



PIVOTING CSR

A BETTER CHANCE AT A **BRIGHTER TOMORROW**

NGC introduces the
'Inspire to Achieve' Programme





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NGC GROUP COMMITS SUPPORT TO 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' INITIATIVE (L-R) Dominic Rampersad, President PPGPL; Mark Loquan, President NGC; The Hon. Minister of Education, Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly; Curtis Mohammed, President NGC CNG; Sheldon Sylvester, Vice President Commercial of National Energy; Wendy Seow, General Manager LABIDCO.

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There is no doubt that young people today are facing extraordinary challenges. Already heirs to complex climate, geopolitical and societal problems, their future prospects have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In mere months, 20 years' worth of advances in global education were wiped out by pandemic restrictions.¹ Those setbacks in education are now projected to exacerbate challenges for young jobseekers, as labour markets are saturating and the Fourth Industrial Revolution is disrupting demand for traditional skillsets.

That said, while the outlook for youth may seem bleak, there are promising opportunities on the horizon, forged from present challenges. For example, by accelerating our transition into an age of digital learning, earning and communication, the pandemic has forced us to confront inequalities

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

of access to technology and digital resources. In Trinidad and Tobago, we already see corrective action being taken in the form of the Ministry of Education's 'No Child Left Behind' initiative, which seeks to support students in need of digital devices.

On the job front, while opportunities in traditional sectors are contracting, entire industries are being incubated in response to climate change imperatives and digital transformation. The value chains of clean energy businesses and technology-based products are projected to create millions of new jobs in the near future. In Latin America and the Caribbean alone, some 15 million jobs could become available by 2030 with shifts towards greener patterns of production and consumption.²

² <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Jobs-in-a-Net-Zero-Emissions-Future-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>



This surge in new opportunities is, however, not a guarantee of success. If young people are not adequately equipped to seize those opportunities, to participate in and contribute to the future that is unfolding, they risk falling behind. There is considerable work that must be done to give all young people a fair shot at a bright future. NGC is one company willing to take on that challenge.

NGC’s renewed focus on youth development

Well before the pandemic drew attention to the outlook for young people, NGC appreciated the link between youth development and a sustainable future for country and planet. The company has for many years invested in nurturing young potential and increasing youth participation in sport, arts and culture, community development, civic life and environmental preservation.



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NGC has also sponsored tertiary level research and scholarships, partnered on energy education initiatives, supported schools with special projects, and provided vocational skills training to members of youth clubs in its fenceline communities. While the cumulative impact of these investments has been considerable, NGC wanted to do more to help young people secure sustainable livelihoods, particularly in underserved communities.

Cognisant of changing market demands and certain gaps in mainstream academic curricula, NGC began to conceptualise a programme that would support more rounded student development and open more diverse pathways for future employment and entrepreneurship. When the pandemic struck in 2020, this concept evolved to address emergent risks and new skill demands that could impact the future prospects of hundreds of vulnerable young people.

For instance, the digital transformation which was already underway across all sectors was accelerated due to the pandemic. More services were automated or moved online, reducing the need for personnel in some businesses and requiring staff to retool in others. Almost overnight, digital literacy became a baseline skill for many more careers. Young people entering the workforce without sufficient training in this area would be significantly less competitive.

Looking deeper, there are other skills that could prove equally vital to career success in the future. According to McKinsey and Company, ‘softer’ skills such as critical thinking, time management, communication, creativity, entrepreneurship, self-awareness and regulation, interpersonal skills



and adaptability are just some of over 50 foundational skills that will help people thrive in the future of work.³

Guided by such insights, NGC wanted to pre-empt some of the challenges that youth would face in the job market, by designing interventions to build their competitiveness, entrepreneurial spirit, technological savvy, emotional intelligence and resilience, among other marketable skills.

NGC also saw the need to prepare young people for a future built on clean energy and environmental stewardship. Young people will need to live and work within green agenda limits. They will be asked to adopt sustainable consumption practices, to adapt to disruptive green systems and technologies, and to lead innovation themselves.

With all this in mind, and after much research, iteration and consultation, NGC has finally turned its vision for a holistic, future-focused youth development programme into a signature project called ‘Inspire to Achieve’, or i2A.

³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work>

Introducing i2A

Starting September 2021, preliminary work will begin on the rollout of NGC’s i2A programme. As envisioned, this programme will seek to holistically develop youth in the company’s fenceline communities through the delivery of after-school training in the areas of:

- i) Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Arts and Math (STREAM)
- ii) Life skills and career coaching
- iii) Environmental citizenship
- iv) Entrepreneurship

Each of these areas, called programme tracks, is intended to build core skillsets that will strengthen students’ ability to participate in future job markets, whether as employees or self-made entrepreneurs. The programme will be structured as a series of lessons spread across two years, delivered in different formats by professional educators and coaches. These formats may include virtual and live lectures, interactive games, videos, field trips, workshops, online and live demonstrations, inter alia. Assessments will also be included to track student progress and development.

At the time of writing, pandemic restrictions remain in place, and there is still uncertainty about the format of the upcoming academic year. Accordingly, NGC will begin i2A activities on virtual platforms.

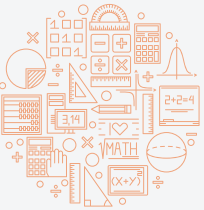
The intent is to eventually transition into live settings when safe and feasible, to allow for practical, hands-on instruction where necessary.

The specific outcomes being targeted by i2A are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Targeted Programme Outcomes



Improved attitudes toward STREAM fields and careers

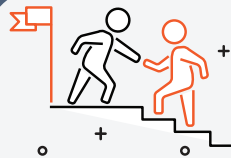
Increased STREAM knowledge and skills

Increased likelihood of graduation and pursuing a STREAM career

Improved participation of girls in STREAM fields and careers

Increased likelihood of girls and young women pursuing STREAM careers

STREAM Track



Helped identify personal, educational and career choices

Helped create action plans to accomplish personal, educational and career choices

Practised skills to monitor progress towards achieving goals

Helped identify and treat with any socio-psychological challenges to goal attainment

Improved ability to cope with adversity and to manage interpersonal conflict constructively

Life Skills and Career Coaching Track



Increased propensity for enjoyment of nature by displaying behaviours related to:

- Energy conservation
- Involvement in environmental preservation
- Recycling and upcycling
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Increased empathy and care for biodiversity and environmentally sensitive species

Increased sense of responsibility for the environment

Increased likelihood of graduation and pursuing a career in Sustainability

Environmental Track



Helped participants develop skills for creative and innovative thinking to identify novel business opportunities

Developed a spirit of perseverance in participants to enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on

Helped participants pursue self-employment and to become self-reliant

Promoted small business creation in target communities

Entrepreneurship Track

General target across all tracks:

Improved abilities in problem-solving, collaborating, critical and systems thinking.



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LA BREA HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR ROLLOUT OF THE PILOT PROJECT

The target population of this programme is youth between the ages of 7 and 25, enrolled in primary, secondary, tertiary or technical/ vocational schools. In the first instance, NGC will be looking to pilot the programme in the community of La Brea. La Brea was identified as a good fit for the deployment of the i2A programme based on needs assessments and NGC’s long-standing relationship with the community. It is hoped that the introduction of i2A activities will go a long way to bolster schooling and equip young residents for gainful future employment.

Restoring lost gains

While the COVID-19 pandemic has set progress back on many of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, prompt and targeted interventions can help restore lost gains. When it comes to education and youth development, the pandemic actually highlighted areas of weakness and inequalities that need to be addressed. It is now up to governments, corporate citizens and civil society to take note and respond accordingly.

It is after all in everyone’s best interest to ensure the next generation is not lost, and that young people are outfitted to fulfil their potential and contribute productively to society.

As a champion of youth development in Trinidad and Tobago, NGC will continue to do its part to ensure that young people are equipped to succeed and inspired to achieve. ■