



Policy Forum Guyana

## **HOW CAN OIL & GAS REVENUES CREATE THE GUYANA WE ALL WANT - POLICY FORUM GUYANA LAUNCHES NATIONAL CONSULTATION**

As a partner in the programme Shared Resources Joint Solutions (SRJS), Policy Forum Guyana(PFG) on Saturday launched the first in what aims to be a series of public meetings aimed at generating a national consensus among ordinary Guyanese on how the mega-revenues expected from oil and gas can best deliver the future all Guyanese aspire to.

The event, which took place at the Guyana Nurses Association on Alexander Street, enabled a range of issues to be explored in relation to oil and gas revenues. A cross-section of civic individuals and organizations took part in multiple discussions utilizing what is known as 'Open Space' methods. UG Biology Club, a Lusignan-based contingent from the East Coast Clean-Up Committees, two disability organizations, youth and student bodies, Eco-trust Society volunteers, the Catholic church, represented by Bishop Francis Alleyne, representatives from the Georgetown Stabroek and Bel Air Leo Clubs, RISE Guyana as well as several other non-governmental organizations.

The agenda of issues was determined initially by participants' suggestions, which were then organized into three rounds of discussions. At the end of the discussion rounds, in which participants were encouraged to move about at will in a 'marketplace of ideas', participants all then identified what they considered to be the three major priorities emerging from the discussions.

The issue attracting most votes was 'infrastructural development', followed by 'protection of nature' with 'a better tertiary system of education' taking the third spot. These were followed by 'revamping the political system', 'better wages and salaries', 'a rapid public transportation system' and 'improving the situation of people with disabilities and vulnerable sectors'. 'Encouraging population shifts off the coast' and 'free Wi-Fi access for the nation' did not attract votes.

Commenting on the event, PFG Coordinator Benita Davis stated, *"I really believe this is an excellent way to engage all citizens in discussion of a complex issue like oil and gas."*

The aim of the programme is to progressively generate a broad-based national consensus on the priority issues to which oil and gas revenues should be applied. Saturday's event was the

first in a series of five to be conducted across the coastal regions in New Amsterdam, Anna Regina, Linden and Corriverton in the coming months.

Having established such a consensus, the second phase of the project in 2019 would be to construct scientific, strategic financial, social and environmental assessments of the feasibility of the identified priorities.

Apart from the ordinary people educating themselves about the consequences of oil and gas, Davis commented that *"The event was a valuable learning opportunity for many of the volunteers, who were experiencing the Open Space technique for the first time. Policy Forum can now go forward to implement other events of this nature more confidently."*

The longer-term aim of the initiative is to revive a collective belief among Guyanese that things could be different. Rather than resigning ourselves to each one striving – as individuals - to better their own position within the existing society, if citizens act together they can renovate society as a whole.

While discussions might focus initially on concrete initiatives, the rationale for why they are proposed as priorities moves inevitably into defending the benefits such priorities would mean for the society and population in general. Debates such as these are essential if the ethnic, political and economic divisions that have thwarted Guyana's potential in the past are to be avoided by the distribution of oil and gas benefits. The fundamental challenge remains that the positive transformation of the society cannot be achieved by one sector alone. Either we all rise together or we remain divided and disillusioned.

Contact Info: Benita Davis 227-4911 +592-614-8566

**September 3, 2018**