliament, by resolution, accepted the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee.

³ In October 2010 the Cabinet agreed to ascertain the status of efforts at reforming the management structure of the Parliament which had commenced in 2000. It was agreed that the package of draft legislation prepared in 2001 needed to be updated and submitted to Parliament for its pre-legislative scrutiny and consideration. The draft "Parliamentary Service Authority Act" is based upon this decision of the Cabinet.



Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will establish a Board responsible for the management of the legislature.

The functions of the Board shall be the making of bye-laws, the approval of terms and conditions of members of staff, the creation of new posts upon the recommendation of the Clerk of the House, the approval of travel abroad on business of Parliament and any other parliamentary business, the approval of policy for general training of members of staff, the Parliament's strategic planning, the approval of the general management policy, the approval of the parliament's budget estimates and any other function necessary for the expedient management of Parliament. The Board will ensure that the remuneration, allowances, benefits and terms and conditions of employees of Parliament are comparable to those of public officers who perform similar duties.

The composition of the Board will be as inclusive and representative as possible, thus strengthening its legitimacy across party line; and it will reflect the status and distinct roles of the two chambers of Parliament. Therefore, and conditional to final approval of the Parliamentary Service Authority Act, during the term of each Parliament, the Board shall consist of the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the Leader in the House, the Leader of the Opposition, a Government Senator nominated by the Prime Minister, an Opposition Senator nominated by the Leader of the Opposition, two Independent Senators nominated by the President, two other Members of the House (one from the Government side and the other from the Opposition side). For the purpose of exercising the function of determining the budget estimates of parliament, the Minister of Finance will be ex-officio member of the Board.

The final decision on the establishment, functions and composition of the Board will be determined in the Parliamentary Service Authority Act.

As foreseen by CPA Benchmarks (5.4.4), the Clerk of the House shall have a protected status to prevent any undue political pressure. The recruitment, promotion and discipline of staff of the Parliament shall be the responsibility of the Clerk through an open and transparent process (5.4.6).

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament will work closely with the Executive in finalizing the process of making Parliament fully autonomous, putting in place clear and transparent roles that will ensure prudent financial management and a smooth transition process towards autonomy for Parliament, including transition provisions for the pension of current MPs in case the provision of parliament autonomy will enter into force after the end of the mandate of the current parliament.

1.2. Strengthening the role and position of the parliamentarians

Over the past decade, the workloads of MPs and the complexity of the issues discussed in parliament has increased substantially in many parliaments around the world as well as in Trinidad and Tobago. In this context, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims at a further professionalization of the function of parliamentarian. It is expected that the Members of the House and Senate are allocating their time to their parliamentary function to the fullest extent possible.

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



CPA Benchmarks (1.5.5), Members should not be required to place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisation that might influence them in the performance of their official duties or might give the impression of so doing. Therefore, as of the next parliamentary term following elections, Parliament expects more Members to allocate time to their parliamentary function on a full time and exclusive basis.

As a result, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago wants to see a substantial increase in the number of MPs who actively serve in Parliament as their first occupation, which implies a substantial decrease of the number of MPs with prior time allocation elsewhere. By the time of taking the oath of Members of the eleventh Parliament in 2015, Parliament expects 75% of its Members to serve in Parliament on a full time and exclusive basis.⁴

The issue of compatibility of the job of MP with other functions or jobs in the public or private sector will be discussed in a revised Code of Conduct for MPs. If required, the discussions on the compatibility of the job of MP with other functions or jobs in the public or private sector in the framework of the revised Code of Conduct could lead to specific legislation on this topic.

The revised Code of Conduct⁵ for the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will outline the high standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters, as agreed in the CPA Benchmarks (10.1.1). In line with the "Integrity in Public Life Act" (year 2000) and the work of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago⁶, the Code will foresee in rules on conflict of interest and the acceptance of gifts, amongst others, and will require Members of Parliament to fully disclose their financial assets and business interests (CPA, 10.1.2 and 10.1.3). The Speaker of the House and/or President of the Senate will take the initiative to task a Committee, as considered appropriate, to prepare such Code of Conduct for parliamentarians, prior to the next parliamentary elections, and will prepare steps to strengthen the enforceability of the Code of Conduct, possibly also be legislating specific aspects.

Similar to the provisions for female staff, a set of arrangements regulating maternity leave for female parliamentarians from both Chambers will be put in place.

1.3. Organizing the parliament's schedule

In order to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, and as foreseen in the CPA Benchmarks (2.4.6), the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises the need to develop an annual parliamentary calendar which aims to confirm at the beginning of each year the dates of regular plenary sessions, timetables for committee meetings, time for interaction with constituents and other major parliamentary activities and conferences throughout the year. The parliamentary Calendar will also foresee in time for parliamentary outreach activities and sufficient time to review the reports of the Auditor General, Public Accounts Committees, reports from other committees and other relevant issues. The

⁴ The option that all parliamentarians (100 %) would serve on full-time basis in parliament is a valid objective as well; and would further put into practice the principle of separation of powers. However, as one might consider this an issue which touches upon constitutional provisions on the way how the government related to parliament, this Strategic Plan puts forward the objective of 75 % full-time MPs serving in parliament because the Strategic Plan has been designed within the current constitutional framework.

⁵ In April 1987, a "Code of Ethics" for parliamentarians including ministers had been issued.

⁶ <http://www.integritycommission.org.tt/role.html>



Parliament recognises the importance to a fully effective Calendar of incorporating the Executive's legislative agenda and consequently commits to work closely with the Executive to do so. The Clerk of the Office of Parliament will take the initiative in preparing such Annual Parliamentary Calendar, for endorsement by the two Chambers of Parliament.

The Parliamentary Calendar will be structured based upon the vision of the incremental growing time commitment of the Members of Parliament to proceedings of the plenary and committees. A Calendar based on consecutive parliament sittings over several months will be considered. The Parliamentary Calendar will take into account the possibility of future simultaneous sittings of the House and Senate, an increase in the number of sittings within one week. The leadership of the two Houses commits to the objective of holding committee and plenary sittings as much as possible during regular working hours. The increase of plenary sittings over the course of one week will enable the holding of sessions during regular working hours. This, together with the planning of parliamentary breaks, will enable MPs and staff a better work/ life balance.

The planned availability of office space for Executive Members of Parliament in the vicinity of the restored Red House will ensure that Ministers will be available to join parliamentary sittings on a regular basis and on short notice; thus facilitating the full realization of the work schedule as foreseen in the Parliamentary Calendar.

1.4. Strengthening the Committee system

In most democratic parliaments, committees are the central venue for debating legislation and overseeing the Executive, in particular when committees are organised based upon regular work plans or timetables and with sufficient secretariat support.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to ensure that all parliamentary committees develop their own annual work plans that tie into the agreed Parliamentary Calendar and that committees meet regularly between parliamentary plenary sessions.

Included in the annual committee work plans will be timetables for inquiries that take into account the need to engage with civil society, experts, stakeholders and individuals as part of these inquiries.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will increase efforts in ensuring that Committees will undertake inquiries and public hearings throughout Trinidad & Tobago and not only in Port of Spain; as was the practice a number of years ago.

The Office of Parliament will continue to provide technical support to Committees to assist them with their duties and provide members with regular subject briefings. The Office of Parliament will develop a roster of experts, CSOs and stakeholders who can be called on by Committees when undertaking enquiries or reviewing draft legislation.

In reviewing the membership of Committees and recognising that the composition of Committees must reflect the balance of parties within Parliament (CPA Benchmarks 3.1.2), the regular attendance of MPs assigned to a particular Committee needs to increase. Therefore membership of Committees should prioritise more than currently is the case on non-Executive MPs. From the eleventh Parliament onwards and in view of the mentioned objective that 75% of MPs allocate the majority of their time to their parliamentary duties, Cabinet Ministers will no longer serve as members of JSCs. While back bench members and Ministers of State will continue to serve as members of JSCs, Cabinet Ministers



will be invited to attend meetings of JSCs when discussing legislation relevant to the area of responsibility of the ministry, or any other matter as required.

As foreseen in the CPA Benchmarks (3.1.3), the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will establish and follow a transparent method for selecting the chairs of Committees. The PAC and PAEC will be chaired by a Member of the Opposition (as stipulated in the Constitution) and the JSCs will be chaired by Independent Senators. In this way, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago envisages to continue and build upon the positive experience of the current practice in which Independent Senators chair JSCs.

The core functions and responsibilities of Committees are to inquire and report to Parliament on the administration of entities falling under their purview. In line with the current practice in the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago as well as common operation in other democratic Parliaments, such inquires should not be limited to occasions when written reports are available but are applicable in all circumstances considered appropriate by the Committee. The Parliament envisages to include a clarification on this matter in the revised Standing Orders. Committees may also review and report on the legislative issues concerning the entities under their purview.

1.5. Developing the capacity and professional skills of MPs

Following the next parliamentary elections, Parliament will foresee in a comprehensive orientation and induction programme for the newly elected MPs. The programme will cover issues related to the main functions of parliamentarians in legislation, oversight and representation, the services available through the Office of Parliament, the history and procedures of the Parliament in Trinidad & Tobago, instruments of governance and accountability, international and inter-parliamentary relations.

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Office of Parliament will also prepare a rolling programme of professional development for MPs. The rolling programme will assist members of the House and the Senate in meeting the increasing demands on their function by sharing knowledge, providing technical expertise, highlighting relevant national and international governance experiences, analyzing procedural rules and regulations, building leadership skills and addressing other issues as identified. Particular attention will be given to ICT, use of the Library and Hansard and developing research skills.

In designing and implementing the induction programme and the rolling programme of professional development for MPs, the Office of Parliament will seek the cooperation from other established parliaments (e.g. Canada, UK), international organizations (e.g. UNDP) as well as CPA and former members of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago.

The Parliament will foresee in a specific budget line for MP's professional development and the Office of Parliament will assign (at least) two staff persons in charge for these programs.

1.6. Reviewing the Standing Orders

The Standing Orders of Parliament govern the way in which the Parliament operates and the way it conducts its business. It is therefore of central importance to the functioning of Parliament that the Standing Orders be effective and fit for purpose. After the Senate introduced a number of new articles in 1989, a comprehensive review of the Standing Orders of Parliament by the Standing Orders Committee is now in process, envisaging harmonized and smooth procedural functioning in, and



between, both chambers. Some of the issues under consideration are the introduction of Prime Minister's question time, limitations to the Member's speaking time, etc.

Following the adoption of the comprehensive review of the Standing Orders, the Office of Parliament will prepare an introduction section to ensure detailed discussion and full understanding of the new provisions by the members.

In addition, a 'procedural fact sheet' will be produced on a regular basis to capture procedural questions, discuss un-clarity or gaps as identified, analyse legal and procedural background, highlight relevant international practices and recommend options for procedural resolution. When a number of such procedural fact sheets have emerged, the information will serve as a basis for possible future adjustment to the Standing Orders. In this way, the Standing Orders will remain an authoritative and living document, providing guidance to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and keeping it up to speed with evolving requirements of Parliament. Following the next parliamentary elections, members which are elected for the first time will be offered a more in-depth procedural briefing.

1.7. Strengthening the internal management of the Office of Parliament

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that for a legislature to operate effectively its Secretariat needs to be fully equipped to be able to respond to changing needs. Therefore, the Parliament will continue to develop the capacity of the Office of Parliament as foreseen in the 2012 Corporate Plan of the Office of Parliament.⁷

In addition, the Parliament will keep under review the organisational structure of the Office of Parliament to ensure that the departments and units correspond to the needs of the Parliament's changing work program.

The Office of Parliament, though a newly established "Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit" (PIMEU), will ensure will ensure that annual work plans are drawn from the Implementation Roadmap for this Strategic Plan and that each department and unit has their own annual work plan which will be regularly monitored and evaluated.

To further streamline its operations and policies, the Office of Parliament will prepare Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) concerning e.g. the flow of documents, decision making on administrative and managerial issues, and internal and external communication. The SOPs will provide clear internal rules on the division of tasks and duties between departments and units. The SOPs dealing with flow of documents will clearly define the rules for classification of documents, timelines, identifying and allocating responsibilities, document management, internal and external correspondence, confidential documents, archiving, etc. The SOPs for document flow will serve as basis for implementation of an integrated workflow and be aligned with the Document Management System, which is part of the Parliament's ICT Strategy. In a similar way, the SOPs dealing with decision making on administrative and managerial issues, and on internal and external communication will address a number of current gaps and ambiguities in the daily functioning of Parliament. These SOPs will help to improve the efficiency and to increase the transparency of the parliament's work.

⁷ The Plan outlined five key areas for a more systematic management approach: security & safety policy; integrated internal communication policy; Human Resources policy; Health and Wellness policy; and ICT policy.



Key to the development of a modern Parliament is the staffing of the Office of Parliament. There is already a well functioning Human Resources Department in place, which functions based upon an agreed HR Mission and Vision, HR Services Organizational Chart and a detailed description of HR structure and HR Functions. The Human Resources Department has an HR Strategic Plan. Challenges are related to the high turn-over of staff and challenges to organize sufficient opportunities for staff training.

As part of this Strategic Plan, Parliament will prepare an HR Manual to improve departmental efficiency and will finalize the six year employment staffing plan. In addition, the Office of Parliament will ensure that all staff have clear and up-to-date job descriptions, personal development plans / staff career plans and that there is a programme of professional development for all staff based on the system of performance appraisal. Parliament will team-up with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) in developing a certified course for parliamentary staff in academic and practical, procedural issues. The Office of Parliament will also conduct a regular assessment of the staffing functions.

Parliament will also continue to provide opportunities for the staff's professional development at international level, when possible, in partnership with other parliaments or international organizations. So far such opportunities were created for procedural clerks, staff of Library, Hansard and Broadcast Departments. The Office of Parliament will also continue with and broaden the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), supporting staff and their family on e.g. health issues.

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

In modern parliaments, the move towards a "paperless parliament" is becoming increasingly prominent through the central place of ICT in parliamentary proceedings. Systems and standards for managing documents in digital formats are an essential element to improve Parliament's operations and also in increasing transparency and accessibility. Within this context, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will develop further its ICT policy in order to ensure working processes and procedures in Parliament become more effective over the next couple of years.

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will implement a comprehensive ICT plan with a view to improve communication and delivery of documents to all MPs, provide them with a single online repository for the collection and sharing of parliamentary documents, and subsequently reduce the use of paper and thus lead to significant cost savings.⁸ The ICT plan has the following components:

1. All documents received or produced by the Parliament will be made available in an accepted electronic format.
2. The Hansard will be available in an open format that will be searchable and reusable by internal and external partners within the next three years.
3. The website will contain all information needed in line with the IPU guidelines within one year.
4. The Parliament will adopt a standard open format for legislation shared between all Government partners within the next three years.
5. Within the next year the Hansard without verified quotations will be published online, 90 per cent of the time within 24 hours of the completion of the debate.

⁸ <http://www.ttparliament.org/hansards/hh20130122.pdf>



6. Parliamentary applications and information will be securely accessible by authorized users from anywhere at any time within the next two years.
7. Paper usage by the Parliament will be reduced by 50 per cent by the end of 2013 compared with the year 2012 usage.

To this end, “The Rotunda”, an application developed by the Office of Parliament to facilitate the sharing of documentation in electronic form with Members, has been launched. Each Member of Parliament has been issued an iPad with the application “The Rotunda Installed”, and training was offered.

In taking a leadership role towards the usage of ICT in its proceedings, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago also recognises the need for a continuing programme of professional development for Parliament staff and Members in terms of utilising the latest ICT in their work; and the Office of Parliament will take the necessary initiatives to offer opportunities for continuing training.

As parliament moves in the direction of an e-parliament, the reliance on hard-copy documents will be systematically reduced. Parliament will ask the Cabinet to issue an instruction to all ministries and departments to only submit electronic documents to parliament. To take a realistic approach in achieving this objective, parliament will suggest to the Cabinet a pilot project, starting on 1 January 2014, in which an selected number of ministries and departments will only submit electronic documents to parliament; while the remaining ministries and departments will do so as of 1 July 2014.

The delivery of hard-copy documents at the private addresses of MPs is a practice stemming from the start of parliament and absorbs a substantial amount of the Parliaments' budget, puts a strain on the life-work balance of parliament drivers, and sometimes puts the safety of staff at risk when documents need to be delivered at late hours. This outdated practice will be phased out and replaced by the further institutionalization of the distribution of electronic documents via email and iPad and, in addition, a system of mailboxes inside parliament premises, where MPs or staff on their behalf can pick up any hard-copy documents at any time (as is the case in many other parliaments). The Office of Parliament will initiate preparations for the new system to commence as of 1 January 2014, including additional briefing sessions for parliamentarians on usage of ICT tools including iPad. The delivery of hard-copy documents to some MPs' private addresses will remain possible in exceptional circumstances upon written request by the MP and the approval by the Clerk.

In addition, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will connect all constituency offices and sub-offices on-line through a high-speed internet connection, ensure that the parliamentary TV-channel can be streamed to mobile phone devices, develop the digital asset management system, enhance systems for back-up and security of data, and work towards a more integrated system of the various ICT sub-systems and applications currently in use. To make this possible, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is committed to increase the human resources assigned to the ICT Department.

During the time of implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Parliament will explore in which circumstances video-conferencing and the usage of Skype can contribute to parliamentary efficiency.

1.9. Developing and sustaining international links

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is an outward looking institution. Over the next five years it will build upon the strong international partnerships and links that have been developed. Specifically, the



Parliament aims to continue its close relationship with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Forum of Presiding Officers and Clerks (FPOC).

Acknowledging the leading role of the Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conducting the foreign policy of Trinidad & Tobago, in conjunction with CARICOM, the Parliament recognizes that the lack of foreign policy consensus among political leaders and potential leaders of the country affects the foreign relations and image of the country as international partners are looking in particular towards stability and predictability of the country's foreign policy. The Parliament considers the process of consensus building on the country's foreign policy objectives as one of the main potential advantages of creating a new Committee on Foreign Affairs.



Objective 2 - Improve legislative process in Parliament to ensure better scrutiny & quality of legislation

One of the key functions of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is the legislative function. According to section 53 of the Constitution, “Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Trinidad and Tobago”.

Therefore, in order to ensure that the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is able to fulfil effectively and transparently the legislative responsibilities outlined in the Constitution, a key objective for the Strategic Plan will be to improve the legislative process in Parliament to ensure enhanced scrutiny and quality of legislation. Specific areas of activity over the next five years needed to achieve this Strategic Objective are outlined below.

2.1. Constructing a platform for the legislative process

The development of quality legislation is a long and extensive process involving multiple actors throughout the state apparatus, including policy staff in Ministries, the Law Reform Commission (LRC), the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC), researchers and parliamentarians, Office of the President and Official Gazette. Legislation comes to Parliament through the following process: 1. Policy Decision by Cabinet; 2. Directive given by the Office of the CPC to draft legislation; 3. Draft legislation goes to the LRC; 4. Draft legislation is approved by Cabinet; 5. Draft legislation is forwarded to Parliament, for review, amendments and final adoption.

During this process, the text of one legislative document undergoes many changes and revisions before it is ever published in final version. Currently, the legislative process in Trinidad and Tobago does not enable the tracking of changes and revisions to the same document based on one comprehensive platform. The creation of a single platform for the legislative process requires the cooperation between Parliament and various actors within Government. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago envisages a series of consultations with the Office of the Attorney General, in particular the CPC and the LRC, to prepare a Feasibility Study for such legislative platform, including a detailed script of responsibilities, actors, timelines and resources. The creation of such legislative platform requires that the Executive transmit Bills to Parliament in electronic form in all circumstances, as stipulated in the CPA Benchmarks (1.6.1).

Within the proceedings of Parliament, an accessible tracking system of proposed amendments, their review and adoption or rejection will be created. Parliament will make the ICT resources for such tracking system available over the next two years. The tracking system will be linked to the Document Management System (DMS). This will facilitate members of parliament to visualize during meetings of Committee the process of amending legislation as it happens.

2.2. Clarifying the timetable for the legislative process

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that in order to achieve the Parliamentary Calendar, mentioned above, it will need to develop a legislative timetable for Parliament.

As in most Westminster model Parliaments, the majority of legislation considered by the Parliament is initiated by the Government. Currently, there is no legislative plan submitted by the Executive. The



main communication are the Cabinet decisions resulting in a “Cabinet Notice” coming to Parliament that a Bill was approved to be introduced in Parliament.

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will work with the Office of the Attorney General in order to move towards the development of new procedures for cooperation and communication between the Parliament and the Government so that the Parliament is able to plan the Parliamentary Calendar and the work to be undertaken both in plenary and in Committee. As part of these new procedures, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will propose the creation of a Business Committee, with senior representatives from Parliament and Government, that will coordinate what legislation is processed.

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that, in line with international best practice, the Committees needs sufficient time to scrutinise the proposed content of draft Bills, consult on the likely impact of the proposed Bills, draft Committee reports and ensure that Members have time to reflect on the Committee’s findings before Bills are voted upon on the floor of the House.

2.3. Scrutinizing bills in Committees

The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago recognises that in order to provide enhanced in-depth scrutiny of proposed legislation, all draft laws need to be reviewed by a Committee with external input from CSOs, experts and stakeholders within a specific timeframe. This provision follows CPA Benchmarks⁹ and will apply to all proposed legislation in Trinidad & Tobago, unless decided otherwise by the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate or a Committee under their leadership.

To support the Committee review of draft legislation, Committee staff is preparing ‘Bills Essentials’. The Bill Essentials informs on the purpose of the Bill, compares the Bill to similar legislation internationally and highlights salient aspects of the Bill. The Legal Unit of the Office of Parliament goes through the Bills Essentials to ensure the proper terminology is used and the rigor of the research is good. The Bills Essentials is then uploaded to parliament website. It gives members of public an idea of what legislation is reviewed and processed.

However, the timeframe to review the Bills and draft the Bills Essentials is very limited. Advance planning through a legislative agenda agreed upon by the Parliament and the Executive will facilitate more opportunities and time for in-depth prior research on the draft law for preparing the Bill Essentials and for organising consultations with relevant stakeholders.

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Office of Parliament will offer training to MPs on methodology of legislative review and legal practices and will develop a Manual on the process of parliamentary review on legislation.

The hearings/consultations of relevant stakeholders on the draft legislation will be open to the public, will be announced in a timely fashion and findings and conclusions will be made available on the Parliament website. The Office of Parliament will develop a good practice guide on engaging civil society, experts, professional associations and stakeholders on the legislative process for use by the Committees, Members and staff. In this way, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will follow-up to the

⁹ "There shall be a presumption that the legislature will consider legislation in detail and/or refer it to a committee, and any exceptions must be transparent, narrowly defined and extraordinary in nature." (3.2.1). "Committees shall scrutinize legislation referred to them and have the power to recommend amendments." (3.2.2). "The legislature shall provide adequate mechanisms to encourage wider consultations and public submissions on Bills introduced" (6.3.1).



relevant CPA Benchmarks that the "legislature will provide adequate mechanisms to encourage wider consultations and public submissions on Bills introduced" (6.3.1).

To bring more policy focus, consistency and resources to the process of scrutiny of legislation, a Legislative or Bills Committee is needed as a Standing Committee. Therefore, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will move to develop and strengthen the capacity of the Bills Committee to ensure that it has the capacity, expertise and sufficient time within the Parliamentary Calendar to scrutinise draft legislation in detail. This increased capacity will include the development of an annual calendar of work for the Bills Committee based on the Government's legislative agenda, training, the development of a guidebook for Committee Members on the legislative process and training for Committee Members on the scope and remit of the Committee.

The main input of the Office of Parliament's Legal Unit in terms of review of draft legislation concerns the review of the "Bills Essentials" as prepared by Committee staff. The Legal Unit, which comprises of a business operations and research officer, a legal officer, and a senior legal officer, does not have the capacity to function as a fully fledged Legal Department, assisting MPs with independent and in-depth advice and legal analysis on draft legislation.

Therefore, during the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will create a well-staffed Legal Department, whose aim will be to provide in-depth and independent advice and legal analysis on draft legislation for individual members and for Committees, firstly but not exclusively the Bills Committee.

2.4. Studying the impact of draft legislation

The potential social and economic impact of draft legislation should be a key consideration for Parliament when scrutinising bills. The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will aim to work with the Office of the Attorney General and other offices in Government to ensure that statements on the likely financial, social, economic and other impact of draft legislation under scrutiny is attached to bills prior to their submission for MPs' review.

When required, Parliament will engage external expertise to make additional impact assessments of bills. This is in line with the CPA Benchmarks which read that "Committees shall have the right to consult and/or employ experts" (CPA 3.2.3).

2.5. Enhancing the capacity of all Members in the legislative process

In addition to developing improved mechanisms within Parliament for scrutiny of legislation, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is committed to providing increased information and support to all Members of Parliament during the legislative process. During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will move to put in place measures to expand the capacity of all Members of Parliament to amend draft legislation and propose backbench bills. Such measures will include the provision of training, orientation and detailed guidance to Members as well as the provision of materials based on this training. The capacity of the Office of Parliament staff will be used to assist all Members of Parliament during the review of legislation in Parliament.

The Parliament aims to make a research assistant available to each Member of the House and each Senator, sitting at shared office space in Parliament. In first instance, the research assistants will be



made available to independent Senators and opposition parliamentarians, since they cannot rely on resources from ministries.



Objective 3 - Improve the capacity of Parliament to provide effective oversight

In addition to adopting legislating, another key function of Parliament is oversight of the Executive branch of government. Ministers of the Government are drawn from the Parliament but remain accountable to the Parliament.¹⁰

The oversight function covers not only the budget plans of the Government and scrutiny of public expenditure but covers also the oversight of the impact and effectiveness of the implementation of policy and legislation.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to building upon current procedures and practices already in place in Parliament, and in particular the Committee system, to improve the capacity of the Parliament to provide effective oversight. Specific areas of activity over the next five years needed to achieve this Strategic Objective are outlined below.

3.1. Exercising oversight in plenary session

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, like many other parliaments around the world, has developed a number of mechanisms of subjecting the executive arm of government to accountability. Such procedures as questions, the estimates process, scrutiny of delegated legislation, private members' motions and adjournment debates allow members to raise issues relating to the use or proposed use of governmental power, to call upon the government to explain actions it has taken, and to require it to defend and justify its policies or administrative decisions. Parliamentary committees are part of the parliamentary infrastructure that helps to ensure that governments account for their operating policies and actions, and the Public Accounts Committee is constitutionally mandated to make certain good management and use of public resources.

To strengthen the practice of oversight, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will, during the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, introduce and conduct on regular basis the "Prime Minister's Question Time". During the Prime Minister's time, questions may be put to the Prime Minister relating to current matters of national importance or on the general performance of the Government and Government agencies.

3.2. Exercising oversight in Committees

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to building upon its own current procedures and practices in Parliament and in particular the Committee system to improve the capacity to provide effective oversight. Committee inquiries can be triggered by any of the following, by way of example: a review of the contents of Administrative Reports, where available; the recognized failure of the entity to report to Parliament; current issues of public concern involving the entity; general concerns about the performance of the entity and weaknesses in the implementation of government policy. Committee staff will prepare an inquiry proposal for the members and chairperson of the Committee.

¹⁰ This is in line with section 75(1) of the Constitution which states that: "There should be a Cabinet for Trinidad and Tobago. The Cabinet shall have the general direction and control of the government of Trinidad and Tobago and shall be collectively responsible therefore to Parliament."



The Committees annual work plans will put particular emphasis on the importance of oversight by foreseeing in a timeline of inquiries as well as follow-up to the findings and recommendations as documented in the relevant reports.

Committee staff and chairpersons of Committees will play an active role in following up to these conclusions and will regularly verify with relevant entities and agencies on the measures taken to address the issues discussed during inquiry hearings. In particular, staff will, through written correspondence and other forms of communications, follow-up on the conclusion of Committee inquiries and keep the chairperson informed. A review of the conclusion of previous inquiries will be put on the agenda of next Committee meeting.

To strengthen the skills and expertise required, Parliament will organise on a regular basis, high level courses of oversight covering issues of methodology, planning and best practices.

3.3. Deepening oversight through two new Committees

As the representative body that cares for current and future generations, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago wants to highlight the challenges which this country, and many other countries around the globe, is facing in the areas of environment, sustainability, protecting and nurturing diversity and multiculturalism. Consideration for these challenges were given as parliament wants to contribute to a policy of gender equality (hence focus on human rights and diversity) and a policy on climate change.

Therefore, during the term of the implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament will create and provide capacity to two new Standing Committees: 1. Human rights and diversity; 2. Sustainable energy and environment. These Committees will exercise their parliamentary oversight role in terms of overseeing government policy, scrutinising and initiating legislation as appropriate. To make the creation and functioning of the two new Committees a realistic objective in light of existing workload and availability of members, the Committees can be constituted with a lower number of members than is the case for other committees, provided the House Committee agrees to this.

With this initiative, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will put into practice its vision to protect the interests and the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the longer term perspective.

3.4. Scrutinizing budgets and expenditures effectively

A key responsibility of Parliament is to approve the annual state budget following effective financial scrutiny of budget plans, and to exercise oversight and ensure accountability of public expenditure.

Good governance requires that the Executive will be held to account for its financial and substantive results. Areas to strengthen within Trinidad and Tobago include the scrutiny of performance *ex ante* and the review of results *ex post*. The ability and willingness of parliamentarians to scrutinize the government's finances and hold Ministries, Departments, statutory Boards and state enterprises to account for their use of public money requires further support.

Preparing the state budget is an extensive process, led by the Ministry of Finance, and involving Ministries, Departments and other entities which are budget holders. Upon completion of this process and following adoption of the budget by the Cabinet, the budget is sent to Parliament and examined by the Finance Committee. The Office of Parliament will make sure that the Finance Committee is serviced by the appropriate parliamentary staff. At average, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago



examines and approves the budget within a period of 5 days.¹¹ Until today, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago has little or no experience with prior consultations on information and policies presented in the annual draft budget; a practice common to democratic parliaments including Commonwealth parliaments.¹²

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will encourage the Executive to table a Pre-Budget Report to be debated in plenary and/or examined by the Finance Committee and JSCs, as appropriate. The aim of a Pre-Budget Report is to ensure that there is a possibility for parliamentary input into the government's annual strategy and budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year, without putting under question the governments prerogative to decide on and move the budget.

In case of absence of a Pre-Budget Report, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will seek to take other initiatives to increase their own and the public's participation in the budget preparation phase. This means that, during the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Finance Committee and/or JSCs aim to start holding hearings on the relevant Ministries' plans and the related budget for the forthcoming year. This will ensure increased interaction between the Parliament and Ministers or Departmental officials and will allow parliamentary committees to give advice and provide suggestions on the future direction of services and programs. The piloting of these hearings will start as of the next Parliament taking the oath, after the 2015 elections.

To facilitate the MPs in the budget review process, Parliament will recruit a full time Parliamentary Budget and Accounting Advisor, to offer independent advice on budgetary matters throughout the year, to assist with budget related research and analysis, to assist MPs with preparing the consultations and inquiries on the main items in the budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year and on issues related to ex-post accounting (as discussed further).

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will take initiatives aimed at strengthening accountability of public expenditure, in particular through the work of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Public Accounts and Enterprises Committee (PAEC). As foreseen in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and in line with the CPA Benchmarks (7.2.3), the PAC and PAEC are chaired by members of the opposition.

Being aware of the backlog of accounts to be reviewed, the Parliament will continue its efforts to systematically review all Ministries, Departments, statutory Boards and state enterprises including inquiring those entities which fail to submit financial reports. Therefore, the Parliament aims at regular meetings of the PAC, possibly leading to a schedule of two-weekly or weekly meetings. Alternatively, establishing sub committees to examine particular entities will be considered.

There are approximately 100 entities under PACs purview. To date only a very limited number of entities are examined on annual basis. The Parliament envisages that, during the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, PACs should move towards examining 50% of the entities under its purview per year. To achieve this, the PAC and PAEC will prepare an annual work plan, including the overview of Ministries, Departments, statutory Boards and state enterprises under its purview which it would like to inquire during that year.

¹¹ "Activities on Strengthening Parliamentary Practices in Trinidad & Tobago" - A Study on Parliamentary Scrutiny and Existing Parliamentary Practices; framework Contract Europe Aid, by Anthony Staddon, February 2012, 70 p.

¹² This has been introduced in countries such as Hungary, Portugal, Rwanda, Sweden, Uganda and UK.



Some of these inquiries, in particular follow-up inquiries, do not always have to be exercised through in-person meetings in front of the PAC. As is the case in the UK, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will encourage its staff to seek written responses from entities related to the PAC findings and the statements made at an earlier hearing with the entity. Based on the written response from the entity, the staff can pull-out issues enabling the chairperson to decide if the Committee wants to meet again with that entity. This approach will add structure to the work of the Committee.

In order to enhance the capacity for financial scrutiny to its fullest potential and cognizant of the time limitations on Ministers of the Cabinet, the presence of the Executive on the PAC will be restricted to Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries only. This provision will apply as of the next parliamentary mandate (2015), when a larger number of MPs is expected to serve in parliament as their main occupation.

The parliamentary staff support to the PAC/PAEC includes currently one parliamentary clerk, one research staffer, and financial and administrative officers. In addition, from time to time the PACs have called upon the assistance of external consultants for specialized technical advice. This model has been considered useful and will be continued in the future as well. In view of the objective to substantially increase the number of meetings and the entities being reviewed or called in, the human resources will need to be strengthened as well. The increase in examinations as described above will need the support of two clerks, two research persons, administration officer and an financial person on a full basis to be able to advise both committees.

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago aims to enhance the interaction between the Auditor General's Office¹³ and the Public Accounts Committees. As foreseen in the CPA Benchmarks (7.2.6), all reports of the Auditor General's Office of Trinidad & Tobago are referred to the PAC for further investigation, if necessary, and report.

The Auditor General is an Officer of Parliament, even though his appointment is by the President. The Constitution provides that the Auditor General submits his reports to the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate and the Minister of Finance. Prior to every examination of entities for which the Auditor General has conducted an audit, the Committee invites the Auditor General to attend the meeting or send a representative. The Auditor General provides the Committee with supporting Notes to the audited accounts of entities under the purview of that office.

With a view to enhance the interaction between the Auditor General and Parliament, the PAC will request from the Auditor General to submit a list of entities which can be of interest to further PAC scrutiny, and PAC will express its views of suggested areas for auditing by the Auditor General, recognizing that the ultimate decision on which entities to audit rests with the Office of the Auditor General.

The PAC will also inquire with the Ministry of Finance on its follow-up to the findings and recommendations of Auditor General reports, including the Ministry's role to surcharge persons and entities which do not comply with applicable legislation and audit results.¹⁴ Parliament envisages that Committees should be given the authority to demand accounts from entities which haven't submitted them yet.

¹³ <http://www.auditorgeneral.gov.tt/>

¹⁴ Exchequer and Audit Act - Chapter 69:01, article 27.1



The Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago aims to ensure that the review of the accounts of various Ministries, Departments, statutory Boards and state enterprises generates a meaningful input into the parliamentary budget review. The above mentioned Parliamentary Budget and Accounting Advisor will assist the PAC/PA(E)C and JSCs for required technical advice.

The current system of line budgeting is accounting-oriented and allows Parliament only to verify whether money has been spent. To verify what has been achieved with the money and to generate a value for money review requires an audit system which moves towards results-based auditing. The PAC will encourage the Office of the Auditor General to apply more value-for-money audits; and will support the requests of the Auditor General to fill all open slots in the approved staffing table of the Office of the Auditor General.

3.5. Reviewing the implementation of legislation

One of the key aspects of parliamentary oversight relates to implementation of legislation. To review the level of implementation of legislation one can assess the availability and timeliness of secondary legislation, the way how courts interpret and force specific legislation, the extent to which the public knows relevant legislation, and the availability of required resources of relevant actors to implement the legislation.

To strengthen its effective oversight role, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims at developing a systematic approach in reviewing selected legislation. As part of the annual work plan of Parliament, Joint Select Committees will review on an annual basis at least one piece of legislation.

Parliament will engage external expertise through an Memorandum of Understanding or Service Contract with Universities or research centres to prepare an extensive research report on the selected legislation for examination and discussion by the Committee and further on by Parliament.

The review of implementation of selected legislation will result in a set of recommendations relevant to the thematic area and ministry. Parliament will consider the possibility of the creation of a special committee to deal with the review of implementation of legislation [*or: assign this responsibility to the Bills Committee*].

3.6. Increasing oversight capacity through improved library and research services

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago recognises that professional and detailed research is essential to Members of Parliament in order for them to fulfil their oversight duties effectively. The Library and Research Department will continue to produce a number of tangible outputs such as the 'research tip of the month', book news, readers alert from Journals, and responses to MP research requests or queries within maximum three days.

Parliament will continue to ensure that library and research staff continue to receive professional development opportunities. Parliament will continue to enable external visitors to make use of the Library resources on days there are no parliament sittings. Parliament will continue to ensure that its Members receive - as part of the rolling programme of professional development - regular orientation sessions on the use of the library and undertaking research.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago further recognises the importance of electronic access to library documents. Therefore, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will focus the development of



the library on providing an effective e-library of up to date documents and resources for Members, bringing its full catalogue on line. The Parliament will also digitize older laws, Hansard documents and books and documents in the years to come.

The main challenge for the Library and Research Department is staff retention, due to the long working hours, in the absence of added remuneration and in the practical impossibility to take compensatory time off. In addition, key staff working in the Library are not parliament staff but staff from the National Library assigned to parliament. Therefore, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will review and adopt a comprehensive proposal to restructure the human resources available to the Library and Research, including a sufficient increase in the number of staff assigned to this Department.

3.7. Strengthening the interaction between Parliament and Ombudsperson¹⁵

The Ombudsperson is the office to which persons can complain and seek redress for any injustice suffered as a result of the exercise of the administrative functions of a State department or any other public authority. As foreseen in Section 93 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the institution of the Ombudsperson is an independent institution aimed at bridging the gap between citizens and the state.

The Ombudsperson is an Officer of Parliament and as such reports directly to parliament. The Ombudsperson in Trinidad & Tobago is still struggling to achieve its full potential due to the lack of responsiveness by Ministries and Departments to the inquiries of the Ombudsperson; and the lack of follow-up to the recommendations of the Ombudsperson to address the issues identified.

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will take a number of initiatives to strengthen the interaction between the parliament and the Ombudsperson Institution. Visible and high-level attention will be given to the Ombudsperson's Annual Report when it is tabled in Parliament. One of the existing JSCs, as assigned by the House Committee, will consider and seek the implementation of the reports of the Ombudsperson. The work and the role of the Ombudsperson will be introduced to newly elected MPs as part of the Induction program following parliamentary elections.

The legal framework regulating the functioning of the Ombudsperson will be strengthened in line with the recommendations adopted by the Law Commission in 1998. The Parliament will adopt legislation or legislative amendments to impose an obligation on public officers and authorities to attempt to conciliate matters which the Ombudsperson advises should be settled. Provisions will be introduced to allow the Ombudsperson to apply to the High Court for the enforcement of its recommendations where the Parliament was unable to consider the matters within a reasonable time or did not succeed to effect compliance with the recommendations of the Ombudsperson.

3.8. Working collaborative with independent oversight institutions

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has an important relationship in terms of liaison and interaction with a number of Independent Oversight Institutions in Trinidad and Tobago including e.g.

¹⁵ <http://www.ombudsman.gov.tt/>



the Auditor General, the Ombudsperson and the Integrity Commission. During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament will undertake a review of its working relationship with these Independent Oversight Institutions including a review of all relevant legal and policy documents and develop options that could improve the interaction between the Parliament and the Independent Oversight Institutions.

In the dialogue with the independent oversight institutions, the Parliament will encourage them to focus more comprehensively on structural and systemic issues -- which will be of high value for Parliament -- while fully respecting the independency of these oversight institutions.



Objective 4 - Develop the outreach work of Parliament and the representative role of MPs

One of the key functions of the Members of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is the representative function. Therefore, in order to ensure that the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago is able to effectively support MPs in this role, a key objective for the Strategic Plan will be to improve the representative role of MPs and to further develop the outreach and communication work of parliament. Specific areas of activity over the next five years needed to achieve this Strategic Objective are outlined below.

4.1. Reformatting the functioning of Constituency Relations Offices

Trinidad and Tobago consists of 41 constituencies. In the performance of his/her duties as a parliamentary representative each Member of the House is entitled to an office within his/her constituency and to organise the activities within that office as he/she sees fit. The Office of the Parliament is responsible for providing guidance on the procedures and policies of the operations of the constituency offices, taking into account CPA Guidelines (8.1.1).

While currently Members of Parliament select the office location in either private or public buildings and select the staff working in the constituency offices, the Office of the Parliament signs lease contracts and administers the payment of salaries and other allowances for staff.

During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, a comprehensive review of the system and daily functioning of the constituency offices will be executed. Pending modalities as identified in the review, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims to locate constituency offices in state owned properties, assigned to Parliament, or by purchasing a new property in case no state owned properties are available in that constituency. Learning from current experiences that changes in election of MPs result in different locations for the constituency offices and subsequent significant additional cost for refurbishment and renovation of these offices and taken into account that MPs office in private properties are not fully perceived as neutral representation venues, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims to acquire, prior to the next elections, permanent transfer of state owned premises to Parliament in each constituency.

Acquiring state owned premises for the constituency offices will provide continuity in the availability of an office for that constituency. It will increase citizens' knowledge of where the constituency office is located and will strengthen Parliament's corporate identity and communications to citizens.

As MPs are recruiting their staff, there are currently a number of discrepancies across the constituency offices in terms of job descriptions, grades and salary scales. During the time of implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Parliament will develop a set of standardised job descriptions, a transparent system of grading of positions and salary scales for each of the positions. The House Committee of the Parliament will issue the required managerial framework to make the Job Descriptions, grading and salary scales applicable to all staff working in Constituency Offices. In this way, more consistency, better employment conditions for staff and considerations of equal pay for equal work will be applied (e.g. all research officers in the constituency offices would get the same salary).

The Office of Parliament will make sure that each staff person at the constituency office has a proper employment contract with the MP and will consider this as a requirement before salary payments can be executed. The Office of Parliament will hold an (anonymous) survey among staff of constituency



offices on employment conditions, including on the way how annual leave or accumulated leave is dealt with. In addition, the Office of Parliament will review and develop in further detail the "Constituency Operations Manual". It will offer to all staff of constituency offices a number of trainings and professional development opportunities and will offer to MPs advice on Human Resources management, including through personal advice and coaching as required. In this way, the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago will improve the system of human resources at the constituency offices, while leaving intact the basic policy choice that MPs select the staff with whom they prefer to work in the constituency office.

Within the next two years and prior to the next elections, the Parliament will conduct or commission a comprehensive review of the system of constituency relations offices with the aim to review in which way the offices respond to the needs of citizens in their interaction with MPs and to enhance the way how these offices can contribute to the corporate communication of the Parliament on its role and on the value of democratic political system as such.

The Office of Parliament will support the constituency work by making ICT and other support systems currently in use for constituency relations offices also available to sub-offices. The Office of Parliament will encourage Members to create their own web-page and then connect it to the parliament's web-page. To strengthen accountability, the Audit Unit of the Office of Parliament will audit once a year the use of the amounts allocated to each MP for running the constituency office. All furniture and equipment owned by the Office of Parliament should be handed over to the newly elected member of the House, in case the elections have determined that there is a change in who is the representative of that constituency.

Parliament will work with the Trinidad & Tobago Police Service in conducting a safety and security risk assessment with the aim to measure current security needs and outline recommendations, including the possible deployment of security staff in or in front of constituency offices.

As part of the efforts to enhance the Parliament's outreach and in support of the representative role of MPs, the Parliament leadership, following consultations with all political parties represented in Parliament, will determine a 'constituency day' on weekly basis. The constituency day, as included in the parliamentary calendar, will constitute when MPs will interact with their constituents and subsequently no plenary or Committee meeting will be scheduled on that day.

To strengthen the representative role of MPs to respond to local development needs, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will advocate for the creation of a constituency development programme. The programme will enable MPs to decide on the realisation of specific development projects through the resources administered by an Agency at the Executive level.¹⁶ The programme will reserve an equal amount to each constituency to address development needs in an accountable, transparent way and in full conformity with all applicable legislative on procurement and spending of public funds.

If state resources would be used in the emerging practice of "shadow constituency offices", this could be seen as going against the electoral framework of the representation of the constituency through the elected parliamentarian; and Parliament communication aims to discourage such eventuality.

¹⁶ Consultations between Government and Parliament will determine which Agency at the Executive level is best placed to administrate the resources for development projects in the constituency as decided by the MP.



4.2. Expanding Parliamentary Communications

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to substantially increasing its outreach and communication. A comprehensive communication and outreach strategy will be developed and adopted, incorporating existing initiatives in terms of media outreach and ICT.

While Parliament's outreach activities continue throughout the years, Parliament will also conduct an annual 'Week of Parliament' upon which outreach activities will focus. The aim will be to use this Week of Parliament to provide increased information to the media on the role of Parliament, to ensure an increased number of visits to Parliament during this week and to facilitate that all MPs are present in their constituency or throughout the country explaining the work of Parliament and the system of parliamentary democracy.

The Parliament recognises that the key feature of any outreach programme should be engaging with and educating the next generation of voters and political leaders. Therefore during the time of implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will further develop a schools outreach programme to ensure that there are regular visits and that formalised programmes of agreed activities is put in place for such school visits.

Parliament will also work with the Minister of Education to develop curriculum materials for schools of both primary and secondary level on the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and systems of parliamentary democracy.

Building upon the current experience of an annual Youth Parliament, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will broaden the concept into a more regular interaction with the selected or nominated youth through a programme that enables participants to learn and experience values and skills of debating and decision making in a democratic way. To this end, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will continue consultations with CPA and the appropriate youth organisations of the country to bring this broadened concept of national Youth Parliament into practice.

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago recognises that in order to provide information from citizens on the work being undertaken in Parliament a close working relationship between Parliament and the media is important. The Parliament will continue to provide a live broadcast of plenary and Committee meetings on its radio and television and Parliament in the renovated Red House will foresee appropriate facilities for media by creating a media lounge.

To encourage continued professional coverage by journalists on the proceedings of Parliament, it will cooperate with any future 'Parliamentary Journalists Association'. Parliament will also continue efforts to produce a series of user-friendly publications on parliament.

Finally, Parliament will design a mechanism for regular and structural dialogue with CSOs and professional associations. The institutional dialogue will be organized every six months, alternating under the auspices of the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.





VI. Preconditions and opportunities to achieve a successful Strategic Plan

The above outlined Strategic Plan is ambitious but realistic. To bring the Strategic Plan into reality will depend upon a number of preconditions. Achieving the Strategic Plan within the set time period will depend very much upon the capacity to address these preconditions.

The first precondition is the need for the full support of the Executive for key-components of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan counts on a constructive relationship between the Legislature and the Executive beyond the existing ways of interacting. Government endorsement will be required in at least five areas: 1. enhanced parliamentary autonomy, 2. an integrated Platform for Legislative Drafting, 3. an annual and quarterly Government Legislative Agenda, 4. a substantial increase in the number of MPs serving in parliament as their first and main occupation, and 5. the substantially enhanced oversight role by Committees. Government endorsement in these five areas constitutes a unique opportunity for deepening the democratic culture in Trinidad & Tobago and strengthening accountability in line with international practices.

The second precondition to achieve the Strategic Plan is the full support of the Office of Parliament. The Plan will rely on the Office of Parliament to remain as strong and respected as is currently the case. The strength of the Office of Parliament goes back to years of good management and a sustained policy of impartiality. These strengths need to be kept and nurtured. Parliament will continue to install values of respecting and validating diversity across race and gender.

The third precondition to achieve the Strategic Plan is the need to find consensus among parties supporting the political majority and opposition parties around the objectives and concrete initiatives of the Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan should not be the Plan of the ruling coalition, or from the leadership of parliament. The Strategic Plan can only be achieved if it is the Plan of the entire institution of Parliament, including MPs which support the ruling coalition, those which oppose it and the independent MPs. The best starting point to achieve the Strategic Plan is for it to be adopted by consensus in both Houses. A vote majority-against-opposition would entirely undermine the point of a Strategic Plan which projects the vision of the institution in a mid-term to long-term perspective and thus beyond the current term of parliament. It is hoped that the inclusive and consultative process in developing this Strategic Plan will enable a political consensus on the adoption of the Plan.

The fourth precondition to achieve the Strategic Plan is the cross-collaboration of the two Chambers of Parliament. From informal activities involving members of the two Chambers over structural cooperation at the level of Committees towards a joint outreach to the public by the two Chambers, underpinned by the commonly shared Office of Parliament, will be a strong guarantee to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

The fifth precondition to achieve the Strategic Plan is to engage the support of civil society and the general public in the work of Parliament, including in the consultations on the draft and on possible adjustments of the Strategic Plan later on. The reaction of the public to some of the components of the Plan may be a critical factor to improve the standing of parliament and of politics in general.

Taking into account these preconditions, this Strategic Plan represents a unique opportunity for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. But it also has the potential to become a milestone for improved governance in the country, as a model of change management relevant to other agencies in the country, demonstrating new ways of governance from a long term perspective and within a grounded, strategic approach.



VII. Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

This first Strategic Plan for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago outlined the key areas of strategic development that the Parliament will prioritise in the period 2013-2018. The Parliament is acutely aware that while this Strategic Plan is ambitious, the reality of the impact of the plan and progress made towards achieving the Parliament's Vision will lie in the need for effective implementation. It is for this reason that the Parliament has developed an "Implementation Roadmap" that broadly outlines how and when the activities outlined in this Strategic Plan will be implemented.

Whilst the Strategic Plan has outlined the general direction in which the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will develop over the coming years, the Implementation Roadmap provides the framework for this development. However, the Parliament is aware of the challenges of long term planning and implementation in a legislative setting that can be unpredictable due to the nature of political events. Therefore the Implementation Roadmap should be seen as a flexible guide that can be amended to better overcome any implementation challenges that may arise during 2013-2018.

The Parliament will draw from the Strategic Plan and Implementation Roadmap to produce an annual work plan for Parliament that will reflect the above Strategic Objectives. The Office of Parliament has committed to ensuring that departmental work plans are also produced. The annual work plans and annual departmental work plans will include specific indicators of success for actual activities.

Overall responsibility for the implementation of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan 2013-2018 will be vested in the Office of the Speaker of the House and the Office of the President of the Senate. A new "Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit" (PIMEU) will be created in 2013, headed by a senior parliamentary officer at the level of Director with the assistance of (at least) two staff persons; all three of them skilled in leadership, team work and knowledge of parliament. The Director and staff of the PIMEU will build consensus on the objectives and main initiatives of the Plan, provide leadership by brokering progress to overcome hurdles at implementation, and strengthen adherence to the specific deliverables of the Plan. The PIMEU will report to the Clerk and present written updates on overall progress on two-weekly basis. The PIMEU will regularly brief the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate and the multi-party Committee and the Trinidad & Tobago branch of the CPA on the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

The Office of Parliament will provide the Speaker and President with two-monthly written updates on progress made in implementing the Strategic Plan at the Secretariat & departmental basis. An annual written report outlining progress made in implementing the Strategic Plan will be developed by the PIMEU supported by the Office of Parliament, on behalf of the Office of the Speaker and the Office of the President, and this annual report will be tabled in both Chambers of the Parliament.

PIMEU will support a Mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, conducted by an external, independent consultant as selected and recruited by the Office of Parliament.¹⁷

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago enjoyed the input from many contributors inside and outside of Parliament in preparing this Strategic Plan. The Parliament recognises that in order to deliver this ambitious but realistic Strategic Plan, the continuing support of these contributors will be vital to the success of the plan. The Parliament is confident that implementing the Strategic Plan will lead to the

¹⁷ Mid-term review can possibly be conducted in cooperation with international partners (e.g. CPA, UNDP).



development of a more effective, efficient and relevant Parliament for the people of Trinidad & Tobago.