

Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 2022

## **YOUTH, SPORTS, CULTURE AND BUDGET 2022**

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***Excerpt from the 2022 Budget Presentation of Minister of Finance, Hon. Camillo Gonsalves***

As is our practice, the Government has crafted Budget 2022 as a youth budget. Throughout the pages of our estimates, the focus on the wellbeing, advancement and opportunities for youth is self-evident. That youth-centric approach permeates almost every initiative in Budget 2022. While it is impossible to reiterate them all here without being accused of repetition, it is worth mentioning that youth-centred initiatives like PRYME, equipping and rehabilitating schools, TVET programmes, generous scholarships and tuition assistance, the YES, SET and Labour-Intensive Agriculture programmes, upgrades to sporting facilities – both through the budget and the National Lotteries Authority – will conservatively cost over \$45 million in 2022.

The jobs being created in 2022 – particularly those in the hospitality, call centre, Blue Economy and IT segments – will overwhelmingly benefit young people. In a year in which our economy is expected to grow between five and eight percent, Budget 2022 is laser-focussed on helping youth to take advantage of the upcoming opportunities. Similarly, our foundational investments in digital transformation and climate resilience will make life and business in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines more sustainable, and more enjoyable for future generations.

An important goal of Budget 2022 is the reinvigoration of the National Youth Council, an initiative that was derailed by the challenges of 2021. Similarly, relief coordination within the Ministry for Youth and Social Development negatively affected our ability to develop a revised National Youth Policy and establish a Child & Youth Development Management Committee. These initiatives will take place in 2022. The Government will build upon ongoing efforts to work with vulnerable and at-risk youth in the development of coping skills and alternative avenues for their energies and talents.

The investment in sporting infrastructure took place even while the Pandemic limited opportunities for their use. In 2021, through the National Lotteries Authority, hardcourts and playing fields were either constructed or upgraded nationwide, including Lowmans Hill, Green Hill, Glen and

Evesham. That work continues this year, as increased vaccination levels portend a greater use of athletic facilities in 2022.

Budget 2022 marks the beginning of a multi-year programme of rehabilitation for the Arnos Vale Sporting Complex that will include work to repair spectator seating and install an electronic scoreboard and replay screen. A total of \$1 million is allocated this year, with the procurement and installation of the electronic scoreboard timed to coincide with the opening of additional hotel rooms, which Cricket West Indies has cited as an impediment to our hosting of major matches. Whether or not the availability of hotel rooms is applicable in an era of Pandemic-limited crowds is an open question. But we continue to work towards the maintenance and upgrade of what is one of the region's most picturesque cricketing facilities.

Last June, World Athletics, the international governing body for the sport of athletics formerly known as the IAAF, certified the track at the Sir Vincent Beache National Stadium in Diamond as fit for high-level track and field events.<sup>54</sup> The newly-certified track is at the heart of our plans to create a first-class athletics and football facility in Diamond. Already, we are excited by the steady stream of young athletes and athletic clubs taking advantage of the track surface for training purposes. Budget 2022 invests an additional \$4.2 million in building out facilities around the track – a process that was delayed by the volcanic eruptions. This year, the stadium site will be enhanced with restrooms, parking, field irrigation, administrative offices, a roof for the existing seating, and state-of-the-art equipment. Enhancement of the grounds and spectator mound will also continue in 2022. By year's end, the facility will be sufficiently equipped to host regional events. In 2023 we shall construct a dedicated warm-up track adjacent to the main facility, enabling it to host international events.

Within walking distance of the Sir Vincent Beache National Stadium is the Brighton Home for Football, which received a multimillion dollar upgrade this year from the

SVG Football Federation. We have recently concluded negotiations with the Football Federation to ensure that the facility will receive improved spectator seating and upgraded amenities in 2022, while remaining accessible to members of the community. To have these two top-class athletic and football facilities within walking distance of each other – where only cow pastures existed before – is an eloquent example of the many positive changes taking place before our eyes, even in the midst of tremendous challenge.

When the first season of Carnival, Easterval and Bequia Regatta passed without traditional celebrations, the Government provided a small payment to cultural artistes in the fields of Calypso, Soca, steel pan, and costume design. The payment was not intended to replace lost earnings, a task beyond the capacity of the Government. Instead, it was a recognition of the invaluable role played by our artisans, and a signal that they should hold the faith amidst our challenges.

Now that a second festival season passed under the cloud of COVID and ash, it is appropriate that the Government once again symbolically affirm our own faith in the cultural and creative industries. Budget 2022 therefore makes provision for a small token of recognition to six steel orchestras, six steel pan arrangers, 12 mas designers, 78 Soca artistes, 72 Calypsonians, and 13 cultural ambassadors resident in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Just under \$120,000 is allocated for this recognition.

The Government is operating under the assumption that Carnival and other major celebrations will return in some shape or form in 2022, with proper regard to the health of performers, patrons and participants. Accordingly, Budget 2022 continues to provide resources to the Carnival Development Committee, and the National Lotteries Authority continues to set aside support for cultural events and practitioners.

Culture will not be left behind as we recover. At the same time, we celebrate those artists who have managed to continue creating and sharing their talent with audiences, and those who have embraced technology and the challenging times to produce meaningful art.