



WATER & SEWERAGE AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (WASA)

OVERSEEING A
TRANSFORMATIVE PERIOD



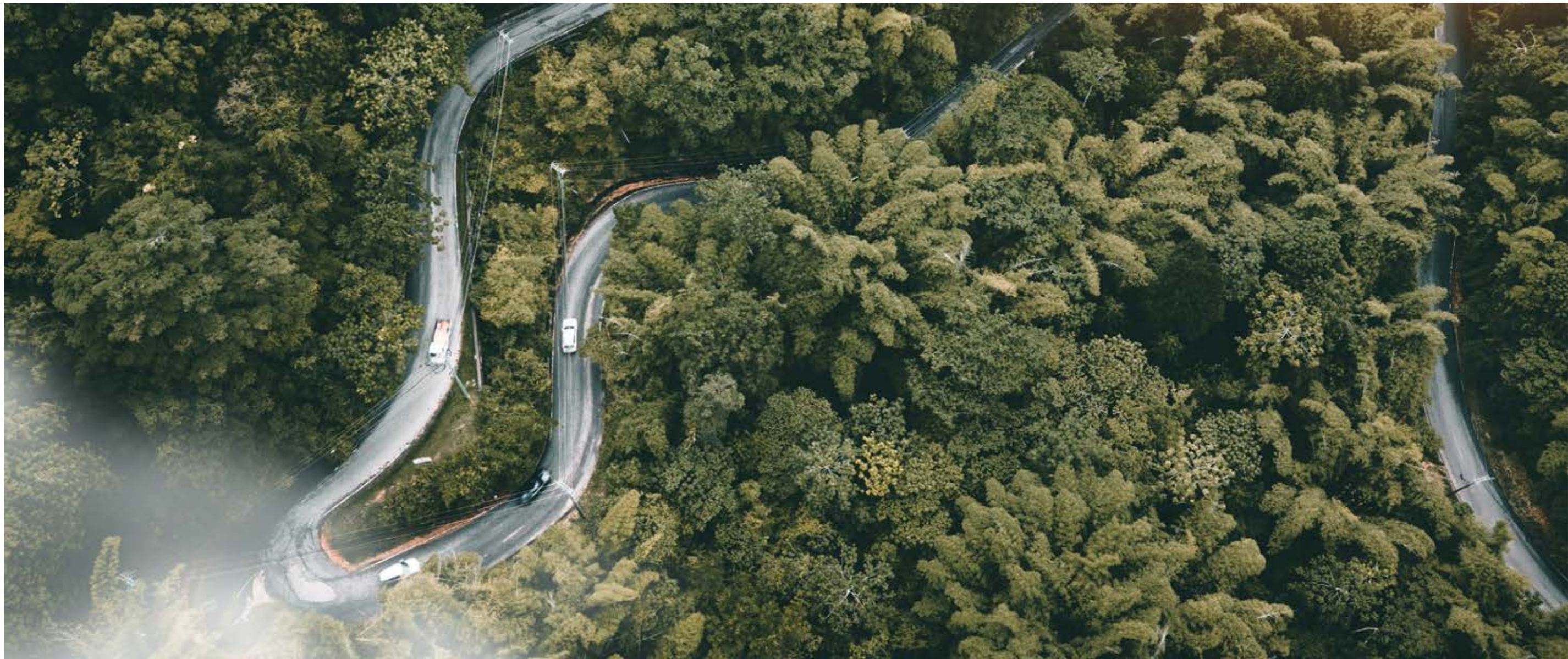


WASA

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OVERSEEING A TRANSFORMATIVE PERIOD

RESEARCH BY *Tayo Akanbi*



Flooding has become more common in recent decades around the world. This phenomenon has had a growing impact, as measured by infrastructure damage, loss of life, and loss of economic output. Flooding events frequently cause significant disruptions in economic and social life in the Caribbean subregion. The region already known for its storm season, has more experience than most in dealing with the consequences of weather events. The Caribbean island nation of Trinidad

and Tobago, for example, has had to deal with flooding and droughts over the last decade, creating serious challenges for those administering the country's water supply. The mandate to build resilience and strengthen infrastructure in the country's water and sewerage falls with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), a state organization controlled by the Public Services Ministry. At a time when WASA is put the final touches to a transformation plan for how it delivers on its mandate, Business Excellence deemed this an

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opportune time to provide some insights into the organization's work.

Overview

Operating out of the Trinidadian capital San José, WASA was incorporated in 1965 to manage the water and sewerage sector of the then newly-independent republic. At that time, Trinidad and Tobago had one dam - that at the Hollis Reservoir - while another - the Navet Dam - was under construction. Fast forward almost sixty years, and WASA not



only oversees three dams, it is also the largest public utility in the country.

WASA has made significant progress in modernizing the country's water and sewerage infrastructure. For example, through its work with the IDB (the inter-American Development Bank), it has increased the daily quantity of wastewater collected and treated from 11% of the total in 2015 to approximately 30% in 2022. And while over 95% of the population has access to safe drinking water, the overarching goal remains to bring that figure to 100%. This will require that WASA roll out its transformation plan, currently waiting to be signed off on by government. Until now, it has worked with third parties such as Desalcott - a desalination company in Trinidad and Tobago - to ensure its water met the hygiene standards required by its population. In 2021, the country's public utilities minister Marvin Gonzales described the contract as 'unsustainable' opening the path for a series of new projects and investments at WASA.

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The WASA transformation plan is broad in its scope, taking into account the organisational structure of the company, automation of its treatment plans

Transformation

“We’ve been talking about this transformation for some time and it’s time to get on with it because at the end of the day, we have to provide the people of Trinidad and Tobago with a reliable and sustainable level of service,” Minister Gonzales said.

The WASA transformation plan is broad in its scope, taking into account the organisational structure of the company, automation of its treatment plans, and the transmission

and distribution of water. To achieve this on the scale that makes the intended impact, considerable investment is required: The government has earmarked \$50 million, which will be used to modernize the system in every aspect.

The starting point to the transformation is a water audit, a key component of the company’s strategic action plan for the short and medium term. One of the goals of this plan is to reduce the quantity of water



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that WASA currently sends to Desalcott by 50-60%, with the ultimate aim of reducing the country's reliance on desalination. Elsewhere, it will collaborate with the private sector to help it exploit mega water sheds, partner with university to explore the feasibility of providing potable water from unused surface water ponds, optimization and integration of WASA information technology management infrastructure, among other opportunities.

Projects already underway which highlight the ambition of WASA over the coming years include the Beetham pipeline works, which will benefit 17,000 residents, and collaboration with Heritage to take over a number of wells, which will be refurbished and supply clean drinking water to communities in southwest Trinidad. The March 2022 commissioning of the Trinicity wastewater plant, which treats over 4,300 cubic metres of water a day, is another highlight.



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WASA is currently heavily dependent on government subsidy to fund its day-to-day operations. The company generates approximately \$700 million annually but spends \$2.2 billion to run its operations. “This cannot continue if we intend to provide an efficient and sustainable water delivery system throughout the country” said Minister Gonzalez.

As part of the transformation plan, the price that end users pay will rise for the first time in over a decade. And considering the cost of WASA’s operations far exceed the revenue generated by the services that it provides. The water tariffs are currently under review

by the government, and will be rolled out in the second half of 2022. A renewal of WASA’s pricing should also serve to remind end users about just how valuable the resource is.

Partners and Suppliers


WASA knows that it needs to improve and fast: The water infrastructure is crucial to the country’s prosperity and progress. In order to ramp up the transformation plan quickly, it will count on its trusted partners and suppliers. These include Rausch Electronics and Qualitech Machining Services, who ensure that WASA is well equipped with heavy machinery. The engineering services provided by D.Rampersad & Company Limited




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complement this work.

The challenge of making it all work from a financial perspective, at a time when tariffs spent so long dampened, has been partly been possible through the consulting work of Ernst & Young Services Limited, and Incorp Investment Company Ltd. Finally, a range of other relevant products and services were provided by the likes of Hosein Construction Company Limited, Air Technology Limited, and Water and Oil Well Services who has worked on several Drilling & Equipping Water Wells for WASA.

Conclusion

It's easy to see why WASA has termed its 5-year strategy plan a 'transformation plan.' To call it anything else would be to understate the scale of its goal: increase operational efficiency by engaging consultants and

training its staff, turnaround the company's finances, and eliminate water scheduling for Trinidad and Tobago to ensure a 24/7 supply of water throughout the country. To achieve all this by 2024 is a tall order but one for which the company seems prepared for. By the team it reaches its sixtieth birthday in 2025, the hope is that WASA will truly have redeveloped a water and sewerage system fit for the demands of the 21st century.

WASA

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