

REVOLUTIONISING LAND AND PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

ISSUE

The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is investing EC \$10.5 million to revolutionise the process of land and property transactions. The formal title of this sub-project is “Single Window Land and Property Transaction Project”, which is part of the larger Caribbean Digital Transformation Project (CARDTP) being implemented by Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and financed by soft-loans from the World Bank/International Development Association (IDA). SVG’s portion of this loan from CARDTP is US \$94 million for the overall project for the four Windward Islands.

The central aim of CARDTP is to increase access to digital services, technologies and skills by governments, businesses, and individuals in SVG. This is part and parcel of the ULP government’s quest to build a modern, competitive, many-sided post-colonial economy which is at once, local, national, regional, and global.

A workshop on the land and property sub-project was held earlier in the week in SVG.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OVERALL

The overall project (CARDTP) has several components of which the following are the most critical:

- A. Enhancing resiliency especially in the government sector by enlarging the foundation of a digital government, a government that can be engaged with using online tools which will allow

individuals and businesses of SVG to access important government services remotely. Several major government operations will be digitized and many of the projects are ongoing including:

- (i) The implementation of the Vincy Electronic Single Window for Trade Facilitation (VSWIFT) has commenced.
- (ii) The implementation of a new Tax Information Management System will commence soon. Tax payers will be able to file and pay taxes online including property tax, vehicle and drivers' licenses.
- (iii) A Civil Registry and National ID Modernisation Project will commence very soon. The ID upgrade is pivotal for all other digital transformation projects: Once an electronic form of ID is available, online access to various services will become standardized and secured.
- (iv) A Government Online Portal and Payment Platform will be established to allow citizens and business to make online payments for services; and submit online forms to government instead of paper forms.
- (v) A Government Data Centre will be established whereby all servers for all major government services will be co-located under stringent requirements of data and cyber security.
- (vi) The Single Window for Land and Property Transactions.
- (vii) Generally, to promote an enhanced digital services culture in SVG.

B. Lifting digital technologies and the digital economy in SVG to accelerate further economic growth and job creation. This many-sided, evolving process has to be accompanied by:

- (i) Creating the digital environment where investors (local and overseas) will find SVG attractive. Thus, the need for far more Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) skills, as well as digital technology skills. CARDTP is helping in this regard. There are other initiatives, too.
- (ii) Creating the enabling legislative and institutional framework for all the initiatives under CARDTP.

SINGLE WINDOW LAND AND PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS PROJECT

This project will integrate digitally all the relevant land management activities and allow users the online tools to carry out their land and property transaction activities,

Land is a very important asset, and it must be managed properly. Access and ownership to land are vital in abundant material respects. The current systems for undertaking land transactions are inefficient, cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly.

The central elements of this revolutionary process in altering the way land transactions are done and formalised, includes the following elements:

- (i) The carrying out of a digital based mapping of the country of every parcel of land. This base map will allow for land – records to be digitized and updated. This activity is expected to commence in the next few weeks.
- (ii) The establishment, accordingly, of an Integrated Geospatial Information framework to address the governance and sharing of spatial or land use data.

- (iii) The complete digitization of each parcel of land, those with deeds and those without. All encumbrances, if any, will be in the information system for each parcel of land.
- (iv) Package of legislation to implement a “title by registration” system linked to the digitized land information.
- (v) The digitization of all the parcels of land in SVG, includes those in both state and private lands.

Many lawyers may not be happy with the new system because the fees for “the certificates of title” under the digitized system of title by registration would be considerably less than at present; it would be faster and more accurate. But the general public would appreciate this advanced electronic conveyancing.

CONCLUSION

While the political elites in the opposition salivate for political power with no ideas for SVG’s development, the ULP continues to be creative, proactive, and developmental in the people’s interest.

The ULP government is performing so well across all sectors, the opposition is left looking inept and increasingly irrelevant to progress.

As always, the ULP for SVG!