

**The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
(NGC)**

NGC'S Capacity Building Programme

Gonzales Sheikers

Place: Gonzales Sheikers' Pan Theatre, Belmont

Date: Tuesday March 29th 2016

Time: 10:00am

Remarks by Mr. Fofi George, Community Relations Officer

Since its inception nearly 41 years ago, The National Gas Company (NGC) has been a strong supporter of development within the gas based energy sector. You can even say that, through continued expansion and careful strategic planning, NGC has become the backbone of the natural gas based energy sector, along with most other related businesses.

But our vision for Trinidad and Tobago has always included a wide and diversified economy, one that is not wholly dependent on energy, but which also embraces and makes use of all the other resources we have been blessed with in this country. This includes manufacturing, hospitality, tourism and the creative industries.

I think we can all agree that we in Trinidad and Tobago are very blessed with an abundance of creative talent. It is evident in our festivals, our music, our dance, our art, and in any number of forms of expression that make us a unique people. But the time has come to move beyond just enjoying our culture, and to see our performers or musicians as simply a form of passing entertainment. We need to make a

concentrated and strategic effort to channel these creative forces into a holistic, thriving and income-generating industry.

In other words, it is high time that our artistes earned a living off their craft, and performing groups were able to finance their own endeavours independently.

This is one of the reasons why for the past three (3) years, NGC has offered Capacity Building Workshops to the cultural groups under its sponsorship. At the moment, NGC sponsors the NGC La Brea Nightingales, NGC Couva Joylanders, NGC Steel Xplosion and, of course, assists Gonzales Sheikers. Other music groups include tassa groups like Bao Simba in Tobago, Show Stopperz from Couva, and Sweet Tassa Enterprises from Princes Town.

The Capacity Building workshops help groups answer critical questions such as how do we earn and manage our finances? How do we manage conflict? How do we handle administration? How do we devise tactics such as a business plan, a mission and a vision?

This training has been offered to the executive members of these groups, along with other community groups like the Police Youth Groups at La Brea, Couva, Laventille Road and Penal, to ensure greater independence, more autonomy in handling their affairs, and greater efficiency and sustainability of the group as a whole.

For the musical groups, however, there is an additional element to the Capacity Building Workshops that we think is critical, and that is music literacy. Traditionally, the pan players of old learned their pieces by rote, observation and repetition. The ability to read and write music was extremely rare.

And while this worked remarkably well, the internationalization of steel pan music means that music

literacy is a must. If pan is to be brought out of urban obscurity to being an international phenomenon steel pan players must be more music literate. Indeed music literacy is crucial not just to a band's ability to compete at the Panorama, but at the growing number of local and international events where pan music is a staple.

Furthermore, music literacy makes players more marketable abroad, greatly enhancing their potential to enjoy an international music career.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the current programme module introduces young players to the fundamentals of the pan playing technique and music literacy. It is scheduled for the Easter vacation period, running five days per week for two hours a day. At the end, we hope that the graduates will be better suited for recruitment into the band, with an eye on their participation in Panorama 2017 and beyond. As a wholly local company, nothing would bring us more pleasure than the knowledge that a national institution such as the Panorama Championships will be enhanced through NGC's efforts, and its ongoing relationships with these bands.

I want to congratulate the young musicians who are willing to devote their holidays to attend the workshops. The spirit of sacrifice and devotion has always been a characteristic of the steel pan musician, and I promise you that the time you spend there will pay off. I acknowledge the leaders of the Gonzales Sheikers for continuing to partner with NGC over the years. It makes me happy to know that we share the same vision of what it takes to be a strong, united community.

And speaking of communities, I want to recognise the members of NGC's Community Relations Department for their continued efforts to put NGC's Corporate Social Responsibility strategies into motion. Through NGC's CSR programme we

continue to ensure that the earnings from our country's natural gas heritage are enjoyed by all citizens, through varied avenues such as sport; education and training; youth and community development; environmental awareness; and, very importantly, music, art, and culture.

Thank you all for being here today and for supporting NGC and its partners, the Gonzales Sheikers, in this initiative. As a true, true Trini company, we eagerly await the positive results of this exercise, which will be more of the sweet, sweet pan that only we can claim as our own.

Thank you.