On Thursday 26th July 2018, the Judicial Education Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (JEITT) held the second installment of its community outreach initiative, “Access to Justice – A Felt Sense”, at the House of Angostura, Laventille, for members of the Morvant/Laventille community. The initiative is geared towards removing the veil that has traditionally separated judicial officers, and the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (JRTT), from the members of the public of Trinidad and Tobago. Further, the JEITT aims to increase public trust and confidence in the JRTT by ensuring that access to justice does not remain a remote concept, but rather, is perceived and experienced by all. The success of the JEITT’s first installment, which was held in Cunupia at the Jerningham Community Centre, fuelled the initiative’s continuance into the Morvant/Laventille community in furtherance of the JEITT’s mandate of ‘Transformation through Education’.

The panel consisted of the Hon. Mr. Justice Peter Jamadar, JA, Chairman of the JEITT, the Hon. Mr. Justice Malcolm Holdip, the Hon. Mme. Justice Andrea Smart, the Hon. Justice Gillian Lucky, Master (Ag.) Carl Quamina, and Ms. Kamla Jo Braithwaite, Judicial Research Counsel II. Dr. Charisa-Marie Alexis-Francois, Judicial Educator of the JEITT, then brought opening remarks on behalf of the Institute.

Dr. Alexis-Francois’ brief introduction set the tone for the evening’s proceedings. She sought to remind the audience of the culturally rich heritage of the Laventille/Morvant Community. Dr. Alexis-Francois acknowledged the societal movers and shakers of time past and present, sons and daughters of Morvant/Laventille, who have contributed to the social fabric of Trinidad and Tobago. Recognizing the realities of the negative stigma attached to the community, Dr. Alexis-Francois indicated that the Judiciary has not turned its back, but rather, is deeply concerned about the educational empowerment of the community. She indicated that she looked forward to an evening that would comprise of lively discussion and healthy exchange of ideas on the theme: Access to Justice, and she was not disappointed.

To expand on the meaning and content of access to justice, Justice Peter Jamadar and Ms. Kamla Braithwaite delivered a brief presentation on the factors that create hindrances to access to justice. They discussed the JEITT’s indigenous research on procedural fairness, which is concerned with the behaviours and systems that inspire trust in, confer on, and bestow authority upon court systems. The elements of Voice, Respectful Treatment, Access to Information, and Inclusivity were four of the nine elements discussed in relation to the Morvant/Laventille community’s experience of being an ‘outsider’ in the
pursuit of justice. Justice Jamadar emphasized that the purpose of procedural fairness was to ensure that each member of the community “feels involved and is engaged” in the processes that are relevant to their needs.

Justice Malcolm Holdip followed Justice Peter Jamadar and Ms. Kamla Jo Braithwaite to provide his perspective on access to justice. Justice Holdip sought to simplify the meaning of the event so that members of the community could better understand its purpose. Justice Holdip stated that access to justice is “more than just getting access to the court” and this was met with nods and resounding affirmation. Drawing on contentious current issues in Trinidad and Tobago, Justice Holdip explained how and why public trust and confidence is dwindling. He then assured the attendees that the JRTT is, however, working very hard to ensure that each person who interacts with the justice system in Trinidad and Tobago can experience accountability and transparency. After briefly explaining certain procedures in the criminal jurisdiction, Justice Holdip asserted his hope that after this sharing of knowledge and ideas, each person would leave with a better understanding of how the system works.

Swiftly following Justice Holdip’s spirited presentation, Justice Gillian Lucky grasped the attendees’ attention with a lusty calypso of “Listen, Analyse, and Solve”. Justice Lucky remained true to her thespian roots as she powerfully recounted instances in her judicial practice which catalysed her to listen, analyse, and solve. Of the solutions derived by Justice Lucky and the JRTT, she detailed the mechanics of the Bail Supervision Programme, Status Hearings, and touched on the philosophy of sentencing. Emphasising that her role as a judicial officer does not abruptly end after sentencing, Justice Lucky reminded all in attendance that justice does have a heart.

The evening was then carried by members of the community as the discussion period bore fruitful engagement. Community members brought their questions and thoughts to the panel and raised pertinent issues such as “losing” youths in the community to crime, the lack of consequence of action and accountability, the difficulty of dealing with negative socialisation of youths, and the vulnerabilities which women in the community face. Justice Smart and Master Quamina offered unique perspectives through their work in the Family and Children jurisdictions. Informing contributors and attendees of the delicacy and thoroughness of her practice, Justice Smart sought to provide assurance of the JRTT’s concern and care for the matters and individuals that come before the court. Master Quamina supported this by outlining the steps that have been made to properly address the specific needs of women and children in the Family Court and detailing the processes involved. Justice Jamadar also noted the work that the JRTT and JEITT have done to produce a Protocol for Gender Sensitive Adjudication that will soon be launched.
The event ended with discussion and engagement between and among all in attendance as members of the community were given information leaflets on various court processes and were introduced to the JEITT’s various publications.

The JEITT aims to continue this community outreach initiative across Trinidad and Tobago. Fuelled by the mandate of Transformation through Education, the JEITT is devoted to promoting the development of judicial practice, access to justice, and the development of the JRTT as it continues to serve Trinidad and Tobago. Information on the JEITT can be found at http://www.ttlawcourts.org/index.php/judicial-education-institute/about-jeitt and the JEITT’s E-book Platform, which contains a host of publications including the recently published research and subsequent manual on procedural fairness, can be accessed via http://www.ttlawcourts.org/jeibooks/.

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