UNDP Trinidad and Tobago:
An innovative approach to Public Procurement

The recognition of the need for procurement reform in Trinidad and Tobago takes stakeholders on a journey which dates back several years. Converting this into a reality, came into focus over the last two Government administrations. Since 2014, UNDP has been working with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in support of the implementation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act 2015. In early 2017 the Ministry of Finance, in partnership with UNDP, embarked on a second phase of a programme of activities aimed at building the capacities of all procuring entities, which are in receipt of public funds, in readiness for the full implementation of the Act.

One crucial element which has been identified globally on the road to procurement reform by developmental organizations, is the need for the design and implementation of a change management programme. A team of UNDP experts, led by Ms. Christine Tonkin, Procurement Reform Specialist, recognized early in the process that the idea behind a change agent’s programme would have to go beyond enabling a strategically identified group of individuals, across procuring entities, to appraise the reform agenda. What would be required, is a unique approach to equip change agents with the tools needed to empower stakeholders to understand how best to frame workable interventions, and where appropriate, to engage in relevant public policy and practice development processes. This insight gave birth to the development of the UNDP Change Agents Toolkit for Public Procurement.

This toolkit was created for supporting evidence-based public procurement policy development and practice transformation. It will enable users to work effectively with stakeholders who, in turn, will identify both problems and opportunities in public procurement to understand their root causes and frame cost effective interventions which promote constructive change. This toolkit, which has now been branded as a primary component of a Change Agents Programme, allows the users to develop a theoretical and practical understanding of procurement and access a range of tools and perspectives that they can use to successfully implement the reform. It further seeks to assist users to empower interested stakeholders to
understand how best to frame workable interventions and where appropriate to engage in relevant public policy and practice development processes.

The programme, which was the brain child of Mr. Richard Blewitt, Resident Representative of UNDP Trinidad and Tobago and designed by a UNDP expert in public procurement management and associated public policy and practice reform, kicks off with a four-day training workshop. During the training the various concepts, tools and methods are explained through their practical application to a series of “problem or opportunity scenarios”. Such scenarios may be generated by the training participants themselves in advance of their participation in the course and/or generated as part of the training curriculum. The scenarios used in each course aim to expose participants to a range of circumstances and to many facets of the Toolkit content. The Toolkit is only issued after the user has completed the face to face training. This approach facilitates learning about the workings of public procurement systems as well as about engaging stakeholders in problem or associated interventions in a manner that is easily assimilated.

Following the face to face workshops, an online User Forum provides Change Agents of the programme, with opportunities for networking and problem solving with other users. It includes the input of an online UNDP Public Procurement Toolkit Advisor who moderates the User Forum. Graduates of the training courses are given access to the User Forum. This facility provides the potential for the formation of a community of practice that enables users to share learnings and to find support in developing their capability to respond effectively to the problems and opportunities that may be presented. Further, it is envisaged that the Forum will give rise to the development of a local cadre of resource experts who can provide advisory services for issues which may go beyond the capacities of members within the existing network.
The Change Agents programme was piloted in July 2017 in Trinidad and Tobago through a collaboration between UNDP Trinidad and Tobago, UNDP Copenhagen and the Ministry of Finance. Reviews from participants described the programme as:

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Already approximately fifty change agents have benefited from this programme. Additional training is expected to follow in August 2017.

The goal of the Change Agents Programme is to arm all participants engaged in the procurement cycle, with the necessary information and skills to effectively implement the procurement reform agenda in a manner which improves efficiency through initiatives which seek to transform and modernize the public sector. Ultimately, it seeks to facilitate an economic and social environment which decreases wastage in Government spending, resulting in cost savings and the widespread acceptance and utilization in procurement practices of the basic principles of transparency, accountability and value for money.