



Opening Remarks
at the
Global Environmental Facility (GEF)
Expanded Constituency Workshop for the Caribbean Region

Radisson Hotel, Port of Spain

March 2, 2016

SALUTATIONS:

- Mr. Peter Lallas and Mr. William Ehlers, and other distinguished representatives of Global Environmental Facility (GEF),
- Ms. Gayatri Badri Maharaj, Managing Director (Ag.) of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) of Trinidad and Tobago,
- Representatives of the World Bank, IDB, UNDP and other Un-affiliated organizations,
- Distinguished representatives of the various State and Ministerial bodies from our regional neighbours,
- Representatives of Civil Society Organisations, locally and regionally,
- Colleagues of the Ministry of Planning and Development,
- Members of the Media.

Good morning and a warm welcome to you all.

To the visitors in our midst, I extend a special welcome on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I trust that your short visit to our country will be both productive and memorable. Your field trip to the Asa Wright Nature Center on Friday will certainly give you a first-hand opportunity to experience the wonder and rejuvenating energy of our rich biological assets.

I must thank the Global Environmental Facility for selecting Port of Spain as the venue for the 2016 Expanded Constituency Workshop for the Caribbean Region and for all the logistical arrangements that have been put in place with the support of local partners. This engagement with the Caribbean Constituency, which is replicated in all the other Constituencies of the GEF global community, on a periodic basis, is an important part of the success story and the uniqueness of the GEF.

The evolution of the GEF, over the past 25 years, has been a chronicle of high achievement. Its' most prized achievement, I would contend, is that it has provided and continues to provide strong environmental leadership and a solid platform for collaboration and cooperation within the global community.

The importance of the GEF in leading global environmental action is recorded in its 'Behind the Number 2015' publication which reported that as at November 2015, the GEF had invested US\$14.5 billion directly and leveraged an additional US\$75.4 billion for 3,946 projects in 167 countries.

Over the years, the GEF has continued to provide new and additional grants and concessional funding to cover the added costs associated with transforming many projects in this Region from one with mere national benefits into one with global environmental value. The GEF has been the facilitator of many successful collaborations involving its Member Governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. These collaborations have added important value to the lives of our citizens and have bolstered our collective resolve to achieve sustainable development in our Region.

As the largest source of financing for projects to improve the global environment, the GEF is a strategic development partner for all our countries. In this role, and through GEF2020, it has sought to bring together broad coalitions of committed stakeholders and encouraged innovative activities that can achieve positive impacts on a broader scale.

The need for high impact, cost-effective projects to protect the environment and promote sustainable development has increased over the past decade as our countries continue to expand economic activity in sectors such as tourism, agriculture, energy and transportation. In these circumstances, it is incumbent upon us in this Constituency to keep abreast of the developments in the GEF, particularly the evolving strategies, policies and procedures.

For this reason, participation in this Workshop is important. A key element of the transformation agenda in all our countries is the institutional and human capacity to effect and manage the change we desire, whether it is from the perspective of the economy, the environment or the society at large. The Workshop is intended to enrich the GEF focal points and other key stakeholders, including civil society, through information sharing and training as well as discussions that will contribute to the shaping of GEF 7.

Focal points have the opportunity with their counterparts from other countries in the Region and other GEF partners to discuss and review policies and procedures, and to share lessons and experiences from the development and implementation of GEF projects and their integration within national policy frameworks. Some of the issues to be covered over the course of the Workshop relate to biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation, ozone depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants ... all issues of extreme importance to this Region.

Equally important is the fact that this Workshop will help to determine and consolidate regional positions to be presented at the GEF Constituency Meeting in Washington D.C. later this year.

Trinidad and Tobago's collaboration with the GEF over the years through the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) allocations has had a positive impact on the use and management of many of our local natural resources. In particular, our coastal, marine and forest ecosystems as well as climate change management have benefited from GEF financing.

Our Region has also benefitted from the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), which continues to provide Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with grants to address a range of environmental issues.

The Small Grants Programme has over the years continued to push this Region to 'think globally, act locally', which recognizes that in order for us to effectively address the range of environmental challenges before us, action driven at the community-level, must play a critical role in developing tangible, practical solutions. 'Thinking globally, acting locally' also attaches importance to the fact that each intervention at the community-level, when considered in the context of the collective efforts across communities, and by extension, the globe, can have far-reaching and meaningful results in terms of environmental conservation and preservation.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the GEF Small Grants Programme has had an outstanding track record, funding some 110 projects at a combined value of US\$3.15M. Over the last two decades, the Programme has sought to tap into existing Civil Society Organisations and networks, providing technical support and funding to community-

based efforts. These interventions have focused typically on mitigating potential threats to the natural surrounding environment.

The issues of sustainable livelihoods and gender, which are cross-cutting in nature, have also been important considerations in the identification and selection of projects for funding and technical assistance. In this effort, Civil Society Organizations have been a valuable partner and must be commended for their continued dedication and determined efforts to improve the environment here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Your discussions today will focus on several other important issues. One of the items on the agenda that is of keen interest to the Ministry of Planning and Development is the 'Building on GEF and the SDGs'. The SDGs recognize that the health of the planet's environmental resources is essential for a thriving world and sustainable human development. To bring it closer to home, the healthy and sustainable existence of many of our Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in this Region is vested in the coordinated and integrated actions of several countries to address environmental degradation. Since many of our countries do not have the financial wherewithal, the GEF is a valuable partner in supporting our efforts to build greener cities, promote cleaner energy and preserve threatened ecosystems. I would encourage delegates to explore all the possible avenues for collaboration as we all move to streamline the SDGs into our own national development agendas.

The global environment is faced with new and, I would contend, exciting challenges, on its path to sustainable development, including those associated with the recent adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. As SIDs, meeting our global responsibilities is in the interest of our own sustainability and, indeed, our very existence.

Also of importance on the Agenda today is the analysis of GEF 6 and the elaboration of GEF 7. I trust that this session will be used to examine the lessons learnt from GEF 6 thus far so as to ensure that GEF 7 achieves even greater success than past allocations.

In closing, I want to encourage you to use the opportunity of this Workshop to exchange your ideas, share your perspectives and find the common ground so that the voice of our Region is strong and articulate at the GEF Constituency Meeting in Washington, D.C. later this year.

I thank you.