

GEO

Guyana Economic Opportunities

Trip Report:
Chambers of Commerce Study Tour
Trinidad, Grenada and Barbados
May 27 – June 2, 2001

Prepared by
Osborne Nurse

Submitted by:
Chemonics International Inc.
In association with:
Management Systems International, Inc.

To:
United States Agency for International Development
Georgetown, Guyana

Under Contract No. 504-C-00-99-00009-00

August 2001

TRIP REPORT
GUYANESE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE
OBSERVATIONAL VISIT TO COUNTERPART ORGANISATIONS
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, GRENADA & BARBADOS

May 27 – June 2, 2001

Osborne Nurse, Technical Coordinator

1 Background

The GEO Project sponsored this Observational Visit for 10 participants representing the following eight (8) Regional Chambers of Commerce:

1. Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce and Industry
2. Linden Chamber of Industry, Commerce and Development
3. Rupununi Chamber of Commerce and Industry
4. Essequibo Chamber of Industry and Commerce
5. West Berbice Chamber of Industry and Commerce
6. Bartica Chamber of Commerce and Industry
7. Mahaica Chamber of Commerce; and
8. Berbice Chamber of Commerce and Development Association.

Participants were accompanied by Nicole Tiano of the Chemonics Washington DC Office, who was responsible for administrative arrangements, myself, Osborne Nurse as Technical Coordinator and Advisor, Ms. Glenda Esdelle of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce who acted as an Assistant Adviser and Tour Organiser, and Mr. Gordon Studebaker, GEO Consultant for Private Sector Development. A full list of persons attending the Tour is attached.

2 Purpose and Approach.

The purpose of the Tour was to assist members of Guyana's regional chambers of commerce to visit several chambers of commerce (or other private business associations) outside of Guyana to learn first hand their experience in such areas as organization, member services, fund raising, and advocacy, among others.

2.1 Approach

The Tour was approached as a comparative study. In each jurisdiction visited, we explored the core issues with the hosting chambers – membership, services, funding/financing, advocacy and lobbying, and community work. The group was asked to focus on the similarities and differences between the different chambers and to enquire into the environmental differences that may govern the different approaches, if any.

On the final day, in Barbados, a private visioning and strategic session was held with the group to attempt to lay out a plan or plans of action for each chamber to be implemented on their return to Guyana.

3 Itinerary

The complete tour itinerary is as attached as an appendix to this Report.

4 Meetings And Lessons Learnt

At each of the meetings scheduled an attempt was made to elicit matters of interest to the group and to identify the experiences of the agencies being visited for relevance to the experiences of the group.

4.1 Trinidad & Tobago

On arrival the group met at the Hilton Hotel to review the planned programme of visit and to outline the objectives of the Study Tour and the potential lessons to be learnt.

Day 1, Monday May 28

The first day was spent entirely with the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The first session consisted of a meeting with the Vice President of the Chamber, **Mr. Joe Pires** and the Chief Executive Officer, **Mr. David L. Martin**. In this meeting, the history, functions and activities of the TTIC were explored and developed, with emphasis being placed on the following topics:

- Relationships with other Chambers in Trinidad & Tobago;
- Activities relating to business and economic developments in Trinidad & Tobago;
- Activities related to issues of community development;
- Membership activities and communication;
- Relationships with the Government of T&T.

After a coffee break, **Ms. Glenda Esdelle**, Manager for Trade relations, TTIC explored the administrative functions being performed at the Chamber, covering membership activities, training and general administrative functions.

Lunch was taken at the Chamber's facilities, after which **Mr. Val Rogers**, a former senior executive member of the Chamber explored and explained the advocacy and community development activities of the Chamber.

Day2 - Tuesday May 29

In the morning, the group met with **Mr. Neville Blake**, Director, Trade Facilitation of the Ministry of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism along with two of his associates. Mr. Blake explained that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago maintained an

open door policy to the several Chambers of Commerce in the country, as well as to other private sector organisations such as the Manufacturers' Association. While there were no formal organisational arrangements for such consultations, opinions were sought and consultation encouraged on all matters of public importance as well those matters that specifically affected the interests of the business community. He indicated as well that members of the Government often took the opportunity to explain government policy and actions by addressing meetings of the different Chambers on such issues.

Later, the group met with the Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce over a lunch hosted by the Chamber. **Mr. Rudy Singh**, Vice President chaired the meeting and hosted the lunch. As one of the smaller Chambers in the country, this Chamber outlined the history of its own development and exhorted the group to adopt a culture of planning for the long term development of their various organisations. The Chamber also outlined the manner in which they established their independent identity from the TTIC which is widely accepted as the major Chamber in the country, and their efforts to encourage the development of other small regional Chambers. The importance and value of collaborating with both the TTIC and other Chambers in critical matters of national concern while presenting the special point of view of its own members was also emphasised.

The Tunapuna Chamber has also offered to visit and meet with any of the Chambers in order to offer additional help or assistance as the Guyana Chambers pursue their own development paths.

The afternoon was spent at the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards where Executive Director **Mr. Lawford Dupres** and his senior officers explained the role and functions of the Bureau.

The group departed from Trinidad to Grenada on the evening of May 29.

4.2 Grenada

Day 3 - May 30

Meetings were held in Grenada with the Grenada Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Trade and with the National Development Foundation.

Mr. Christopher DeAllie, Chairman, and **Mr. Christopher de Riggs**, Chief Executive Officer of the Grenada Chamber of Industry and Commerce along with other members of the Chamber met with the group. The Grenada Chamber, which was established in 1921 and incorporated in the 1940's, indicated that its prime concern was that of advocacy in a number of areas such as government's fiscal policy, the Labour Code, issues relating to the CARICOM Common External Tariff, as well as issues of relevance to individual members, such as matters dealing with the Customs Department. The group was told that the Chamber had established a regular monthly meeting with the Ministry of Finance during which it was able to deal with most of the matters of concern to the Chamber and its members.

The Chamber is a member of the Grenada Private Sector Organisation, along with the Manufacturers' Association and the Employers Association. It had established a number of

important committees including Ways and Means, Economic Affairs and a Multi-Partite Committee on Governance which includes the other PSO's, Government and the NGO's. The Chamber was also very proud of its Youth Programme – the Junior Chamber.

Two officials of the Ministry of Trade met with the group and outlined the open approach of the government to the Chamber and to other PSO's. The discussion included a general review of economic matters in Grenada as they affected the private sector.

Ms. Anthea Bullen of the Small Business development Unit met the group along with the Manager of the National Development Foundation at whose offices the meeting was held. This meeting explored the ways in which the SEDU and the NDF functioned to support small business in Grenada.

The group departed for Barbados later in the evening.

4.3 Barbados

Day 4 - May 31

Mr. John Williams President, and **Mr. Ruall Harris**, Executive Director of the Barbados Chamber of Commerce and Industry met with the group and outlined the operation and interest of the Chamber. They emphasised the strong relationship that they enjoyed with the Government as well as with other PSO's. In particular they referred to the role of the Chamber in the development of the Barbados Social Contract which includes all the major PSO and NGO organisations, Labour and the Government. One of the outcomes of this broad social consensus and consultation is the development of a 10-year Strategic Plan for Barbados, a document produced through tri-partite consultation.

The meeting also explored administrative aspects of the Chamber, outlining its history, membership and principal operations.

Meetings were also held with **Mr. Lionel Weekes**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry and International Business, and **Mr. Cephas Gooding**, Permanent secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Business Development. The two Ministries represent the breadth of the Barbados Government's coverage in the area of business, given their very strong thrust in the Offshore market. Both Permanent secretaries emphasised the role of private sector consultation in developing the overall development strategy for Barbados, as well as in dealing with the specific problems faced by individual PSO's and their memberships.

A meeting was also held with **Ms. Anthea Ishmael**, Deputy Director of the Barbados national Standards Institution.

Day 5, June 1

The meeting referred to above with Mr. Cephas Gooding was held on the morning of day 5.

The principal activity on this day was the conduct of a brainstorming session with the participants. The Session covered the following topics:

1. Issues In Building The Chambers As Institutions
 - Membership
 - Funding
 - Staffing
 - Organisation
2. Building Image And Acceptance
 - Government
 - Community
 - Other PSO's
 - Outsiders
 - NGO's
3. Advocacy
 - National
 - Local/Regional
4. PSO Cooperation And Coordination
 - Unity
 - Role Of ARCC
5. Developing A Social Partnership With Government And Labour
 - Board Memberships
 - Tri-Partite Discussions
 - Information Exchange With Government

The discussions were extremely lively. However, a number of things were evident that indicate the need for the Chambers to devote more attention to the development of their organisations. These include:

1. It is clear that the participants rely heavily on the GEO Private Sector Advisor, which is normal considering his close involvement with the chambers. For long-term sustainability of GEO's assistance, he should at some point begin to assume a less direct role.
2. It was obvious that the development of the Association of regional Chambers of Commerce (ARCC) was important to all of the participants. Unfortunately the primary concern appeared to be with redressing the balance and perhaps showing the more established Georgetown Chamber that the Regions have voice as well. The approach appeared strongly to be one of "political" competition with Georgetown to the extent that it began to seem that no early strategy was being developed for cooperation among organisations.
3. Similarly, it appeared that the development of ARCC seemed to have higher priority than the individual development of each of the Chambers. More discussion was forthcoming on what ARCC could and should do than on how specifically each Chamber was to develop itself, notwithstanding their small sizes.

4. The fourth issue that strikes the independent observer is the extent to which the strands of Guyanese politics influence the thinking and approach of the participants, to the extent that at some points political issues appeared to render the organisations immobile on their own development.

There was however strong consensus on their shared view that the Chambers need to:

1. Provide information that will help their members to develop their businesses;
2. Provide a strong voice advocating for the delivery of supporting mechanisms for businesses and for the community.
3. Recognise that the following tools may be instrumental in achieving these goals:
 - Training
 - Information Sharing
 - Legislation at the National Level
 - Development of a Single Voice on Issues Affecting Business
 - Advocating for improved public utilities.

5 Participant Involvement

At all times participant involvement was strong and inclusive. All members made contributions and asked questions relating to their areas of interest.

6 Observations and Comment

The Study Tour should prove to be a significant learning experience for the participants and for their Chambers. The following requirements appear to be important if this is to be achieved.

1. The role of the ARCC needs to be further developed, and especially the manner in which it will seek to achieve broad private sector consensus involving all of the PSO's in Guyana in an effort to provide the strongest, most united private sector front for dealing with the Government.
2. The Chambers need to develop techniques that will help them to place the needs of all of its diverse members as their highest goal, and to minimise the impact of the political environment on their approaches to doing so.
3. The GEO Private Sector Advisor should develop a specific goal for his own consultancy of gradual withdrawal or less direct involvement to ensure the long-run sustainability of the training he is providing.