

Progress made on the commitments in the 2012 Joint Ministerial Council communiqué

British Virgin Islands

Overview

This Progress Report sets out the Government of the Virgin Islands' implementation of the Joint Ministerial Council 2012 communiqué in the areas below.

Jobs and Growth

The Government's Youth Employment Services remains in operation as the efforts continue to register unemployed youth and provide basic job training and preparation skills. The initiative has trained over 600 youths of which 200 were placed into jobs. Additionally, the Government is currently reorganising and strengthening the Alternative Secondary Education Programme to ensure that those previously unable to complete secondary school at one of the established public or private institutions are able to obtain a diploma.

Increasing investment and trade

The Government received a commitment from Sir Robert McAlpine Holdings to invest \$100 million into the redevelopment of the Prospect Reef Resort to upgrade it to a four or five star hotel.

Preparations by the BVI Ports Authority for a public investment into the extension of the Road Town cruise pier are underway to accommodate larger classes of cruise ships that will increase passenger arrivals and boost commerce in the cruise market.

The Government invested in refrigeration and packaging equipment for its Fisheries Complex that has significantly expanded storage capacity. The complex's payments system for local fishermen was also overhauled to shorten payment times to compensate for catches. These developments have stimulated the fishing sector with greater fishing, processing and storage activity in the fisheries sector. As the supply of fish caught in BVI waters for year has increased, local fishermen's profit margins have significantly widened and the importation of fish from abroad dropped.

BVI Hong Kong Office

The Government officially opened the BVI Hong Kong Office on 5 September 2013. The office will serve to develop relationships between the BVI and companies, institutions and organisations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Developing entrepreneurship and small businesses

The Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Bank of The Virgin Islands on 16 September that launched a loan guarantee programme for small businesses. The loan

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guarantee programme is co-managed by the National Bank of the Virgin Islands and the Government's National Business Bureau. The issue of business loans continues under the programme.

Infrastructure Investment

The new Peebles Hospital building was officially completed by developers in October and formally turned over to government. The state of the art facility is currently being outfitted with the required medical equipment.

The Government continues to upgrade road infrastructure and to expand the road network. A loan was secured from the Caribbean Development Bank for a Road Infrastructural Rehabilitation Development Project to support the implementation of road and bridge rehabilitation works to improve drainage in flood prone areas.

Meeting international standards on tax co-operation and financial sector regulation and combating financial crime, bribery and corruption

The BVI continues to comply with international regulatory standards and has made a number of steps in this regard:

- Ensured effective implementation of the OECD mechanisms as a member of the OECD Global Forum and Peer review Group;
- BVI has committed to a FATCA inter-governmental agreement with the USA and the UK
- The BVI committed to being part of the pilot of multilateral arrangement with France, Germany, Italy and the UK
- BVI have asked that the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials be extended to them. While also reviewing the Criminal Code 1997 with a view to embrace fully the provisions of the Convention.
- BVI fully supports the revised FATF 40 recommendations, and has commenced the process of reviewing its AML/CFT regime to bring it up to date with the standards from the 40 recommendations.
- BVI has prepared a National Action Plan on beneficial ownership to meet the FATF standards
- BVI has formally requested extension of the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance on Tax Matters
- BVI have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Securities and Markets Authority

The Environment and Green Growth

The Government implemented a number of initiatives on environment and green growth.

Management and protection of the natural environment

The Government approved the Virgin Islands Climate Change Policy in May 2013. The policy sets out the Territory's plan of action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Climate Change Committee oversees implementation of the policy. The Committee's first report is currently being prepared and will be presented to Cabinet by the close of 2013.

Caribbean Challenge Initiative

The Caribbean Summit of Caribbean Political and Business Leaders was co-hosted in the BVI in May 2013 by Premier Dr. the Honourable D. Orlando Smith, OBE, Prime Minister of Grenada, The Right Honourable Keith Mitchell, and CEO of Virgin, Sir Richard Branson. The summit launched the second phase of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI).

At the Summit, participating governments and partnering companies pledged to protect at least 20% of their coastal and marine environment by the year 2020 and to develop and implement sustainable finance mechanisms to manage these protected areas.

The BVIG declared the following priority actions to be implemented by the year 2020;

- i. Priority Action #1 – “20 by 20” Conservation Target**
 - Declaration of the protected areas identified in the BVI Protected Areas System Plan in a phased manner. Phase 1 will represent the declaration of three initial priority areas to be followed by subsequent declarations as identified and agreed upon. The total area under protection and management once the System Plan is fully implemented will represent approximately 33 percent of the Virgin Islands' near shore coastal/marine habitats.
- ii. Priority Action #2 – Sustainable Finance Architecture**
 - Implementation of the Sustainable Finance Plan for the Virgin Islands' System of Protected Areas.
 - Establishment of the Virgin Islands Climate Change Trust Fund, to include a sub-fund specifically for protected areas management within the Territory.
- iii. Priority Action #3 – Ecosystem Based Coastal and Marine Management**
 - Establishment and implementation of a Sustainable Yachting Initiative, primarily to reduce/minimise marine pollution.
 - Approval and implementation of the Virgin Islands Wetlands Management Policy to include directives to guide the management of wetland areas within the Territory, specifically ghuts, salt ponds, beaches and mangroves.

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Climate Change Trust Fund

The Government approved the Virgin Islands Climate Change Trust Fund in 2013 to financially support implementation of the Virgin Islands Climate Change Policy. The Fund will become operational by the end of 2014.

Conservation of Biodiversity Bill

The Government's draft Conservation of Biodiversity Bill is currently under legislative review.

Agricultural policy

The Government has proposed a draft agricultural policy that will regulate imports in international standards; dedicate more land to sub-sciences and the practice of agriculture, and facilitate the development of Agriculture as a viable industry enhancing method. The draft policy will be approved in the second quarter of 2014.

CITES

The Government drafted a new CITES bill that was reviewed by DEFRA that provided recommendations on amendments. Amendments are currently being made ahead of submission to the CITES Secretariat before the 2015 deadline.

Sustainable fisheries

The Government undertook a number of sustainable fisheries activities that are set out below.

National Fisherman's Conference

The First Annual National Fisherman's Conference was held in 2013. The Conference provided an official forum for fisherman to present ideas and concerns about the development of the local fishing industry. The second conference is planned for the first quarter of 2014.

Training

Small scale training of fishermen was carried out in alternative fishing techniques in October 2013 to target underutilized species.

By the close of 2013, fisheries personnel will undergo intensive training to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the fishing vessel registration and licensing programme. This training will emphasize improved data collection to support surveillance of the Virgin Islands Fishery Waters and enforcement of the Fisheries Act and Regulations.

Biodiversity

A project was launched to remove derelict fish traps from the ocean floor in an attempt to curb overfishing and improve the overall aesthetics and water quality of the marine environment.

Renewable energy

The Government developed and implemented a comprehensive Energy Conservation programme in January 2013 aimed at enhancing energy conservation and the generation of renewable energy, as well as reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels and the cost of electricity to consumers. The programme focuses on four main areas:

- Energy conservation;
- Energy generation using alternative Energy elements;
- Reduction of energy generation using traditional means;
- Recycling;

The Energy and Conservation Programme will be implemented in collaboration with the BVI Electricity Corporation (BVIEC). It will reduce the consumption of electricity by the Government, private business and homes, with a view to reducing the demand on the electricity grid, reducing the need of fossil fuels at the BVIEC.

Request for proposals are currently being drafted to invite tenders for the renewable energy systems of solar, wind, sea wave and energy from waste (elements available in abundance in the Territory). It is expected that Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) will be utilised to purchase power from these systems, which will minimise the impact of capital expenditure financed by the Government.

Updated legislation is also currently being considered to allow licensed entities to generate their own power to feed unused excess back into the national grid. The Ministry's goal for the energy programme is to have almost half of the Territory's energy produced by renewable means by 2023 and would include numerous benefits for the BVI and its citizens.

Support from International Organisations: Strengthening relationships with the EU, Commonwealth and other international organisations

EU

The Government attended and participated in a policy dialogue on environment between EU and Overseas Countries and Territories experts within the framework of the Environment Partnership Working Party.

The Government also attended a series of tripartite meetings between EU Member States (Britain, Denmark, France and Netherlands) throughout 2013 to discuss the revision of the Overseas Association Decision, among other things.

The BVI is administering an EU project, the Small and Medium Enterprise project, on behalf of the Caribbean British and Dutch territories from which it will also benefit. The project is currently in the tendering phase and will benefit the BVI when rolled out in 2014.

Commonwealth

The Government continues to receive support from the Commonwealth via its technical assistance programme with the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. The programme is focused on strengthening institutional governance and economic planning.

Officials attended the Public Administration in Very Small States Conference in April that examined solutions to governance challenges in small states.

A delegation also attended the 59th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa in August.

Better Government

Developing democratic institutions

The Government's senior officials responsible for the administration of the House of Assembly attended a workshop on the operation and administration of legislature in London organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Integrity in public life

The Government is currently in the process of incorporating The Seven Principles of Public Life into a new Public Service Code and Public Service Act that will be completed in January 2014. An information pamphlet for public officers outlining how they should conduct themselves was completed earlier in September 2013.

Strengthening the public service

The Government, spearheaded by the Deputy Governor's Office, is currently assessing various initiatives in order to agree on a collective approach for reform by embarking on the Creation of a Centre of Excellence. This is geared at insuring comprehensive and continuous reform within the Public Service. This approach will also focus on creating an assessment body to measure service delivery standards within each Ministry. In the interim an Internal Complaints Procedure has been created to put clear procedures in place should there be a need for customers to file a complaint.

The Attorney General's office has embarked on a Consolidation of the Laws project with the aim to amalgamate all laws, which have been updated over the years. Additionally, the Deputy Governor's office will introduce an approach to public service managers and leaders called Sustainable Development, which indicates that for sustainable growth and development three factors, must be considered:

- Economic growth and stability;
- Social impact and cohesion;
- Environmental protection.

Sustainable Development promotes the idea of comprehensive policy planning without the exclusion of the three relevant factors.

The Deputy Governor's office is also leading on the training within the public service, and will focus on learning and development that encapsulates all forms of learning that public officers can explore. For the first time in the public service, priorities include an area for secondments and exchanges within specific disciplines and to utilise the MOU with Hertfordshire County Council.

The introduction of the Service Commission Act and Regulations will streamline the recruitment process and identify the selection criteria for all public officers. Similarly, a recently completed Job Analysis Exercise ensures that all jobs and requirements have been updated and revised, giving all applicants equal chance to be assessed on the same job requirements. The Civil Service Learning programme has been extended to April 2014.

Strengthening Public financial management

The Government signed the Protocols for Effective Financial Management (PEFM) in November 2012, and amended its Public Finance Management Act in April 2013. Budgets are planned carefully, and reports are presented through the House of Assembly and are thoroughly evaluated by professionals to ensure transparency and accountability.

The Treasury department is being restructured in order that financial reporting standards adhere to the highest level of transparency and accountability.

BVIG is doing extensive work in producing its budget in a three-stage process that involves: the production of a budget policy; a medium term fiscal plan; and a budget document based on the medium term strategy. By 2015, BVI is forecasted to be within all financial limits imposed.

Stronger and healthier communities

Sport and healthy lifestyles

There have been general improvements to facilities to ensure that there are provisions for people to engage in sports and recreation: building of the park on Virgin Gorda, the upgrade of the Bellevue Gym, plans to open a sub office of the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports on Virgin Gorda; and improvement to a basketball court on Anegada. There has been collaboration with the BVI Olympic Association on the Paralympics. Youth and Sports policies are in the final stages of finalisation.

Disability

Both the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Health collaborate on several initiatives, including Autism programme, Healthy Lifestyle projects, early intervention programmes.

Older people

A healthy aging study was recently commissioned to assess the current situation of older persons living in the Virgin Islands. Its findings will be used to develop a Healthy Aging Policy to improve services in areas such as income protection, access to health care and services, home care and community day care, access to continuing education, social support and participation, housing and living arrangements, and safety.

Recent efforts have focused on further strengthening the policy and legislative framework guided by the National Health Policy 2011. Recognising the individual right to the highest attainable level of health, the work of the Ministry has been undergirded by a commitment to achieving universal access to quality care.

Children

With funding help from the governor's office, BVIG are taking forward work on safeguarding children. The Ministries will work closely with the Social Development Department on the issues of child abuse.

Tackling Discrimination

BVI is in a good place as far as anti-discrimination legislation goes. The majority of work took place before JMC 2012. The relevant human rights conventions have been extended and legislation to remove discrimination is already in place in the BVI.

Safer Communities

Strengthening coordination on tackling crime

The RVIPF is working on a number of initiatives to tackle gangs and youth crime by improving detections and bringing offenders to justice. These include improved intelligence gathering, greater use of forensic technology, better training for staff and a campaign to tackle unlawful possession of firearms (a prevalent feature of gang crime). Specific initiatives are:

- improving intelligence gathering through the identification of gang signs and symbols throughout the Territory;
- partnering with the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) Police Department to obtain insight on how they are dealing with gangs in their Territory;
- appointing school liaison officers to various schools to monitor gang activity;
- providing training to teachers and parents in collaboration with the Ministry of Education on identifying gang symbols and behaviour;
- using forensic technology more, such as the increased use of DNA testing,
- increasing the use of fingerprints for identification through the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), and working with the USVI for ballistic identification;
- providing training for staff which include officers from every station in the identification and diversion of gang behaviour; and
- creating a campaign to tackle unlawful possession of firearms which is being pursued through the identification of a Fire Arms Intelligence Officer who is charged with gathering intelligence on firearms in the Territory including the trafficking of firearms, and developing a closer working relationship with ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) in the USVI to improve intelligence around the movement and sources of firearms.

A Strategic Plan has been developed for prison and training. Discussions on amendments to various Ordinances have taken place, that deal with alternative sentencing and the use of electronic tagging to reduce the number of inmates in the Prison.

In 2012 the National Security Committee established a Crime reduction strategy for the BVI. The drafting team was drawn from a cross section of the community that consulted widely. The strategy was shared, in draft, with officials in Jersey and Hertfordshire County Council for peer review who were complimentary. It was presented to the NSC earlier in 2013 and subsequently to Cabinet where it was endorsed, and the agreed strategy was to be overseen by the Premier's office, with actions coordinated by a Community Safety Team.

Prisons and probation

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is placing emphasis on alternative forms of sentencing (other than the custodial sentence); leaving the custodial sentencing for the more serious

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offender/offence. This will lead to more non-adversarial dialogue and the rehabilitation of the offender with more guidance.

Plans are being initiated for a rehabilitation programme at the prison.

Disaster preparation and resilience

The Department of Disaster Management (DDM) uses a number of tools to evaluate the level of readiness of both the public sector and essential private sector services. Based on this the DDM determines that 74% of Government agencies have developed and practised contingency plans.

Overall there are 36 national plans for DM in the BVI that include specific plans for each of the main Sister Islands as well as plans that guide response activity between the BVI and the USVI (relating to oil spills)

In 2012, the DDM collaborated with various local and regional agencies to conduct various training activities/simulations/workshops that tested hazard management planning in the Territory.

All schools have disaster management plans and eleven schools are certified as safe schools. A schools Health and Safety policy completed – awaiting tabling at Cabinet.

Health

Strengthening public health systems

Following the Minister of Health's visit to Hertfordshire County Council and various HMG departments in health related areas in May, a report will be produced to discuss the present and future relationship between the BVI and UK in Health Services.

Tackling chronic non communicable diseases

Health promotion has been endorsed as a national strategy focused on health enabling policies and actions through multi-sector collaboration and community mobilization. Recognising that health is influenced by actions and issues outside of the health sector, a ten year strategy entitled "Towards a Healthier Virgin Islands" geared towards the prevention and control of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases is being implemented.

The strategy, which draws on the findings of a recent Health Risk Factor Survey, utilises a population health approach, mobilising all sectors of government, the business community, and voluntary organisations. Committees have been established at the national and community level to oversee the implementation of the strategy.

Appropriate emphasis is also being placed on encouraging the populace to take personal responsibility for their health so as to avoid diseases associated with certain behaviours.

With the help of matching funds from the Governor's Office, the Ministry is embarked for behaviour change with training and technical assistance provided by the UK-based National Social Marketing Centre.

International Health Regulation compliance

The BVI continues to make concerted efforts to fulfil its obligations under International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005. This was reflected in the findings of the Gap Analysis of the compliance of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies prepared on behalf of the UK Health Protection Agency in March 2013.

Local health surveillance capabilities have partnered with relevant local and international agencies, like Port Health Office at the Terrance B. Lettsome International Airport and initiatives to implement similar facilities at the main cargo port.

The legal framework is also under active review and a range of new legislation has been drafted to include a revised Quarantine Act, Quarantine (Ship) Regulations, Quarantine (Aircraft) Regulations, Human Remains (Importation and Exportation) Act and Human Remains Regulations.

Discussions with officials in the UK Ministry of Health in July 2013 - Officials expressed their willingness to provide support for the BVI's participation in regional capacity building projects, such as port health training.

Education

Strengthening participation and attainment

There is continuous teaching of Health and Family Life Education at all levels of the school system.

There are several initiatives underway to improve participation in education and raise attainment levels:

- Adaption of OECS Education Sector Strategy (2012-2021) is underway to guide developments in the Education sector;
- Changes are being made to the criteria for graduation;
- Remediation programmes introduced at all schools to cater for students having difficulties in Language, Arts and Maths;
- A policy of inclusion adopted to ensure the differently able have equal access to work next to their peers;
- Technical and vocational education and training policy being finalised and plans in place to start a technical high school;
- Education Act to be reviewed and revised by Education and Regulations;
- Continued work with Hertfordshire County Council to gain help to strengthen the education system and learn from best practice. Two principals were given attachments to schools in Hertfordshire in May and others to follow. Help will also be given to review and revise the Student Services Unit. Twinning arrangement between schools in BVI and Hertfordshire are also being pursued.

Early childhood education

Early Childhood Education teacher training is being considered to assist the private institutions.