

S.A.D. FOR TOCO



Salibay Beach, Toco

Alternative Development Plan

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“Most of us here can still remember when Toco was a really vibrant place. It had busy shops and groceries, its own bakery, hardware, tailor – even its own street theatre. Of course the decline started with the abandoning of the estates and the introduction of the “five days”. But the real nail in the coffin came in 1987, when government workers stopped being paid in Toco.

Since then, they’ve had to go to Sangre Grande to get their fortnightly pay, so most of their money is also being spent down there. I know, I spend too much down there myself....you have to wait for transport anyway, so you pick up the groceries, a few things for the kids and some chicken at KFC. If you just take the Regional Corporation workers, that’s \$180,000 a month which is paid in Grande instead of Toco. And that’s without the Ministry of Works people and the teachers. Imagine what it would do for our economy if all that money stayed right here in Toco.

But too few of us recognised the threat back in 1987. We didn’t stand together to resist the change that would destroy our local businesses. Now we have another threat to our way of life. This time we must work together to reject what we don’t want and to promote the alternatives that can make Toco a thriving community once again. And what better way to start than by demanding that our government workers are paid right here in Toco.”

Extract from a speech by SAD Vice Chairman, Stephen McClatchie.

Mission Statement

Stakeholders Against Destruction (S.A.D.) for Toco is a community-based non-partisan organisation dedicated to empowerment and sustainable development in the Toco region through capacity building, project development and project implementation.

**S.A.D. FOR TOCO
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Alternative Development Plan for Toco was produced by Stakeholders Against Destruction for Toco (**SAD for Toco**), in consultation with a wide cross section of the community. SAD for Toco was set up by the community to prevent the creation of a major industrial and commercial port complex in the heart of Toco, and to produce an alternative plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of the communities from Matura to Matelot.

The plan reflects community consensus that all development activity in the Toco area should take place within a holistic, environmentally sensitive framework, with the eventual goal of showcasing the region as the Nation's "**Green and Clean**" corner. The plan seeks to develop a spirit of partnership between the community, the government, and non-governmental agencies that will benefit the broadest possible base of community residents and stakeholders.

The plan encourages entrepreneurial initiative and creativity at all levels in the community. It seeks first to develop facilities and services that are already in high demand by the numerous visitors to the area. Three projects are proposed to initiate this process: development of **Salibay beach** (Galera Road); upgrading of **Galera Lighthouse Park**; and introduction of a **Food Pavilion** in Toco village offering a variety of meal choices, with the emphasis on local dishes and produce. These projects will not only be financially self-sustaining, but will stimulate a major increase in economic activity in Toco, providing permanent jobs, both directly and indirectly.

The plan calls for the establishment of a **Community-based Ecotourism Centre**, which will implement and manage a comprehensive ecotourism programme involving a high degree of community participation. The centre will co-ordinate the development of ecotourist accommodation and related visitor services, and the management of ecotourist attractions. It will initiate a comprehensive marketing programme, with an overall focus on customer satisfaction and creating a distinctive market identity.

In the area of agricultural revitalisation, the plan proposes a market driven approach focusing on the production of high value items, such as organic products, and targeting niche markets, both internationally and locally. A **Farm and Agricultural Resource Management (FARM) Centre** will organise and apply the existing reservoir of agricultural knowledge and experience in the region, while conducting the studies necessary for charting the best course for the future. The plan also seeks to help those active or interested in the **fishing industry** to more effectively exploit the many business opportunities available in that sector. In view of Toco's record of sporting excellence, **improved sporting facilities** are seen as an investment that will pay healthy dividends athletically, economically, and socially. Finally, the plan introduces a number of carefully co-ordinated **cultural and social initiatives** that are considered vital elements in the overall development of the community.

The plan is based on a vision of environmentally sensitive sustainable development shared by all the communities from Matura to Matelot. However, it is **only the beginning** of the realisation of that vision. It seeks to lay a solid foundation by starting in Toco with projects that are challenging, but clearly achievable by the community; projects that boldly set out in a new direction of sustainable development, but on a scale that assures a high probability of success.

List of Key Projects

Salibay Beach Development

Galera Lighthouse Park

Recreational Dining Facility (Food Pavilion)

Community Based Ecotourism Centre

Farming and Agricultural Resource Management (FARM) Centre

Sporting Complex

Creative Arts Centre

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S.A.D. FOR TOCO

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1.0 Introduction

A consortium of developers, known as Toco Developers Inc., has submitted to the government of Trinidad and Tobago a proposal for the creation of a large multi-purpose industrial port in the centre of Toco. This project would disperse the heart of the village of Toco, and replace it with a major industrial and commercial complex, including an oil terminal dispensing 11,000 tons of fuel oil per month, a base for oil and gas exploration, a long line fishing fleet, a cruise ship terminal, and a pleasure craft marina. The local people have overwhelmingly rejected the developers' proposal, and this type of development for the area. They have instead appointed a group of community representatives to act on their behalf in opposing the port, and in producing an alternative development plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. This organisation is known as SAD (Stakeholders Against Destruction) for Toco.

1.1. History of SAD for Toco

On 17 June 2000, a group of about 30 concerned Toco community members met at the Anglican Church in Toco. They came together to discuss two documents which had recently come to the attention of the community:

- The Land Acquisition Notice published in Newsday of 6 June, announcing the compulsory acquisition by the state of 17 hectares (42 acres) of land in the centre of the village.
- A scale drawing showing the layout of the proposed port and a list of the facilities to be constructed under Phase 1 of the development.

The group reviewed the available information with increasing alarm. They felt the community had been deliberately kept in the dark about the enormous scale of the project, and the dire effects it would have on the natural and social environment. It was agreed that certain actions should be taken on an urgent basis. The wider community must be made aware of the issues raised by the documents, and steps taken to halt the development process until further information was made available.

On this basis, a wide range of community members and other stakeholders were encouraged to attend a public meeting with the developers on June 24th to review the port proposal. The community was far from satisfied with the outcome of these discussions, and called a press conference at the Anglican School in Toco on 8 July 2000 to air its concerns. This was attended by over 100 community members, the vast majority of whom expressed strong opposition to the port proposal. Because it seemed the contract might be awarded to the developers imminently, the meeting agreed that urgent action needed to be taken.

A decision was taken to set up a committee immediately to represent the interests of the affected communities. Individuals were nominated from the floor, and the committee was mandated to halt the forcible acquisition of land, to oppose the granting of a final contract to the development consortium, to seek proper consultation and transparency, and to put forward a more appropriate development plan for the Toco area.

The resulting committee, comprising those nominees who decided to accept the community's mandate, is known as **Stakeholders Against Destruction for Toco** (SAD for Toco, or just SAD). The committee is deliberately large and diverse, including representatives of the various economic interests (agriculture, fishing, ecotourism), the churches, long-term residents (young and old), residents whose property is due to be forcibly acquired, new residents, part-time residents, land-owners and representatives of the other villages between Matura and Matelot.

SAD is committed to sustainable development of the Toco area and believes this can only be achieved through consultation with, and participation from, as many members of the local community as possible. SAD is based in Toco, but holds public meetings on a regular basis in Toco and the surrounding villages, to report to the community and to obtain feedback on its activities and proposals.

1.2. Community Consensus on Development

The people of Toco appreciate the importance of the nation's major industrial and commercial centres. However, they do not want Toco to become another Point Lisas,

Port-of-Spain, or Chaguaramas. Local sentiment is overwhelmingly against rapid large-scale industrial or commercial development that will traumatise existing communities. The strong preference is for community participation in sustainable development that will maintain and enhance the natural, social, and cultural environment, while offering opportunities to all the people of the community for growth and prosperity.

SAD has identified opportunities for sustainable development in the following areas:

- 1. Traditional local tourism and recreational activity.**
- 2. Community Based Ecotourism, including nature tourism and adventure tourism.**
- 3. Revitalisation and modernisation of agriculture and agricultural processing, including exploitation of developing niche markets for speciality products, both locally and internationally.**
- 4. Revitalisation and modernisation of the fishing industry.**
- 5. Consolidation and expansion of Toco as a centre of sporting excellence.**
- 6. Cultural and social initiatives.**

Sustainable development in these areas will contribute far more to the long-term economic and social well being of our community, and of the nation as a whole, than the ill-conceived semi-private industrial port complex.

1.3 An Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development

Sustainable development, which preserves a healthy social and natural environment for future generations, cannot be successful on the basis of a fragmented or piecemeal approach. Promoting the rich biodiversity of the Toco area, while at the same time endorsing a development which has demonstrated a singular lack of concern for the environment, is clearly a recipe for failure. SAD for Toco has therefore adopted a holistic, environmentally sensitive approach to all development activity in the area.

Our long-term objective is for the Toco region to become known, locally and internationally, as a leader in the preservation and promotion of a healthy environment. Toco will be the "**green and clean**" corner of Trinidad and Tobago. Not only will its ecotourism attractions be maintained in a pristine and unspoiled state, but its fruits,

vegetables, local dishes, processed foods and other farm products will be in high demand for their healthy, 'natural' quality. The overriding importance of preserving a healthy natural, social, and cultural environment will be integrated in all the initiatives and activities proposed in this plan. Our entire country will gain something priceless by having one region dedicated to remaining healthy and unpolluted, in harmony with nature, **green and clean.**

2.0 Traditional Local Tourism and Recreational Activity

The greater Toco region (Matura to Matelot) currently hosts significant numbers of visitors, holidaymakers, and recreation-seekers. This is due to its relatively pristine environment, its beaches, wildlife, nature and hiking trails, spectacular scenery, and not least, its friendly hospitable people. SAD is proposing that we start our community development by **putting our house in order.**

In view of the near-absence of any amenities or services for visitors to Toco, the increasing popularity of the area represents a wealth of unsatisfied customer demand. Development should begin by ensuring that visitors to the area can enjoy a pleasant recreational experience without having to bring their food, beverages, and other basic necessities with them. This can be accomplished quickly, and with minimal risk, by improving and upgrading sites that are already popular but are lacking in basic amenities. In conjunction with offering visitors easy access to a range of local cuisines and delicacies, this will quickly generate permanent jobs and an increase in economic activity that will primarily benefit local residents.

SAD for Toco is proposing three projects that will both satisfy these customer needs, and reverse the degradation of some of Toco's most popular sites. The projects are:

- 1. Salibay Beach Improvement**
- 2. Galera Lighthouse Park Upgrade**
- 3. Establishment of a Food Pavilion in the village of Toco**

These three projects together can be described as “putting our house in order”, because they rectify existing deficiencies, and are therefore crucial to the success of many of the other projects proposed in this plan.

2.1 Project 1. Salibay Beach (Galera Rd, Toco) Development.

This lovely beach with its offshore reef attracts hundreds of visitors on weekends and holidays. However, in spite of its popularity, the site is completely without visitor amenities, and many first-time visitors, both local and international, are appalled and outraged that such a beautiful area has been allowed to degenerate into what often looks like a rubbish dump.

There is no designated parking area. As a result, much of what was once beach area has become rutted and muddy due to heavy vehicular traffic as visitors bring their vehicles right up to the high tide mark. There are no toilet facilities, no changing rooms, no facilities for preparing and selling food and beverages, and inadequate bins for litter disposal. Consequently, much of the natural beauty and potential enjoyment of this site has been marred and degraded by uncontrolled human activity. This includes huge amounts of paper and plastic waste from meals brought in by the large numbers of visitors, and the cumulative effects of hundreds of people having to “go to the bathroom” behind a convenient bush.

The site is blessed with a wide expanse of flat land between the beachfront and the road, as well as a significant amount of useable space on the far side of the road. The following improvements are therefore proposed:

- Paved and gated parking areas in the segment closest to the existing paved road (Galera Road), and on the far side of the road away from the beach
- The construction of buildings housing toilets, showers and changing rooms.
- Lifeguard structures and a First Aid station.
- A food and beverage concession area with appropriately designed buildings, facilities, and amenities, that blend harmoniously with the environment.
- Animal resistant trash receptacles throughout the area.
- A designated camp site area.
- Facilities to support and promote the sport of surfing.
- A beach volleyball court with appropriately designed bleachers, located at the western end of the beach, away from the main bathing and surfing area..

- Designated areas for rental of recreational and sporting equipment, and for craft and souvenir concessions.
- A site maintenance and security facility.

Complete project details will be set out in a formal proposal. This project is expected to be financially self-sustaining within one year of completion of construction. It is anticipated that TIDCO will be responsible for the acquisition of the land and construction of the facility in consultation with SAD for Toco. Thereafter, SAD for Toco will manage and maintain the facility in conjunction with the Regional Corporation and other local organisations. SAD's management and maintenance functions will generate employment directly, and further employment will be generated by the increase in local business activity. The objective is that all operating costs, including employees' wages and salaries, will be covered by revenues generated from the various activities at the facility.

2.2 Project 2. Galera Lighthouse Park

This is another popular attraction for day-trippers, weekend visitors, holidaymakers, and overseas tourists. It is situated at the very north-eastern tip of the island, where the great Atlantic Ocean meets the blue Caribbean Sea, and has great potential as an attraction for all types of visitors. However, like nearby Salibay, the site is without any basic visitor amenities.

The following improvements are proposed:

- A parking area, properly surfaced and marked, with a controlled entrance gate.
- A Visitors Information Building with washroom facilities, refreshments, and gift shop.
- Repair of the lighthouse tower, including access to the upper level.
- An observation deck with facilities for night sky astronomical observation and study.
- An appropriately designed picnic and recreation area with playground facilities for children.
- Walkways and observation areas along scenic routes.

This park is expected to be financially self-sustaining within one year of completion. Revenues will be generated primarily from parking fees, concession leases, and special

events. Complete project details will be set out in a formal proposal. As with the Salibay project, it is anticipated that TIDCO will be responsible for the improvements to the facility in consultation with SAD for Toco, after which SAD for Toco will operate and maintain the facility.

2.3 Project 3. Recreational Dining Facility (Food Pavilion)

Probably the most frequent complaint heard from visitors to the Toco area (and even from locals) is difficulty in finding “something to eat”. This is despite the fact that many Toco residents have completed formal training in food preparation and service. SAD for Toco is therefore proposing the establishment of a food service and dining pavilion in the village of Toco. This facility will feature several **local** food service concessions with an attractively designed covered/open-air outdoor area for casual dining. This will give area residents an opportunity to enter the food service business without the need for large initial capital investments that are beyond their means. It is also a “pump priming” mechanism for the future development of restaurants to serve the expected growth in tourism and ecotourism. Ecotourists particularly enjoy dining at facilities that serve authentic local food and operate in a manner that respects the natural environment. A working dirt oven would appeal to visitors and locals alike.

SAD has identified a site with an unused state-owned building that is suitable for this facility. SAD will be approaching the government for use of this site. Further details on construction, operation, and management of this facility will be provided in a separate proposal.

The three projects described above are the foundation projects for further sustainable development in Toco. They will generate a rapid increase in economic activity within Toco, providing opportunities for local residents to accumulate capital, and qualify for credit. They can then launch or expand their own innovative businesses, stimulating further growth and prosperity in this area. This approach to development keeps control firmly in the hands of the local community, and this is what the people of Toco want.

3.0 Community Based Ecotourism

The International Ecotourism Society, one of the world's leading ecotourism organisations, defines ecotourism as follows:

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”

Demand for this type of tourism has increased rapidly over the past 10 years and continues to rise (estimates of annual growth rates vary between 10 and 30%). The greater Toco area (Matura to Matelot) has great potential for attracting ecotourists thanks to its rich biodiversity, wide range of natural attractions, and pool of relevant skills. With community-based ecotourism, community residents retain control of their development, and receive the lion's share of the economic benefits. Mass tourism has the opposite effect. Community residents lose control of their community, and most of the profits go to rich investors.

Achieving success in ecotourism is not just a matter of building a few lodges at the edge of the forest. Studies of ecotourism in other developing countries contain many lessons from which we can benefit. One of these is that **community-based** ecotourism projects in which *the entire community has some level of involvement and some level of benefit* tend to be more successful than those imposed by external interests (whether private or governmental). Another important lesson is that in instances where such projects do founder, it is often due to poor customer service and inadequate overseas marketing. Drawing on its continuing analysis of the ecotourism industry, SAD for Toco is approaching this opportunity from three main directions:

- 1. Development and co-ordination of ecotourist accommodation and related visitor services**
- 2. Development, management and maintenance of ecotourism attractions**
- 3. Co-ordination of ecotourism marketing and promotional activities.**

To ensure complete integration of all elements of its programme, and to achieve maximum community involvement and participation, SAD for Toco proposes to establish a **Community-based Ecotourism Centre**, from which it will implement and manage its Ecotourism Programme. This facility will not only provide information and assistance to the community, but will also receive ideas and feedback from the community, and work

to ensure that the whole community develops a sense of ownership of its ecotourism programme, and derives some meaningful measure of benefit from it.

3.1 Ecotourist Accommodation and Related Visitor Services Programme

Many community residents have completed training in some aspect of the hospitality industry. They are interested in providing guesthouse or bed-and-breakfast-style facilities and related services aimed at the ecotourism market. Within the ecotourism market, there is scope for a wide range of different types of accommodation, from the very simple to the relatively luxurious. As with any service enterprise, effective marketing, customer satisfaction, and efficient management are indispensable keys to success. SAD's Ecotourism Centre will therefore offer the following centralised services to local people:

- Information and guidance on design, furnishing and maintenance of lodging facilities.
- Assistance in accessing guesthouse improvement loans.
- Training courses in management of lodging operations, with particular emphasis on customer service.
- Training, co-ordination and management of ancillary support services such as meal preparation and delivery, laundry service, building maintenance, security services, transportation, and tour guiding arrangements.
- Marketing and sales assistance and co-ordination.
- Information about environmentally sound practices and products.

SAD's goal will be to maximise the opportunities for skills development and employment of local people, while enabling even the smallest bed and breakfast-type operator to access high quality services - at an affordable price, and on an as-needed basis. This will give operators the opportunity to focus on managing their lodges and keeping their customers happy, while SAD's Ecotourism Centre handles such things as marketing, reservations, transportation, and scheduling of tours or other activities.

3.2 Development and Maintenance of Ecotourism Attractions

The Toco area is well endowed with natural attractions, which can make it an effective competitor in the ecotourism market. However, enjoyment of these attractions must be managed in such a way that the natural environment is not damaged or destroyed, while the visitor gets a completely satisfying experience.

It is clear from the example of Costa Rica and elsewhere that involvement of the local population is an indispensable element in developing a successful ecotourism project. The local people know the area best, and have a deep appreciation of its natural attributes. They are key stakeholders in the enterprise and are, in fact, a part of the environment. Without their willing participation, the project is not likely to succeed.

Some of the activities and attractions requiring their participation include:

- Nature Trail development and maintenance: these are trails intended primarily for observing interesting animals and plants in their natural habitat, and for appreciating the region's biodiversity
- Hiking Trail development and maintenance: while these will also offer a "nature" experience, they will be of primary interest to hiking enthusiasts
- Establishment of bird watching routes and trails: these will be specifically for bird watching
- Wildlife conservation and protection programmes
- Turtle protection programmes and turtle watching tours
- Biodiversity research, monitoring and study programmes
- Environmental awareness education programmes for young people
- Area Beautification and Maintenance Programmes

These activities can provide stable long-term employment for area residents, much of which can be directly supported by fees charged to visitors. SAD will develop specific proposals for training and employing community residents to perform these functions. Required skills and services will include maintainers of trails and access routes, game and litter wardens, tour guides, and other protectors and maintainers of the natural environment. SAD will actively involve local people in designing tours and other ecotourism experiences for visitors.

As part of its marketing initiative, SAD will develop a catalogue of ecotours, which will briefly describe each tour. It will include such things as:

- Main features and attractions
- Duration of tour
- Degree of difficulty or challenge
- Recommended clothing and equipment
- Meal options and arrangements
- Transportation options and arrangements
- Geographical references
- Educational or other documented references

A number of Toco area residents have already been trained as tour guides, turtle and game wardens, and litter wardens. SAD will arrange for additional or refresher training as necessary. SAD will also enter into partnerships with national nature-based tour operators so that their customers can enjoy Toco's ecotourism attractions in the company of local guides.

3.3 Co-ordination of Marketing Activities

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world today, and ecotourism is one of the fastest growing segments of this industry. To compete effectively, it is essential that Toco differentiates itself within the global ecotourism market, and establishes its own unique identity. SAD's marketing programme will focus on targeting specific niche markets whose needs coincide with the unique ecotourism features and other special qualities of the Toco experience. Marketing efforts associated with this ecotourism programme will fall into the following areas:

External

- Marketing and promotion of the entire Toco region as a prime ecotourism destination with unique advantages and appeal to the traveller.
- Marketing and promotion of specific attractions, activities, and events in the Toco area.
- Marketing and promotion of individual guesthouses, lodges and other accommodation, and of related services.

Local

- Promotion of ecotourism benefits, opportunities, and best practices among the community residents.

It is essential that all elements of the ecotourism programme be co-ordinated to ensure that:

- The desired message is effectively communicated to the potential customer in a cohesive and harmonious manner.
- Potential customers perceive Toco as an attractive alternative to other ecotourism destinations, and find their ecotourism experience in Toco to be as good as, or better than, what is promised in promotional communications.
- The marketing activities go hand in hand with the development and availability of the complete Toco ecotourism product, including quality accommodation, visitor-oriented support services, and access to attractions and activities with enduring visitor appeal.

As the stresses of modern urban life continue to increase, more and more people seek to get away to a natural environment to renew their energies and revive their inner spirit. Toco residents will specialise in providing this valuable service, and in sharing with visitors all the things that Toco people like most about Toco.

4.0 Agricultural Revitalisation

Historically, agriculture has played a major role in Toco's economy but its importance has declined since the 1960's, with many estates now abandoned or inaccessible.

Revitalisation of agriculture can play a vital role in the sustainable development of the Toco region. However, there are many interrelated facets to this enterprise, and a carefully co-ordinated approach is required. It is not simply a matter of recultivating abandoned estates. Creative methods must be devised for returning these estates to productive and profitable use, as they represent a valuable unutilised resource.

Success will also depend on identifying crop species that flourish best under local conditions and hold the best promise of profitability in the marketplace. Gaining access to the most profitable markets is also another key factor for success. In short, agricultural revitalisation must be based on the realities and opportunities of the local and global marketplaces, and on the methods and technologies best suited to the realities of the Toco region. In the near term, Toco is unlikely to become a large-scale agricultural producer when viewed from an international perspective. Our best opportunities may lie in market niches where we can have a competitive advantage despite our small size. Our objective should be not merely to follow what others are doing in agriculture, but to focus on needs and opportunities that others are not yet fully addressing.

4.1 Organic Farming - Niche Market Opportunity?

There is a strong and rapidly growing demand worldwide for organically grown products and for manufactured products made from organically grown fruits and vegetables. A recent report in the prestigious British Guardian weekly newspaper cited a 40% annual growth rate in the demand for organic products in the UK, with annual sales of US \$800 Million.

There may be opportunities for farmers in the Toco area to service these markets by specialising in organic farming of high value products, and developing expertise and leadership in this area. For example, instead of simply producing fruit juice beverages, concentrates, jams, and similar products, Toco can specialise in producing organic fruit juice beverages, jams, and similar products for specific markets where such items are in high demand. Focusing on organic farming will enhance Toco's image as an environmentally green and clean area, while making its products sought after by the

growing base of consumers who seek products that are free of chemical contamination. Toco is already a relatively pristine and chemical-free area. It can capitalise on this condition by specialising in natural methods of fertilisation and pest control, and building a prestigious image for foods, herbs, and health products produced in Toco.

4.2 Toco's FARM Centre - Getting Organised for Revitalisation

Many farmers in the Toco area are already producing impressive crops without the use of chemicals. There is clearly a wealth of untapped agricultural knowledge, expertise and talent in the Toco area that can be used to far better effect than is currently the case.

SAD will initiate its own **Farming and Agricultural Resource Management (FARM) Centre** by drawing upon existing knowledge and expertise within the Toco community and beyond. The centre will provide leadership and direction in the revitalisation of agriculture by pursuing a dual strategy as follows:

a) Applying current knowledge

The FARM Centre will provide assistance and support to farmers and entrepreneurs in the following areas:

- Verification, documentation and dissemination of success stories and lessons learned
- Information on research, education, training, and best practices, particularly in organic farming
- Information on sources of financing for agricultural projects
- Proposal development
- Farm management
- Marketing, and access to local and foreign markets
- Consolidation and development of effective co-operatives

b) Acquiring additional knowledge

Concurrently with these activities, the FARM Centre will initiate a **comprehensive study of agriculture** throughout the Toco region. This study must address the following areas as a minimum:

- An assessment of the current state of agriculture in the Matura to Matelot region, including a survey of **existing studies** of agriculture in this region.
- An assessment of the agricultural and farming skills available in the region.

- An assessment of current and emerging niche markets with attractive long-term prospects.
- Recommendations for accessing and servicing the most profitable markets relative to Toco's agricultural attributes.
- Best approaches to organic farming in the Toco area.

SAD will approach the appropriate agencies for assistance and co-operation in conducting these studies and in promptly implementing effective programmes based on their results.

In addition to these activities, the FARM Centre will develop programmes to encourage young people to pursue careers in agriculture and agribusiness. Many young people in the Toco area have expressed a passion for farming, but don't see a clear and viable career path along which they can pursue their dream. Much of the future energy and innovation needed to revitalise our agriculture can come from these young people. Today, there are exciting and rewarding career opportunities in farming and agribusiness. SAD's FARM Centre will provide the leadership and encouragement that so often makes the crucial difference between success and mediocrity (or worse) as young people enter adulthood. SAD will also insist that wherever possible, Toco's bright young people be included in the study teams and projects listed above.

5.0 Revitalisation and Modernisation of the Fishing Industry

The demand for seafood products continues to increase both locally and internationally. However, this does not justify the marginalisation of our local fishermen by the sudden introduction of a mega-scale fishing operation based on a fleet of long line factory boats. SAD believes that the development of local fishing should proceed in a way that allows the men and women working in this enterprise to play a central role in its expansion, and to be among the primary beneficiaries of its future growth and improvement. SAD is therefore proposing the establishment of a training programme that will periodically offer appropriately designed courses in the following broad areas:

- Safe and efficient fishing techniques
- Proper methods of handling harvested fish
- Preservation and processing of seafood products

- Business opportunities and operations in the seafood industry.

This will allow the people in the local fishing community to take initiatives based on their own needs and abilities, and to pursue the opportunities they perceive to be most potentially rewarding. SAD will make its FARM centre available as a co-ordination and information facility for persons working in or interested in the local fishing industry. As with its agricultural initiatives, SAD will encourage an entrepreneurial approach to local growth and prosperity in this industry. SAD will focus on removing the most difficult barriers faced by persons or groups wishing to take advantage of business opportunities in the seafood industry.

6.0 Sporting Activities

Despite its relative lack of sporting facilities, Toco has managed to excel in sports, and has produced many notable athletes and sporting figures. A sporting complex in the area would be a worthwhile investment, with the potential for generating revenue and producing more world-class sportsmen and women, in a wider range of disciplines, than can be produced with our current limited facilities.

A modern complex can serve as the sporting hub for the Northeast region, and will afford promising young athletes throughout the area the opportunity to achieve their full potential. It will also encourage the formation of sporting clubs and leagues in the area, giving our young people the opportunity to enjoy the many rewards of participation in sports, and providing recreation and entertainment for people of all ages. A well-designed sporting facility will stimulate further economic activity in the area, and can be a money earner for the community. The Hambug Trace area has already been considered by the Regional Corporation for a development of this kind and TSTT has in the past shown interest in supporting such a venture.

6.1 Recreational Sports

Toco's attractiveness as a recreational centre can also be enhanced by making it a centre for beach volleyball (an Olympic sport), mountain biking, and surfing.

6.1.1 Beach Volleyball

There is sufficient space at Salibay beach for the creation of a beach volleyball court with appropriate spectator seating area. This facility can be used for casual games as well as by organised leagues and associations. Once the facility is established, SAD will work with appropriate persons and organisations to develop and manage the activities, and to make Toco the centre in T&T for beach volleyball. This sport has wide appeal to people of all ages, both as participants and as spectators. It is certain to draw additional visitors to Salibay beach, thus increasing the economic activity that will be generated by this facility.

6.1.2 Mountain Biking

The Toco area has many miles of old unimproved roads and traces that could provide interesting and challenging courses for mountain bikers at all levels of participation in the sport. Many of these courses involve little, if any, conflict with vehicular traffic. And for those interested primarily in the health benefits of the sport, there is no cleaner air to be found anywhere in Trinidad. SAD is working to have these potential courses evaluated by mountain biking enthusiasts with the objective of producing a programme of events and activities to promote the Toco area as an excellent region for mountain biking.

6.1.3 Surfing

Salibay beach is already a popular surfing site, and improvements to this beach should include the provision of facilities and concessions to serve surfing enthusiasts, as recommended in section 2.1.

In addition to their inherent benefits, all these sporting activities will generate permanent self-sustaining jobs, and significantly increase the level of economic activity in the Toco area.

7.0 Cultural and Social Initiatives

Plans for the cultural development of Toco should build on the existing organisations, institutions, events and skills which exist in the area and seek to reinforce them through the provision of additional infrastructure, skills training and co-operative marketing. Toco already boasts a number of events that attract large crowds from the region and beyond - the Toco Season, the Old Boy's Fete, the Toco Trade Fair and the Fisherman's Fete. It is also unique in Trinidad in having its own Folk Museum, which provides a focal point for developing an appreciation of the region's history, culture and environment. Traditional craft skills are practised by many individuals, and marketed co-operatively through organisations such as the St. David's Handicrafts Association.

This section of the SAD Development Plan contains suggestions that have been received from several sources within the community, including individuals involved in many of the activities highlighted above. The next step will be to form a Cultural Committee with representation from all the relevant organisations, including youth groups, in order to finalise a collaborative cultural development plan and calendar of events. SAD recognises the importance to the community of having its own radio station, Radio Toco 106.7 FM. Radio Toco and the Toco Foundation have made significant contributions to the development of the community. SAD looks forward to building an effective working relationship with the Foundation¹ with the goal of making Toco a vibrant and prosperous community once again.

7.1 Creative Arts Centre

The Toco region is rich in creative talent but there is no central venue where these talents can be developed on a consistent basis and showcased to the outside world. The centre would serve as the focal point for classes and workshops in areas such as music-making, musical appreciation, dance, theatre, creative writing, painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, pottery, ceramics, textile crafts etc. Particular emphasis would be placed on

¹ This statement was written before the leader of the Toco Foundation asked Foundation members to endorse him as a political party candidate for the next General Election. ***It no longer represents SAD's position.*** See Attachment 1 for a full statement regarding SAD's position in relation to the Toco Foundation.

keeping alive the varied musical and dance traditions of Trinidad and Tobago and on exploring their heritage in similar forms in Africa, India, S.America, Europe and the wider Caribbean. Similarly, in the area of crafts, the emphasis would be on the use of local materials while drawing on skills and expertise from within and outside the region. The centre would be staffed by locally-based, trained tutors but would also offer residencies to artists and craftspersons from overseas. The centre would also act as a performance and exhibition centre which, in conjunction with the Folk Museum, would reinforce the cultural element of Toco's ecotourism portfolio.

Initial funding would be sought from the Ministry of Culture, while foreign embassies and High Commissions would be approached to support residencies of artists from their respective countries. Once the centre was established, revenue would also be generated through tuition fees, performances, and sale of artwork and crafts. Although the classes would primarily be directed towards the local community, it is also anticipated that the centre would host weekend workshops and conferences, attracting paying participants from other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, and from overseas.

7.2 Community Library

SAD strongly endorses the need for a good community library for the north-eastern region. In addition to a well-stocked fiction and reference section, the non-fiction sections should place particular emphasis on local and national history and on all the areas of proposed development such as agriculture, fishing, ecotourism, the hospitality industry, the environment, crafts etc. To ensure that the library is truly a community resource, a van should visit each of the villages in the surrounding area on a weekly or fortnightly basis, paying particular attention to the needs of the elderly, disabled and others who cannot travel to the central library. The van would travel with a selection of the most popular books, and would also supply books reserved by telephone or in person on the previous visit. The library could also serve as a computer lab and Internet café.

7.3 Co-ordination of Marketing for Cultural Activities

In keeping with its proposals for ecotourism, SAD believes that it is essential to have a coherent marketing strategy, highlighting and promoting the unique nature of Toco's cultural offerings. Marketing efforts would include:

- a cultural section in all ecotourism marketing initiatives.
- monthly bulletins listing all the cultural events taking place that month.
- an events noticeboard in each of the villages from Matura to Matelot on which the bulletin and notices about individual events could be posted.
- events boards at strategic points along the main roads between Valencia/Sangre Grande and Matelot.

In the longer term, SAD would like to institute some form of newspaper or journal which would fill the void left by the Toco Folk Museum Quarterly and Eastern Voice.

7.4 Community-based rehabilitation

A community-oriented development plan must take into consideration not only the economic well-being of its members but also their health, education and social well-being. In the absence of intervention, certain members of any community find themselves excluded from economic and other opportunities as a result of illness, physical or mental disability, dysfunctional home environment, or other economic or educational disadvantage. SAD proposes to facilitate the rehabilitation and inclusion of such individuals in the Toco community through the introduction of a disability rehabilitation programme, similar to that piloted in Moruga with the assistance of WHO and PAHO. Such a programme would involve the development of a pool of educators, health workers, social workers, psychologists etc. who would work with individuals (and their families) to overcome disadvantage or disability and maximise each person's potential to participate in, and contribute to, society.

8.0 Other Community Development Initiatives

SAD for Toco's continuous interaction with the greater Toco community has resulted in an outpouring of valuable ideas and exciting proposals for making the community a better place to live for all of its residents.

8.1 National Parks and Nature Reserves

Many countries around the world have discovered that the most effective way to preserve natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations is to place them outside the arena of competitive market activity. The method most often chosen to accomplish this is the creation of national parks and nature reserves. SAD will be lobbying for early implementation of the proposed **National Parks system**, and for the involvement of local communities in the development and management of the parks. The most recent proposals published by the National Parks and Wildlife Management Project include a 8200 hectare national park stretching between Matura and Grand Riviere, and comprising mainly intact Mora type forest.

SAD will also explore other innovative ideas in this area. These include offering incentives for landowners to designate portions of their lands as **private nature reserves** or **wildlife sanctuaries**, based on qualifying criteria to be developed. Also worth pursuing is the concept of small local nature reserves whereby relatively small areas within or adjacent to communities can be designated as **Local Nature Reserves**, and maintained as natural green spaces, free of commercial activity, for the enjoyment of all community members, present and future. The savannah in Port-of-Spain is a good approximation of the Local Nature Reserve concept, albeit one that is under serious threat from commercial activity due to its profit-making potential.

8.2 State Responsibility for Infrastructure and Services

The projects in this plan are intended to stimulate economic activity, social cohesion, and cultural expression primarily through the energies, talents, and creativity of community members. The Toco community is taking responsibility for its own development. However, the people of Toco believe that certain improvements to infrastructure and services are properly the responsibility of the government. Of particular importance is ensuring that government workers are paid in Toco not Sangre Grande. This is crucial to the rapid stimulation of local economic growth and to the viability of a local banking service. A proper study of local transport needs must also be undertaken to ensure that rural transportation is scheduled to match the patterns of demand, particularly at peak periods. Other infrastructural improvements that are needed are:

- An upgraded police station for our police

- A fire station
- Improved medical facilities
- A modern revenue office
- A proper post office
- Adequately maintained roads and bridges
- Telephone service for the whole community, including cellular service.

As the Toco community aspires to achieve its full potential, it expects the government to do its part by removing the infrastructural impediments to progress.

8.3 Other community contributions

Many of the contributions received from the community require further study and evaluation to establish their full potential. Among the suggestions being evaluated are:

- Establishment of trade schools and/or technical guild type workshops.
- Environmental improvements to the Almond Tree beach area.
- Development of a protective cropping (undercover garden) project.

8.4 Development in Other Communities from Matura to Matelot

Because the village of Toco faced the most immediate threat from undesired heavy industrial development, this Alternative Development Plan focuses on high priority alternative projects in and around the village of Toco. However, SAD for Toco is conducting a series of meetings and consultations in all of the villages from Matura to Matelot and will work with them in producing development plans for their communities. These communities already have representatives on the SAD for Toco committee, and are fully supportive of the type of development being proposed for the area as a whole. Once SAD is assured of co-operation and support for its Alternative Development Plan for Toco, it will expand the scope of its plan to include projects in the other Northeast communities.

9.0 Development Priorities

Development should begin with the projects that can generate a high return in terms of economic activity, in both the short and long term, on the basis of a relatively modest initial investment. The three projects described in Section 2, - Salibay, Lighthouse Park,

and Food Pavilion – will satisfy an existing and growing customer demand, and are therefore excellent investments in the community. SAD for Toco recommends that TIDCO approach these three projects as a single operation, and begin work on them immediately and concurrently. The sites are relatively close together and there is a significant degree of commonality between the projects. Consequently, there are significant advantages and favourable economies to be gained by integrating these three projects into a single operation. Where appropriate, the incorporation of common design themes can enhance aesthetic appeal while helping to establish a distinct Toco image.

During the construction phase of the Section 2 projects, SAD will focus on implementing its other two high priority initiatives, the Community Based Ecotourism Centre, and the Farming and Agricultural Resource Management (FARM) Centre. However, SAD will pursue its other initiatives in fishing, sports, and culture as facilitated by available opportunities and resources.

This plan focuses on those projects that represent the most logical start on the road to sustainable self-development for Toco. This is by no means a complete or final list. It is a credible and manageable start to the type of development desired by the people of this area. SAD for Toco expects to be successful in these initial development initiatives, and to build on these successes by continuing to act as leaders in initiating the type of development which the communities in this region support.

10.0 Organisation and Management

SAD for Toco is aware that resources for this type of alternative development are likely to be scarce, particularly in the early stages. SAD will continually seek to ensure the best balance of economy and sufficiency of human and other resources. However, SAD is also sensitive to the fact that projects with a strong potential for success sometimes fail because of insufficient management and administrative resources.

10.1 Core Management and Staff

To implement and manage the programmes and projects described above, SAD will establish a central office with the following core staff:

- A Manager
- An Office Administrator
- An Operations Supervisor

This staff will be responsible for much of the planning activity that is a prerequisite for ensuring successful operations. It will also have responsibility for the drafting of detailed project proposals, project implementation and project management, and will report to the SAD Management Committee. Additional staff will be added only when required by the scope of operations being undertaken, and as funding becomes available to support the additional staff.

Each of SAD's projects will be based on a detailed proposal wherein staffing requirements will be provided and properly justified. One of SAD's central objectives is to use sound management principles to make all of its projects and programmes become self-sustaining in the shortest possible time. With the exception of the social services, all of the projects contained in this plan are expected to eventually generate revenues in excess of operating costs, including wages and salaries.

10.2 Volunteers and Interns

As a non-profit organisation dedicated to community service, SAD will encourage volunteerism within the community, and will give recognition to persons and organisations who make significant contributions of voluntary time and service in support of community goals and objectives. SAD will also provide opportunities for interns to obtain first hand on the job experience. This will help young people to pursue their career goals while helping SAD to meet its programme objectives.

11.0 Funding, Financial Accountability and Transparency

SAD for Toco believes that this Alternative Development Plan can be a model basis for co-operation between the community, the government, international agencies and other non-governmental organisations. The plan has been generated from within the community, and has very strong community support. The scale of economic activity that will be generated by these development initiatives far exceeds the level of investment required for their initiation. The government and other funding agencies have an excellent opportunity to be partners in this investment in community-based development, an investment that will benefit the country as a whole.

The people of Toco have demonstrated commendable foresight in rejecting the “instant gratification” of job-producing industrial development because of its extensive and permanent collateral damage to the physical, social, and cultural environment. They have instead embraced a more careful and environmentally responsible approach to development in their community. SAD will turn first of all to the community for financial support in pursuit of these initiatives. SAD also hopes to be supported by agencies that promote and encourage this type of development, and that must often struggle to persuade communities to adopt this approach. SAD for Toco will therefore be preparing detailed proposals for investment in the community, and presenting them to a wide range of government and non-governmental agencies.

SAD for Toco will establish in its constitution, the requirement for an **independent internal audit committee** that will be elected by the membership, and will operate independently of the management committee. This independent committee will ensure complete transparency and accountability in all financial and other official transactions and operations.

12.0 Conclusion

This document attempts to capture the aspirations of a community determined to take responsibility for its own future, a community aspiring to establish itself as one of our nation’s most innovative and forward-looking rural communities. The Toco community is committed to taking control of its own development, and to pursuing prosperity and

fulfilment as willing custodians and protectors of our rich natural environment. This places additional responsibilities on each and every member of the community. Both as individuals and as a community, we treasure most, not what is handed to us with little or no effort on our part, but that which we acquire through our own energies, our own creativity, and our own resolve. Let us rise to the challenge of building our future together, with confidence in ourselves and each other, with a willingness to pull together to overcome the obstacles we will inevitably face, and with the firm conviction that **the preferred developers of Toco are the people of Toco.**

Attachment 1

Statement on the relationship between SAD for Toco and the Toco Foundation

SAD for Toco is a non-partisan, non-governmental community based organisation. SAD believes that non-governmental community based organisations should serve everyone in the community, and should not endorse or support any political party. SAD encourages all members of our community to take an active interest in the affairs of the community and of the country, to support the party of their choice, and to vote as they see fit in all elections. SAD reserves the right to take positions on issues of importance to the community, and to express support for, or disagreement with, any individual or organisation, with respect to such issues. However, SAD will make no attempt to influence the political opinions of any individual or group, either directly or indirectly.

The leader of the Toco Foundation has requested – and received – the “endorsement” of his membership to contest the general election as a member of a political party. Further, this “endorsement” is being presented to the nation as **community endorsement for that political party**. As such, the Toco Foundation has taken a public position as a politically partisan organisation.

In order to remain completely non-partisan, SAD cannot be associated in any way with the Toco Foundation, because any such association might be interpreted as support for a political party, and would compromise SAD’s position as a non-partisan organisation. SAD stands willing to work constructively and harmoniously with the Toco Foundation, if and when it becomes a non-partisan, non-governmental community organisation.

12th September, 2000