

Responses from the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited (exporTT, invesTT and CreativeTT) to recommendations contained in the 17th Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the National Export Facilitation Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (exporTT) for the financial years 2017 and 2018 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's 28th Report, 11th Parliament

1. Status of the Outstanding Audited Financial Statements (Page 17)

Recommendation:

- *exporTT should comply with Section 3.2.5 (a) on page 30 of the State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual and provide an update on the status of the outstanding audited financial statements for years 2021-2023 to Parliament by November 29, 2024.*

Response:

The outstanding audited financial statements for the years 2021-2023 have been completed. The Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited is engaging the Ministry of Finance, Investment Division to set a suitable date for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to approve the statements. Following the AGM, the approved audited financial statements will be submitted to the Parliament.

Recommendation:

- *To improve accountability, exporTT should develop an internal timeline with reporting milestones to the MTI on the progress of audits, ensuring that delays are identified early and provide a status update to Parliament by November 29, 2024.*

Response:

Progress reports of the audits of financial statements are provided to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) on a monthly basis.

2. Outdated Accounting Manual (Page 18)

Recommendation:

- *Since the manual is outdated and the organization faces operational risks without updated policies, exporTT should provide a status update to Parliament by November 29, 2024 on the establishment of interim guidelines that promote international best practices in alignment with IFRS until the Accounting Operations Manual has been finalised.*

Response:

The Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited is currently developing an Accounting Operations Manual best suited for the Organization that will be in alignment with updated International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). This is expected to be finalized by the second quarter of Fiscal 2025.

Need to Continuously Train Team Members (Page 19)

Recommendation:

- ***exporTT should conduct and submit to the MTI, a skills audit assessment on the Client Support Services Unit and its Advisors, the Procurement Unit and the recently promoted managers to identify the training gaps and provide a status update on the implementation of this initiative to Parliament by November 29, 2024.***

Response:

The MTI engaged a consultant to provide Human Resource and Industrial Relations services for the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited. This engagement included, but was not limited to the conduct of a gap analysis of exporTT Limited, invesTT Limited and creativeTT. This analysis entailed an assessment of the existing talent pool against competency models, analysing market trends to understand availability of key skills and talent gap analysis for critical and non-critical roles.

The completion of the gap analysis informed the skills and core competencies required to fulfil roles within the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited, the development of talent action plans and a staff transition plan in the development of the new organizational structure.

Recommendation:

- ***exporTT should, in collaboration with the MTI establish an annual budgetary allocation for the training of staff. A status update on the implementation of this initiative should be provided to Parliament by November 29, 2024.***

Response:

The Fiscal 2025 annual budget of Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited has an expenditure allocation for the training of staff.

3. Underutilisation of the Green Packaging Initiative (Page 20)

Recommendation:

- ***Given the capabilities and funding available, exporTT should provide to the Parliament by November 29, 2024 the following:***
 - a) Develop a clear timeline for the utilisation of the allocated funds along with KPIs for the adoption rates by exporters.***

Response:

The Green Packaging Initiative was subsumed under the Green Manufacturing Initiative (GMI), which is being led by the MTI. The wider GMI covers the cost of audits to identify areas for the application of green practices, as well as the implementation of green practices, which includes processes, equipment, the upskilling of persons, and packaging. The MTI aims to fully utilize the Fiscal 2025 Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) allocation of \$1Mn for activities related to the GMI.

Recommendation:

- b) Undertake an awareness campaign on the benefits of green packaging to exporters as well as consumers in order to facilitate higher participation in the initiative.*

Response:

Awareness campaigns will take place under the Green Manufacturing Initiative. This includes collaboration with the TTMA to bring greater awareness to manufacturers and consumers about the importance of Green Packaging. The TTMA has undertaken extensive research in this area and many of its members are manufacturers and exporters of packaging materials.

Recommendation:

- exporTT should develop a formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to assess the impact of its initiatives, such as the Green Packaging Initiative and other capacity-building programs and export data collection improvements. This would allow for evidence-based adjustments to strategies. An update on this implementation should be submitted by November 29, 2024.*

Response:

The Green Manufacturing Initiative will include a formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system.

4. Export Data Availability (Page 21)

Recommendation:

- exporTT should develop and implement a data-sharing guidance document and standard operating procedures that would identify and standardise the data needed to benefit all stakeholders (government, suppliers and clients) and support better use of data across the public service and provide an update to Parliament by November 29, 2024.*

Response:

The Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited will seek to obtain access to the Single Electronic Window (SEW) database for selected datasets. The Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited has partial access for the certificates that are processed. Once this access has been approved, the Agency will proceed with the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The SOP will outline the timeline and process for acquiring data, ensuring clearly defined steps and responsibilities. It will also include timelines for disseminating high-level, anonymized data to relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation:

- exporTT should develop strategies to improve client confidence such as through a dedicated communication channel for instance, a quarterly exporter feedback forum, where exporters can discuss challenges and opportunities. This can reassure exporters of the discretionary nature of their synergetic relationship with exporTT so as to encourage compliance with contractual obligations, a status update on these efforts should be provided to Parliament by November 29, 2024.*

Response:

The Agency is set to host quarterly forums throughout Fiscal 2025. These will facilitate open discussions where exporters can share their successes, challenges and suggestions. Topics such as contract compliance and reporting, export procedures, market access, and the support services provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited, will also be presented. Impact assessment surveys will be administered at the forums to collect information on successes, as well as to guide discussions at future forums.

5. Absence of the Internal Audit Function (Page 23)

Recommendation:

- ***exporTT should provide a status update on its efforts to recruit an Internal Auditor to Parliament by November 29, 2024.***

Response:

The internal audit function at the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited is currently filled by a full-time Internal Auditor.

6. Lack of a Whistleblowing Policy (Page 24)

Recommendation:

- ***exporTT should, in the interim until the TIPPA is effected, include in its Code of Ethics, an established guideline relating to whistleblowing in accordance with Section 11 of the Whistleblower Protection Act 2024.***

Response:

For Fiscal 2025, the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited has prioritized the development of new guidelines relating to whistleblowing in accordance with Section 11 of the Whistleblower Protection Act 2024.

Recommendation:

- ***The MTI should provide a brief report to Parliament on the amalgamation of the exporTT, InvesTT and CreativeTT.***

Response:

The amalgamation of exporTT Limited, InvesTT Limited and Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited (CreativeTT) was completed on July 16, 2024, following the approval of the Articles of Amalgamation of the new entity by the Registrar General. This marked the establishment of the new Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency Limited. The Board of Directors of the Agency was installed in August 2024. The operations of the merged entities will continue to be performed unchanged by the Agency in accordance with the terms of the Amalgamation Agreement.

The Agency's organizational structure consists of 77 unique positions that is to be filled by 110 persons. The structure was approved by Cabinet and informed by the recommendations of a consultant. The MTI has secured the services of a consultant which is currently implementing a Recruitment Plan to fill 23 critical roles within the new Agency in accordance with the new organizational structure. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Deputy CEO are to be recruited in Quarter 1 of Fiscal 2025. All other staff recruitment will be completed by March 2025. All existing staff members will be eligible to apply for positions in the Agency once advertised.

The MTI is also developing, in collaboration with an international partner, a 5-year Strategic Plan and a 1-year Operational Plan for the Agency, both of which should be completed by December 2024.

The MTI is also working with the Property and Real Estate Services Division of the Ministry of Public Administration, to identify a suitable location for the headquarters of the Agency.

7. Maximising Utilisation of Trade Initiatives (Page 24)

Recommendation:

- ***exporTT should provide a status update to Parliament on the strategies pursued to promote the utilization of duty-free market access under the CBI to local exporters in order for there to be full-scale capitalization of this trade initiative. exporTT should also track the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing exports through the CBI.***

Response:

The Agency, in keeping with its strategic direction, intends to exploit duty free access available through existing trade agreements inclusive of the CBI. This is to be pursued, in part, via the Commercial Officers and Commercial Attachés that are located in strategic markets, namely the United Kingdom (UK), Panama, Guyana, Jamaica and the United States of America (USA). Among the major responsibilities of the Officers, is assisting businesses in utilizing the existing Trade Agreement(s) in countries/regions for which they have responsibility.

In the case of the CBI, the Commercial Officer based in Miami, USA is charged with raising awareness of the benefits of the CBI and assisting local exporters in navigating US laws and regulations to realize those benefits. To date, the Officer has facilitated the execution of a trade mission and participation at various trade shows in the USA. The Officer has also conducted webinars for local exporters on "Mastering the American Market", as well as a targeted session focusing on Tobago-based exporters seeking to enter the US market.

Other methods to promote exports, in general, including to the US, include the use of trade shows, trade missions, and collaboration with key organizations such as the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA), the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries (TTCISI) and the various Chambers of Commerce.

The Agency and the MTI will track the effectiveness of initiatives through quarterly reports submitted by the US-based Commercial Officer, frequent follow-ups with local companies and data from the Central Statistical Office (CSO). To address any data gaps, the Agency will utilize data generated by the US Trade Representative (USTR) via its annual reports on the utilization of the CBI.