The Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Actions for Children and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago-UNICEF Work Plan 2013-2016

are the result of joint planning and national consultations for children in Trinidad and Tobago.

The documents are in line with national priorities for children outlined in the Medium-Term Policy Framework (2011-2014) and National Strategic Plan for Child Development (2012-2016).
A. The Situation of Children and their Families in Trinidad and Tobago

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a high income country in the Southern Caribbean with a total population of 1,328,019\(^1\). According to Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census, out of the total population, 351,622 are under 18 (334,305 in Trinidad, and 11,586 in Tobago) and 112,723 are under 5 years of age (106,992 in Trinidad and 5,731 in Tobago).

Overall, Trinidad and Tobago has made commendable progress in achieving the millennium development goals. There is limited current data available on poverty levels in 2012; however the earlier data indicate that the country has considerably reduced its poverty levels from 35% in 1990 to 16.7% in 2005\(^2\). Chronic malnutrition is rare and primary medical care and access to ante-natal care and to a skilled medical practitioner at birth is either near or completely universal. Demographic and disease patterns are also approaching those of the developed countries. Trinidad and Tobago provides free and universal primary education and the quality of education has generally improved. Similarly, there is no difference between male and female school attendance and the country has achieved equitable access for both sexes. Adult literacy is well above 95%.

Despite overall progress, children remain one of the most vulnerable groups in Trinidad and Tobago. Children’s experience of risk, vulnerability and deprivation is shaped by characteristics of childhood poverty that is multidimensional and embracing both monetary and non-monetary aspects and also reflects children’s vulnerability over the course of the lifecycle.

Trinidad and Tobago is in a unique situation for having better data collection for children and women than many countries in the Caribbean region. The country is completing a second round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 3 and MICS 4) that will provide disaggregated data on children and women, including 20/60 of MDG indicators. There is need to enhance further analysis on the basis of this available data and strategic appreciation of the benefits of collecting, sharing and using social data on children for planning and measuring performance of public policies.

There is general recognition that children in Trinidad and Tobago suffer from various forms of abuse, exploitation, discrimination and neglect\(^3\). In 2012, the Government enacted the Children’s Act which requires speedy implementation in light of the growing public concerns on the high level of violence against and abuse of young children. While the process of aligning children’s legislation with the CRC has commenced with the enactment of the Children’s Act, there are unresolved legal concerns. For example, marriage of children as young as 12 years is sanctioned by law in the country. Violence against children is a key concern, especially child sexual abuse. In the first 9 months of 2009, 13,684 calls were made to Child Line to report issues such as sexual, verbal, physical, and emotional abuse, neglect and incest in Trinidad and Tobago\(^4\).

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1. Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census, Central Statistics Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
3. Trinidad and Tobago National Strategic Plan for Child Development 2012-2016, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development.
4. It is not analyzed if all calls were made by children who are less than 18 years of age.
From 2004 to 2010, 19 children were murdered, 75% of whom were between the ages of one month and six years. Reports indicate that more female children than male suffered various forms of violence. In 2010 there were 687 reported cases of child sexual abuse. Child neglect is another problem and its root cause is poverty, stemming from unemployment and lack of financial support from fathers. Further, Trinidad and Tobago has not yet comprehensively addressed the issue of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).

Similarly, despite substantial progress made in improving child’s health, relatively high child mortality continues to be an area of concern for children in Trinidad and Tobago. Efforts to accelerate further reduction of under-five mortality have been recognized as an area needing concerted action. In order to reduce the under-five mortality rate to 5 per 100,000 by 2015, a study has been initiated to review and analyse barriers and bottlenecks to service delivery and access to health care services for pregnant women, new-borns and under-five children.

As per the Education Act, education is compulsory from six to twelve years old and is free in the public system from pre-primary to university level. However, the Early Childhood Development sector in the country faces a challenge, especially for disadvantaged groups, in achieving the goal of education for all with 70 percent enrollment at the pre-primary level. The average net enrolment in primary education for children in 2010 was 94%, for both girls and boys.

Enrolment rates in secondary education are much lower than in primary school, especially among boys. More girls (76%) than boys (71%) enrol in secondary school. Boys also generally underperform compared to girls at secondary school as is reflected in the Caribbean Secondary School Certificate Examinations records. Despite the fact that education receives a relatively large share of the national budget equating to 4.3% of GDP in Trinidad and Tobago, truancy, drop-out, low passing rate in CXC, the gender disparity, inter-student violence and inequity continue to exist, highlighting the remaining challenges in the education system.

The government intends to reform social safety net programmes in order to provide an effective and targeted safety net for the poor and vulnerable. The reforms focus on consolidation of existing cash transfer programmes to eliminate duplication in processes and multiple targeting, introduction of improved targeting system supported with management information system and central beneficiary registry and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy for the social safety net programmes.

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5 Trinidad and Tobago National Strategic Plan for Child Development 2012-2016, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development.
6 Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development has targeted to reduce the under-five mortality rate to 5 per 100,000 live births by 2015.
8 Average % over the 11 countries with enrolment figures from 2005-2008
11 From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation, Social Sector Investment Programme 2012, Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
Overall, there has been a continuous increase in fiscal expenditure for social sector and child related expenditure in the last decade. The total fiscal expenditure for social services continued to increase over the period 2001 – 2009 in both current and constant dollars. The data also showed that projects, programmes and resources targeted for children are concentrated within the government’s capital budget and recurrent expenditure budget. For example, over 80% of the expenditure was on recurrent programmes rather than development programmes from 2001-2009. The distribution of child-specific fiscal expenditure has been for four main sectors: education, social welfare, youth and sports and health. 

Trinidad and Tobago is one of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the Caribbean and is listed in the top 62 countries on the Human Development Index in the world. In November 2011, the OECD removed Trinidad and Tobago from its list of developing countries. According to the World Bank, Trinidad and Tobago’s Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in US Dollars is 15,380 and in PPP US Dollars 24,000 in 2010. The Gini Index is 40.3 in 2010 and unemployment rate is 5.8. Due to global economic recession, real GDP growth has declined from 4.8% in 2007 to -3.3 in 2009, and -0.0% in 2010. Similarly, real GDP is estimated to have contracted by 1.4 percent in 2011 and it is estimated to be 0.2 percent in 2012.

B. National Policy Framework for Children

In light of the challenging economic situation, there is renewed commitment to strategize priorities for children, especially with the point of view of the progressive realization of the children’s rights and well-being in Trinidad and Tobago. 

There is ample evidence that highlights the linkages between policy development and child rights compliance i.e., investing resources to ensure children’s right to health, education and protection from violence, exploitation and discrimination. In addition to ethical imperatives in recognizing children’s rights, there are complementary links between social and economic policy and positive implications of social investment on children for economic development and productivity gains in any country. Therefore, well-articulated economic and social policy decisions in general and for children in particular could play a crucial role in promoting equity, social justice and facilitate economic growth and poverty reduction in the medium to long term.

In this context, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on a Framework for Sustainable Development to promote a process of people-centred development, whereby the promotion and protection of the children is a high priority for the government within the national development imperatives that shape the institutions, relationships and norms of Trinidad and Tobago’s state and society.

The government has also developed a Medium-Term Policy Framework (2011-2014) that outlines a strategic shift for economic and social transformation, and prioritizes five areas:

- poverty reduction and human capital development
- crime, law and order
- health care services and hospitals
- agriculture and food security
- economic growth and job creation

The programme contains nationally defined targets central to the country’s development over the period 2011-2014 and has built in strong mechanisms for measuring results.

Similarly in 2011, Government established a new ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development that is mandated to facilitate work for child development in the country. The ministry has already outlined a Cabinet approved Trinidad and Tobago National Strategic Plan for Child Development for the year 2012-2016. In 2012, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago passed the Children’s Act 2012 that is designed to be a critical element in Government’s legislative agenda for the protection of children in the country. These are all positive elements which the UNICEF programme of cooperation can add value to national priorities for children and youth.

C. UNICEF in Trinidad and Tobago

UNICEF has been working with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago since 1952 supporting national priorities for children. As of 1 January 2011, the UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area assumed responsibility for oversight of programmes in Trinidad and Tobago as part of the Multi-Country Programme of Cooperation with twelve countries and territories in the Eastern Caribbean area for the period 2012-2016.

UNICEF has prepared, through a consultative process, the Multi-Country Programme Action Plan (MCPAP) for the period 2012-2016 that outlines country level Programme Outcomes, Strategies, Results and structure to achieve the desired outcomes. The MCPAP includes areas of cooperation in Trinidad and Tobago which are further defined in terms of activities in the multi-year work plan.

The overall goal of the multi-country programme is ‘to contribute to realization of the rights of all girls and boys in the Eastern Caribbean area by ensuring accurate and
current data on their situation, fostering an enabling, child-friendly and protective environment, reducing the vulnerabilities of girls and boys and their families to social, environmental and economic risks and enhancing their participation’.

D. UNICEF Multi-Country Programme Action Plan Outcomes

The expected GOTT-UNICEF Programmes Outcomes are as follows:

**Immediate Result Outcome 1:**
By 2016, equity-sensitive national policies, programmes and budget allocations are made with reliable disaggregated data on the actual situation of girls and boys and their families in line with CRC, CEDAW and MDGs in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Immediate Result Outcome 2:**
By 2016, Government of Trinidad and Tobago capacity enhanced to develop national policies, programmes, laws and institutions to ensure comprehensive systems for positive development, lifelong learning and protection of all boys and girls, especially those poor and most vulnerable to neglect, violence, exploitation and all forms of discrimination.

**Immediate Result Outcome 3:**
Within the context of meeting CRC obligations, by 2016 all boys and girls from the poorest communities in Trinidad and Tobago are accessing pre-school and early stimulation opportunities, are benefiting from positive child-centred approaches at school; and, from laws/policies that protect them from violence and discrimination.

E. Joint Planning: Government of Trinidad and Tobago and UNICEF

In 2013, The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area have initiated joint planning to develop a national strategic work plan (2013-2016) that is agreed upon by government counterparts and UNICEF, and is in line with national priorities for children in Medium-Term Policy Framework (2011-2014) and National Strategic Plan for Child Development (2012-2016). Furthermore, this strategic work plan is developed through national level consultative process with government ministries, departments and UN agencies working for the girls and boys in Trinidad and Tobago.
F. UNICEF Programme Focus Areas in Trinidad and Tobago

Government of Trinidad and Tobago and UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area Strategic Work Plan for 2013 – 2016 is divided into five focus areas:

1. Data for evidence-based policy making for girls and boys
2. CRC, policies and budgets for girls and boys
3. Child Protection
4. Communication for Development – addressing social norms and supporting child protection programming
5. Education and Early Childhood Development

Each focus area outlines UNICEF’s Multi-Country Immediate Results (IRs) and its linkages with seven pillars of sustainable development outlined in Medium-Term Policy Framework (2011-2014), key priorities of National Strategic Plan for Child Development (2012-2016) and Indicators specifically for Trinidad and Tobago.

G. Implementation

The Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Work Plan (2013 – 2016) will be implemented by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in partnership with UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area as part of Multi-Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) for the period 2012-2016. The Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development will coordinate planning and implementation review in conjunction with the Implementing Ministries and with UN System efforts in Trinidad and Tobago. These activities will form the basis for UNICEF’s contributions to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2014-2015) under preparation. In efforts for UN coherence, activities jointly undertaken with other UN Agencies have been indicated in the Work Plan.