TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

THE Contractor

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

QUARTERLY EMAGAZINE MAY-JULY 2026 | ISSUE NO.16

The Risk Map: How FIDIC Risk Allocation Should Drive Pricing, Negotiation, and Project Management from Day One

T&T Declining Birthrate and Its Strategic Implications: From Population Pressure to Population Constraint

Getting High on Your Own Supply! A Leadership Warning and Discipline for Staying Sober

THE CONTRACTOR EMAGAZINE: KNOWLEDGE FOR THE MODERN BUILDER.

Marine Construction & Coastal Engineering Services

- Design & Construction of Marine, Coastal, Port Structures & more.
- Shoreline Protection & Beach Restoration.
- Construction & Restoration of Waterways.
- Marine Tubular & Sheet Piling (concrete, steel, composites).
- Zero-Percussion Screw Piling (no vibration).
- Upgrades & Maintenance of Ports, Piers, Docks, Marine Facilities, Mooring Systems etc.
- Dredging & Land Reclamation.
- Breakwater & Revetment Design & Construction.
- Dynamic Pile (PDA) Testing.
- Laying & Burial of Submarine Cables, Pipelines & Outfalls.
- Crane Barge Operations & Associated Heavy Equipment.
- Wreck & Marine Structure Removal.
- Dive Support Services.
- Steel Fabrication Services.
- Geotechnical & Survey Engineering.

Port and Shore Base Facilities

- 1200 LF Berthing Accommodation.
- 4.5 Acre Storage & Work Area.
- Cargo handling up to 45T.
- Specialized & Ultra Heavy Lifts.
- Shore-base Support & Logistics.
- Mob / Demob of Offshore Projects.
- Mob / Demob of Geoscience Projects.
- Wet Docking.
- Gritblasting & Coating.
- Crew Change Facility.
- Tank Cleaning Services.
- Welding & Fabrication.
- Waste & Garbage Removal.
- Office Accommodation.
- Portable Water Supply.
- Vessel Repairs.

WWW.CAPITALSIGNAL.COM
cssales@capitalsignal.com / Tel: 1-868-694-2725

FIND THE RIGHT PARTNER FOR YOUR NEXT PROJECT

CLICK AND CONNECT WITH TTCA INTERACTIVE MEMBER DIRECTORY

TTCA DIRECTORY

BUILDING CONNECTIONS FOR OVER 25 YEARS

RELIABLE LISTINGS. TRUSTED RESOURCE

TTCA DIRECTORY STANDS AS THE TRUSTED GUIDE FOR CONNECTING WITH THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY'S MOST RELIABLE PROFESSIONALS.

DELIVERING THE CONNECTIONS THAT KEEP OUR CONSTRUCTION SECTOR MOVING FORWARD.

VIEW ONLINE NOW

OR ACCESS THE DIRECTORY ANYTIME ON OUR WEBSITE TTCA.COM

THE Contractor

MAY-JULY 2026 ISSUE #16

06 **The Risk Map: How FIDIC Risk Allocation Should Drive Pricing, Negotiation, and Project Management from Day One**

14 **T&T Declining Birthrate and Its Strategic Implications: From Population Pressure to Population Constrain**

Article By: Vaughn I. Lezama

20 **Getting High on Your Own Supply! A Leadership Warning and Discipline for Staying Sober**

Article By: Mikey Thackoor

TTCA TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

CONTACT US

Professional Centre Building,
2nd Floor, Unit 203B 11-13
Fitzblackman Drive,
South Woodbrook, POS.

1 868 627-1266

generalmanager@ttca.com
service@ttca.com

TTCA MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION IS NOW ONLINE ON OUR WEBSITE

www.ttca.com

TTCA e-Magazine
DESIGNED, PUBLISHED & HOSTED BY
EdgeStream Media Ltd (ESM)
www.edgestreamtt.com

BUILT ON TRUST. DELIVERED FOR GENERATIONS.

For over 30 years, Unicom Limited has shaped the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago with precision and purpose. From national infrastructure to bespoke outfitting, proven expertise across every major sector. The result is work that stands the test of time and relationships that do the same.

PRESIDENT'S HOUSE


DOMHAD WAREHOUSE


REPUBLIC BANK LTD.
ST. AUGUSTINE


U.W.I.
SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY


TRINITY CATHEDRAL

Exclusive Distributors of
AVONITE SOLID SURFACES • NEVAMAR LAMINATES

CONSTRUCTION | RESTORATION | INTERIOR OUTFITTING | CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

unicom LIMITED

GENERAL CONSTRUCTION • MANUFACTURING • INTERIOR OUTFITTING

unicomtrinidad.com

+1.868.663.4124

THE RISK MAP:

HOW FIDIC RISK ALLOCATION SHOULD DRIVE PRICING, NEGOTIATION, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT FROM DAY ONE

FIDIC SERIES: PART TWO

In Part 1 of this series, we laid out the essential differences between FIDIC's three main contract forms. The Red Book places design responsibility with the employer and distributes core risks in a broadly balanced way. The Yellow Book moves design responsibility to the contractor while generally leaving key external risks — such as truly unforeseeable ground conditions — with the employer, though with a higher foreseeability threshold and greater contractor due diligence obligations than under the Red Book. And the Silver Book, used for EPC and turnkey projects, transfers the vast majority of project risk to the contractor in exchange for a fixed price and a fixed completion date.

Getting that framework right matters. But understanding the hierarchy of the three books is only the starting point. The harder and more practical question is what the risk map actually demands of you — in your bid, at the negotiating table, and across the life of the project.

PRICING: YOUR BID HAS TO REFLECT WHAT YOU'RE ABSORBING

The contract form you're working under should have a direct and material effect on how you build your price. That sounds obvious. In practice, it gets underestimated far more often than it should.

Under the Red Book, the employer provides the design and the contract is typically a remeasurement arrangement. Rates and prices are set in a bill of quantities, and the final contract value

is determined by measuring the actual work completed. Because the employer carries the design risk — and the risk of unforeseeable physical conditions that an experienced contractor could not reasonably have anticipated — your exposure as a contractor is comparatively contained. Pricing here is primarily about accurately estimating execution costs. The framework is there to protect you if the ground turns out to be materially different from what you had any reason to expect.

The Yellow Book changes the equation in two important ways. First, because you are responsible for both design and construction under a lump sum, your price has to carry the cost of getting the design right. If the design you produce fails to meet the employer's requirements, that is your problem to fix. Second, the fitness for purpose obligation — which applies under both the Yellow and Silver Books — sets a higher bar than ordinary reasonable skill and care. Your completed facility has to actually perform as intended, not just be built to specification. Professional indemnity insurance, time to scrutinize the employer's requirements before tender, and design contingencies are real costs. They need to be in your number before you submit.

The Silver Book is a fundamentally different financial proposition. Under Sub-Clause 4.12, the contractor is deemed to have obtained all necessary information about risks and other circumstances affecting the works, accepts total responsibility for having foreseen all difficulties and costs of completing the project, and — save for limited exceptions expressly provided elsewhere in the contract — the contract price will not be adjusted to account for

any unforeseen difficulties or costs. That is not standard risk-sharing language. It is one of the sharpest risk transfers in international contracting. Unlike the Red and Yellow Books, there is no general relief mechanism for adverse physical conditions. The contractor is also responsible for verifying and interpreting any site data provided by the employer; the contractor cannot assume that the employer warrants its accuracy or completeness.

The practical consequence is that responsible Silver Book bids carry a premium. Contractors who properly price the risk they are absorbing will come in higher than comparable Red or Yellow Book prices for the same physical scope. Employers who understand the arrangement accept that — the premium is the price of cost and schedule certainty. Unrealistically low Silver Book bids are often a red flag, not a competitive advantage. Where contractors strip out their contingencies to win work, what they usually find is that the contract they won is one they cannot deliver without a loss. The transfer of risk in the contract does not reduce the risk. It just decides who pays when it materializes.

NEGOTIATION: KNOW WHAT YOU'RE BEING ASKED TO ABSORB

FIDIC's standard forms are a starting point for contract negotiation, not a finished product. They are amended on almost every project. The terms that actually govern what happens in the field sit in the Particular Conditions, and those terms can move risk substantially — sometimes without being transparent about it. This is where contractors and project managers need to read carefully. Particular Conditions amendments that cap entitlements, tighten the definition of "unforeseeable," remove or limit time extensions for employer-caused delays, or restrict the contractor's ability to recover for adverse physical conditions can quietly undo the balance the General Conditions were designed to create. An employer who negotiates those amendments into a Yellow or Silver Book contract is asking the contractor to take on risks the standard form was not originally structured to allocate that way.

FIDIC's 2017 editions addressed this concern through five published Golden Principles. Golden Principle 3 is the most directly relevant: it states that risks allocated to one party under the General Conditions should not be transferred to the other through Particular Conditions amendments. These principles carry no independent legal force — they are

COOSAL'S
Group of Companies

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

QUARRYING

- Mining and Processing - Concreting Sand and Aggregates
- Mining and Processing - Road Base Aggregates, Asphalt Concreting Aggregates and a Range of Single Size Stone and Blended Aggregates

CONTRACTING

- Road and Highway Construction
- Road and Highway Rehabilitation – Foam Bitumen Technology and Cement / Hydrated Lime-Stabilisation
- Asphalt Pavement Cold Milling and Profiling
- Supplying and Placement - High Specification Asphalt Surfaces
- General Contracting inclusive of Building Infrastructure Works
- Construction of Specialised Reinforced Concrete Structures (Bridges, Culverts and Foundations)
- Design-Build Contracting for Building and Infrastructure Works
- Refurbishment and Renovation – Building and Infrastructure Works
- Plant and Equipment Rental

MANUFACTURING

- Suppliers and Manufacturer of Concrete Masonry Blocks
- Pre-cast Concrete Pavers and Grass Pavers
- Suppliers and Manufacturer of Premix Concrete and High strength Grouts Inclusive of Pumping Services
- Suppliers and Manufacturer of Hot Mix Asphalt Concrete –both Trinidad Lake Asphalt Binder and 60/70 Refinery Binder

800-COOS

CORPORATE HEAD OFFICE
31-45 Coosals Boulevard
Madras Settlement Road
Trinidad and Tobago 520736
T: (868) 800-COOS;
(868) 612-5117

MADRAS SALES
10-20 Coosals Avenue
Madras Settlement Road
Trinidad and Tobago 520736
T: (868) 800-COOS;
(868) 612-5117

AGGREGATE SALES
Acono Road
Maracas
T: (868) 800-COOS;
(868) 612-5117

SOUTH OPERATIONS
Gasparillo Bypass
Gasparillo
T: (868) 800-COOS;
(868) 612-5117

Corporate Office - Guyana
Tract TJ Plantation Rome,
East Bank, Demerara,
Georgetown Guyana
Tel: +592-261-6223
Email: coosalsguyana@coosals.com

www.coosals.com coosals@coosals.com @coosals Coosal's Group of Companies

advisory expressions of FIDIC's intent, and many projects deliberately deviate from them — but they give contractors a useful reference point when reviewing proposed amendments.

Negotiation strategy under each book should follow the risk map. The Red Book usually sees the most attention on rate structures, the bill of quantities, and how variations will be measured and valued. With the Yellow Book, the employer's requirements deserve intense scrutiny before the contract is signed — errors or ambiguities that an experienced contractor should have caught at tender become the contractor's responsibility, not the employer's. The Silver Book puts everything on the table: the employer's requirements, the scope of site investigations made available to tenderers, what completion actually requires, and what protections — if any — exist for genuinely exceptional circumstances.

There is also a timing issue that belongs in any Silver Book negotiation. FIDIC's own guidance states that the Silver Book is not appropriate when tenderers have insufficient time or information to scrutinize the employer's requirements, carry out their own due diligence, or develop meaningful risk assessments. Where an employer compresses the tender period, contractors are being asked to price risks they haven't had the

chance to quantify. That is not a good starting position for either party — and it is a legitimate point to raise and resolve before a contract is signed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: THE RISK MAP IS OPERATIONAL FROM DAY ONE

Risk allocation is not just a commercial concept that lives in the contract documents. It has to be live and working from the moment the project starts. How risk is distributed determines what your project management function needs to look like.

Under the Red and Yellow Books, the Engineer is a central operational figure. Appointed by the employer, the Engineer administers the contract, issues instructions, certifies payments, and — under the 2017 editions — is required to act neutrally when making determinations under the contract. That neutrality is significant. When the contractor encounters an event that generates an entitlement to additional time or money, the Engineer is the first decision-maker in the chain. Managing that relationship, maintaining contemporaneous records, and submitting notices on time are core project management disciplines under both forms.

Remove the Engineer from that picture and the dynamic shifts considerably. The Silver Book has no Engineer. The employer's representative administers the contract, and they are acting for the employer — not as a neutral party. Without a neutral intermediary, the contractor's documentation and notice practices have to be even more rigorous. Disputes that might have been resolved at the Engineer

level under the Red or Yellow Books are more likely to escalate quickly under the Silver Book, where there is no equivalent buffer.

Across all three forms in their 2017 editions, the notice regime under Clause 20 carries real financial consequences. A contractor who fails to give notice of a claim within 28 days of becoming aware — or of when they should have become aware — of the event giving rise to the claim may lose the entitlement altogether, subject to limited discretion provisions in the contract. This is not an administrative inconvenience. It is a substantive risk. Under a contract where the risk map already puts heavy exposure on the contractor, losing entitlements through missed or late notices makes a difficult position worse. A project management system that routinely identifies potential claim events, documents them in real time, and issues notices as a matter of course is not optional — it is a financial control.

The 2017 editions also replaced the Dispute Adjudication Board (DAB) from the 1999 suite with the Dispute Avoidance/Adjudication Board (DAAB). The key operational difference is that the DAAB can be engaged proactively — before a dispute has fully formed — to provide informal assistance and recommendations. For project managers, this is a practical tool worth understanding early and using early. Waiting until positions have hardened before engaging the DAAB means losing the opportunity to use it the way it was designed.

Perhaps most importantly, the risk allocation in your contract should be a living, working reference throughout the project — not something reviewed at contract signing and then left in a drawer. A risk register built directly from the contract, tracking which party owns which risk, what triggers an entitlement, and what records would be needed to support a claim if it came to that, gives you a practical management instrument you can use from mobilization through to final account. The contract tells you who carries what. Your job is to run the project in a way that reflects that allocation — and to make sure the evidence exists to support it if it's ever tested.

Risk allocation in FIDIC contracts is not background noise. It is the architecture of the deal. The contractors who navigate FIDIC projects successfully are the ones who treat the contract as an operational document — not as a dispute mechanism they reach for when something has already gone wrong.

PART 3 OF THIS SERIES WILL EXAMINE THE CLAIMS AND DISPUTES FRAMEWORK UNDER THE 2017 FIDIC EDITIONS — INCLUDING HOW THE DISPUTE AVOIDANCE/ADJUDICATION BOARD WORKS IN PRACTICE AND HOW CONTRACTORS CAN BUILD A CLAIMS CULTURE THAT PROTECTS ENTITLEMENTS WITHOUT DAMAGING PROJECT RELATIONSHIPS.

ADVERTISE IN THE CONTRACTOR

EXPAND YOUR REACH

EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS

Connect with Decision-Makers

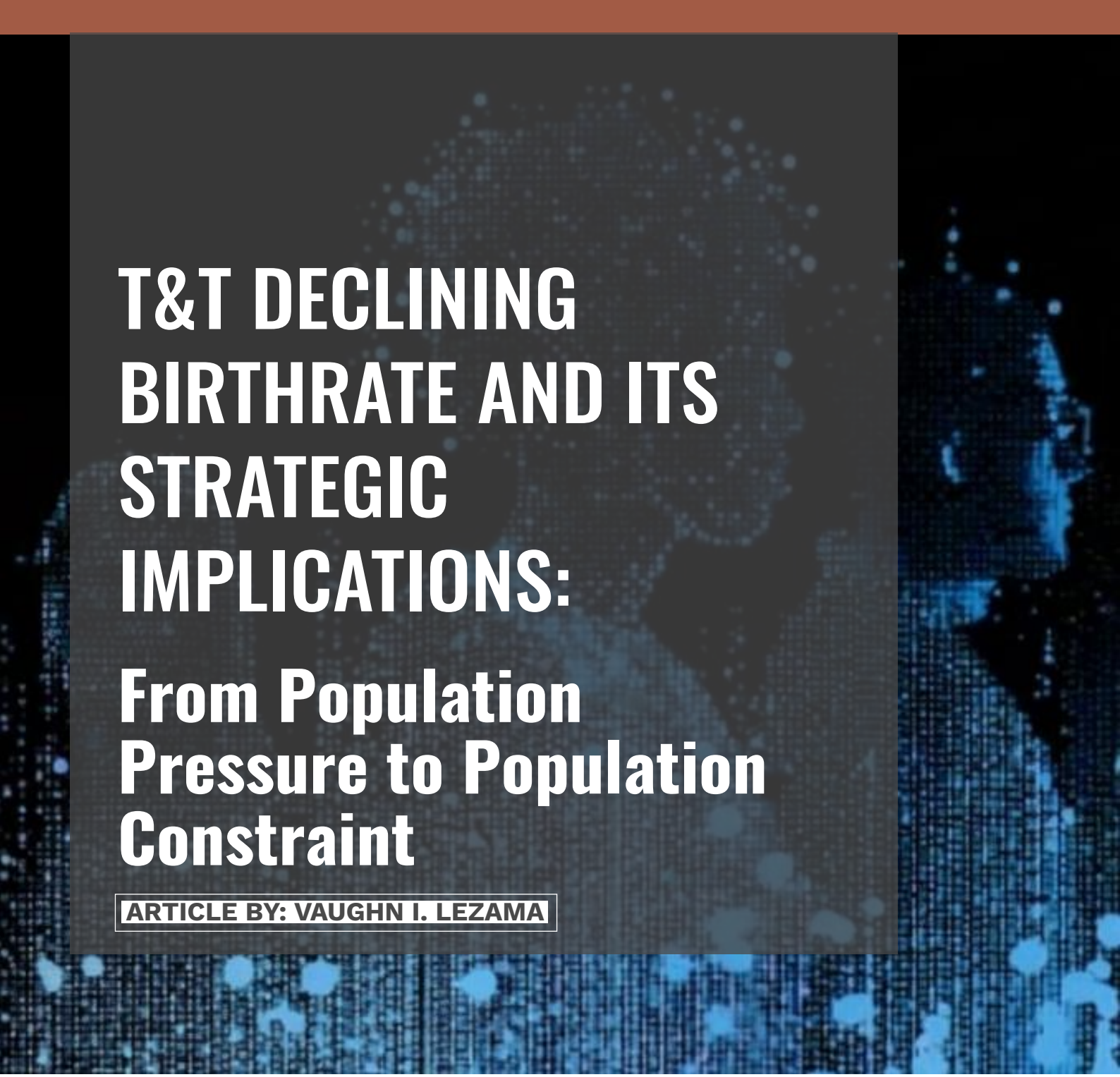
As the official publication of the Trinidad and Tobago Contractors Association, The Contractor is the industry's most trusted source of information. By advertising with us, you align your brand with authority and tap into a highly engaged audience, expanding your reach far beyond traditional print limits.

Maximize your advertising ROI!

Every issue is permanently hosted digitally on the official TTCA website. Your message continues to work for you 24/7, reaching new clients and ensuring long-lasting visibility well past the initial publication date.

Contact ESM for Advertising Information

marketing@edgestreamtt.com / 776-8266



T&T DECLINING BIRTHRATE AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

From Population Pressure to Population Constraint

ARTICLE BY: VAUGHN I. LEZAMA

An article headlined "Two oil nations, one engineering crisis: Guyana short, Trinidad shrinking" published by OilNOW, an online-based Information and Resource Centre, highlighted how the challenge of producing and retaining engineers is playing out in two different ways in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. One a long-standing oil producer, and the other a newcomer racing to meet the demands of its booming industry. The Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago flagged the declining number of new engineers as a growing problem for the sector.

The Chamber linked the drop to factors such as changes in GATE (T&T Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses) funding, the impact of COVID-19 on academic performance, and a declining birthrate that has reduced the pool of students entering universities. On the other hand, the situation is starkly different in Guyana, in that the demand from the oil

industry is outpacing supply of engineers in that country. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, is reported to have explained that although the number of engineers produced since 2020 has been trebled, that is still not enough because engineering students were getting absorbed into the international private sector even before they graduate.

The focus of this paper is not really about engineering, but about the implications of the reported declining birthrate in Trinidad and Tobago that has reduced the pool of students entering universities and the wider impact of such decline on future national development.

WHY DEMOGRAPHICS NOW MATTER MORE THAN CAPITAL OR TECHNOLOGY

At Independence in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago had a population of approximately 880,000. A population growth rate that was among the highest in the Caribbean, with extremely high fertility averaging 9–12 children per family. Myself and many of my cohorts, as children

of the 50s, were part of such families. Such a population growth rate was considered unsustainable for a newly independent state with what was considered then to be limited fiscal capacity. This rapid growth was seen as alarming, threatening education systems, housing supply, employment creation, health-care and social services. However, today, human capital availability—not financing, geology, or engineering know-how is likely to become the binding constraint on infrastructure delivery, energy-sector expansion and technical capacity.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE (1960S–1980S)

The country's first, post-independence, national transport planning study in 1967 projected a population of 1.5 million by 1985, based on then-current growth trends. National policy responded rationally and successfully. T&T established a Family Planning Association (FPA) and the promotion of birth control, coupled with expanded education opportunities for women and their increasing entry into the workforce, was one of the most successful population interventions in the developing world.

This policy worked. But like many successful long-term policies, it overshot its original target. Six decades later, the demographic problem has inverted. Today, the very success of family planning—combined with delayed childbearing, smaller desired family sizes, emigration of young professionals and insufficient immigration integration has shifted T&T from a country managing population pressure to one facing population constraint. This has profound implications for a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) such as T&T.

Economists have long proffered that a country needs a population of at least two (2) million to achieve viable sustainability. I have long argued that T&T is underpopulated, but there are those who insist otherwise. It is this lack of critical mass that made the much talked about Rapid Rail Transit System uneconomical and unsustainable, hence the reason it could not have been presented as a viable transportation option.

ENGINEERING WORKFORCE: THE SHRINKING ENTRY PIPELINE

The declining birthrate has reduced the size of secondary school cohorts, narrowed the university intake pool and directly affected engineering enrolment, as flagged by the Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago. The consequences are fewer graduate engineers entering civil infrastructure, mechanical and electrical engineering, petroleum and process engineering, as well as an increased average age of registered engineers and accelerated loss of institutional knowledge through retirement. This is particularly acute in a small professional ecosystem, where even small numerical declines have outsized effects.

ENERGY SECTOR IMPLICATIONS: RESURGENCE WITHOUT CAPACITY

T&T's potential energy resurgence—particularly in deep-water exploration—would require petroleum engineers, subsea engineers, process engineers, electrical, mechanical, and instrumentation specialists, construction and commissioning engineers. The Energy Chamber shared data from the University of the West Indies which highlights two key issues in the energy sector at the moment: the lack of female representation and the declining number of new engineers. The fear is that the potential benefit of deep-water exploration can be thwarted by skills mismatch

DEMOGRAPHIC RISK

Declining birthrate reduces the long-term domestic supply of specialists while at the same time competition from international energy markets draws away scarce local talent. Without intervention, T&T risks becoming a resource host with diminishing local technical participation.

LOCAL CONTENT AT RISK

Local content policies depend on the availability of locally trained engineers and technologists and a pipeline of technicians and inspectors. If the workforce shrinks, local content becomes nominal rather than substantive, foreign EPCs dominate technical scopes and value capture leaks abroad.

VENEZUELAN MIGRATION AS AN UNREALIZED STRATEGIC ASSET

Recent Venezuelan immigrants have filled gaps in the construction and services sectors and have demonstrated adaptability and productivity, as immigrants are wont to do. However, formal integration pathways for technical professionals and skilled workers remain weak. Technical qualifications are under-recognized and work permits and registration pathways are slow and opaque. Such shortcomings represent a lost opportunity in that this cohort could have stabilized agriculture and construction labour supply, replenished technician and technologist pools and provided future engineering students through second-generation effects.

TRADITIONAL PLANNING UNDER DEMOGRAPHIC CONSTRAINT

Traditional planning models in Trinidad and Tobago were predicated on assumptions of continuous population growth, an expanding labour force, and a steady inflow of young engineers and technicians to design, construct, operate, and maintain national assets. These assumptions may no longer be valid. The emerging demographic reality—characterized by declining birthrates, an ageing population, and outward migration of skilled professionals—requires a fundamental rethinking of the planning models.

STRATEGIC POLICY RESPONSES FOR ENGINEERING & ENERGY SECTORS

1. National Engineering Workforce Strategy
Critical Intervention is required to forecast engineering and technical manpower needs for energy, water, transport, climate adaptation and align university intake, scholarships, immigration quotas and professional registration capacity. A comparable model would be Norway's energy-linked workforce planning.

2. Targeted Skilled Migration for Engineers

- Fast-track permits for registered engineers, technologists and inspectors.
- Structured pathways from temporary — permanent residence.

ENGINEERING EDUCATION REFORM

- Early STEM pipeline development.
- Industry-sponsored engineering programmes.
- Structured internships and mentorship programmes, facilitated by state agencies in the construction, utilities and energy sectors.
- Return-of-service scholarships linked to national infrastructure projects.

RETENTION AND LATE-CAREER UTILIZATION

- Extend productive engineering careers

through phased retirement, mentoring roles, and expert panels for infrastructure review.
- Preserve institutional knowledge.

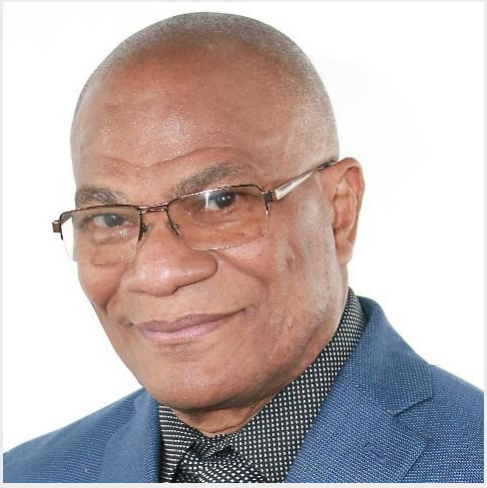
STRENGTHENING THE "INTELLIGENT CLIENT"

- Rebuild engineering capacity within Ministries, particularly the MOWT, state agencies, statutory authorities, and regulators bodies.
- An industry policy for building local engineering capacity.
- Encourage the growth and strengthening of the local private-sector consulting engineering industry so that it can continue to provide sustained, highly technical, knowledge-based, rewarding employment opportunities

STRATEGIC INSIGHT FOR DECISION-MAKERS

In the 1960s, T&T's priority was slowing population growth to protect development gains. In the 2020s, the priority should be ensuring sufficient engineering and technical human capital to sustain national infrastructure and energy ambitions.

The declining birthrate is not merely a social issue—it is a hard constraint on project delivery, energy sovereignty, and economic resilience. Unless population, migration, and engineering workforce policies are explicitly aligned, T&T risks having projects without engineers, energy without local expertise and infrastructure without capacity to maintain it.



Vaughn Lezama, BSc., R. Eng. MASCE, FAPETT, is a Civil Engineer with over 44 years of engineering practice. He is the Chairman and Principal Engineer at Consulting Engineers Associates 2005 Ltd. Eng. Lezama is registered with the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago and is a Fellow and Past President of the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago. He is also a Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Eng. Lezama has extensive experience in Engineering Designs, Technical Studies, Construction Supervision, and Contract Administration. He is highly trained in the use of the FIDIC suite of Contracts. Currently, Eng. Lezama serves as the Registrar of the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago (BOETT) and is responsible for maintaining the Register of Engineers in accordance with the Engineering Profession Act No. 34 of 1985.

esm

Slow website holding you back?

At **ESM** we engineer **SITES BUILT** to **PERFORM**

Every great build starts with the right site. www.edgestreamtt.com

GETTING HIGH ON YOUR OWN SUPPLY!

A Leadership Warning and Discipline for Staying Sober

ARTICLE BY: MIKEY THACKOOR

By mid-morning, the sun is reminding you who is boss, and the heat is already arguing with you. Not the gentle kind you ignore, but the kind that sits on your shoulders, runs down your back, and reminds you that every decision you make today will cost energy—will exact a toll. The ground is dry in one corner, soft in another, depending on what fell from the sky last night or which water line gave way. Critical materials that were supposed to land yesterday are now "on the way," which could mean anything from ten minutes to next week. One crew is waiting for instructions. Another has already started without it—standing still does not pay.

Near the edge of the site, a generator coughs to life, fighting its own battle with clogged filters and deferred maintenance. A supervisor stands off to the side, scanning the work, the project manager's voice in his ear, already calculating how to recover time that has not officially been lost. Two trades are about to cross paths in the same space, neither fully aware of the other's sequence. A question that should have been answered three days ago is being asked again.

This is not chaos. This is normal.

This is a Caribbean jobsite—where the plan meets reality early, and reality rarely comes alone. It comes with weather, logistics, gaps in information, resource constraints, and the constant need to adapt faster than the problem develops. Out here, leadership is not theoretical. It is immediate, visible, and tested in real time.

And it is precisely in this environment, where pressure is constant, and success is hard-earned, that a quieter, more dangerous problem can take hold.

The most dangerous drug on any project is not in a bottle. It is the leader who starts getting high on his own supply.

THE INTOXICATION OF SUCCESS

Leaders rarely fail when they are weak. Weak leaders tend to reveal themselves early; they are corrected, constrained, or removed before significant damage is done. The more dangerous failure comes from strength—proven strength, repeated success, and the quiet confidence that follows.

Success does not simply validate judgment; it reshapes it. Leaders must stay connected to reality to prevent subtle shifts that can mislead them.

The project responds accordingly. Meetings become smoother. Decisions move faster. Friction, which once sharpened thinking, begins to disappear. To the untrained eye, this feels like progress. It feels like maturity in the team and control in the leadership.

It is neither.

It is the early formation of an echo chamber, where silence and agreement mask dissent, leading leaders to operate within a distorted version of reality that can be dangerously misleading.

This is what it means to get high on your own supply-confidence detached from reality, which can be prevented through self-awareness and humility, ensuring leaders stay grounded in truth.

THE MOMENT I LOST THE ROOM

I do not speak about this from theory. I had my moment.

I had just completed a project that, by any reasonable measure, was exceptional. Sixteen months of work were delivered two weeks ahead of schedule. The job outperformed the tender. We achieved Taking Over with a one-page snag list. It was controlled, disciplined, and precise—the kind of project that reinforces every instinct you relied on to deliver it. I carried that forward.

Not with noise, but with certainty. I trusted my judgment completely. I corrected everything and everyone. I moved faster than the team. I stopped questioning my own reads because, in my mind, I had already proven I was right. That was the high of the rush; I was hooked.

On the next project, I applied the same approach with the same confidence. It felt efficient. It felt decisive. It felt like leadership.

Then, late one Tuesday afternoon, exhausted and deep in the demands of the job, I felt something shift. The workers had their helmets on, tools in hand. Work moving.

But no one stepped forward. No one interrupted. No one challenged.

They had stopped pushing. They had stopped questioning. They had started letting me decide.

And in that moment, it hit me. I was no longer leading a team. I was operating inside a vacuum of my own making. The very people who should have been sharpening my thinking had stepped aside and allowed me to carry the decisions alone—not because they lacked the ability, but because I had made it clear, without ever saying it directly, that I did not need them to.

That realization does not come with noise. It arrives quietly, and when it lands, it is heavy.

THE SYSTEM THAT FEEDS THE ILLUSION

What makes this condition dangerous is that it rarely resolves on its own. The system around the leader adapts in ways that reinforce the problem.

Teams learn quickly what is rewarded and dismissed; building feedback systems helps leaders stay grounded and aware of the true project state.

Meetings become theatre. Dashboards become cosmetics. Problems do not disappear; they are deferred, diluted, or disguised. By the time they re-emerge, they do so at a cost—financial, operational, and reputational.

At this stage, the leader is not simply mistaken. He is structurally isolated. The feedback loop that should correct him has been compromised.

And the work continues. However, the work does not forgive.

Concrete does not respond to confidence. Coordination does not bend to authority. Program assumptions do not survive on belief. Reality has a way of asserting itself, and when it does, it does so without negotiation.

Gravity is undefeated. Quality is a bill that must be paid.

THE LEADER'S SOBRIETY PROTOCOL

If this is the condition, then correction cannot be casual. It must be deliberate, structured, and continuous.

The first step is admission. A leader must acknowledge that success can distort judgment, that experience can create blind spots, and that confidence, when left unchecked, becomes a liability. Without this awareness, every other step is cosmetic.

The second step is to reconnect with the work itself. This requires more than presence; it requires intent. The leader must return to direct observation—walking the site, interrogating what is seen, and validating it against what is reported. Reports are interpretations. The site is evidence.

The third step is to reintroduce friction into the decision-making environment. A system without challenge is neither efficient nor robust. Leaders must actively create space for disagreement, encourage it, and protect those who provide it.

The fourth step is to separate respect from compliance. A compliant team is easy to manage but dangerous to rely on. A respectful team will challenge, question, and refine decisions. If authority produces silence instead of clarity, the system is already degraded.

The fifth step is to demand unfiltered information and trace it back to its source. Data must be understood in its original form, not just in its presentation. Leaders must engage directly with those generating the information.

The sixth step is to build a counterweight within the leadership structure. Every leader needs someone willing to challenge him directly. Without that counterbalance, leadership becomes self-reinforcing and increasingly detached.

The final step is to re-anchor leadership to outcomes rather than identity. The project does not respond to reputation or past success. It responds to present decisions and present execution.

For me, this meant returning to first principles—discipline, not instinct. It meant grounding my decisions in a structured approach: PACE: Planning deliberately, Action with intent, Completing with accountability, and Evaluating honestly. Not occasionally, but as a continuous cycle.

It also meant forcing myself to see the job through all its realities, the 7M's—not just progress and cost, but workforce, materials, methods, machines, money, measurement, and the one factor that humbles all plans—Mother Nature.

Because when you are high on your own supply, you stop seeing the full picture. And when you stop seeing the full picture, the job begins to slip—quietly at first, then all at once.

This is not a one-time correction. It is a discipline because the conditions that create the problem do not disappear.

WORKING WITHIN THE SYSTEM

For those operating under a leader in this condition, the challenge is immediate and practical.

Confrontation is rarely effective. Emotional responses will be dismissed, and blunt opposition will be interpreted as resistance. At the same time, passive compliance allows flawed decisions to move forward unchecked. The path forward is precision.

Communication must be grounded in facts, not opinions. Problems must be made visible through the work itself rather than framed as arguments. The objective is not to win the discussion, but to expose reality in a way that cannot be easily dismissed.

This requires discipline and patience. Influence in such an environment is rarely direct.

At the same time, professional integrity must be preserved. Documentation, clarity, and alignment of understanding are essential—not for politics, but for accountability.

There is, however, a harder truth. Not every

leader corrects course.

Some are too deeply embedded in their own narrative. Some are supported by systems that reinforce it. Some do not want to hear the truth. In those cases, the decision becomes one of judgment.

Do you remain within the system and manage the risks, or do you step away before the consequences extend beyond the project and into your own professional standing?

Because failure does not remain isolated, it propagates.

WHERE THIS ENDS

Leadership is often described in terms of strength—decisiveness, confidence, control. These are necessary, but they are not sufficient.

The more difficult discipline is restraint. The ability to question your own judgment, to invite challenge, and to remain connected to reality even when success suggests otherwise.

The discipline, then, is not complexity. It is consistency. To plan, act, complete, and evaluate without skipping steps. To measure the job through all its moving parts, not just the convenient ones. To stay grounded in the fundamentals, even when success tempts you to rise above them.

What that Tuesday afternoon taught me was not to reduce confidence, but to respect its limits. Because confidence, without correction, is not strength. It is exposure.

And on a jobsite like this—under that heat, with that pressure—exposure does not stay hidden for long, it reveals itself.

Through rework. Through delay. Through cost. Through failure that no report can mask.

So the question is not whether you are capable. It is whether you are still connected to the work, to the truth, and to the people willing to challenge you.

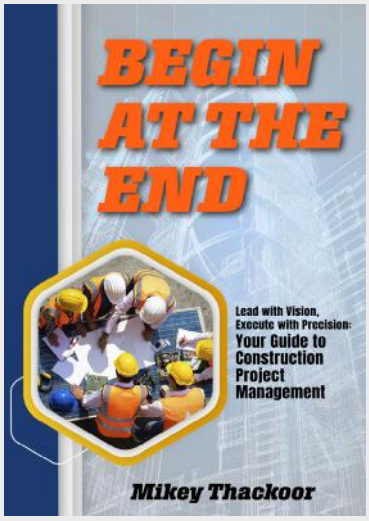
Because the moment that the connection is lost, leadership does not fail immediately.

It drifts, and by the time you feel it....the job already knows, reality doesn't raise its voice—it just sends the bill.

Mr. Mikey Thackoor is an experienced professional in the construction industry with a track record of over 25 years working across the globe. Mr. Thackoor provides expert leadership in project development, design, implementation, and execution to ensure optimal results are achieved.

Mikey Thackoor is the author of:

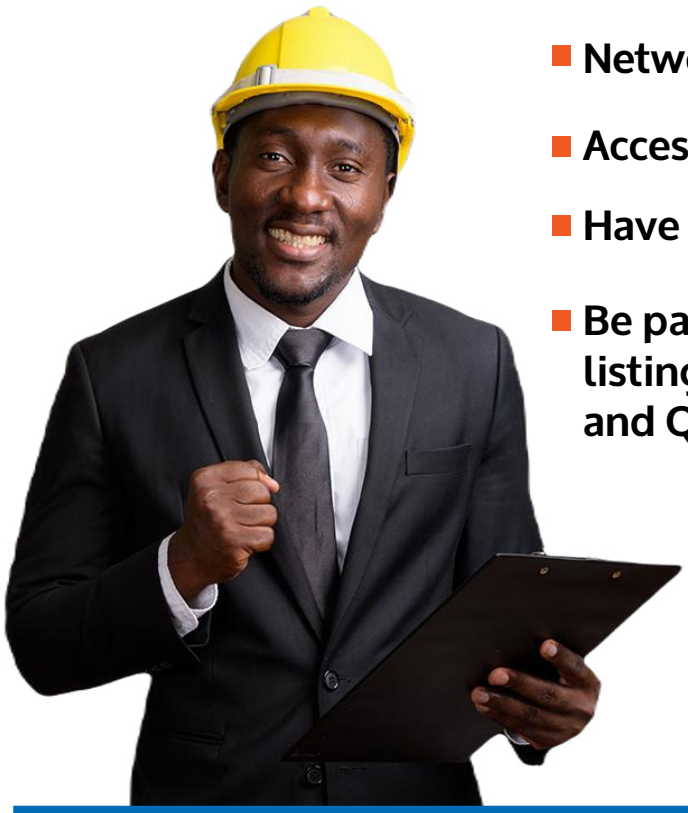
BEGIN AT THE END
Lead with Vision, Execute with Precision: Your Guide to Construction Project Management



www.mikeythackoor.com

JOIN TTCA

Be part of a United Voice for our Construction Sector



- Network with fellow Members
- Access to Events, Workshops & Seminars
- Have a Voice in shaping Industry Legislation
- Be part of TTCA's Database with Company listings on our Website, Annual Directory and Quarterly e-Magazine - The Contractor

Register Online

627-1266

service@ttca.com