



Civil Society Advocacy Case Study

under the [CSOs For Good Governance: Enhancing civil society's contribution to governance and development processes in Trinidad and Tobago](#) (CSOs4GoodGov) project

The Importance of Collaborative Advocacy in Changing Policy

Organisation(s): Veni Apwann (VA)

Date: 2015

Geographic Location: Trinidad & Tobago

Partners: Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education National Training Agency; Parenting TT; Kids in Need of Direction (KIND); CANARI; WINAD; The Arrow Foundation; Trinidad and Tobago National Council of Parent Teachers Associations; Brasso Seco Paria Tourism Action Committee; Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago; The Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Human Development Foundation; Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago; Tobago Theta Company; Healing with Horses Foundation; Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Tobago Shelter; Environment Tobago; and Yahweh Foundation

SDGs in Action:



Veni Apwann is a non-profit company registered in 2003. Its mission is to build capacity in Caribbean civil society organisations (CSOs) by providing training, technical support and guidance to empower them to become visionary leaders in their communities. CSOs are uniquely positioned to address unmet needs in every sector of society. However, this work is often affected by challenges such as limited human resource and staggering financial challenges, which hamper civil society's ability to have the maximum reach possible.

In 2015, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Mr. Fazal Karim in conjunction with the National Training Agency (NTA), recognising the potential value of CSOs in contributing to national development, initiated an informal partnership with CSOs to advocate for a proposed Cabinet Note aimed at allowing the provision of the On the Job Trainee (OJT) programme to support the civil society sector to be fully subsidised by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. At the time, CSOs were subject to the same policy as Private and Public-Sector organisations, in which OJTs could be placed once the partnering organisation paid 50% of the stipend, a liability which many CSOs could ill afford. Working with the NTA, Veni Apwann took up the cause to mobilise civil society and advocate for 100% subsidy by

government, on the basis that civil society makes significant contributions to national development. Veni Apwann led an assessment that would validate this, and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education's position that the civil society sector would benefit tremendously from a 100% subsidisation of OJTs.

In March 2015, Veni Apwann made a call to local CSOs who readily provided information on how their work was contributing to the then pillars of national development. These pillars included:

- National and Personal Security
- People Centred Development
- Poverty Eradication and Social Justice
- Good Governance
- Holistic Child Development
- Foreign Policy
- Human Capital Development
- Information and Communication Technologies
- More Diversified Knowledge Intensive Economy

Veni Apwann prepared a collective document outlining the critical contributions of 16 CSOs representing various sectors towards national development and a covering letter reinforcing the sector's need for the intended support. This was submitted to the NTA in late March 2015. This

document supplemented the Cabinet Note prepared by the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and was presented successfully to Cabinet.

Key Results and Impact

Effective August 2015, Cabinet approved the allowance of recruitment of OJT Trainees by CSOs, to help ease the burdens of staff remuneration. CSOs were given the opportunity to begin registering up to 10 OJTs per organisation for a maximum of 24 months.

To date, many CSOs have benefitted from access to additional and affordable human resources provided to their organisations through the OJT programme. These include members of the SDGs Catalysts Network, such as the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, and other CSOs such as Parenting TT and the Yahweh Foundation. The Government's approval of providing 100% subsidisation of OJTs for CSOs signalled its willingness to recognise the critical work that they do and an understanding of government's role in creating a more enabling fiscal environment within which the civil society sector can operate. Veni Apwann and others feel that there is much more to be done in this area but it is a start.

Key Lessons Learned

- It is sometimes difficult for CSOs to invest time and other resources in strategic initiatives such as advocacy, given limited resources and competing short-term demands to deliver projects. It is important to be able to critically assess the feasibility and potential impact of any advocacy initiative; to weigh the cost of the effort that will be required to successfully advocate; and to seize the opportunity in a timely fashion.
- Major national events such as national elections and possible change of government administrations can (and did) significantly hamper the implementation of the new policy change. The policy change was announced less than two weeks before the general election in 2015. While a few CSOs were able to bring on OJTs under the new government administration, further implementation was hampered by changes to ministries.

- Continuous follow up and follow through of key advocacy actions is necessary despite changes in government administrations and possible realignment of government ministries to enable effective implementation of the policy change.
- Advocacy messages should be reviewed and updated as necessary, to remain relevant and reflect changing national circumstances. The drastic downturn in the national economy hampered the implementation of this policy change by the Government. However, during downturns, CSOs play an even more critical role in national development and the subsidisation of OJTs would have facilitated this work. Unfortunately, this key message was not utilised by CSOs to advocate for continued access to this facility.

Advocacy Tips

- *Do continuous research and nurture potential strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors with whom CSOs could identify common interests and form a base for positive change.*
- *Make advocacy an ongoing strategic programme area for CSOs.*

References and Links

Website: OJT Programme -

<http://ojtonline.org/default.aspx>

Article:

<https://ttngonews.com/2016/09/16/staffing-your-ngo-with-fully-funded-on-the-job-training-ojt-programme-trainees/>

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