

“Growth and Opportunity- Where next for Trinidad?”

Webinar Note

On **28 October 2020**, the Caribbean Council was pleased to welcome Shelly-Ann Mohammed Head of ACCA Caribbean, Asha Javeed, Senior Journalist at Trinidad Express, and Nirad Tewarie CEO of AMCHAM Trinidad, to provide insight on Trinidad and Tobago’s future for a webinar titled: **“Growth and Opportunity- Where next for Trinidad?”**

The event shed light on key opportunities in the country which is now seeking strategies to overcome the health, social and economic challenges presented by COVID-19. At the time of writing, Trinidad and Tobago has reported 5,754 total cases – 715 are active – and 110 deaths.

Trinidad’s economy is the largest in the region. It is also considered one of the more robust in the Caribbean given that, unlike many of the other island states in the region, it does not rely heavily on tourism - highly vulnerable to external shocks - or the financial industry, which is increasingly subject to international scrutiny and pressures. Thanks to its oil and gas wealth, Trinidad has seen the emergence of regionally dominant conglomerates which providing increasingly varied goods and services.

Nonetheless, Trinidad’s economy is faced with the likelihood of very low revenues for much of its economy in 2020. The country has been hit by both pandemic-related restrictions on commercial activity, as well as low energy prices. The cost of COVID-19 will be high for Trinidadians, with 50% of SMEs likely unable to survive the pandemic according to some estimates. As such, in addition to raising health costs for the government, which has also seen tax revenue decline significantly, economic recovery is also likely to be costly as countries in the region grow increasingly concerned about the accessibility of affordable finance to cover economic stimulus plans.

Looking to the future, efforts are needed to make Trinidad and Tobago globally competitive. To make the country more attractive for commerce and investment, measures should aim to reduce red tape and administrative hurdles, improve access to finance for local businesses, increase commercial incentives, and improve access to digital solutions.

Encouragingly, in recent years, Trinidad has seen an expansion of the private sector with the liberalisation of the energy sector, rising manufacture and construction investments, an expansion of the agricultural sector, and announced plans to privatise the operations of Port of Spain.

As local companies seek to cut costs, streamline operations, and sell to domestic, regional and international markets using digital solutions, the government will be pushed to ensure that Trinidad’s successes translate into good jobs and improved quality of life for the country’s inhabitants.

The pandemic has proven to be a reset button for Trinidad and Tobago, which must now determine how its economy will be restructured and how resources will be allocated. The need for a strategy to diversifying Trinidad's oil and gas dependent economy, has been brought back into focus.