

## QUESTIONNAIRE FROM THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON ADEQUATE HOUSING

**1. *What role will national and international human rights standards on the right to adequate housing play in informing your positions and proposals for Habitat III? Can you please provide concrete examples in this regard?***

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) and by extension the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD), recognises primarily the rights and obligations imposed on it by the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and acts accordingly to ensure that these are not disregarded in the fulfilment of its responsibilities. Trinidad and Tobago as a member of the UN, is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights include the right to adequate housing and safe water and sanitation. As such obligations are also imposed on T&T as a member state to take into consideration fundamental human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, inclusion and participation, accountability and the rule of law in the development of policy, programmes and projects.

As far back as 2002, the policy document “Showing *Trinidad and Tobago a New Way Home*” has provided the template for guiding the development of housing programmes and projects within Trinidad and Tobago geared towards “providing access to adequate shelter and improvement of the lives of all segments of the population.” Over the years, modifications via cabinet decisions, have been made to the policy to meet the needs of the changing society, however the basic underlying principles of the document still holds.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) continues to be responsible for:

- The provision of appropriate low-cost housing solutions through the direct construction and distribution of new homes at approved locations in the country;
- Develop and implement innovative home financing polices to enable first-time home-owners to purchase their new homes;
- Maintain the current housing stock through refurbishment and upgrade programmes so that all homes under the Ministry remain in good condition;
- Develop approximately 8,500 residential housing lots for distribution to ex-workers of Caroni (1975) Ltd;
- Fulfil government’s mandate for urban development through renewal and growth by UDeCOTT, focusing on social infrastructure projects including hospitals, police stations and fire stations with emphasis placed on Port of Spain as the business and financial centre, and San Fernando as the energy capital.

Towards this end, the Ministry has a number of key agencies and departments under its purview with responsibilities for delivering services to the population; and also assist in the achievement of its mandate to provide adequate and accessible housing for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. For e.g. The Housing Development Corporation (HDC) one of the MHUD’s key executing agencies, is mandated by law “to do all things necessary and convenient for and in connection with the provision of affordable shelter and associated community facilities for low and middle income persons”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.13(1)(a) Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Act, Chap 33:03

2. ***One aspect for discussion in the context of Habitat III will likely be “social cohesion and housing” what public policies, programmes or plans are being considered or have been put forward by national or subnational level governments related to “social cohesion” (for example: non-discrimination and equality) and the right to adequate housing? Please specifically reference any policies, programmes or plans aimed at ensuring inclusive housing for disadvantaged groups such as migrants and refugees, women, young people, older people, and people with disabilities in urban areas.***

One of the developmental objectives of the GORTT as articulated in the Medium Term Policy Framework (MTPF) 2011-2014<sup>2</sup> was “To reduce socio-economic and regional inequalities within our borders, move people out of poverty and promote social inclusion through more meaningful economic participation” Policies, programmes and projects are therefore formulated under the rubric of the seven developmental pillars for example “*Poverty Reduction and Human Capital Development*”.

Under the MHUD’s Accelerated Housing Programme, the construction of low to middle income homes is facilitated mainly by the Ministry’s executing agencies, the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT). A cross section of housing models are constructed in order to cater for varying incomes levels; taking into consideration the peculiarities of site and location. An underlying principle in the construction of houses and the development of housing estates is that of creating mixed communities, catering for the differences in income levels; the objective being that human beings will always strive to improve their situation if given the opportunity.

The Ministry’s housing programmes are guided by the following policies:

#### **Allocation Policy**

. However the following criteria applies:

##### *Selection Criteria*

Under the Government’s Housing Programme, a potential Beneficiary must satisfy the following criteria:

- Be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and have been residing here for the last five (5) years preceding the date of signing a statutory declaration.
- Be twenty(21) years and over
- Not be owner/part owner of property/land in Trinidad and Tobago
- Be first time owners
- The monthly (combined) income of the applicant (applicants) must not exceed (\$45,000)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.planning.gov.tt/mediacentre/documents/medium-term-policy-framework>

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Minute No.464 of February 13, 2014



### *Selection Process*

The selection of successful applicants is based on a random selection process; 60% of the pool of applicants are selected via this random selection process, so each applicant is given the same chance of selection.

### *Special categories of beneficiaries*

Whilst persons falling within the above criteria can apply for a Government house or benefit from housing solution, the following categories of persons are also considered for special allocation from within the pool of applicants based on the following percentages; these are:

- 10% for personnel from the protective services
- 5% for senior citizens and physically challenged persons
- 25% on the recommendation of the Minister to deal with persons with special cases and/or emergencies.

At present there are no specific policies catering to disadvantaged groups such as migrants and refugees, women, young people. Any issues pertaining specifically to migrants and refugees would have to be a ministerial decision taken at the level of the Cabinet.

However, the HDC's policy is to intervene to provide housing in cases deemed "special or emergency" for example if there are instances of persons being victims of fire, natural disasters and other specially challenging circumstances.

### **Programmes and Projects**

#### **A. IDB Assisted Neighbourhood Upgrading Programme (NUP)**

The NUP is a six (6) year US\$50M Programme funded by the IDB and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT). The loan agreement was signed in 2011 and is administered by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development through its Programme Monitoring and Coordinating Unit (PMCU).

The aim of the Neighborhood Upgrade Programme is to improve the quality of life for some 50,000 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. It attempts to achieve this through:

- The regularization of squatters in existing squatter communities by developing infrastructure and utilities so that lease titles could be granted to beneficiaries in such communities.
- The provision of matching subsidies to eligible lower income beneficiaries of some 2,000 families for home improvement, and the construction of incremental housing for some 1,530 households

- Institutional strengthening and capacity building; specifically with regards to the amendment of the Land Settlement Act (LSA)<sup>4</sup> so that the LSA can more effectively fulfill its public policy function of developing wholesome communities through squatter regularization and resettlement; and, concurrently enhance its capacity by the design and development of a containment strategy and information system, for the monitoring and prevention of squatting, and safeguarding the environment.

**B. Home Improvement Grant (HIG) Programme**

The HIG is administered by the Housing Policy and Facilitation Implementation Unit (HPFIU) of the MHUD. The programme targets eligible persons who wish to execute improvement works on their home. The purpose of the Grant is to equip households to carry out basic structural repairs, that would modestly enhance their living conditions and by extension lead to their improved social condition. The Grant is expected to maintain the current housing stock by increasing the number of homes that undergo repairs and reduce the annual national demand for new homes.

The Ministry would provide a maximum of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000.00) to successful applicants who are randomly selected, for approved repair works.

Eligibility is based on the following criteria:

- Combined household incomes must not exceed \$5,000.00 per month or \$60,000.00 per annum
- Must be a resident citizen of Trinidad and Tobago
- Must be at least 21 years old
- Must own the house or have legal authority to occupy the land
- The applicant or any other household member must not have benefitted from the Ministry's Home Improvement Subsidy

The HIG is consistent with Government's National Medium Term Policy Framework and falls under Pillar 2- Poverty Reduction and Social Justice, within the Medium Term Policy Priority area No. 5- Poverty Reduction and Human Capital Development. The Key Priority Area (KPA) is: A Society Free from Poverty. Special attention is placed on serving the elderly, disabled persons, single parents and the most vulnerable households.

**C. The Emergency Shelter Relief Fund Programme**

This Fund provides emergency financial assistance ranging from \$10,000-\$15,000 to needy persons whose homes and lives have been severely affected by fire, natural disasters such as flooding, landslides, hurricanes or earthquakes. The disbursement of assistance under this fund however requires the final approval of the Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

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<sup>4</sup> State land (Regularisation of Tenure) Act Chap 57:05



The objective of the grant is to provide some level of emotional, physical and financial relief to the beneficiary by contributing financially towards the rebuilding or repairing of the house, and improving the living conditions and the quality of life of individuals.

#### *Qualifying criteria*

The applicant must provide the following documents to qualify for the grant.

- Evidence of citizenship of Trinidad and Tobago.
- Copy of a Fire, Police or ODPM Reports.
- Copy of Title Deed or Deed of Lease or permission to occupy property and consent to repair or rebuild from owner.
- Proof of income (weekly, fortnightly or monthly) since the household income must not exceed thirty-six thousand dollars (\$36,000) annually.
- A Building Inspector's report which should contain the following: - an update of the property in question, pictures to verify claim and recommendations based on the applicant's suitability for the grant.

#### **D. Mortgage Programme**

In fulfilling its mandate to make housing more affordable, the MHUD has implemented innovative home financing solutions like the 2% interest rate on mortgages of properties valued up to \$625,000.

#### *Qualifying criteria*

- *Household monthly income must not exceed \$8,000*
- *Value of the property must not exceed \$625,000*

Persons with an income exceeding \$8,000 can qualify for a mortgage interest rate of between 5%-7% depending on the value of the property.

3. ***In light of the fact that subnational and local governments play an essential role with respect to the implementation of the right to adequate housing, what plans and procedures does your government intend to implement to ensure they are engaged in the lead up to Habitat III as well as with respect to the implementation of committees coming out of Habitat III?***

The general approach of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in preparation for such a forum as Habitat III is to invite submissions from key government ministries and non-governmental agencies to submit proposals of key issues that they consider of import that the MHUD and its representatives can raise at the forum.

4. *What interesting or unique housing policies, programmes or good practices consistent with the human right to housing does your Government intend to highlight through the Habitat III process? Please provide examples both from local, national and subnational and national levels of government, and if applicable from non-government actors as well.*
  
5. *Please reflect on mechanisms used to monitor compliance with Habitat II (1996) at the national level that have proven effective and if, possible, provide examples. What kind of mechanisms would your Government envisage as part of the monitoring and implementation of Habitat III?*