

**Comments on the Seventh Report of  
the Joint Select Committee on Social  
Services and Public Administration on  
an Inquiry into the Management of  
the Targeted Conditional Cash  
Transfer Programme:  
Fourth Session 2018/2019  
11th Parliament of the Republic of  
Trinidad and Tobago**

Ministry of Social  
Development  
and Family  
Services

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## **Foreword**

The Ministry of the Social Development and Family Services, (MSDFS) is the core social sector Ministry charged with the responsibility for coordinating the implementation of Government's social and human development objectives. The MSDFS is mandated with responsibility for addressing the social challenges of poverty, social inequality and social exclusion. Particular emphasis is placed on developing and executing programmes and services that protect and assist vulnerable and marginalized groups in society such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, the poor/indigent, the socially displaced, ex-prisoners, deportees and persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Guided by the tenets 'Helping, Empowering and Transforming Lives', the Ministry seeks to empower its clientele through rehabilitative and skill enhancement initiatives, which promote human prosperity in the context of sustainable development. The MSDFS is also responsible for developing, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating social sector policies and programmes to ensure sustainability, cultural relevance and economic viability. Given this mandate, the MSDFS remains committed to adhering to the first thematic pillar of the National Development Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago, Vision 2030, *putting people first so as to nurture our greatest assets*.

The MSDFS continues to support the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration in achieving its mandate and objectives as outlined in Standing Order 91 of the Senate and 101 of the House of Representatives, by reporting in a timely and comprehensive manner. This document provides the Ministry's response to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the management of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP).

## **Overall Comment**

The Ministry reviewed the Report and is of the view that it outlines in a comprehensive manner, the key issues relevant to the TCCTP, providing very practical and valuable solutions to the challenges faced and sound recommendations for improvement. Accordingly, the Ministry thanks the Committee for the report and commits to work on the implementation of the recommendations as far as is possible within the context of the availability of adequate human and financial resources. The comments of the Ministry have been outlined in keeping with the various objectives of the Inquiry.

## **Comments on Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Management of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme**

### **Objective 1- To assess the effectiveness of the programme since its inception, with respect to poverty reduction.**

**General Comments:** The MSDFS recognises the challenges encountered in providing up-to-date poverty statistics necessary to inform policy development, policy implementation and resource allocation. Accordingly, the Ministry has been working toward the institutionalisation of the Survey of Living Conditions by recommending that it be undertaken every two years and by obtaining Cabinet's approval for placing the responsibility of its conduct under the Central Statistical Office.

**Recommendation 4.1.32 (A):** The MSDFS does not realistically have the necessary data and human resources available to undertake a social impact assessment of the TCCTP on poverty reduction within the timeframe stipulated in the Report. The MSDFS would require more time to plan and undertake this type of assessment, which may require the recruitment of a consultant.

#### **Recommendation 4.132 (B)**

The Ministry notes the recommendation. However, the Ministry wishes to point out that the Term of Reference and research framework for the conduct of the SLC were sound. The issue which led to the rejection of the Report was a technical one related to the analysis of the data. The Ministry also notes the recommendation on the inclusion of risk mitigation methods into contractual agreements. Whilst this is usually done, the Ministry will consider the strengthening of this component in the future.

#### **Recommendation 4.132 (C) & (D)**

The revision of the STEP-UP has been completed and is under review by the executive of the Ministry. Implementation will commence before the end of fiscal 2019 on a phased approach and will include an M& E component, which requires the capture of data on the clients.

#### **Recommendation 4.132 (E)**

The list of approved food items was revised. Careful consideration will be given to the recommendation for the inclusion of locally produced goods. The Ministry is mindful however, that we must first determine the feasibility of such an initiative.

#### **Recommendation 4.132 (F)**

The Ministry has undertaken a number of community outreaches throughout the country and proposes to continue these in fiscal 2019. Already a number of such outreaches have been undertaken, which includes promotion of the Food Support Programme. A new wave of outreaches have been planned to follow the launch of the Ministry's Mobile Outreach Unit in June 2019.

**Recommendation 4.132 (G):**

- (i) Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) 2018/2019 - Cabinet vide Minute No. 1286 of July 20, 2017 agreed to inter alia: the commencement of the conduct of the SLC 2018 by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in collaboration with the MSDFS; and that the CSO should be charged with the responsibility of undertaking all future SLCs under the direct purview of the MSDFS. The conduct of the fieldwork for the SLC 2019 will be undertaken by the CSO, while the MSDFS would have responsibility for procuring a consultant to analyse the data obtained and produce the written report. As at May 2019 a draft Cabinet Note was prepared for submission by the Ministry of Planning and Development for approval of staffing and funding for the CSO for the conduct of the SLC 2018/2019

Additionally, the findings of the SLC 2014 were adjusted by Kairi Consultants based on an updated Retail Price Index (RPI) provided by the CSO. The Tables will be published on CSO's website and the revised final report will be handed over to the MSDFS.

- (ii) National Poverty Reduction Strategy: The Ministry is currently preparing a concept paper on a National Poverty Strategy. Further internal discussions are required in order to effect any action, while awaiting the necessary output data from the implementation of the SLC 2018/2019. The revised SLC 2014 data will be utilised to update this document.

**Objective 2 – To examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and organisational structure of the TCCTP**

**General Comments:** The MSDFS acknowledges that some critical systems required for the successful implementation of the TCCTP were not adopted prior to implementation of the programme. The absence of formal inter-sectoral linkages, a robust information technology infrastructure and mechanisms to monitor supermarkets contributed to many of the challenges encountered in successfully implementing the programme. The efficient and effective implementation of this type of programme depended heavily on the availability of structured supply-side interventions and comprehensive data management systems.

**4.2.32 (iii)** – The Ministry of Public Administration in collaboration with the MSDFS is undertaking an institutional strengthening exercise for the Social Welfare Division. This exercise would also examine the staff and client satisfaction levels with the current service delivery methods and highlight issues with regard to efficiently administering the food card. This exercise will also entail an examination of current policies, processes and operational procedures, which govern the Social Welfare Division with a view to identifying deficiencies and making recommendations, which can bring about greater responsiveness for both staff and citizens who seek the MSDFS' services. The purpose of the diagnostic is to examine the operations of the Social Welfare Division based on:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the delivery system;
- The overall quality of the delivery system; and

- An identification of the desired and actual performance related to service delivery;
- Gaps between desired and actual performance; and
- Causes of these performance gaps.

The outcome of the diagnostic will be a more responsive, efficient and effective delivery system to both internal and external customers.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (A):** As at May 2019, seven (7) contract positions for Social Welfare Field Officers have been filled. The Human Resource Division of the Ministry is working to fill the remaining twelve (12) vacancies, which should be completed by June 2019.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (D)**

The implementation of the STEP Up model will address this recommendation.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (B), (C) and (E):** The MSDFS is currently drafting an internal Policy for Administration of the Food Card under the Social Welfare Division, which would speak to inter alia timeframes and expectations for service delivery. The document would also speak to the need for a standardised application process as well as regular audits and accompanying checks and balances to prevent fraud. Upon finalisation of the Policy, all Social Welfare Officers involved in administering the Food Card will be sensitised to the requirements of the Policy, so that implementation of this initiative is standardised, efficient and effective.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (F)**

Funding constraints may pose a challenge to the undertaking of this recommendation.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (H):** There are other grants available under the MSDFS to treat with minors with special needs. The food card is issued based on the household's need for food. Perhaps the Ministry can explore giving multiple families within the same house food cards, as opposed to multiple households within the same house.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (I):** The updated card processing system is expected to be implemented by July 2019. The Ministry is currently finalising arrangements with TT Post to deliver the new card to approximately 17,000 clients.

**Recommendation 4.2.32 (J):** In instances of natural disasters the ODPM's Disaster Response Policy Framework for Trinidad and Tobago would take effect. First responder agencies such as the Regional Corporations provide food relief via food hampers together with other basic household amenities to affected persons. The Regional Corporations are also responsible for stocking the shelters provided by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Education. As a secondary responder, the MSDFS is activated during the recovery phase of the disaster management cycle and has responsibility along with other key agencies for the restoration of living conditions of disaster-affected communities. At this stage of support, which occurs after the emergency has been brought under control, the provision of food support via cards is supplementary.

**Objective 3: To examine the financial status of the TCCTP and the procedures/policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money in the management of the programme.**

**General Comments:** The Ministry is committed to developing and implementing more comprehensive systems and procedures to ensure value for money in the continued administration of the Food Support Programme. In this regard, a Food Support Policy is being prepared and more robust mechanisms for monitoring card usage have been incorporated into the new card system to be introduced from July 2019.

**Recommendation 4.3.18 (A)**

Implementation of this recommendation will be subject to the availability of funding.

**Recommendation 4.3.18 (B):** The estimated total expenditure for food support for 24,327 clients (17,894 persons via the TT Card at \$119,374,814.00 and 6,433 persons via cheques from NIB at \$30,226,360.00) as at the end of fiscal 2018 was \$149,601,174.00. As the STEP-UP model is essentially a case management approach to the delivery of social services, it is not envisaged that its implementation will entail significant costs save for those associated with adequate staffing of the relevant Units and training of staff which will be undertaken internally.

**Recommendation 4.3.18 (C):**

STEP-UP continues to be viewed as a major strategy in support of the Ministry's and Government's overall social development objectives. Given the tenets of this programme, the intention is to enhance and widely implement the STEP-UP component, with particular focus on the psychosocial aspect, to treat with the dependency syndrome. Such enhancement must consider the current socio-economic landscape of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and more importantly, the country's vision for the most vulnerable in our society. In this regard, the enhancement and extensive implementation of the STEP UP Developmental Model for social programmes was recommended as a pre-requisite for building resilience. The STEP-UP Model also includes process flow charts as well as a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan.

**Objective 4: To assess the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the TCCTP**

**General Comments:** The Ministry acknowledges that STEP-UP was never fully operationalized over the years reducing the ability of the programme to contribute in any meaningful way to the overall poverty reduction objective of Government. Beneficiaries continued to stay on the programme for years despite the initial plans to work closely with households with a view to graduating them to sustainable livelihoods. The Ministry commits to fully implementing the Programme by the second quarter of fiscal 2020.

**Recommendation 4.4.3 (A&C)**

The Ministry continues to work on the finalisation of its M&E framework assisted by the Ministry of Planning and Development as the Ministry with oversight of the Government's results-based management framework. The Ministry expects to complete the framework by

the end of the second quarter fiscal 2010 as the M&E Unit is almost fully staffed save for a Director for which technical assistance has been sought from the Commonwealth Technical Assistance Fund.

**Recommendation 4.4.3 (B):** To achieve the strategic objective of integrating all social services, the Ministry is proposing the ISEMS – Integrated Social Enterprise Management System. The goal of this project is to develop, implement and maintain an ISEMS that will facilitate the automation and re-engineering of the Ministry’s core business processes and allow for the seamless administration of social services, data and information collaboration among Government ministries and agencies. In fiscal 2018, the MSDFS through iGovTT invited tenderers and potential vendors for the establishment/development of the system. A Tender Evaluation Committee was convened to review the tender bidding documents but no vendor was selected as the bidders failed to meet the minimum approved threshold in the technical evaluation phase. The Request for Proposals was recently revised. The procurement process is expected to commence by the middle of the third quarter.

### **Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**