

THE THREE Rs AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ROLLING APACE

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

THREE RS: RELIEF, RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION, AND MORE

The process of relief, recovery, and reconstruction [Three Rs], post-Hurricane Beryl, continues apace. Accompanying the Three Rs, nationally, is a scaling-up of the central aspects of the pre-existing developmental programme as detailed in the Capital Budget for 2024.

In the extant circumstances, the capacity, in every material particular, of the public and private sectors is being stretched to its limits. The relevant government agencies and public officials, including the Prime Minister, have been calling for all building contractors, skilled and unskilled workers to come forth to be actively engaged in this historic national venture of relief, recovery, reconstruction, and sustainable development.

The assistance from regional and international agencies on the ground in respect of relief, even for short periods, is very much appreciated. We appreciate, too, the voluntary, and commercial, efforts of local and foreign business enterprises and individuals to be integral to the process of the Three Rs.

Given the estimated cost of relief, recovery, and reconstruction amounting to EC \$800 million, huge financial and technical resources are still required to be mobilized. As always, though, for the optimal outcomes of the Three Rs to be realized, we in SVG must be united and in solidarity with each other, and possessed of abundant Faith, Fresh Hope, and Love! Infantile divisiveness based on politics, creed, vanities, personal agendas, greed or whatsoever is to be avoided at all costs. And we need a continuing patience, calm, yet urgency in pursuance of the central tasks-at-hand.

RELIEF CONTINUES

The shelters throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines are in operation; so, too the accommodation in private homes for evacuees, especially from the Southern Grenadines. Food is sufficient, and in many cases, abundant. Water in the devastated areas continues to be available in sufficient quantities, though fragile, and of good quality, including bottled water for drinking. Basic security and public health in the affected areas are sound, though challenging.

As at July 31, 2024, there were 1,331 persons in 72 emergency shelters, forty-four of which are listed shelters by the government and twenty-eight are operated by non-governmental entities but fully supported by the government. Of the 1,331 shelterees 711 are on St. Vincent, 52 on Bequia, 95 on Canouan, 44 on Mayreau, and 429 on Union Island.

According to the data from the National Private Home Placement Registry, opened on July 10, 2024, at the Ministry of National Mobilisation, households in private homes placement are as follows: on St. Vincent, from St. Vincent:2,720; on St. Vincent, from Union Island: 618; on St. Vincent, from Bequia: 122; on St. Vincent, from Canouan:147; on St. Vincent, from Mayreau:30. Please note that these are households; on average there are just over 3 persons per household. The data in the Registry of persons on St. Vincent from St. Vincent point to the fact that significant numbers of persons register in order to receive the substantial benefits offered such as food, bottled water, and mattresses, even though some were probably not directly impacted by Hurricane Beryl. The Ministry is seeking to interrogate the data in this regard without in any way depriving persons of the requisite benefits.

Twenty-one persons, mainly elderly, have been placed in guest houses.

RECOVERY APACE

The recovery continues apace. A snapshot of this recovery includes:

- (i) On Union Island: The clean-up is progressing well. Two contractors engaged by BRAGSA employ nearly 600 persons in the aggregate. A barge of the waste materials (mainly galvanise sheetings) has already been shipped to the scrap-metal dealers in Trinidad. More barge loads are to be taken from Union, Canouan, and Mayreau.

On Tuesday August 06, 2024, an additional 80 or so workers were ferried to Canouan to assist further with the clean-up campaign; this is to continue daily for another two or three months in the first place. St. Vincent and Canouan are being used as veritable “Beach Heads” to facilitate the recovery and reconstruction efforts. This use of Canouan as a “beach head” is a joint initiative by a wealthy Trinidad-British homeowner in CARICOM, Mr. Ian Wace and his REACT team and the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Experienced former British army personnel and logistics experts are leading Vincentian workers in this exercise. This initiative is to be ramped up to include reconstruction of buildings in tandem with BRAGSA. As living conditions in Union Island improve, more and more workers will be resident there for the recovery and reconstruction. Some 80 solar lamps have been installed at various points on Union Island so as to engender community and social activities in the night.

VINLEC is working assiduously to restore-electricity. The plan is to have electricity available to the main government facilities fit to receive electricity by the end of August in the Clifton area, hence moving towards Ashton. The overall build-out will then follow a natural progression of the availability of electricity, to buildings fit to receive electricity, by the end of 2024 onwards.

The repairs on the Union Island Secondary School are scheduled for completion by the end of August. Contractors/builders are being sought for the repairs/rebuilding of the Stephanie Browne Primary School and for the start-up of the new building for the Mary

- Hutchinson Primary School. Works on these are commencing very shortly; the former is likely to be ready for school on September 2024. The Ministry of Housing sent a substantial shipment of building materials to Union Island on Monday August 5th. Housing repairs are to start there shortly; and then be ramped-up.
- (ii) On Canouan the clean-up is more or less completed. Work has been, and is being done, on the primary and secondary schools; the Administrative Building; the clinic and doctors' quarters; and two or three others. At least ten private homes are being rebuilt/repaired currently. Electricity is available to all government buildings, including the airport. As houses are rebuilt, they will become connected to the electricity grid. The bulk water system is still fragile and is being addressed by CWSA in concert with one private sector investor. The efforts of a wealthy home-owner in Canouan have been significant. The schools are expected to be ready to receive students in early September. Substantial quantities of building materials have been sent to Canouan to effect repairs to essential government buildings first.
 - (iii) On Mayreau the clean-up is proceeding well under a BRAGSA contractor in concert with the organisation on the ground (the state, a NGO, and community-spirited persons) and the people of Mayreau. The electricity situation is similar to the progress in Canouan. The primary school is to be repaired before September. Building materials have been sent and repairs to government facilities are underway. Many secondary school students from Mayreau have expressed a preference to go to school in Canouan rather than Union Island.
 - (iv) On Bequia: recovery is proceeding well on all fronts
 - (v) On St. Vincent: Recovery is also proceeding very well in all material particulars.

HOUSING

As of Monday August 5, 2024, the Ministry of Housing has commenced the repairs/rebuilding of 235 houses across St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This effort has to be scaled up massively. This is an urgent work in progress. And it will take time, given the magnitude of the damage and destruction of homes by Beryl, and the remainder to be fixed from the volcanic eruptions in 2021, including 6 to built in North Windward and a dozen or so in North Windward, and some 200 or so more to be repaired.

EDUCATION

BRAGSA is at work repairing all educational institutions as per usual driving the long vacation from school. But this year the situation is far, far worse because of Hurricane Beryl. Some 28 educational institutions across St. Vincent and the Grenadines were destroyed, severely damaged or moderately damaged due to Beryl. For example, on St. Vincent, the Calder Primary School has to be rebuilt; similarly, Bishop's College Kingstown (416 students) requires a massive construction intervention; and there are others on St. Vincent. In Bequia the Paget Farm Primary School and the Lower Bay Primary have to be rebuilt. Mention has already been made to the situation in Union Island, Canouan, and Mayreau.

By far, the worst affected is Union Island. The government is providing two options to the parents of the children: Educating and housing them on St. Vincent in the start term; or on Union Island as circumstances admit. The choice is for the parents. The Ministry of Education is collecting information on the choices of the parents. It is expected that there will be schooling on St. Vincent and Union Island. The government is preparing for both options, though the Ministry of Education prefers the St. Vincent option, given all the practical considerations attendant on schooling in Union Island at this time, including availability of housing and other adequate facilities for life, living and learning.

The recovery in Education is complicated further by the use of 26 schools in St. Vincent as shelters. The accommodation issue has to be solved, for these schools to be made available in time for September 2, 2024, for the students. The government is working assiduously on this challenge.

MEANWHILE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS CONTINUE

Meanwhile, the major capital projects in Budget 2024 continues, including the Kuwait-funded road programme; the Taiwanese and CDB funded road programme; the Sandy Bay Sea Defense Project; the CDB-funded school reconstruction programme; the Modern Port Project; the Acute Care Hospital at Arnos Vale (the contractor OECC now has control of the site); the World bank funded projects in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Information Technology; the Saudi funded projects (clinics, cultural hubs, police stations, housing); the Modern Parliament and Court House Projects; the Holiday Inn and other hotel projects; and so forth.

It is a massive capital programme with funds allocated in the 2024 Budget and the supplementary of July 2024. Thus, the capacity issues raised earlier.

FINAL COMMENT

Amidst all our difficulties and challenges, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is on the move. We will recover and reconstruct better. And we will develop sustainably in our people's interest. Of that the government and people are sure! Meanwhile heroic BRAGSA starts today (Wednesday August 7th) the usual road cleaning for the August period; some 5000 persons would be actively engaged nation-wide on this, plus the truckers!

For week of Friday August 9, 2024