



LAND TENURE CENTER
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Consultancy Services to
The Government of the
Republic of Trinidad &
Tobago

LAND USE POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION PROJECT (LUPAP)

FINAL REPORT

Assessment of Capacity Building in Tobago Mission Report

**Harvard University Graduate School of Design
Center for Urban Development Studies**

December 27, 2000

A. Overview

A team consisting of François Vigier (CUDS), Lynette Atwell (LUPAP) and Ancil Kirk (LUPAP) visited Tobago from November 20 to November 22 and met with the heads of the departments of the Tobago House of Assembly involved in physical planning. The purpose of the meetings was to assess the nature of the Tobago segment of the local capacity building component of the Land Use Policy and Administration Project. The team was favorably impressed by the quality of the discussions on the future of the island.

As a result of its relative isolation and constitutional status, THA officials are keenly aware of the importance of preserving the island's natural assets, for the benefit of its inhabitants and for tourism, the mainstay of the economic base. In spite of a lack of financial resources and some institutional weaknesses, THA has given considerable thought to the formulation of the broad guidelines of a development strategy to balance development and conservation. Over the past years, it has undertaken a multi-faceted strategic plan.

The main problems facing Tobago include:

- Diminishing water resources;
- A trend toward larger tourism resorts, including condominiums, the design of many of which is in clear conflict with their natural setting;
- Infrastructure improvements;
- The treatment and disposal of liquid and solid waste;
- The management of coastal resources, including fisheries and an environmentally significant reef;
- The protection and management of other natural areas, including agricultural land, forests and bird sanctuaries;
- The management of extensive public lands.

Generally, a greater devolution of planning and land management responsibilities to THA involves, as in Trinidad, the improvement of local governmental capacities to evaluate and finance public projects and services and the ability to establish mutually beneficial community partnerships with the private sector. Yet, significant differences exist, as the bulk of new development is attributable to tourism rather than residential or commercial construction; the demand for new residential dwellings is relatively small and largely attributable to the return of former residents late in life.

LUPAP has conducted a recent assessment of planning procedures in Tobago (*Review of Existing Planning Resources and Capabilities*, September 2000). The report concluded that, in spite of a significant effort to prepare a long-range plan by the Policy Research and Development Institute, little success had been achieved in integrating physical planning in an overall development strategy for the island. Furthermore, the Tobago Regional Office of the Town and Country Planning Department has restricted its activities to enforcing existing development regulations. In spite of this limited role, the processing time of building applications has been increasing and does not appear to be functioning efficiently. The major problems faced in the review of applications are:

- A lack of professional and technical staff in the regional office.
- A lack of GIS capability.
- A lack of specific development plans and policies to provide the necessary regulatory context.
- Delays in the referral process to obtain the approval of concerned agencies.
- A lack of public involvement in the decision making process.

B. Description of the capacity building component.

Terms of reference for *A Physical Development Plan for Tobago* have been prepared by LUPAP (September 5, 2000). The document properly stresses the importance of the island's sensitive environmental context. Assuming that it will lead to the preparation of a physical plan, it provides the context for the capacity component described below, which is based on the assumption of a somewhat greater level of devolution and autonomy than is envisaged for local authorities in Trinidad. For example, it is doubtful that much would be gained by applying to Tobago the distinction between "simple plans," to be approved locally, and the approval of other projects by the National Physical Planning Commission's Development Control Standing Committee as proposed by the Planning and Development of Land Bill. It should be sufficient for the NPPC to review and approve Tobago's *Physical Development Plan* and delegate its implementation to THA. Similarly, all appeals from regulatory decisions should be heard initially in Tobago; they should be referred to the national Planning and Development Appeals Board as a last resort. In addition, it should be assumed that, over time, the THA would become increasingly self-sufficient in the collection of tax revenues and in financing infrastructure investments.

It should be noted that a key policy question that must be addressed is the assignment of planning responsibility between the THA, the island's "central government," and the seven parishes. Given the size of the island, its development pattern and the probable nature of future development, it is recommended that planning be construed as a *regional function*, at least initially, and that the role of the parishes be limited to:

- (1) Consultation in the preparation of the physical plan;
- (2) Participation in the public hearings for significant projects that, because of their size and/or location is deemed to have a significant impact on the parish.

Generally, capacity building in Tobago will follow the outline submitted by CUDS (*Outline of Program to Strengthen the Physical Planning Capabilities of Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago*, October 2, 2000). The modifications to the outline to reflect conditions in Tobago are described below.

1. Preparing a local development plan.

As stated above, Tobago is further ahead than local authorities in Trinidad in the preparation of its plan. As a result, most of this component of the training proposal can be omitted. However, component 4(b) of the *Terms of Reference for the preparation of a Physical Development Plan for Tobago* should be modified to include a clear explanation of the

environmental standards that should be adhered to in the island and how they are integrated in the development standards applicable to new construction. This will facilitate the permitting process.

2. Improving financial management.

The November mission allowed only a review of the activities of the Division of Works. Its financial management capabilities need be strengthened as it operates in what can be described as a "hand to mouth" manner. According to its administrator, it does not have a capital improvement program for public works and depends on monthly transfers from Port of Spain for maintenance and improvements. It is estimated that delayed maintenance amounts to some T\$200 million and that T\$40 billion are needed for capital improvements. The Division might be a good initial candidate for items "2.1 Operational budgets" and "2.2 Capital budgeting" of CUDS' October 2, 2000 *Outline of Program to Strengthen the Physical Planning Capabilities of Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago*. Items "2.3 Local levies" and "2.4 Debt management" could be targeted to the THA financial division.

3. Permitting process and enforcement

In addition to items listed under this heading in the CUDS October 2, 2000 memo, the Tobago permitting authorities will require training to empower them to systematically include a mandatory environmental evaluation of all projects as part of the permitting process. Reviews can range from a simple assessment of run-off and septic systems for single-family dwellings and small subdivisions to a more extensive review of larger projects, particularly those requiring extensive grading. Several of the recent tourism developments constructed on the island would have benefited from a closer scrutiny of their environmental impact on natural resources, including water consumption and the disposal of solid and liquid wastes. They would also have benefited from a closer examination of the appropriateness of their design to the context of the island.

A good model to be followed is the one developed for Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. All projects are reviewed as to their fit in the regional development pattern. The former Commissioner for Martha's Vineyard is an affiliate of CUDS and we propose to ask her to prepare a training manual incorporating an environmental assessment for the use of the reviewing authorities.