

“CONSTITUENCY RELATIONS OF THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO”

Assessment Report

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UNDP in Trinidad and Tobago

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The Assessment Report on the Constituency Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has been prepared by Blerim Vela, the International Consultant. The analysis and conclusions of this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago or United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Trinidad and Tobago.

Preface

Tetova, September 2014

The Assessment Report on the Constituency Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is an objective assessment of the current constituency relations offices model and practices and it offers recommendations for future development. The Assessment Report is meant to give the members of the Parliament, constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago guidance and recommendations to efficiently improve the way constituency work is carried out by constituency offices throughout the country. Additionally, the Assessment Report could serve as a reference guide to the Office of the Parliament unit administrators and assist them to streamline the support given to members of the Parliament on constituency work.

The Assessment Report could not have been prepared without the pivotal support from Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel, the Clerk of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and Stephen Boodhram, Project Manager from UNDP in Trinidad and Tobago. The author would like to express special thanks to members of the Parliament, their constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament staff for their willingness to actively participate in the review of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

The publication was produced based on the request from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Trinidad and Tobago and Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Abbreviations

COM – Constituency Operations Manual

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HDI – Human Development Index

ILO – International Labour Organization

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union

JSCs – Joint Select Committees

MP – Member of the Parliament

NDI – The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

PAC – Public Accounts Committee

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

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Executive summary

The Assessment Report on the Constituency Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The goal of the assessment exercise was to contribute to further strengthening of the constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The review of constituency relations model of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was carried out taking into account four strategy foundations: promoting national ownership; incorporating 'lessons learned' from other parliamentary development projects; knowledge building and transfer; and working cooperatively with all stakeholders.

The assessment report stems from the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018 that requested implementation of a comprehensive review of the system and daily functioning of the constituency offices during the time of implementation of the Strategic Plan.¹ The findings of this report clearly indicate that in order for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to fulfil its representative role through efficient constituency offices, the service delivery and streamlining improvements should not be centred only on the Office of the Parliament but rather in a holistic review of the system of governance that underpins the service delivery to citizens. Therefore it is appropriate to undertake a full review of the constituency office model and practice that includes both the Parliament and Government perspective.

This assessment involved a desk review of existing documents on Parliament's functioning and constituency related practices – most notable the Constituency Operations Manual that served as a baseline for assessment and identification of development gaps on the current constituency office model and practices. The in-country expert mission took place from 17 July to 8 August 2014. During this time, the International Consultant met with key officials from the Office of the Parliament that interact with staff from Constituency offices. For the purpose of the assessment of the constituency relations, the Consultant prepared a questionnaire that was used during the interview with 9 Members of the Parliament (MP) representing both government and opposition parties and staff of 8 constituency offices.

The assessment report contains six main sections and is focused on four key components: Casework, Policy work, Voicing out views or concerns of constituents regarding national policy issues, and Attending constituency events.

The first section of the assessment concentrates on the background and context to Trinidad and Tobago's political system, operations of the Parliament and makes reference to its recent Strategic Plan. The second section outlines the scope of the assignment and its goals, as well as

¹ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg. 29.

details the methodology used by the International Consultant. Third section presents the current state of affairs regarding the constituency relations in Trinidad and Tobago and looks critically at the support provided by the Office of the Parliament for constituency related tasks of the members of the Parliament. Fourth section is dedicated to gap analysis of the current model and practices of constituency relations and addresses institutional, legal and capacity development challenges. A summary of these recommendations and conclusions for further development of the constituency relations offices model and practices is included as section five and six of this report.

As in most Westminster parliaments, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago exercises three main functions: legislation, representation and oversight of the executive branch. The Office of the Parliament is a well-established bureaucracy, operating with **XX units and XXX staff**. Office of the Parliament has a structure in place that supports the work of the Constituency offices. Most of the interaction is done through Administration Officers, while for some specific issues Constituency office personnel liaise with IT staff, internal audit and Office of the Marshal. From the practices identified on the ground, there is a need for incremental improvement to avoid duplication and assure better coordination in the Office of the Parliament on provision of support to Constituency offices. Related to constituency relations, Parliament has 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices with a maximum number of personnel at 298 staff.² The workings and operations of the constituency offices are governed by the Constituency Operations Manual which was approved in 2010 for the 10th Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

This assessment report makes specific findings and recommendations for improvements in several functional areas related to operations of constituency offices.

The first area is that of scope of constituency work. During the assessment, it quickly became clear that scope of constituency work has increased and it has become more demanding and complex in nature. MPs dedicate more time to constituency work, which not necessarily is performed only at Constituency offices. Several MPs have reported that face-to-face communication, walks in communities and cottage meetings remain a widely-used form of communication and interaction with constituents outside of the Constituency office. Such outreach activities have created financial implications that were not foreseen in the Manual and are not covered by Office of the Parliament.

Although the work conducted in the constituency office largely is shaped to assist members and communities in the constituency, there were instances when some MPs conducted political promotion works in their constituency offices. Such activities are strictly prohibited by the Constituency Operations Manual (COM) and there should be mechanisms in place to assure that resources of the Office of the Parliament are not used for such purposes. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to drafting new guidelines by the Parliament to assure across the board implementation of such COM provisions. The Office of the Parliament also needs to increase monitoring and develop instructions to constituency office staff on implementation of non-partisan procedures within constituency offices.

² UNDP (2012), 'Strengthening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago', Project Document, pg. 46.

The report also highlights specific findings regarding personnel of constituency offices. Due to the increased complexity and nature of constituency work, MPs need to staff their Constituency offices with professional staff. Currently there is a disparity in terms of qualifications and skills of staff performing same tasks across Constituency offices. The situation is further aggravated as with current levels of remuneration, MPs are not able to attract qualified staff. Office of the Parliament should look into the possibility of reviewing the Constituency Operations Manual (COM) to provide more details on the profiling staffing requirements that would help implement a more standardized approach from MPs. Additionally, there are some considerations regarding the staff rights and entitlements. Correspondingly, COM's provisions should be brought to at least minimum labour law standards implemented by public institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. Introduction of exit interviews for staff discontinued at Constituency offices can help also raise the accountability of MPs and also identify areas where MPs could be assisted by the Office of the Parliament to better perform HR management tasks. Additionally, a list of capacity building trainings for Constituency office staff has been identified that could be shape the training programmes implemented by the Office of the Parliament.

Another key challenge facing the MPs and their constituency office staff is that there is no standardized way of registering and tracking the progress for individual request received from constituents. Currently, each MP has developed its own rudimentary mechanism for registering and tracking progress, which are not reported or shared with the Office of the Parliament. Despite the potential, there were no instances when the collected information was used to strategically guide Parliament's outreach and communication efforts. Nonetheless, all interviewed MPs and constituency office staff have welcomed the idea of introducing constituency tracking mechanism in place. This software solution will help them in two ways. First it would allow them to track all the requests and complaints received from constituents. Secondly, it would allow them to record all the requests for services and investments and their actual implementation. Through such software solution, the Parliament and Government could have a clearer geographical overview of requests and implemented activities that would ultimately lead to greater transparency on the way public funds are spent.

The final area covered by the assessment report is that of communication between staff of the Office of the Parliament and constituency offices. Interviews and field visits to constituency offices created a perception that communication between constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament is limited and occur only when there is a request for services and support from Constituency office staff. There were concrete proposals from constituency office's staff that merit consideration about ways how to improve communication: i.e. by assigning staff from Administration for a number of constituency offices so that the workload is manageable. Additionally, personnel of the Office of the Parliament are encouraged to have a more proactive approach in early identification and dealing with requests from constituency office. Therefore, it is recommended that Office of the Parliament institutes regular visits from Administration staff to Constituency offices and implementation of annual surveys to assess satisfaction with the services and support delivered to Constituency offices.

It is hoped that the assessment report provides an important starting point for both the members of the Parliament and the Office of the Parliament when considering improving the constituency office model and practices in Trinidad and Tobago over the coming years and in particular when

the Parliament is revising its Strategic Plan. In order for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to address effectively challenges related to constituency work, in order to continue to operate as a modern and competent national legislature, MP's and their constituency office staff, as well as the Office of the Parliament, need to put in practice effective mechanisms. Furthermore, it is believed that the recommendations included in this report will provide an important step on the road towards achieving this aim.

Introduction

This assessment of the current constituency office model and practices of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was commissioned by the UNDP in Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

The general model of Parliament - constituency relations consists of two elements: the relationship between the Member of the Parliament and their constituencies; and the relationship between the people and the Legislature. The constituency relations assessment won't simply just analyse the demand side of the equation, but also look at the supply side. This will involve reviewing what Parliament can offer to and how it can engage with constituents in terms of its parliamentary business. The assessment of current Trinidad and Tobago's model and practices was based on a two trier approach: initially assess the Office of the Parliament's practices and procedures in delivering support and services to Constituency offices, and secondly validate initial findings and identify gaps through field work and direct interviews of the MPs and their constituency office staff.

However, following the completion of meetings with MPs and their constituency office staff, it became clear that the assessment should have included also interviews with line Ministries, government agencies, and local authorities responsible for delivery of critical services to citizens. Such services represent the bulk of the requests presented to the MP and constituency office staff. A more holistic approach could have enabled not only an assessment of the Parliament's gaps but a wider review of government service delivery mechanisms – which are critical elements for effective functioning of constituency offices. Because of limited time available for this assignment such a review is not carried out. Nonetheless, it is highly recommended that such review takes place in near future, since it can help inform scenarios related to introduction of Constituency Development Fund.

This assessment of the constituency office model and practices focuses only on the review of current state of affairs as presented by the relevant Office of the Parliament units, members of the Parliament and their constituency office staff. The review did not include the review of functioning of central and local government units in charge of service delivery to citizens. The assessment focused on whether the Office of the Parliament, members of the Parliament and their constituency office staff are able to provide an effective service to constituents by addressing their requests and needs. The report makes recommendations for the Parliament to consider in order improving the services they provide.

Assessing line Ministries and local government units' services

The review was Parliament-centred focusing on how members of the Parliament and the Office of the Parliament interact within the current model and practices of constituency relations. However, due to consultancy and time limitations, the assessment report does not cover the review of services delivery to citizens of the line Ministries and local government units that are critical for MPs to successfully carry out their constituency tasks. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future review of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago focuses on the review of delivery of the key services such as social welfare, health care and educational services.

The report contains six main sections with the first section focussing on the background and context to Trinidad and Tobago's political system, operations of the Parliament and makes reference to its recent Strategic Plan. The second section outlines the scope of the assignment and its goals, as well as details the methodology used by the International Consultant.

Third section presents the current state of affairs regarding the constituency relations in Trinidad and Tobago and looks critically at the support provided by the Office of the Parliament for constituency related tasks of the members of the Parliament. Fourth section is dedicated to gap analysis of the current model and practices of constituency relations and addresses institutional, legal and capacity development challenges.

Following each section, specific recommendations are made. A summary of these recommendations and conclusions for further development of the constituency relations offices model and practices is included as section five and six of this report.

1. Background and Context

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island republic with a population of around 1.3 million. Most of its citizens are ancestors from Africa and India, with smaller percentage of the population who are descendants of Amerindians, Latin Americans, Chinese, Middle Easterners and Europeans. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is USD 18,374³ (World Bank, 2013) and the country's Human Development Index (HDI)⁴ for 2013 is 0.766, which is in the high human development category, positioning it at 64 out of 187 countries and territories. Between 1980 and 2013, Trinidad and Tobago's HDI value increased from 0.658 to 0.766, an increase of 16.4 percent or an average annual increase of about 0.46 percent. Trinidad and Tobago is a middle-income country, but key social indicators lag behind economic growth and there are substantial pockets of poverty.⁵

The economy of Trinidad and Tobago is driven by natural gas and petro-chemical exports but there are also well-developed industrial and financial sectors. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing more robust growth after several years of sub-par performance. With the end of maintenance-related outages in the energy sector, IMF projects the economy will grow around 2 1/2 percent in 2014 after around 1 1/2 percent growth in 2013. The non-energy sector was fairly buoyant in 2013, which is anticipated that will continue to be the case in 2014. Core inflation has been relatively quiescent, though it picked up to 2.7 percent in February 2014.⁶

Public's attitude towards democratic governance

Several factors have been shown to contribute to the strength and stability of democracy in a country. The importance of citizens' support and popular acceptance of the legitimacy of the system have been demonstrated, and can be used to gauge the durability of the system. According to the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) Survey that was undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago in 2010 42% of all respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the way democracy works in Trinidad and Tobago, whereas 52% indicated that they were dissatisfied with the way democracy operates in the country. Although more than half of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction with the way that democracy operated in Trinidad & Tobago, 69% of the survey respondents perceived Trinidad & Tobago as democratic, with 62% indicating that Trinidad & Tobago was "somewhat democratic" and 7% believing the country

³ World Bank's Trinidad and Tobago country data: http://data.worldbank.org/country/trinidad-and-tobago#cp_wdi Last accessed on 12 August 2014.

⁴ The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/TTO.pdf Last accessed on 12 August 2014.

⁵ Trinidad and Tobago – European Community Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme 2008-2013, pg. 7: http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/scanned_tt_csp10_en.pdf Last accessed on 12 August 2014.

⁶ IMF (2014), IMF Concludes 2014 Article IV Mission to Trinidad and Tobago, Press Release No.14/149: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2014/pr14149.htm> Last accessed on 12 August 2014.

was “very democratic”. Conversely, 21% of respondents perceived the country to be “not very democratic”, and 4% believed the country was “not at all democratic”.⁷

To date, there is no public opinion surveys conducted regularly that measures the satisfaction of citizens with the work of the Parliament. Such surveys would provide valuable information on different social group's (based on gender, age, education level, and residence) level of understanding of Parliament's work and help determine the knowledge gap of specific aspects of Parliament's work. If the Parliament and the Office of the Parliament had such information, it would greatly facilitate the development of specific educational and awareness-raising programmes. Moreover, the Parliament would be able to implement a more targeted outreach programme that addresses and engaged specific groups in society.

Political and legal system

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago system of government comprises of three independent arms: the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. Trinidad and Tobago is a unitary state with two levels of government: central and local. Trinidad and Tobago has a bicameral parliament comprised of an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate. The head of state is the non-executive president who is elected by the members of both houses for a five-year term. The 41 members of the House of Representatives are directly elected for a five-year term by the first-past-the-post system. The president appoints the 31 senators: 16 on the advice of the prime minister, six on the advice of the leader of the opposition and another nine at the president's own discretion.

The Prime Minister is appointed by the president and is usually the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister appoints a cabinet from the members of both houses. The Prime Minister governs based on a majority support in the House of Representatives and has the power to appoint and dismiss Ministers. Like in all Westminster states, the Prime Minister presides over the Cabinet and is responsible for the allocation of functions among Ministers. The civil service is non-partisan and a Public Service Commission monitors all substantive appointments.

The Chief Justice heads the judiciary and its independence is guaranteed in the Constitution. An independent Judicial and Legal Services Commission vets all judicial appointments. Trinidad and Tobago's legal system is founded on the common law and legislation approved by the Parliament. The doctrine of precedence applies to Trinidad and Tobago's legal system and judgments of the Supreme Court of the Judicature of Trinidad and Tobago and of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council are binding.

Local government in Trinidad and Tobago

There is no specific constitutional provision for local government; however, the Tobago House of Assembly is enshrined within the constitution. The Municipal Corporations Act 1990 and the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996 comprise the principal legislation governing local government. The Ministry of Local Government oversees local authorities on Trinidad whilst the Tobago House of Assembly reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister. The structure of

⁷ 'The Political Culture of Democracy in Trinidad and Tobago: 2010', pg. 26-27.

local government in Trinidad comprises the head office and 14 municipal corporations in Trinidad a single authority in Tobago and 14 municipal corporations in Trinidad, comprising two city corporations, three borough corporations and nine regional corporations.⁸

At central level, the role and responsibilities of Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Local Government are to convey the policy perspectives and guidelines of central government monitor the finances and expenditure and render expert advice. Additionally, the Ministry issues guidelines on administrative and statutory regulations, and supervise the execution of projects and programmes by local government units. The Ministry coordinates the activities of Municipal Corporations in order to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of services in a timely manner and also balanced growth development. In cases of disputes between Municipal Corporations - the Ministry acts as an adjudicator.

The local authorities have developed responsibility for a wide range of functions from policing to primary health and education. Many of the community services and facilities are provided by the municipal corporation. Moreover, municipal corporations are responsible for the building and maintenance of local roads, bridges and drains, collecting garbage, maintaining parks and community facilities, issuing building approvals and overseeing public health and sanitation. The Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for these services in Tobago. These competencies are relevant to the work of the MP as most of the request received from citizens in their constituency offices related to facilitation of effective and efficient delivery of basic community services.

Competencies of municipal corporations in Trinidad and Tobago:

- Secondary Roads, Drains and Municipal Infrastructure
- Public Health and Sanitation Services
- Municipal Building and Development Control
- Community Services and Facilities
- Daily Paid Employment
- Tendering for Municipal Projects

MPs and constituency office staff interviewed during the assessment mission reported that most of the citizen's requests they receive are related to provision of social services, facilitation of employment opportunities and improvement of basic infrastructure (housing, water drainage etc.). Functional delivery of such community services is the responsibility of both central and local level government units. However, sometimes due to political and non-effective governance reasons, MPs find it challenging to facilitate the delivery of such services as the MP has to navigate through different layers of bureaucracy and lengthy procedures. Therefore, future review of constituency services should look into efficiency of operations of the central and local government units in delivering community services.

Table 1: Summary of service provision in different spheres of government⁹

⁸ Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago is broken up into two cities (San Fernando and Port of Spain), three boroughs (Arima, Point Fortin and Chagaunas) and nine regional corporations (Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Diego Martin, Mayaro/Rio Claro, Penal/Debe, Princes Town, Sangre Grande, San Juan/Laventille, Siparia and Tunapuna/Piarco).

SERVICE	DELIVERING AUTHORITY			REMARKS
	Central Government	Trinidad Municipalities	Tobago House of Assembly	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION				
Police	X	X	X	<i>The municipal corporations play a coordination role in civil protection</i>
Fire protection	X			
Civil protection				
Criminal justice	X			
Civil status register	X			
Statistical office	X			
Electoral register	X			
EDUCATION				
Pre-school	X		X	
Primary	X		X	
Secondary	X		X	
Vocational and technical	X		X	
Higher education	X		X	
Adult education				
SOCIAL WELFARE				
Kindergarten and nursery	X	X	X	
Family welfare services	X		X	
Welfare homes	X	X	X	
Social security	X			
PUBLIC HEALTH				
Primary care	X			
Hospitals	X			
Health protection		X		
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING				
Housing	X		X	<i>Town planning is done with input from the municipal corporations</i>
Town planning	X		X	
Regional planning	X			
TRANSPORT				
Roads	X	X	X	
Transport	X			
Urban roads		X	X	
Urban rail				
Ports	X		X	
Airports	X		X	
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION				
Water and sanitation	X		X	<i>Municipal corporations are responsible for trucked water where no lines exists</i>
Refuse collection and disposal		X	X	
Cemeteries and crematoria	X	X	X	<i>Municipal corporations are responsible for refuse collection, central government for disposal</i>
Slaughterhouses	X	X	X	
Environmental protection		X	X	
Consumer protection	X			
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS				
Theatre and concerts	X	X	X	
Museums and libraries	X		X	
Parks and open spaces	X		X	
Sports and leisure	X	X		
Religious facilities			X	
UTILITIES				
Gas services	X			
District heating				
Water supply	X			
Electricity	X			

⁹ CLGF (2013), 'Country profile: The local government system in Trinidad and Tobago', The Commonwealth Local Government Forum: [http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/file/Trinidad Local Government Profile 2013 CLGF.pdf](http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/file/Trinidad%20Local%20Government%20Profile%202013%20CLGF.pdf)
Last accessed on 8 August 2014.

ECONOMIC				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	x		x	
Economic promotion	x		x	
Trade and industry	x			
Tourism	x		x	
Other economic service			x	

x – Discretionary service by the local authority

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

The Parliament is made up of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and two chambers: the nominated Senate and the elected House of Representatives. The House of Representatives reflects the electoral districts in Trinidad and Tobago which at present are forty-one. However, when the presiding officer is selected from outside the group the membership is increased by one. Members of the House of Representatives can belong to a political party or be independent. In history of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago most of the elected representatives have been members of a political party and usually are divided into two groups: those who belong to the Government and those who form the Opposition. The parliamentary committee system is based on three Joint Select Committees (JSCs), a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and a Public Accounts Enterprise Committee.

Key functions of the Parliament

The roles and functions of Parliament include:

- a. Representation: ensuring that the public's interest are protected;
- b. Legislation: to enact or amend laws and bills;
- c. Monitoring of financial expenditure of the government on the nation's behalf;
- d. Legitimizing the passing of bills and laws via voting, thus ensuring 'fair play;'
- e. Accountability: convening Parliamentary sessions to allow for transparency; and debate, thus facilitating both the executive and the opposition to air their opinions in such a manner that the populace understands their positions.

The work of the Speaker, MPs and parliamentary committees is facilitated by the Office of the Parliament – a professional secretariat of the Parliament. The Office of the Parliament provides professional, administrative and non-partisan support services to the Parliament. Operations of the Office of Parliament are guided by a Corporate Plan, which 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 Office functions under the leadership of the Clerk of the House assisted by the Clerk of the Senate, as Deputy Head. The Office also ensures the proper functioning of the Chamber and offers relevant services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Related to constituency relations tasks, each member of the Parliament while performing his/her tasks as a representative of the constituency is entitled to an office within his constituency and to organize the activities of that office as the MP sees fit. The Office of the Parliament is responsible for providing guidance on the procedures and policies for the operations of constituency offices as may be recommended by the House Committee and approved by the

Speaker of the House. The Clerk of the House as Accounting Officer is responsible for ensuring accountability of the funds expended, in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act.

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament 2013-2018

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago developed its first Strategic Plan in 2013 as an important step on the road towards maturity and the institutionalisation of the legislature. Whilst the Corporate Plan of the Office of the Parliament focusses on its role and functioning, the Strategic Plan recognises that a more integrated approach to developing and strengthening Parliament as a whole is needed over the next 5 years. The 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.¹⁰ The Strategic Plan will guide the work of all bodies of the Parliament in deepening parliamentary culture and improving the administrative mechanisms to better serve our citizens.

Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018¹¹

According to the Strategic Plan, the Trinidad and Tobago's Parliament vision is: *'By 2018, to be a modern Parliament that fulfils its constitutional duties to its fullest extent, and effectively serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago'*.

The mission statement states that *'As the national legislature of Trinidad and Tobago, our mission is to ensure that Parliament exercises its legislative, oversight, representative 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.¹² 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.¹³

¹⁰ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg.8.

¹¹ Ibid, pg.7.

¹² Ibid, pg.8.

¹³ Ibid, pg.8.

- 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.¹⁴

Strategic Plan of the Parliament and the constituency relations

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament recognized that one of the key functions of the Members of the Parliament is the representative function. More concretely, in order to ensure that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is able to effectively support MPs in this role, a key objective of the Strategic Plan is to improve the representative role of MPs and to further develop the outreach and communication work of parliament. Specifically, the Strategic Plan provides for the basis to conduct and assessment of current constituency relations model and practices. The review of the system of constituency relations offices will address the 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.¹⁵ As a result, the Parliament is expected to reformat the functioning of Constituency Relations Offices. The current assessment mission is a direct contribution towards achieving the goal of the Strategic Plan to review of the system and daily functioning of the constituency offices.

The Strategic Plan emphasized two key components related to functioning of constituency offices: location and ownership of the constituency offices, and human resources.

After each election, especially with the election of new MPs, the Parliament was faced with a practice of changing the location of the constituency offices. This incurred subsequent significant additional cost for refurbishment and renovation of these offices. Moreover, taking 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.¹⁶ More concretely, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago aims to locate constituency offices in state owned properties, assigned to Parliament, or by purchasing¹⁷ a new property in case no state owned properties are available in that constituency.

Concerning the human resources management of the constituency office staff, the Strategic Plan notes that currently there are a number of discrepancies across the constituency offices in terms of job descriptions, grades and salary scales. This was confirmed also during the assessment mission. During the time of implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Parliament will develop a set of standardised job descriptions, a transparent system of grading of positions and salary

¹⁴ Ibid, pg.8.

¹⁵ Ibid, pg.31.

¹⁶ Ibid, pg.31.

¹⁷ 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.

scales for each of the positions.¹⁸ The Office of Parliament will hold a (anonymous) survey among staff of constituency offices on employment conditions, including on the way how annual leave or accumulated leave is dealt with. Moreover, 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).¹⁹

The Strategic Plan requires that the Office of Parliament reviews and develops in further detail the "Constituency Operations Manual". In addition, staff of the constituency office capacity gaps will be addressed through a number of trainings and professional development opportunities. MPs will benefit from advice on Human Resources management, including through personal advice and coaching as required. In this way, the Parliament of Trinidad and 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.

Concerning the outreach tasks related to constituency work of the MPs, the Strategic Plan proposes introduction of 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.²⁰ Such efforts will enhance the Parliament's outreach and in support of the representative role of MPs. Based on the field visits and interviews with MPs, this practice is largely implemented by most MPs.

Lastly, the Strategic Plan outlines the possibility of setting up a separate fund managed through the Constituency Development Programme. Such tool is expected to strengthen the representative role of MPs to respond to local development needs. 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 that will be determined at a later stage. 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. The current assessment touched upon the issue of the set-up of the Constituency Development fund in subsequent sections of the report.

¹⁸ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg.31.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg.32.

2. Assessment Goals and Methodology

As part of the review of Parliament's representative role, parliamentary practitioners and scholars often deliberate on the quality of the relationship between the Member of Parliament (MP) and their constituency. This includes understanding the implications in what sense does the MP "represent" the constituency, as well as how do constituents influence the MP. These considerations are important because in Parliamentary democracies, national leadership is premised on constituents electing representatives to the legislative body, delegating to these representatives the responsibility of forming a government, advising that government of their interests and needs, and monitoring the efforts that the government is making to satisfy these needs. Therefore, the legitimacy of Parliamentary democracy rests on the ability of Parliament and its members to be conscious of these functions and to fulfil them. Often, such interactions are viewed from the perspective of the input and benefits they provide in the public policy processes. During the assignment, the International Consultant will review existing model of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and provide recommendations how to improve functioning of constituency offices and capacities of their staff.

The parliamentary system in Trinidad derives from the Westminster system of government. The Westminster system of parliamentary government seeks to control the exercise of power by making the executive directly responsible to the legislature and the executive is therefore drawn from and constitutionally responsible to the legislature. Government depends on the support of most MPs, while at the same time MPs are expected to subject it to critical scrutiny. Simultaneously, MPs must also represent their constituents and maintain this relationship in order to effectively and informatively carry out their other core functions. In Trinidad and Tobago there are 41 constituencies and 31 sub-constituency offices. MPs received support in terms of staff and equipment to carry out their duties as parliamentary representative within their constituency and to organize the activities within the constituency office as they see it fit. The state of constituent-member relations provides constituents with some means of measuring the performance of their MPs and government actions.²¹

The assessment reviewed the constituency relations offices model and practice and offered recommendations for its future development, including outlining the capacity building for constituency office staff. The main objective of the assessment was to move forward the process of strengthening the constituent relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. In accordance with the overall objective and under the supervision of UNDP staff, the International Consultant for two months (July – August 2014) analysed the work of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in matters related to constituency relations. Based on consultations with MPs, staff of the constituency offices and specialists of the Office of the Parliament, the International Consultant reviewed the current context and carried out the assessment in a process that sought to promote national ownership in parliamentary development; incorporating of 'lessons learned' from other parliaments; knowledge building and knowledge transfer in order to enhance sustainability of the project outcomes; and working cooperatively with other partners.

²¹ UNDP (2009), 'The Legislature and Constituency Relations', available at: <http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/UNDP%20-%20The%20Legislature%20and%20Constituency%20Relations%20-%20EN%20-%20PI.pdf> Last accessed on 5 July 2014.

The assessment of current model and practices was based on a two trier approach: initially assess the Office of the Parliament's practices and procedures in delivering support and services to Constituency offices and secondly validate initial findings and identify gaps through field work and direct interviews of the MPs and their constituency office staff. However, following the completion of meetings with MPs and their constituency office staff, it became clear that the assessment should have included also interviews with line Ministries, government agencies and local authorities responsible for delivery of critical services to citizens. Such services represent the bulk of the requests presented to the MP and constituency office staff. A more holistic approach could have enabled not only an assessment of the Parliament's gaps but a wider review of government service delivery mechanisms – which are critical elements for effective functioning of constituency offices. Because of limited time available for this assignment such a review is not carried out. Nonetheless, it is highly recommended that such review takes place in near future, since it can help also avoid overlap if Constituency Development Fund is introduced.

While the Terms of Reference²² has outlined the expected outputs, list of deliverables and timeframe, the International Consultant developed a more detailed methodology that is based on allocation of adequate resources and full cooperation of all parties involved. The assessment was based on a participatory approach involving all management levels of the Office of the Parliament including selected sample of the members of the Parliament, staff of the Constituency offices and resource people who are knowledgeable in the work of parliaments in general. International Consultant served as process facilitator relying heavily on input and content produced by UNDP Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago staff that have the in-depth knowledge and experience on Parliament's constituency work.

Mobilization and Desk Review

Prior to arrival in the country, the International Consultant carried out all preparatory work in close coordination with UNDP Trinidad and Tobago and Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago counterparts. This included preparing an inception report that outlined the agenda and time schedules for the various activities. In addition, the Consultant reviewed relevant documents and literature, and other materials necessary for the assessment process – that were provided by the Parliament and UNDP. The desk review focused on relevant Parliament's documents such as standing orders, orders, bylaws, guidelines, job descriptions, internal system and procedures, annual plans and reports, any assessment report conducted for the organization in the past, and others as appropriate and relevant.

In-country Assessment Mission

Starting from mid-July till first part of August 2014,²³ the International Consultant was engaged in a series of on-line and in person meetings with staff of the Office of the Parliament, MPs, and constituency office staff. The aim of such consultations was to identify the current good practices and challenges in Parliament's constituency relations. Consultations were followed by an internal analysis, which covered issues related, but not limited to current gaps in organizational and regulatory status, internal systems and procedures, and key activities related to constituency

²² See Appendix I.

²³ See Appendix II.

relations. The analysis served as the base for defining the baseline and set the focus of the assessment of Parliament's constituency relations.

During the month-long in-person interviews, the International Consultant conducted a counterfactual check of implementation of the Constituency Operations Manual, identified the institutional and capacity gaps. Additionally, the interviews served as a platform for discussing expectations and determining what can or cannot be tackled during the assessment mission. The Consultant sought to identify Parliament's strengths and weaknesses in constituency relations, coupled with concrete recommendations related to constituency relations. The consultation process assisted in building a common understanding among stakeholders regarding key pertinent issues related to long-term development of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, consultations assisted the International Consultant identify realistic organizational issues and priorities.

Assessing constituency relations of the Parliament

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has a consolidated constituency relations network with a substantial number of offices, staff and dedicated budget. Currently, there are 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices. The support provided by the Office of the Parliament is guided by the Constituency Operations Manual. The assessment of the workflow of the constituency work of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago assessed four key components:

- Casework (getting information and lodging demands on behalf of people),
- Policy work (seeking ways to benefit constituencies through existing or proposed national programs and legislation),
- Voicing out views or concerns of constituents regarding national policy issues (this involves listening and explaining and expressing informed positions, although MPs are not obliged to agree with morally or ethically unsound views), and
- Attending constituency events (particularly important in for diverse constituencies as a key means of maintaining close personal ties with their constituents).

For the purpose of the assessment, the Consultant reviewed the support provided by the Office of the Parliament to constituency offices. In order to assess the current model of constituency relations support, the Consultant developed a questionnaire²⁴ for MPs and constituency office staff that sought to detail current practices on management of constituency offices, type of requests/complaints received from constituents and the way MPs and constituency office staff engage and communicate with constituents. The assessment resulted in identification of immediate needs of MPs and constituency office staff for effective functioning of Constituency office through introduction of improvements at regulatory and institutional level as well as required resources. Finally, the Consultant assessed the feasibility of introducing a constituency relations tracking mechanism, as well as identified capacity development needs for constituency office staff.

²⁴ See Appendix III.

3. Constituency Relations in Trinidad and Tobago

Any discussion of MPs duties towards their constituents must start with the concept of democracy. At its core, both etymologically and philosophically, democracy means government by the people. In principle, in a democracy, citizens should decide directly upon the policies under which they will live. The most frequently cited models of “direct democracy” of this sort are the Athenian city state of ancient times. In modern times it refers to town hall meetings that still exist today, private organizations, such as clubs or civic associations where all members participate in decision-making, and the initiative and referendum process in Switzerland as well as in other countries. In all of these arrangements, decisions are turned over to all adult members of the group, community or nation involved.²⁵ However, most democratic governance today is based on the model of ‘representative democracy’, where citizens through election of their representatives delegate powers to MPs in a forum (parliament) where joint decisions are made.

Undoubtedly, parliaments carry out a number of important functions in democratic societies. They represent different groups and bring their needs, aspirations and concerns to the national level where they can be factored into the policy-making process. Unlike heads of governments, who are responsible for representing the society as a whole, MPs in legislatures represent the differences in society, ensuring that the specific concerns and groups are heard at the national level.

MPs and constituency services

Representative role of MPs often entails a two way interaction with constituents. On the one side, the MPs keep contact with their constituents to assure that there is a linkage between the work of the Parliament and their input in parliamentary business with the needs of the constituents. On the other side, constituents through direct communication with MPs seek to assure access to government services and to hold MPs accountable to constituents needs. This interaction, in principle, should lead to greater accountability in MP-constituency relations. Moreover, it should aid constituents to assess the performance of their MPs in representing constituent’s needs and to facilitate the communication of constituency needs in the policy-making process.

Although the electoral and party system of a nation will have a significant impact on how MPs view their obligations to the policy preferences and interests of their constituents, there are other representational activities that are more universal and less subject to the influence of such systemic factors. According to NDI’ guide to best practices on constituency relations, the need to conduct constituent relations is based on the principle of public service.²⁶ Constituents are citizens whom a MP has been elected to represent. Part of a MP’s job in a democracy is to serve these constituents by representing their interests in the parliament and by providing a direct link to government. In most countries, citizens expect to have contact with their elected MP and

²⁵ Mezey M., (2011), ‘Representation and Constituency Relations’, Comparative Assessment of Parliaments Note, SUNY Center for International Development, pg. 4.

²⁶ NDI (2008), ‘Constituency Relations – A guide to best practices’, pg. 5.

recognize them as someone who can solve their problems and help him/her navigate the complex government bureaucracy.²⁷

Specifically, almost in all countries, MPs devote a significant portion of their time to being present in their community and helping constituents with individual problems that they might be having with various branches of government. MPs are asked to serve as intermediaries between citizens and the government agencies that among other things dispense retirement benefits, educational grants and opportunities, and in some instances, jobs, and that regulate how people conduct their economic activities. As the responsibilities of governments around the world have expanded, and as the actions of government agencies have come to have a direct effect on so many aspects of the lives of individual citizens, it is not surprising that citizens encounter problems. If an agency has been late in sending out a needed check or if it has denied eligibility for a program to a constituent who believes that she is eligible, the average citizen may not be in a position to challenge or question these decisions, either because of literacy or other educational impediments, or simply because of a lack of knowledge about how to proceed.²⁸

Types of constituency services

According to UNDP's Global Parliamentary Report²⁹ constituency service covers a huge range of activities that broadly encompasses the following:

Support to individuals – which ranges from helping to find work or opportunities, to more clientelistic patterns of behaviour designed to buy support;

Grievance-chasing – in which citizens have a particular problem with a government service, welfare entitlement or bureaucracy, with the MP acting to help resolve such problems;

Policy responsiveness – in which voters try to seek or to influence an MP's opinion on particular issues, especially votes in parliament;

Project work – in which politicians seek funds for the development of the area or the promotion of local economy, with MPs using their position to secure government funding.

Constituency work literature review

However, study of constituency work, as a distinctive field of legislative studies, is rather young and research remains mainly country-specific.³⁰ Literature that aims to explain why MPs focus on constituency work is well established thanks to development of common criteria for assessing it. The neo-institutionalist scholars Blomgren and Rozenberg³¹ contributed to this development by placing the institutions in the centre of research - similarly the work done by Dudzinska et

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mezey M., (2011), 'Representation and Constituency Relations', Comparative Assessment of Parliaments Note, SUNY Center for International Development, pg. 18.

²⁹ Power G., and Shoot R. (2012), 'Global Parliamentary Report: The changing nature of parliamentary representation', UNDP and IPU, pg. 6.

³⁰ Poyet C. (2014), 'French MPs Constituency Work: a (Hi)story of Social Relations with Citizens', paper presented at the 8th ECPR General Conference, Glasgow, pg.2.

³¹ Blomgren M. and Rozenberg O. (2012), 'Introduction', in Blomgren M. and Rozenberg O. (eds.), 'Parliamentary Roles in Modern Legislatures', London: Routledge/ECPR.

al.,³² Pilet et al.,³³ and Poyet.³⁴ Country-specific literature is developed and focusses on explain differences in practices regarding the constituency work among MPs.

Halligan et al.³⁵ investigated the different practices regarding constituency work among sub-national MPs in Canada and Australia. The research showed that MPs elected in rural constituencies spend more time for their districts than urban MPs. This result challenged one of the seminal studies in the field by Anagnoson³⁶ who argued in the case of New Zealand that urban MPs are more frequently in their constituencies than the rural ones. In the United States, Thomas³⁷ noted that elected representatives of minority groups (women and black) devote more time for constituency work than their peers.

On the other side, the research on the content of constituency work is less frequent and mainly focuses on one specific activity: surgeries. Such scholarly work notes that the institutional frameworks shape constituency work. For example in France, studies show that the link with the constituents is mainly explained by the importance of personal vote and the multiple-office holding. This approach is applied though surgeries and involvement in the social life of members/communities in the constituency; the most important remaining office hours. Elsewhere, Poyet³⁸ noted that this part of the parliamentary work is not present among all MPs but depends on the career path of the MPs. Those with high resources (position in the chamber, former minister, etc.) are less involved in office hours than backbenchers.

MPs also view it as part of their responsibilities to lobby government agencies for distributive benefits for their constituents. According to Frears, French deputies report that they receive “numerous demands from local councils on matters like road maintenance, school building, water supply, or flood damage.”³⁹ In one cross-national survey of citizen expectations of their MPs in Korea, Turkey, and Kenya, respondents indicated that their primary expectation was that their MPs tell the government what they think, but the second most frequently mentioned response was they expected the MP to work to obtain projects and benefits for the constituency. Third was that the representative help them with problems that they were having with the government.⁴⁰

³² Dudzinska A. et al (2014), ‘Representational Roles’ In: Deschouwer K. and Sam Depauw S. (eds.), ‘Representing the People. A Survey among Members of State-wide and Sub-state Parliaments’, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³³ Pilet J. et al (2012), ‘Political Representation in Belgium, France and Portugal: MPs and their Constituents in very Different Political Systems’, *Representation* 48(4), 351-358.

³⁴ Poyet C. (2014), ‘Explaining MPs Constituency Orientation: A QCA Approach’, paper presented at the 110th APSA Annual Conference, Washington DC, 28-31 August 2014.

³⁵ Halligan J. et al (1988), ‘Constituency Service among Sub-National Legislators in Australia and Canada’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 13(1), 49-63.

³⁶ Anagnoson J. (1983), ‘Home Style in New Zealand’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 8(2), 157-175.

³⁷ Thomas S. (1992), ‘The Effects of Race and Gender on Constituency Service’, *the Western Political Quarterly*, 45(1), 169-180.

³⁸ Poyet C. (2013), ‘Individual Resources and Constituency Work Styles among French MPs’, paper presented at the 7th ECPR General Conference, Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013.

³⁹ Frears J. (1990), ‘The French Parliament: Loyal Workhorse, Poor Watchdog’, in Norton P. (1990), ‘Parliaments in Western Europe’, London: Frank Cass, pg. 46-47.

⁴⁰ Kim C. et al (1984), ‘The Legislative Connection: The Representative and the Represented in Kenya, Korea, and Turkey’, Durham: Duke University Press, pg. 102.

Literature about surgeries is particularly developed and it shows that MPs play a role of social worker solving mainly administrative problems (housing, etc.). Such studies detailed this question and show how this function is perceived as important by MPs themselves and their collaborators. Other scholars researched not only the concrete work during office hours by examining the archival but also the expectations of citizens. Moreover, their conclusions were rather the same namely that there is a gap between citizens' expectations and the MPs' capacity to solve problems.

Surgeries were also investigated in other countries mainly with a descriptive approach. In Israel, Uslaner⁴¹ shows that despite the absence of institutional incentive, office hours are frequent among MPs. The expectations of citizens in both cases are the same. Jackson⁴² underscores that MPs are used as a last-chance administrative shelter which becomes more and more virtual. Research has also confirmed the increasing number of emails received by MPs which is concomitant with the socio-economic changes. If the content of surgeries activities is well known by scholars, this does not mean that contacts between citizens and MPs are limited to surgeries. As noted in the works of Poyet⁴³, office hours are only one part of constituency work. It is thus important to also consider others activities and mainly social events.

Constituency relations in Trinidad and Tobago

Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has an extensive constituency relations network with substantial number of offices, staff and budget. There are 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices. Each MP is provided with an office and Parliament covers the rent, staff and all utilities. According to UNDP in Trinidad and Tobago, each day approximately 420 staff (175 staff are based in Parliament's premises in Port of Spain and 245 staff work in the constituency offices) support the effecting functioning of the Parliament, including constituency services.⁴⁴ According to Terms of Reference⁴⁵ of the assignment, assessment of the representative function of the parliament should review three criteria.

Firstly, citizens' observation of parliamentary proceedings; secondly, citizens' access to accurate and timely information on the work of the parliament; and finally, citizens' interaction with members of the parliament.

The goal of the MP-constituency relations assessment is to enhance the public debate and the public input into the legislative work of the Parliament and encourage MPs and Parliament to enhance the in-person interaction with the electorate. In this way, programs will be implemented with the objective that the governance system will be increasingly willing to listen to their constituents and act responsibly.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Uslaner E.(1985), 'Casework and Institutional Design: Redeeming Promises in the Promised Land', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 10(1), pp. 35-52.

⁴² Jackson N. (2003), 'Vote Winner or a nuisance: email and British MPs relationship with their constituents', Paper presented at the 2003 PSA annual conference, Leicester, 15-17 April 2003.

⁴³ Poyet C. (2013), 'Individual Resources and Constituency Work Styles among French MPs', paper presented at the 7th ECPR General Conference, Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013.

⁴⁴ UNDP (2012), 'Strengthening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago', Project Document, pg. 5.

⁴⁵ See Appendix I.

⁴⁶ UNDP (2012), 'Strengthening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago', Project Document, pg. 6.

Trinidad and Tobago constituency relations model

The general model of Parliament - constituency relations consists of two elements: the relationship between the Member of the Parliament and their constituencies; and the relationship between the people and the Legislature. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the model is more centred on the performance of MPs individually to simultaneously receive requests/complaints from citizens and at the same time liaise with central and local government structures so that citizens' needs are addressed effectively. In parallel, all MPs have reported that they put a lot of emphasis in community outreach activities outside the premises of the constituency office. In this way the MP proactively seeks to identify community needs and engage with the community with the hope that such efforts will be rewarded in the next election cycle.



Figure 1: Model of Trinidad and Tobago's MPs constituency work engagement.

The Office of the Parliament has a structure in place that supports the work of the Constituency offices. Most of the interaction is done through Administration Officers, while for some specific issues Constituency office personnel liaise with IT staff, internal audit and Office of the Marshal. The Office supports the constituency work of MPs based on 'Constituency Operation Manual' that enables MPs to open and maintain constituency relations offices. Below section provides overview of current services offered to MPs based on the COM and the Strategic Plan of the Parliament.

Premises

Generally Members of Parliament are entitled to establish one constituency office within the constituency and, subject to approval, no more than three sub-offices in remote areas of their

constituencies. The Office of the Parliament provides assistance to MPs regarding the sub-offices only after an approval by the House Committee. COM underscores that the constituency office is not a political office, which means that no party symbol or emblem should be displayed on constituency offices. If such a rule is violated, the Office of the Parliament will not provide support to the constituency office in question. Where it is possible, the government provides the MPs Member with a suitable and acceptable government building to set their constituency office. All furniture and equipment provided to the MP in the constituency office are property of the Office of the Parliament. The MP is solely responsible for ensuring the security of the constituency office and should inform the Office of the Parliament if there are any incidents of fire, theft or other event that causes damage to the constituency office. In cases when the MP resigns or is not re-elected, the constituency office should be vacated within two working days. The staff of the Office of the Parliament are obliged to visit constituency offices to provide appropriate services.⁴⁷

Utilities and stationary

Each MP has at disposal 2,500 TTD per month to cover the constituency office costs relate to utilities (telephone, electricity and water charges). While for postage, stationary, supplies and janitorial services MPs have 1,500 TTD per month.⁴⁸

The Office and IT equipment

The Office of the Parliament provides each constituency office with a set of office and IT equipment. Moreover, the Office of the Parliament provides funds for monthly maintaining of equipment as well as is tasked with provision of high speed internet services.⁴⁹

According to the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, the Parliament intends 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.⁵⁰ More concretely, 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.

Guidelines when establishing a constituency office⁵¹

Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago advises its MPs to be mindful of the following guidelines:

- Choose a location that is accessible, visible and inviting. Consideration to bus, maxi taxi, taxi routes, walk-in accessibility and parking facilities should also be factored in.
- Consider whether your office space is sufficiently inviting. An atmosphere that makes the public feel welcomed is encouraged.
- Use your office to communicate to constituents your commitment to them.
- Make sure your office has cross partisan appeal. Displaying party signs, posters and symbols at these offices are prohibited.
- Make sure staff is safe and comfortable. The best constituency assistants love people, are problem-solving, loyal and know their communities inside and out.

⁴⁷ COM (2010), 'Constituency Operations Manual', Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, pg. 4-6.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pg. 9-10.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pg. 10-15.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ COM (2010), 'Constituency Operations Manual', Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, pg. 3

Security issues

In July 2014, the Office of the Parliament conducted a safety and security risk assessment of MPs constituency offices.⁵² The goal of the survey was to identify current immediate and long term security needs and outline concrete recommendations. 26 out of 41 MPs responded to the survey that included registering security requests of MPs in terms of provision of electronic door, cameras, unarmed and armed security. Only 4 MPs noted that they would not like to have any security measures implemented in their Constituency offices. Majority of the remaining 22 MPs requested cameras and computer doors are installed at their Constituency offices, while 13 MPs requested unarmed security and 10 MPs armed security. As a result of the findings of the survey, the Office of the Parliament recommended and implemented immediate deployment of security staff in or in front of the critical constituency offices.

	Yes	No
Electronic door	20	6
Camera	24	2
Unarmed security	13	13
Armed security	10	16
No security	4	22

Communication

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.⁵³

The Office of the 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 the Parliament will encourage MPs to create their own web-page and then connect it to the parliament's webpage.

Engaging constituents beyond Constituency offices

Cottage meetings organized by MPs seem to be a response to engage communities that do not approach Constituency offices but who feel underprivileged yet want to make a difference. Such forums enable public deliberation with participation for 20-40 participants and create opportunities for people to do things that they can't do in a polling place. For example, cottage meetings allow people to name problems in their own terms and frame issues to identify more than the usual two opposing options for action. They can also set in motion civic actions that are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, cottage meetings seem to be intended to help people to get off the side lines and take a stronger hand in shaping their future.

Human resources

⁵² Office of the Marshall (2014), 'Constituency Security Review: A review of security with respect to Constituency main Offices', Office of the Parliament.

⁵³ Ibid, pg. 30.

The MP has the authority to employ, promote and terminate staff of the constituency office, with a limitation that they can't be members of the immediate family. The MP should assign working hours and approve job descriptions of the constituency office staff in accordance with the established rules and regulations. The MP can hire administrative, clerical, research and messaging/driving staff within a budget limit of 30,000 TTD. The COM does not provide information of required staff profile and tasks for each of the staff categories. Constituency office staff have entitlements related to annual leave, sick leave, and maternity leave and severance benefits. Upon request, the Office of the Parliament can assist and advice the MP in implementing HR duties.⁵⁴

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 the Strategic Plan 2013-2018, 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).⁵⁵

MP's occupations

The position of a Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago is not a full-time occupation. Non-executive members have other careers than often demand a greater portion of their time. According to UNDP's project document⁵⁶, as many as 38 MPs also have executive portfolios and 33 MPs are employed in the private sectors.

House of Representatives

Number of portfolioed MPs	28	Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries All at the Executive Level
Number of non-portfolioed MPs	14	Opposition MPs, government backbenchers, Speaker of the House All employed in the private sector

Senate

Number of portfolioed MPs	10	Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries All at the Executive Level
Number of non-portfolioed MPs	21	Opposition MPs, government backbenchers, President of the Senate, Independent Senators All employed in the private sector

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 6-9.

⁵⁵ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg. 29.

⁵⁶ UNDP (2012), 'Strengthening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago', Project Document, pg. 5.

Nonetheless, the workload of MPs and the complexity of the issues reviewed in the Parliament have increased substantially. Having said that, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is looking into professionalization of the function of the parliamentarian that would enable MPs to allocate their time to MP functions to the fullest extent possible. More concretely, the Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for 2013-2018 calls for a review of the remuneration for MPs with the aim to enable MPs to make their job in Parliament their main professional activity – counting for 95% of their professional time allocation.⁵⁷

Constituency Development Programme:

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago advocates for strengthening the representative role of MPs vis-à-vis the local development needs. For this purpose, the Strategic Plan advocates for the creation of a constituency development programme. Ideally, 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. 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. 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.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg.11.

⁵⁸ Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago (2013), 'Strategic Plan of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018', pg. 30.

4. Gap analysis and challenges

Trinidad and Tobago consists of 41 constituencies. Each MP while performing he/she's duties as a parliamentary representative is entitled to an office within the constituency. The MP can organise the activities within that office as he/she sees fit. Currently MPs 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. Moreover, the Office of the Parliament is responsible for providing guidance on the procedures and policies of the operations of the constituency offices.

The assessment of current model and practices was based on a two-tier approach: initially assess the Office of the Parliament's practices and procedures in delivering support and services to Constituency offices and secondly validate initial findings and identify gaps through field work and direct interviews of the MPs and their constituency office staff.

Following the completion of one month in-country mission that included interviews with MPs and their constituency office staff, it became clear that the assessment should have included also interviews with line Ministries, government agencies and local authorities responsible for delivery of critical services to citizens. Such services represent the bulk of the requests presented to the MP and constituency office staff. A more holistic approach could have enabled not only an assessment of the Parliament's gaps but a wider review of government service delivery mechanisms – which are critical elements for effective functioning of constituency offices. Because of limited time available for this assignment such a review is not carried out. Nonetheless, it is highly recommended that such review takes place in near future, since it can help inform scenarios related to introduction of the Constituency Development Fund.

Every MP interviewed reported a number of generic challenges in conducting constituency activities. Though, it seems some MPs have developed own strategies to successfully manage many of these challenges. Three of the most common challenges include the following:

Limited Resources: Most MPs have reported limited financial and staff resources for conducting constituent relations. Initially, MPs position is not considered a full-time job – despite the fact that in reality most of the MPs were dedicating long hours of work to their constituency activities. It is obviously much easier to represent, assist, and look out for constituents when one is not working alone. Nonetheless, developing an active profile in the constituency does not necessarily require a lot of money or staff. MPs can often take advantage of the support of their local government and local associations to communicate with citizens in a cost-effective manner. In many countries where MPs lack funds to hire staff, they are able to recruit volunteers to help. Over the long-term, MPs may be able to convince the Parliament to allocate more funds to further professionalise the work of constituency offices, to cover costs related to travel and organizing events within the constituency and to hire extra staff to help with casework.

Limited Responsiveness: Most MPs reported that their constituency offices face limited responsiveness from government offices when it came to addressing constituents

requests/complaints. While some MPs can afford to cover from their funds the provision of services through their constituency offices, most MPs depend on responsiveness of the central and local government to positively address their request. Some MPs have developed innovative strategies to reduce reliance on government support programmes. This mainly involved organizing self-help training, roundtable discussions with participation of government officials and citizens, liaising directly with local government officials and through provisions of tailored trainings offered by NGOs and educational institutions. However, systemic problems of governance require systemic solutions. The Parliament should conduct annual audit of the delivery of key government services requested by constituents to MPs. In this way it can avoid politicization and clientelism in public service delivery and strengthen overall government accountability. A more streamlined government service delivery will not only benefit MPs but most importantly the main beneficiaries – the citizens.

Citizen Expectations: Many MP have expressed their primary concern for not being able to meet citizen's expectations or address all the misperceptions about what MPs do. Citizens often ask for assistance that falls outside a MP's responsibilities (i.e., request for employment or direct financial assistance). The NDI's constituency relations manual noted that MPs in other countries have commented that their constituents view them as a "walking ATM." In most countries, citizens have a limited understanding of the constraints placed on MPs and national policy makers, especially those related to limited budget resources, competing priorities, or to constraints on policy-making owing to requirements by international financial institutions. While this perception gap is hard to close, MPs can best combat it by educating and communicating with their constituents. Therefore, the Office of the Parliament should involve constituency office staff when drafting the communication and outreach strategy of the Parliament – especially related to education activities. Additionally, the most effective way to ensure that citizens understand what their MP can do for them is for MP to conduct effective constituent communication. Majority of MPs do not use effectively social media tools – the Office of the Parliament could assist MPs and their constituency office staff by offering the training on strategic usage of social media tools to disseminate information.

Common activities to strengthen constituency relations⁵⁹

Support for regular meetings with constituents. Citizens generally want to see as much of their elected representatives as possible. Town hall meetings, end-of-session "report-backs" by MPs and participation in other community events are very popular with constituents. Assistance may include support for planning these meetings, financial support for travel expenses (either directly or helping to build a mechanism into the government or legislative budget process), and training in techniques for responding to constituent concerns and questions.

Constituency relations training and manuals. When MPs have individual staff to support constituency relations or when MPs have strong political incentives to reach out to a constituency, broad-based constituency relations training may be appropriate. Constituency relations manuals or toolkits can provide practical reference materials for representatives; they may include things like checklists for organizing meetings, form correspondence to respond to common constituent concerns, tips for speech writing, general advice on media relations, etc.

Social media, newsletters, radio and TV communications. In large constituencies, greater

⁵⁹ Martin E., (2001), 'Guidebook on Strengthening the Representative Capacity of Legislatures', the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), pg. 13-14.

reliance needs to be placed on mass communication with constituents, through newsletters, radio, TV or through individual MPs websites. Obviously, the choice of media is strongly influenced by local conditions and cost. Assistance may typically involve skills training on the production of newsletters, training on radio or TV interview skills, and training for MP constituency office staff to support individual MPs websites.

Establishment and development of constituency offices. Where constituencies are far from the capital or where travel is difficult, effective representation may require representatives to have an established office in their constituency. Assistance can take a variety of forms, including provision of technical assistance on the design, feasibility and management of constituency office systems; procurement of initial office space and equipment; training for constituency staff; and the development of guidelines regarding the proper use of constituency office facilities.

Casework. Constituency casework – where MPs use their good offices, whether in the parliament or constituency, to help constituents untangle government bureaucracy or appeal unfair decisions – is human-resource intensive. Assistance may include provision of staff training on the receipt and resolution of complaints, public outreach to citizens on constituency casework, systems and form letters for representatives to use in resolving common complaints, training on ethics issues in conducting constituency casework, and methods of tracking correspondence and constituent contacts.

Below are presented common challenges in conducting constituency activities presented by MPs and their constituency office staff:

I. Operations of the constituency office

The Speaker of the House noted that there's a need to formalize processes in regards to management of the constituency offices.⁶⁰ Currently, there is no formal system in place that would enable to monitor the performance, efficacy and efficiency of the work performed at constituency offices. Moreover, the Parliament does not have set benchmarks for measuring impact of the constituency offices and across the board agreed standards of operations for the work of constituency offices. Clearly, there is need to standardize functioning of all constituency offices. One way to achieve this is to initiate a dialogue with MPs that would result on an agreement on the main functions of the constituency office. This would help the Office of the Parliament to easily identify and address needs of the constituency offices. In parallel, it is worth considering introducing a mechanism that would enable MPs report on the work they do in the constituency offices on yearly basis. Such a report would assist the Parliament and citizens monitor their performance.

Constituency Handbook for Malawi MPs⁶¹

MPs in Malawi have expressed concern that they lack the resources and tools needed to do their jobs effectively; in particular, in meeting the expectations of their constituents. A program was developed to respond to this situation with by assisting MPs on constituency relations. The Speaker and political party leaders created a working group of interested MPs,

⁶⁰ Meeting with Speaker of the House, 23 July 2014.

⁶¹ Martin E., (2001), 'Guidebook on Strengthening the Representative Capacity of Legislatures', the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), pg. 14.

the Constituency Outreach Supervisory Committee, which served as the core body to guide the program. The committee included a mix of nationally prominent figures and relatively obscure backbench members who spend most of their time at home in their villages. The input from the supervisory committee was critical to program success.

The committee readily identified two major constraints: lack of constituency offices and lack of information. To meet the need for constituency offices, the group drafted a proposal for government-funded constituency offices. They actively lobbied fellow MPs, ministers, and parliamentary committees for the funding. For the second need, information, the committee guided the development of a Constituent Handbook. The committee outlined the elements of what they thought should be included in the handbook and a draft was created for their review. From the beginning, the handbook was designed to be a very practical tool – programs are often most successful when MPs are able to see an immediate, practical use for a particular document or tool. The handbook is introduced with a concise one-page essay “Why Should I Work in My Constituency?” that is followed by such basic information as a definition of casework and how MPs can gauge public opinion. The bulk of the book contains names of contacts at the national level, as well as places for local contact information to be added.

Within the framework of the principle of accountability and value for money - before any review and changes to financial entitlements for constituency offices is introduced, the Parliament should set up a system that provides information on the work done at constituency offices (number of requests/complaints received vs. solved, aggregate number of type of requests received, expenditures report, activity reports, etc.). Moreover, the Office of the Parliament should facilitate the possibility of creating mechanisms for sharing information between constituency offices and local government authorities in order to address the requests from constituents that fall within the remit of the local government authorities. Additionally, constituency office staff should be trained to identify requests that are the responsibility of the local government authorities and direct them to appropriate institution. In this way the constituency related workload of the MP would be significantly reduced. Another proposal is look into feasibility of introducing coordination meetings or even inviting representatives of the local government authorities during the days when MP is present in the constituency office and is receiving constituents.

Some MPs are of the opinion that MPs should rather focus on their main tasks on law-making, representation, scrutiny and budget approval.⁶² Though, very rarely do MPs engage with their constituents in soliciting input during the review of bills. Therefore, MPs should inform and educate the public on the role of the Parliament and functions that their constituency offices can perform. Additionally, MPs could organize information sessions with citizens at their constituency offices with representatives of the line Ministries or agencies on how they can access the services. Speaker of the House suggested that MPs should also focus on major topics such as climate change and major health issues.⁶³

Recommendations:

⁶² Meeting with Speaker of the House, 23 July 2014.

⁶³ Meeting with Speaker of the House, 23 July 2014.

I.1 Develop a standard operating procedures (handbook) and code of conduct for constituency offices

I.2 MPs and the Office of the Parliament should agree on benchmarks for measuring impact of the constituency offices

I.3 The Office of the Parliament should introduce a mechanism that would enable MPs report on the work they do in the constituency offices on yearly basis.

II. Office of the Parliament internal coordination

The Office of the Parliament is a well-established bureaucracy that is capable and has adequate resources to support the functioning of the Parliament. Specifically related to constituency work, the Office of the Parliament has a structure in place that supports the work of the Constituency offices. Most of the interaction is done through Administration Officers, while for some specific issues Constituency office personnel liaise with IT staff, internal audit and Office of the Marshal. From the practices identified on the ground, there is a need for incremental improvement to avoid duplication and assure better coordination in the Office of the Parliament on provision of support to Constituency offices.

The Administration Unit should serve as a focal point for every communication of the Office of the Parliament with Constituency office staff and vice versa. Correspondingly, a mechanism lead by the Administration Unit should be created that would help coordinated delivery of services originating from other Units (IT, Internal Auditor, Office of the Marshal). The Administration Unit should enhance its human and financial resource to perform such tasks and also provide strategic leadership in efficient delivery of current and new services to Constituency offices.

The Administration Unit should have the mandate to suggest to the most adequate mode for the delivery of support services to Constituency offices. This could include outsource the delivery of support services to Constituency offices; liaise equipment for Constituency offices; etc.

Recommendations:

II.1 Assign the Administration Unit as a focal point unit for every communication of the Office of the Parliament with Constituency office staff and vice versa.

II.2 The Administration Unit should have additional human and financial resources to implement a wider mandate for coordination and service delivery to constituency offices.

II.3 The Office of the Parliament should set a formal coordination mechanism that oversees the delivery of services to MPs and their constituency office staff.

III. Liaison with central and local government

Currently, MPs during their work at the constituency offices perform tasks that overlap with the duties of local councillors and local government authorities. MPs seem to serve as brokers for

provision of government services to citizens that often lead to overlap with authority of other institutions and agencies. However, high number of citizens approaching MPs for such services attests that MPs are successful at facilitating the delivery of such services. An alternative approach could be that MPs take a more proactive approach rather than waiting for constituents to put a request/complaint, they could in advance target the constituents and through active communication strategy engage with them. Only one MP reported the usage of such proactive tools.

The review was Parliament-centred focusing on how members of the Parliament and the Office of the Parliament interact within the current model and practices of constituency relations. However, due to consultancy and time limitations, the assessment report does not cover the review of services delivery to citizens of the line Ministries and local government units that are critical for MPs to successfully carry out their constituency tasks. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future review of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago focuses on the review of delivery of the key services such as social welfare, health care and educational services.

Several MPs reported that government websites (www.gov.tt) are not reliable source of information on developments and forms that need to be used to require services because of frequent changes that are not reflected on the website. That's why staff of the constituency offices most of the times browse on their own for definite answers when constituents ask about government services/programmes. Some MPs noted that an important challenge to successful delivery of services to constituents and the delays in receiving responses to requests forwarded by the constituency office to government stem from systemic governance failures as governance structures are set up in a manner that leads to overlaps each other.⁶⁴ Moreover, the institutions seem not to be driven to deliver efficient services and deal with citizens/consumers swiftly.

Some MPs reported that when MP is present in the constituency office, during meetings with constituents that have problems accessing local government service, the MP is joined by local councillors. In this way, the MP links directly the requests with local councillors and both he and local councillors are aware of constituent's grievances.⁶⁵

Recommendations:

III.1 The Parliament should conduct annual audit of the delivery of key government services requested by constituents to MPs. In this way it can avoid politicization and clientelism in public service delivery and strengthen overall government accountability.

III.2 Analyse the financial and operational feasibility of making calls from Constituency offices to dedicated Government Ministries/Agencies phone lines free.

III.3 Conduct a holistic review of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago focuses on the review of government mechanisms for delivery of the key services such as social welfare, health care and educational services.

⁶⁴ Meeting with a Member of the Parliament, 26 July 2014.

⁶⁵ Meeting with constituency office staff, 24 July 2014.

IV. Human Resources

Currently, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices with a maximum number of personnel at 298 staff. Though the overall number of staff might seem sufficient, some MPs have highlighted that due to insufficient funds they can't attract qualified personnel in the job market. As a result, constituency offices do not have permanent professional support – i.e. legal or economic advisor that would assist MPs in reviewing bills. Therefore, it is advisable to amend the Constituency Operations Manual to reflect three broad bands of staff in constituency offices:

- A. Professional staff (Office Manager, Researchers, IT, Advisors)
- B. Administrative staff (Secretaries, Case Officers)
- C. Support staff (Drivers, Messengers, Field Officers)

The Speaker of the House underscored that constituency office staff contracts and salaries should adhere to minimum labour standards stipulated in the Trinidad and Tobago legislations and International Labour Organization (ILO) regulations, especially regarding leave entitlements, safety, minimum wages, and employee rights.⁶⁶ Some MPs and staff of the constituency offices were not aware of the Constituency Operations Manual and therefore were not aware of duties and responsibilities related to human resources of the constituency office. Most MPs and constituency office staff have noted that salaries of the constituency office staff are not sufficient and that there should be efforts to align them with existing salary ranges of staff of the Office of the Parliament. Staff of the constituency offices should be introduced to such standards during induction training that they would receive as soon as they join the constituency office. It is imperative that MPs serve as role models in society and apply these standards as hiring and other job related issues for the constituency office are their responsibility as outlined in COM.

The amended Constituency Operations Manual should contain general description for the tasks and profile/skills required for each position. If possible, in consultation with MPs agree on the salary range for each staff band. Moreover, the HR Department should work with relevant units in the Office of the Parliament and outside to determine the legal status of the staff hired in Constituency offices. Additionally, the Manual should contain general description for the tasks and profile/skills required for each position. If possible, in consultation with MPs agree on the salary range for each staff band. Moreover, the HR Department should work with relevant units in the Office of the Parliament and outside to determine the legal status of the staff hired in Constituency offices.

All staff of the Constituency offices should be hired based on contract. The HR Department can assist the MPs to develop a contract template. The contract should clearly stipulate duties and tasks, as well as entitlements and obligations. All entitlements and obligations of Constituency office staff should correspond to Contract Officers positions. For staff that are discontinued by MPs, the HR Department should conduct exit interviews.

The Administration Unit should conduct annual surveys with staff of Constituency offices to identify challenges they face in their work. The Unit should coordinate the delivery of

⁶⁶ Meeting with Speaker of the House, 23 July 2014.

Induction/Orientation training for new Constituency office staff. Such trainings will be delivered on regular intervals in coordination with MPs and Constituency office staff. The Unit should facilitate the delivery of specific trainings to Constituency office staff based on regular review of capacity development needs of Constituency office staff.

Staff of Constituency offices should be included in the in-house trainings offered by HR Management Service. Newly recruited staff of Constituency offices should be offered induction training about the Parliament and parliamentary business similarly to induction programme offered to new MPs. Depending of the nature of their work, staff Constituency office could be trained on specific topics such as public relations and communications, parliamentary protocol, official communication styles, financial management, etc.)

A possible solution for aforementioned issues could be adoption of a regulation on human resources management of constituency office staff that would detail the hiring and discontinuation procedures, align staff entitlements and duties as per applicable legislation in Trinidad and Tobago. Such a regulation would provide the legal basis for Human Resourced Department involvement in terms of monitoring, facilitation and advisory role. Moreover, the HR Department should offer MPs information, advice and capacity development opportunities to enhance their HR management skills. Newly elected MPs should be informed about such services during their Induction Programme.

Lastly, although a well-established legal and governance framework can encourage effective representation, parliaments also need the professional human resources necessary to support MP's constituency work. In parliaments lacking traditions of effective representation, new MPs often require training and skills development on constituent and media relations in order to effectively represent their constituents. Where citizens are actively engaged in the legislative process, even the most skilled MPs are unlikely to be able to respond to all constituent needs without additional professional staff to support their efforts. In order to meet the needs of constituencies outside of the capital, Parliament needs to support significant travel allowances for MPs. In addition to the individual MP staff, centralized staff is needed to support general public information and legislative outreach activities. Martin notes that in established parliament's caucus and party staff are needed to translate constituent concerns into a party platform, and to translate this party platform into a legislative agenda.⁶⁷

Recommendations:

IV.1 Set up a working group with participation of MPs and relevant Office of the Parliament staff to clarify the legal status of constituency office staff.

IV.2 Draft a regulation on human resources management of constituency office staff that should harmonize the job descriptions and salary levels for each post, hiring and discontinuation procedures, and detail staff entitlements and duties.

⁶⁷ Martin E., (2001), 'Guidebook on Strengthening the Representative Capacity of Legislatures', the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), pg. 9.

IV.3 The HR Department should keep records for each constituency office staff. This should include following data (but not limited to): CV, job description of the post, education degrees/certificates, copy of contract for the post, leave monitoring sheet, and a professional capacity development plan.

IV.4 Provide MPs with professional support staff besides the ones assigned for the constituency office.

V. Premises

During the interviews with MPs, staff of the constituency offices and Office of the Parliament official it was noted that some of the constituency offices are in premises that do not poses all the required permits and licences according to applicable law in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, a priority for the Parliament should be to assure that all constituency offices and sub-offices are accommodated in premises that poses all the required permits and licences. In parallel, rapid planning is required to assure transition of all constituency offices into publicly/state owned premises before the inauguration of the 11th Parliament.

Staff of the Office of the Parliament noted that constituency offices should not just be places where MPs meet with constituents, but also places where constituents receive information about specific government programmes (i.e. social welfare, employment, civil registry etc.).⁶⁸ Additionally, the constituency office staff should be able and have sufficient resources to provide constituents with basic information on the work of the Parliament, current parliamentary business and government programmes.

One of the constituency offices that was visited during the in-country assessment mission seemed to serve as a coordination point for activities a political party. On couple of other offices, visible signs of political parties were displayed in public spaces and uniforms worn by constituency office staff. This is clearly in violation of the Constituency Operations Manual provisions on political neutrality and impartiality. MPs and the Office of the Parliament should address the perceptions that constituency offices are MPs office and represents the political party to which the MP is affiliated. The public should be made aware that the constituency office is set up to serve all constituents regardless of their political preferences. The Administration Unit should monitor regularly whether the premises of the Constituency offices and their staff adhere to provisions of the Constituency Operations Manual on political impartiality and neutrality. Clerk of the House should be informed accordingly.

Most of the interviewed MPs and their staff of the constituency office remarked that it would be financially more feasible to have the office in publicly/state-owned premises rather pay the lease. The Parliament should consider organizing a survey on the constituency office premises and their transfer into publicly/state owned premises. The survey should identify alternatives that would enable transferring existing constituency offices from privately leased premises into publicly/state owned premises. All constituency offices should adhere to construction and safety

⁶⁸ Meeting with Office of the Parliament staff, 17 July 2014.

standards prescribed in the 'Guideline on Constituency Relations' and other regulations of the Parliament.

Alternatively, based on the findings of the survey, the Parliament could decide to purchase privately owned land for construction of constituency offices. Even in such scenario, costs for set up and operation of the Constituency office in the long-run could be financially more feasible than the current model of leasing privately owned premises. The Office of the Parliament based on the findings of the survey should prepare a transition plan that would aim to accommodate all MPs from the new sitting into publicly/state owned premises.

Recommendations:

V.1 All constituency office and sub-offices should be accommodated in premises that poses all the required permits and licences.

V.2 The Office of the Parliament should draft a plan to assure transition of all constituency offices into publicly/state owned premises before the inauguration of the 11th Parliament

V.3 The Administration Unit should monitor regularly whether the premises of the Constituency offices and their staff adhere to provisions of the Constituency Operations Manual on political impartiality and neutrality. Clerk of the House should be informed accordingly.

V.4 Organize a survey and follow up it with a public awareness campaign to present Constituency office as premises for accessing MPs for all constituents.

VI. Constituency outreach and community engagement

On average 250 to 450 constituents visit the constituency offices every week. However, MPs said that important part of their work was organizing meeting with community outside the constituency office through cottage meetings and on special occasions (festivals, religious holidays etc.). Some constituency offices reported that they have protocols in place that outline the procedures for organizing community meetings. However, MPs complained that they don't receive financial support for organizing such events and that they have to use their own financial resources to organize such activities. MPs also noted that Parliament does not provide support that would facilitate their travel and mobility in the constituency. It was reported that all travels done by MPs in the constituency are with expenses born by MPs themselves.

Specifically, cottage meetings organized by MPs seem to be a response to engage communities that do not approach Constituency offices but who feel underprivileged yet want to make a difference. Such forums enable public deliberation with participation for 20-40 participants and create opportunities for people to do things that they can't do in a polling place. For example, cottage meetings allow people to name problems in their own terms and frame issues to identify more than the usual two opposing options for action. They can also set in motion civic actions

that are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, cottage meetings seem to be intended to help people to get off the side-lines and take a stronger hand in shaping their future.

One of the constituency offices reported that it requested the local Business Association to provide comments on relevant draft bills, but it never received any feedback. Moreover, the constituency offices do not have a dedicated budget line to organize public events that would facilitate the solicitation of opinions of constituents on bills. The Office of the Parliament though its professional units can assist the MPs and their constituency office staff to develop a framework for engaging constituents and interest groups in parliamentary business.

During the in-country mission, MPs reported that they have developed innovative ways to engage with constituents. One of the MPs has taken a proactive approach in engaging with constituents through organization capacity building and self-help trainings that target diverse groups in the constituency. Another MP reported that with own fund he established a scholarship that funds 11 students from his constituency.

Majority of MPs and their constituency office staff use traditional tools in communication with constituents. Several MPs have their own Facebook/webpage about the work done in the constituency. Some MPs issue that MPs should decide whether they want and what type of information they would publish about meetings and requests from constituents on their Facebook/webpage. The Office of the Parliament should look into the feasibility of allowing MPs under equipment heading of the COM to purchase cameras that would enable them to present their constituency work. Currently, all the communications outreach costs with constituents are covered through personal funds of the MP.

One of the MPs reported that its constituency office prepared a report in a form of a magazine about the achievements of the MP during the period from 2010 till 2013. The publication was shaped as a report to constituents and was distributed to widely among members of the constituency. Moreover, the MP did not limit his interaction with the constituents only through contacts at his constituency office. The MP undertook a proactive and innovative approach in engaging with constituents through organization of social events, trainings and outreach activities that target diverse groups in the constituency. One such event was 'MP treats children' event. Additionally, this was the only constituency office that had an opinion/complaints box installed in the premises. Through a predetermined questionnaire on feedback, citizens could express their satisfaction with the quality of services received at the constituency office. Such a novel approach should be replicated with all other constituency offices.⁶⁹

Recommendations:

VI.1 The Office of the Parliament jointly with MPs should analyse the costs and benefits of providing financial support for organizing outreach activities that aim to engage with constituents/community outside constituency offices.

⁶⁹ Meeting with a Member of the Parliament, 23 July 2014.

VI.2 Add in the Constituency Operations Manual a section on 'Constituency Communications and Outreach' that would have a dedicated budget to support preparation of communication tools and outreach events of the Constituency office.

VI.3 Organize general social media training for staff of the Office of the Parliament, as well as for MPs (if interested) and their constituency office staff. More specific trainings on visualisation of data through social media could be provided based on request.

VI.4 Install in all constituency offices opinion/complaints box and develop a corresponding questionnaire to measure the satisfaction of citizens with quality of services of the constituency offices. Data collected through this mechanism should be shared with the Office of the Parliament for planning and monitoring purposes.

VII. IT services related to constituency offices

Currently, the Information Systems unit of the Office of the Parliament provides technical support and maintains Parliament's website, Intranet (Parlnet) and Rotunda (MPs software solution). Additionally, the unit provides support to constituency offices by delivering the IT equipment (computer, multifunctional devices for printing, fax, scanning and copying, printers, and internet connection).⁷⁰ Most of sub-Constituency offices do not receive support from the unit, with the exception of two sub-offices in Tobago and Chiguanas East. Staff of one of the Constituency offices noted that some of the equipment received from the Parliament are outdated and stressed that there is a need for provision of new computers and other equipment.⁷¹

With assistance from Information Systems unit of the Office of the Parliament, constituency office staff can be assisted through the development of a software solution that will aid the recording and tracking of requests/complaints received from constituents. Through such software (Constituency Tracking Mechanism), constituency office staff could draw information on type of request/complaint received and provide MPs information on real time about their status. The Constituency Tracking Mechanism would help MPs manage their agenda of meetings with constituents and to draw information on the type and number of requests/complaints received from constituents. This data can also inform and help shape Parliament's law-making and oversight activities. Moreover, such information will enable the Parliament to focus and tailor its thematic activities – i.e. organize specific outreach events for certain communities that face common problems that could be tackled at the Parliament.

The Information Systems unit of the Office of the Parliament could develop a specific module in SharePoint to address the needs of the constituency offices to have standardized communication with other public institutions, manage requests/complaints of constituents and offer accurate information about government programmes and services (via www.gov.tt). Furthermore, based on input from MPs and constituency office staff, the unit could develop electronic forms that could standardize the communication of constituency offices with other government bodies (i.e. Parliament, Ministries, Agencies, municipal authorities etc.).

⁷⁰ Meeting with Office of the Parliament staff, 17 July 2014.

⁷¹ Meeting with MP and constituency office staff, 19 July 2014.

Recommendations:

VII.1 Review the possibility to outsource the maintenance of computers and other IT equipment in select constituency offices.

VII.2 Information Systems unit staff and/or subcontractors should regularly visit the Constituency offices to monitor the functioning of IT equipment and provide necessary maintenance support in timely manner.

VII.3 The Constituency Operations Manual should be updated in terms of budget and what type of equipment/software it provides to Constituency offices (i.e. Windows 2007 is no longer supported by Microsoft).

VII.4 Conduct an analysis with the involvement of MPs, Constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament staff on the framework and type of Constituency Tracking Mechanism that will aid effective management of the Constituency offices.

VII.5 Based on input from MPs and constituency office staff, the Information System unit should develop electronic forms that could standardize the communication of Constituency offices with other government bodies (i.e. Parliament, Ministries, Agencies, municipal authorities etc.).

VII.6 Conduct an analysis with the involvement of MPs, Constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament staff on the framework and type of Constituency Tracking Mechanism that will aid effective management of the Constituency offices.

VIII. Library and research services

The services of the Library of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago are mostly used from opposition MPs and staff of MPs.⁷² Government MPs utilise library and research services offered from government ministries where they work. In order to attract MPs to use more Library and its services, the Library staff introduced changes to cater for specific needs of the MPs. This included making the Library available only to MPs when there are sittings of the House of Representatives. Currently, constituency office staff do not receive notification about the services and products prepared by the Library. However, the Library would be able to address request for information and inquiries for specific research that might be requested by MPs and their Constituency office staff. In order to understand why Constituency office staff do not use services of the Library and Research, it is advisable to conduct a survey with Constituency office staff. In addition, Constituency office staff should be included in the mailing list when Library disseminates information about its work and services

Recommendations:

VIII.1 Library and Research unit should conduct a survey with Constituency office staff on their library and research needs.

⁷² Meeting with the Office of the Parliament staff, 17 July 2014.

VIII.2 Library and Research unit should setup a mailing list of contacts of the constituency office staff that could be used to disseminate information and products prepared by the unit.

IX. Budget and auditing of constituency offices

Most of the interviewed MPs and their constituency office staff noted that budget allocated for constituency office is not sufficient. In several instances, MP had to use their money to cover the portion of expenditures related to constituency work not covered by the COM. More concretely, a common request was for more funds for staff, utilities and stationary costs – partially since the prices have gone up from 2010 when the budget division was assigned based on COM. Therefore, the Office of the Parliament should conduct an annual survey of costs of services that should be reflected in the budget for each constituency office. Additionally, the Office of the Parliament should consider remove altogether the budget allocations in the COM and instead after each survey (annually or biannually) the House Committee can decide on budget ceilings (or minimums and maximums).

Related to auditing, Internal Audit staff of the Office of the Parliament regularly (every 3 months) visit the constituency office. This is a good model to assure material accountability, however more focus should be given to financial auditing. In this regard, the constituency offices should submit regular financial together with activity reports to Office of the Parliament. This will help both the MPs and the Office of the Parliament to check whether budget assigned for constituency office is sufficient and whether it is spent properly (as intended).

Recommendations:

IX.1 The Office of the Parliament should conduct an annual survey of costs of services that should be reflected in the budget for each Constituency office.

IX.2 The constituency offices should submit regular financial together with activity reports to the Office of the Parliament.

X. The Constituency Development Fund

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago outlines the possibility of setting up a separate fund managed through the Constituency Development Programme. Such tool is expected to strengthen the representative role of MPs to respond to local development needs. 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 that will be determined at a later stage. 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.

The Constituency Development Programmes schemes typically involve the allocation of a certain sum of money to each constituency with decisions about how these funds should be spent

made at the local level by bodies involving the MP and local leaders. Such an approach allows individual citizens to have a role in deciding what projects are supported in their area and, if the process works as its advocates suggest, creates greater responsiveness to local needs than expenditures that are centrally determined at the national level. Also, by guaranteeing a certain amount of money to each constituency, it can reduce the pressures on individual representatives to lobby on behalf of their constituents, freeing them to devote more time to dealing with the national policy challenges that the nation confronts. On the other hand, in some cases, such arrangements can become thinly disguised patronage systems, manipulated by representatives to generate voter support for themselves by punishing their opponents and rewarding their supporters.⁷³

There was no consensus among MPs interviewed on the topic of benefits and challenges to establishing a Constituency Development Fund. An MP considered that introduction of 'Constituency Development Fund' would give clout to the MP and means to solve concrete problems of his constituency.⁷⁴ Other MPs considered it a tool that would overlap with the existing government service delivery and would not contribute to solving the systemic problems of governance.

If the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago decides to set up a Constituency Development Fund, it must develop mechanisms to assure that activities financed by the Fund do not overlap with existing initiatives of other governmental bodies at central and local level. As such, the Fund won't contribute to solving governance problems and improve the service delivery of government institutions. Instead it will just add another layer of public fund expenditures that not necessarily will be efficient. Therefore, it is imperative to assure timely sharing of information on on-going and implemented activities through the Fund with other government institutions and accountable spending of public funds.

Recommendations:

X.1 The Office of the Parliament should conduct a feasibility study on setting up a Constituency Development Programme with focus on institutional and financial accountability.

X.2 If the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago decides to set up a Constituency Development Fund, there should be a transparent mechanism in place for overseeing the implementation of projects funded through the Programme.

⁷³ Mezey M., (2011), 'Representation and Constituency Relations', Comparative Assessment of Parliaments Note, SUNY Center for International Development, pg. 23-24.

⁷⁴ Meeting with MP, 19 July 2014.

5. Recommendations

The assessment report recommends to build on recent, on-going or currently-discussed initiatives that may have an indirect but positive impact on the constituency office practices; and to focus future interventions on strengthening the institutional and policy framework that governs the support the Office of the Parliament provides to MPs and their constituency office staff. Moreover, special attention should be given to internal functioning of constituency offices with regard to human resources management, premises utilisation and enhancing general capacities to better serve the constituents. Below are presented all recommendations with the lead units of the Office of the Parliament assigned to implement the recommendations in a set timeline:

Functional areas	Recommendations	Lead Unit	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
I. Operations of the constituency office	I.1 Develop a standard operating procedures (handbook) and code of conduct for constituency offices		X	X			
	I.2 MPs and the Office of the Parliament should agree on benchmarks for measuring impact of the constituency offices			X			
	I.3 The Office of the Parliament should introduce a mechanism that would enable MPs report on the work they do in the constituency offices on yearly basis.			X	X		
II. Office of the Parliament internal coordination	II.1 Assign the Administration Unit as a focal point unit for every communication of the Office of the Parliament with Constituency office staff and vice versa.		X				
	II.2 The Administration Unit should have additional human and financial resources to implement a wider mandate for coordination and service delivery to constituency offices.			X			
	II.3 The Office of the Parliament should set a formal coordination mechanism that oversees the delivery of services to MPs and		X	X			

	their constituency office staff.						
III. Liaison with central and local government	III.1 The Parliament should conduct annual audit of the delivery of key government services requested by constituents to MPs. In this way it can avoid politicization and clientelism in public service delivery and strengthen overall government accountability.				X	X	X
	III.2 Analyse the financial and operational feasibility of making calls from Constituency offices to dedicated Government Ministries/Agencies phone lines free.		X	X			
	III.3 Conduct a holistic review of constituency relations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago focuses on the review of government mechanisms for delivery of the key services such as social welfare, health care and educational services.			X	X		
IV. Human Resources	IV.1 Set up a working group with participation of MPs and relevant Office of the Parliament staff to clarify the legal status of constituency office staff.		X	X			
	IV.2 Draft a regulation on human resources management of constituency office staff that should harmonize the job descriptions and salary levels for each post, hiring and discontinuation procedures, and detail staff entitlements and duties.			X			
	IV.3 The HR Department should keep records for each constituency office staff. This should include following data (but not limited to): CV, job description of the post, education degrees/certificates, copy of contract for the post, leave monitoring sheet, and a professional capacity development plan.			X	X	X	X
	IV.4 Provide MPs with			X	X	X	X

	professional support staff besides the ones assigned for the constituency office.						
V. Premises	V.1 All constituency office and sub-offices should be accommodated in premises that poses all the required permits and licences.			X	X	X	X
	V.2 The Office of the Parliament should draft a plan to assure transition of all constituency offices into publicly/state owned premises before the inauguration of the 11th Parliament.		X	X			
	V.3 The Administration Unit should monitor regularly whether the premises of the Constituency offices and their staff adhere to provisions of the Constituency Operations Manual on political impartiality and neutrality. Clerk of the House should be informed accordingly.			X	X	X	X
	V.4 Organize a survey and follow up it with a public awareness campaign to present Constituency office as premises for accessing MPs for all constituents.				X	X	X
VI. Constituency outreach and community engagement	VI.1 The Office of the Parliament jointly with MPs should analyse the costs and benefits of providing financial support for organizing outreach activities that aim to engage with constituents/community outside constituency offices.			X			
	VI.2 Add in the Constituency Operations Manual a section on 'Constituency Communications and Outreach' that would have a dedicated budget to support preparation of communication tools and outreach events of the Constituency office.			X	X		
	VI.3 Organize general social media training for staff of the Office of the Parliament, as well as for MPs (if interested) and their constituency office staff.			X			

	More specific trainings on visualisation of data through social media could be provided based on request.						
	VI. 4 Install in all constituency offices opinion/complaints box and develop a corresponding questionnaire to measure the satisfaction of citizens with quality of services of the constituency offices. Data collected through this mechanism should be shared with the Office of the Parliament for planning and monitoring purposes.			X	X		
VII. IT services related to constituency offices	VII.1 Review the possibility to outsource the maintenance of computers and other IT equipment in select constituency offices.			X			
	VII.2 Information Systems unit staff and/or subcontractors should regularly visit the Constituency offices to monitor the functioning of IT equipment and provide necessary maintenance support in timely manner.			X	X	X	X
	VII.3 The Constituency Operations Manual should be updated in terms of budget and what type of equipment/software it provides to Constituency offices (i.e. Windows 2007 is no longer supported by Microsoft).			X			
	VII.4 Conduct an analysis with the involvement of MPs, Constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament staff on the framework and type of Constituency Tracking Mechanism that will aid effective management of the Constituency offices.			X	X		
	VII.5 Based on input from MPs and constituency office staff, the Information System unit should develop electronic forms that could standardize the				X	X	

	communication of Constituency offices with other government bodies (i.e. Parliament, Ministries, Agencies, municipal authorities etc.).						
	VII.6 Conduct an analysis with the involvement of MPs, Constituency office staff and Office of the Parliament staff on the framework and type of Constituency Tracking Mechanism that will aid effective management of the Constituency offices.			X	X		
VIII. Library and research services	VIII.1 Library and Research unit should conduct a survey with Constituency office staff on their library and research needs.			X	X		
	VIII.2 Library and Research unit should setup a mailing list of contacts of the constituency office staff that could be used to disseminate information and products prepared by the unit.				X	X	X
IX. Budget and auditing of constituency offices	IX.1 The Office of the Parliament should conduct an annual survey of costs of services that should be reflected in the budget for each Constituency office.			X	X	X	X
	IX.2 The constituency offices should submit regular financial together with activity reports to the Office of the Parliament.			X	X	X	X
X. The Constituency Development Fund	X.1 The Office of the Parliament should conduct a feasibility study on setting up a Constituency Development Programme with focus on institutional and financial accountability.			X			
	X.2 If the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago decides to set up a Constituency Development Fund, there should be a transparent mechanism in place for overseeing the implementation of projects funded through the Programme.				X	X	X

6. Conclusions

Improving constituency relations is an important but often very challenging area. Like elsewhere, in Trinidad and Tobago the incentive structures surrounding constituency relations are heavily influenced by the electoral and governance systems. In a majoritarian electoral system with single-member constituencies, the direct linkage between constituents and MPs may provide greater incentives for constituency relations than in a proportional representation system. However, as Martin notes, that may also encourage representation to be viewed largely in terms of the MP's ability to win resources for his or her particular geographic constituency.⁷⁵

Although the relationship is not a perfect one, the single member constituency systems appear to intensify the tension between serving the constituency and effective policy-making because of the strong expectation that the MP from a particular geographical area has a special responsibility to that area. In multimember proportional representation systems, constituencies are larger and there isn't a single representative who citizens think of when they have demands to make or concerns that need to be reflected. To some extent, such an electoral system has the potential to reduce the pressures on MPs to be responsive to local concerns and presumably increase their ability to deal effectively with national policy issues.⁷⁶

Martin highlights another danger that often representation is viewed in terms of a patronage model.⁷⁷ In certain countries, a MP from a particular social group or region may be expected to assist in securing jobs or other benefits for other members of the group. In other countries, a MP who has received substantial contributions from a particular industry or interest group may be expected to secure benefits for that industry or group once elected in the parliament. Therefore, moving from a patronage-based to a policy- or interest-based model of representation, it is often appropriate to incorporate an ethics or public integrity component into support for constituency relations or constituency casework activities.

Most interviewed MPs noted that constituent relations is often one of the most challenging aspects of their work, but it is important to them for many reasons as they can provide benefits to constituents, parliament and society as a whole. First, MPs who actively engage their constituents seem to help establishment of a link between citizens and their national parliament. In Trinidad and Tobago, in numerous instances, MPs engaged with constituents both in constituency offices and outside. In this way, MPs demonstrate parliament's ability to address everyday issues in constituents lives and provide tangible benefits to communities they represent. That's why MP's constituent relations activities provide a much needed public benefit. MPs are uniquely situated to assist citizens connect with their parliament and untangle the bureaucratic maze they often face. Several MPs highlighted the importance of listening to constituents

⁷⁵ Martin E., (2001), 'Guidebook on Strengthening the Representative Capacity of Legislatures', the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), pg. 12.

⁷⁶ Mezey M., (2011), 'Representation and Constituency Relations', Comparative Assessment of Parliaments Note, SUNY Center for International Development, pg. 28.

⁷⁷ Martin E., (2001), 'Guidebook on Strengthening the Representative Capacity of Legislatures', the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), pg. 12.

concerns and then conveying those concerns in the Parliament and to their respective political parties. MPs have authority and resources to get answers and they enjoy access to information often unavailable to citizens, local elected officials or other community leaders. Through such engagement, MPs reported that they are better placed to provide input and influence policies that respond to real constituents and community's needs.

Second, efficient constituent relations depend on access to adequate professional support. Currently, at Parliament level there a number of units within the Office of the Parliament are in charge of communicating and providing specific services to MPs and their constituency office staff. The Office of the Parliament should look into the possibility of assigning the Administrative Unit as a focal point for coordination, monitoring and delivery of services to constituency offices. Though constituency offices have sufficient administrative support staff, MPs have noted that they suffer a chronic shortage of professional staff that would assist them in dealing with requests/complaints received by constituents. With the growing complexity and volume of parliamentary work (including constituency related work), MPs are dedicating more time and actual majority of them are now full time parliamentarians. Correspondingly, there is a need to provide MPs with professional support staff that would cover key legal, economic and social issues.

Amending and updating Constituency Operations Manual should part of the Office of the Parliament's regular routine of monitoring and evaluating its implementation. The manual should be used as a guiding tool to maintain the quality and standardize the services offer to and by the constituency offices. As such, COM should be regularly adopted to serve the needs of constituents and MPs. Moreover, the Office of the Parliament should review the implementation of Parliament's Strategic Plan and seek to institutionalize good practices and identify innovative approaches to supporting MPs and their constituency office staff in their daily constituency work.

Finally, effective constituent relations work creates the preconditions and sustainable foundation for active citizen participation in public affairs. When a MP works with Ministries, local officials, local associations and ordinary citizens to solve local problems, he or she empowers them to improve their lives and their communities. By widening the circle of citizens who involve themselves in public policies and public decisions, the MP contributes to countering apathy and helps make democracy work through practical problem-solving. MPs who establish strong ties with constituents also develop a base of supporters and help to mobilize volunteers.

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Appendices

I. Terms of Reference of the Assignment

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Parliamentary Advisor – Communications

1. Purpose

This consultancy is designed to move forward the process of strengthening the Outreach and Communication strategies of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

In a parliamentary democracy, it is of vital importance for parliamentarians to keep good contact with their voters and to strengthen the accountability of Members of Parliament to their electorates. These accountability measures should enable electorates to assess the effectiveness of their respective Member of Parliament in representing their aspirations in public decision making processes, as well as their ability to explain the importance of decisions made and laws adopted by parliament.

In this regard, the Parliamentary Advisor- Communications is expected to undertake an assessment of the Constituency relations offices model and practises and offer recommendations for future development in an effort to strengthen the overall Outreach and Communication strategies of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

2. Situational Analysis and Context

To make an assessment of the representative function of any parliament, one needs to look at three criteria. Firstly, citizens' observation of parliamentary proceedings; secondly, citizens' access to accurate and timely information on the work of parliament; and finally, citizens' interaction with members of parliament (constituency relations).

In many countries, including in Trinidad and Tobago, parliament supports the constituency outreach initiatives of their members by opening and maintaining constituency relation offices. Trinidad and Tobago has an extensive constituency relations network with a substantial number of offices, staff and budget. There are 41 constituency offices and 31 sub-constituency offices.

In addition, the Parliament has strong ICT communication tools in place, such as parliamentary web sites, streaming via the web, Television Broadcasting via Cable TV, Free to Air Television Broadcasting, Radio Broadcasting, Facebook, Twitter and Wikipedia.

The project will make an assessment of the Constituency Relations offices model and practices and offer recommendations for its future development, while recommending training to staff. The project will also facilitate a round table discussion on best practices and different models for constituency relations, and propose the launch of a Constituency Relations tracking Mechanism and a parliamentary Handbook on Constituency Relations.

The project will also assist in designing a comprehensive communications strategy, offer a tailor made Parliamentary handbook on media relations and communication skills; and enhance more systematically

the in-person outreach events of Parliament via a Week of Parliament, Parliament Day and support to the Youth parliament.

In so doing and with a particular focus on youth and participation in public/political life, the project supports programmatically the Vision of the Presiding Officers to ensure a greater proximity of parliamentary work to young people and future leaders in society. The project seeks to enhance and solidify the knowledge and understanding of the role of Parliament within a democratic system of political representation.

3. Expected Outcomes

The tasks and responsibilities of the Parliamentary Advisor- Communications need to be exercised taking into account the four strategy foundations of the Strengthening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Project: promoting national ownership in parliamentary development; incorporating of 'lessons learned' from other parliamentary development projects; knowledge building and knowledge transfer in order to enhance sustainability of the project outcomes; and working cooperatively with other partners. The consultant will be required to:

- Bring best practices on parliamentary communication and outreach to the project;
- Deliver quality project outputs, including but not limited to: an assessment of the Constituency relations offices; a parliamentary Handbook on Constituency Relations; and assist in designing a comprehensive communications strategy;
- Contribute to roundtable discussions and seminars, and
- Participate in UNDP global knowledge networks, communication or meetings for the area of parliamentary development

4. Key Deliverables

The key deliverables for this project would be:

- I. Constituency Relations (Report 1) – An evaluation report on constituency relations in Trinidad and Tobago with recommendations for the launch of a constituency relation tracking model as well as identifying required training for office staff. The report should be informed by roundtable discussions and culminate with a Parliamentary Handbook on Constituency Relations and Representations.
- II. Communication Strategy of Parliament (Report 2) – The communication strategies of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago should be reviewed and recommendations should be given to strengthen any weaknesses identified.
- III. Parliament Outreach (Report 3)- A report recommending approaches to strengthen the Outreach Programme of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago with a focus on:
 - A week of Parliament- a Concept note to be prepared for this recommendation, selection of appropriate time period, work plan, media strategy and launch of publication or policy initiative;

- National Youth Parliament (internship support) as an annual event, and
- Parliamentary Partnership Forum- working with UNDP in the formation of a forum for regular de-briefing sessions by parliament leadership on the main policy issues discussed at the parliament sessions as well as on oversight activities. It is envisioned that representatives from the international community will have the opportunity to exchange views and further inquire on issues in the legislative agenda.

5. Competencies and Qualifications

Competencies

- Has excellent written communication skills, with analytic capacity and ability to synthesize project outputs and relevant findings for the preparation of quality project reports;
- Has demonstrated knowledge and experience in working on improving parliamentary communications functions;
- Maturity and confidence in dealing with senior and high ranking members of national and international institutions, government and non-government;
- Ability to work under pressure; and
- Excellent spoken and presentation skills in the English language.

Qualifications

- Degree or equivalent in communications, journalism, media studies, international affairs or any other relevant field;
- Qualifications in social and political sciences, law or public administration will be considered an asset
- A minimum of seven (7) years relevant professional experience in the area of parliamentary communications affairs,
- Proven experience in developing parliamentary communication/public relations strategies, and
- Knowledge of the Westminster System of democracy.

6. Duration and Duty Station

The consultant is expected to fulfil the deliverables within two (2) months with the possibility of an extension of one (1) month. The consultant will submit their work plan illustrating the number of working days within Trinidad and Tobago and where necessary the number of working days at their home base.

7. Supervision

The consultant will report to the Clerk of the House of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, or her representative.

II. Agenda of the in-country Assessment Mission

Monday, 14/7/2014

Peggy Lynch-Grecia, Senior Human Resource Officer, HR Management Services

Brian Ceasar, Marshal of the Parliament, Office of the Marshal

Isele Robinson-Cooper, Programme Analyst, UNDP in Trinidad and Tobago

Tuesday, 15/7/2014

Jason Elcock, Manager of Corporate Communications, Corporate Communications

Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel, Clerk of the House

Wednesday, 16/7/2014

Kalawatee Badoo, Administrative Officer IV

Yvonne Joseph, Project Administrator

David Ali, Business Operations Assistant II

Thursday, 17/7/2014

Keiba Jacobs,

Garreth Ferguson, Information Systems Manager

Gomatee Lakhram,

Lisa Lum Kong,

Friday, 18/7/2014

III. Questionnaire on Constituency Relations

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND THEIR CONSTITUENCY
OFFICE STAFF**



SURVEY ON CONSTITUENCY RELATIONS OF PARLIAMENT TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



CODE

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

A-1 Name of the MP/staff			
A-2 Constituency			
A-3 Address of the Constituency office			
A-4 Telephone			
A-5 Fax			
A-6 Email			
A-7 Web page			
A-8 Political party affiliation			
A-9 How many times have you stood for, or been elected to, parliament?	<i>1.1 Stood for parliament</i> <i>Once</i> <i>Twice</i> <i>Three times</i> <i>Four times or more</i>	<i>1.2 Been elected to parliament</i> <i>Once</i> <i>Twice</i> <i>Three times</i> <i>Four times or more</i>	
A-10 Number of employed staff at the constituency office (provide details of their titles and responsibilities)	<i>Professional staff:</i>	<i>Admin/Support staff:</i>	<i>Volunteers:</i>
A-11 How many hours per week do you dedicate for:	<i>Participating in the Plenary Session:</i> <i>Participating in parliamentary group (caucus) meetings:</i> <i>Participating in parliamentary committees:</i> <i>Voluntary work (if yes, provide details):</i> <i>Working from the constituency office:</i> <i>Meeting constituents outside the constituency office:</i> <i>Preparing bills:</i> <i>Preparing written and oral questions:</i> <i>Other (please explain):</i>		
A-12 Annual expenditures of the constituency office (Please provide detailed breakdown per budget categories for actual expenditures)	<i>Appropriated</i> <i>2010: \$ 5,500</i> <i>2011: \$ 5,500</i> <i>2012: \$ 5,500</i> <i>2013: \$ 5,500</i> <i>2014: \$ 5,500</i>		<i>Actual spent</i> <i>2010:</i> <i>2011:</i> <i>2012:</i> <i>2013:</i> <i>2014:</i>

B. GENERAL DATA ON CONSTITUENCY RELATED WORK

B-1 Information/data on your constituents

1. Size of the constituency:	
2. Male/female ratio within the population:	
3. Number who are of working age:	
4. Number of adherents of various religions:	
5. Number of workers in various industries:	
6. Number who are unemployed:	
7. Levels of education:	
8. Number of educational institutions:	
9. Number of religious institutions:	
10. Number and focus of social organizations, etc.:	

B-2 Please explain the type of request received from the constituents and responses given (per week, month and year):

	Weekly (received/responded)	Monthly (received/responded)	Yearly (received/responded)
1. Employment			
2. Infrastructural services of the constituency			
3. Education (scholarships)			
4. Social services (pensions, welfare benefits etc.)			
5. Complaints to the central government			
6. Complaints of the local government			
7. Legislative activity			
8. Other (please explain)			

B-3 Please describe your constituency related work in terms of:

1. Casework (getting information and lodging demands on behalf of people)	
2. Policy work (seeking ways to benefit constituencies through existing or proposed national programs and legislation)	
3. Voicing out views or concerns of constituents regarding local and national policy issues (this involves listening and explaining and expressing informed positions, although MPs are not obliged to agree with morally or ethically unsound views)	
4. Attending social events (particularly important in constituencies as a key means of maintaining close personal ties with their constituents)	
5. Other (please specify):	

B-4 What are the main successes of your constituency office?

B-5 What are the main challenges that your constituency office faces in fulfilling its mandate?

B-6 How would you address the challenges related to the fulfilment of the constituency office mandate?

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUENCY OPERATION MANUAL

C-1 How would you assess the Office of the Parliament’s constituency support system (as required per ‘Constituency Operations Manual’)?

C-2 How would you assess the available budget for operation of your constituency office?

C-3 How would you assess the rate of implementation of specific services provided through ‘Constituency Operations Manual’ (select all that apply)?

	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Remains to be implemented	Not implemented	Don’t know
Accommodation services					
Staff (Recruitment)					
Utilities					
Postage, stationary, supplies and janitorial services					
Office equipment					
Internet services					
Residential phone and cellular phone					
Furniture and equipment					
Constituency bank account					
Other					

C-4 Which improvements should be introduced to 'Constituency Operations Manual'? (*please elaborate why?*)

D. INTERNAL OPERATION OF THE CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

D-1 Does your constituency office have an action plan (weekly, monthly, annually)? If yes, please elaborate and provide a copy. If no, please elaborate why (is it because of lack of resources/capacities)?

D-2 Do all your constituency office staff have clear job descriptions and salary scales?

D-3 List the main interlocutors of the constituency office and your office's relationship with them.

D-4 Does your constituency office provide reports/data collected from constituents to the Parliament? Is there any follow up on the reports/data submitted to the Parliament?

D-5 How would you improve the interaction of your constituency office with other institutions, especially the local and central institutions?

D-6 Which changes/improvements would assist the effectiveness of your work as MP/constituency office?

D-7 Which capacity development activities for staff of constituency office should be implemented?

D-8 Which new technological tools would facilitate the effective work of your constituency office?

E. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CONSTITUENTS

E-1 How accessible and visible is your constituency office?

E-2 How do you use information collected from your constituents in your work as MP?

E-3 What is the focus of your communication with constituents?

E-4 Do you target specific societal groups (i.e. youth and women)?

E-5 Do you provide information about the work of the Parliament to your constituents?

E-6 How do you collect feedback from constituents about the work of the MP and the constituency office? Do you have an operation Constituency Tracking Tool/Survey? *(please explain frequency and tools used, and provide an example when such feedback resulted in action from MP/constituency office)*

E-7 How do you engage with your constituents? (please elaborate type of activities/tools you use)

E-8 Which activities do you organize or participate that aim to enhance the engagement with your constituents?

E-9 How do you engage your constituents with the work of the Parliament? (please explain if you organize visits to the Parliament or participation in Committee proceedings)

F. COMMUNICATION WITH CONSTITUENTS (SOCIAL MEDIA)

F-1 Which of the following technologies do you or your parliamentary office use to communicate with your constituents and how long have you been using them?

	Don't use and don't plan on using	Don't use but plan on using within six months	Use it daily	Use it weekly	Use it monthly	Use it annually	Have used but do not use now
Email (for correspondence)							
Email newsletter							
Party website							
Personal website							
Web-based discussion forum							
Web-based campaign							
Blog							
Social networking (such as Facebook etc.)							
Texting to mobile phones							
Uploading photographs							
Uploading video or audio							
Other (please specify)							

F-2 Of the technologies that you or your office has used, how would you rate them in terms of their ability to support how you communicate with your constituents (and them with you)?

	Not applicable (don't use it)	Very positive	Somewhat positive	Neither positive or negative	Somewhat negative	Very negative	Don't know
Email (for correspondence)							
Email newsletter							
Party website							
Personal website							
Web-based discussion forum							
Web-based campaign							
Blog							
Social networking (such as Facebook etc.)							
Texting to mobile phones							
Uploading photographs							
Uploading video or audio							
Other (please specify)							

F-3 Which of the following would improve the way that your parliamentary office uses digital technologies (select all that apply)?

The office is already using digital technology as much as it needs to	
Increasing the budget for hardware	
Increasing the budget for software	
Greater awareness of what new technologies can do	
More training in the use of software applications	
Increased staffing levels	

Other (please specify):	
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F-4 How has the use of new technology affected the way you communicate with your constituents?

It has made communication much more effective	
It has made communication somewhat more effective	
It makes no difference	
It has made communication somewhat less effective	
It has made communication much less effective	

F-5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of new technologies, such as social networking, blogging, email, audio, with regards to communication between you and your constituents?

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