

Inquiry into Persons living in Poverty and
Extreme Poverty in Trinidad and Tobago
with specific focus on Vulnerable Groups

Ministry of Social Development and Family
Services

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Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) to Recommendations from Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Persons Living in Poverty and Extreme Poverty in Trinidad and Tobago with Specific Focus on Vulnerable Groups

1.0 Introduction

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services reiterates its gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to the rich and meaningful discussion conducted on the inquiry into persons living in poverty and extreme poverty in Trinidad and Tobago with specific focus on vulnerable groups. The Ministry further welcomes the opportunity to respond to the final recommendations and comments emerging out of the inquiry.

The Ministry, as a leader within the social sector, entrusted with the responsibility to implement the Government's social and human development objectives is committed to alleviating poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as facilitating the provision of the highest quality social services to the citizens, in keeping with the Ministry's Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023. Accordingly, in the Ministry's efforts to achieve its Strategic Goal 3 to "*Reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and inequality*", it is prepared to work with its stakeholders and partners to identify collaborative solutions to address the concerns and recommendations emanating from the inquiry. In general, the Ministry is in agreement with the recommendations proposed and further provides specific responses to the recommendations as outlined on pages forty-seven (47), fifty-six (56) and fifty-seven (57) of the Committee's Report.

Specific Response to Recommendations:

4.10. The Committee concurs with the recommendation of OPM (Appendix VIII) that greater understanding of poverty, nationally, requires up-to-date research and recommends that the MSDFS conduct and complete the Survey of Living Conditions by August 2020 and update the poverty line utilised by the MSDFS to reflect the current economic climate in Trinidad and Tobago.

The MSDFS also endorses the requirement to maintain an evidence based approach to poverty reduction initiatives and a robust social protection system. Accordingly, Cabinet in 2017 directed that the conduct of the Survey of Living Conditions should fall under the responsibilities of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) with collaborative support from the MSDFS. The CSO has indicated that, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, training and fieldwork for the Survey were suspended in March 2020, and is proposed to resume in October 2020. At this time, the Survey is expected to be concluded in fiscal 2021. Following the analysis and findings of the Survey, the MSDFS will be able to further update the poverty line, it utilises presently. It should be noted

that the line has been adjusted taking into account the food basket prices for December 2019 as collected by the Central Statistical Office.

4.11. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS collaborate with the requisite NGOs to sensitize vulnerable groups on the current MSDFS programmes and services (as identified in Table 4) and seek proposals of NGOs on making programmes and services of the MSDFS more accessible to vulnerable persons living in poverty.

The MSDFS seeks to host regular public sensitisation sessions about the services of the Ministry through the conduct of its *Public Information Education and Sensitisation (PIES)*, as well as the *Social Outreach and Impact Caravan*. Through both mechanisms, the Ministry is able to provide stakeholders with direct information on services of the Ministry, eligibility criteria and accessibility guidelines. Through the Caravan, the Ministry also partners with other Governmental co-creators within the social sector, as well as, civil society organisations catering to the needs of the indigent, poor and vulnerable.

In March 2020, the Ministry had to suspend its outreach calendar due to the measures adopted to contain the spread of Covid-19. Accordingly, the Ministry proposes to recommence its schedule of sensitisation and engagement sessions in September 2020 utilising a hybrid modality, which includes virtual and appointment-based face-to-face sessions. These initiatives are in keeping with the Ministry's current thrust to improve targeting to enhance social services delivery.

Additionally, the NGO Unit of the MSDFS manages the Ministry's relationship with partner NGOs in the delivery of social services in communities. In this capacity, the Unit provides a yearly reminder to the NGOs under its purview, a listing of social services (inclusive of contact information) accessible through the Ministry. In fiscal 2021, the Unit will also seek to strengthen its collaborative relationship with the NGOs ensuring that their respective work plans are closely aligned with the mandate of the MSDFS. In this regard, the Unit will host virtual and face-to-face sensitisations sessions to keep the NGO community abreast of the initiatives of the MSDFS geared towards vulnerable groups.

Also in fiscal 2021, the Ministry will be implementing a number of initiatives outlined in the National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP) one of which is the Review of Social Programmes. As part of the project, NGOs will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the ways in which key social programmes could be improved.

4.12. In accordance with Goal 8 of the “ILO’s Decent work and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development ^{xxviii}” to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030,” the Committee recommends that the MSDFS and the MOLSED collaborate with NGOS who represent PWDs and other stakeholders to create policies to promote equal recruitment practices for PWDs, as well as to develop strategies which promote job creation as well as address skill mismatching for persons who are underemployed.

The MSDFS acknowledges agreement with this recommendation and notes that the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities has identified *Work and Employment* as a fundamental pillar in keeping with Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The policy seeks to facilitate labour market participation and equality of opportunity and treatment within the workplace for persons with disabilities.

Accordingly, the Ministry, through the Disability Affairs Unit (DAU), and in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (MOLSED), will commence technical discussions in August 2020 on a project aimed at employment and entrepreneurship for persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups (previously “Project Enable”). The project is designed with several objectives in keeping with the MOLSED’s Decent Work agenda and ILO’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention (No. 159) and Recommendation (No. 168). The project will seek to:

- create visibility of persons with disabilities to prospective employers
- sensitise employers with the requisite guidelines on the types of accommodation required for persons with disabilities
- facilitate the empowerment of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups by exposing them to entrepreneurship development
- provide persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups with the necessary support mechanisms to strengthen their capacity to successfully acquire jobs and develop viable business enterprises

The Ministry will continue to pursue this initiative by finalising the project design and commence a pilot programme in Fiscal 2021 in anticipation of its phased implementation.

The Ministry also advises that following the completion of an Assessment of the Disability Sector currently being conducted through the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), its findings will help to better inform the Ministry’s strategic work plan agenda for the fiscal periods going forward. The Assessment will cover areas such as education, livelihoods and social protection, and more specifically examining economic activities such as labour force participation, employment, unemployment and access to employment services, etc., which would be useful towards the MSDFS satisfying its commitments towards persons with disabilities.

4.51. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS commence implementation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy by December 2020.

The MSDFS will actively continue in its commitment to address the issues of poverty and vulnerability in Trinidad and Tobago, through the development and implementation of a well-coordinated and targeted NPRS. This strategy will primarily seek to reduce poverty, vulnerability and inequality through a number of data-driven social programmes and initiatives, among other things.

Moreover, the reduction of poverty has been prioritised in Goal 3 of the ‘Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services 2018 – 2023,’ which reads: *Reduce and Prevent Poverty, Vulnerability and Inequality.*’

Some of the initiatives under this goal include the following:

- Develop and implement a National Poverty Reduction Strategy including:
 - Improved targeting mechanisms for social programmes
 - Improved mechanisms to reduce vulnerability and inequality
 - Improved mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Ministry’s social programmes
 -
- Strengthen and develop initiatives, informed by strategy to enhance opportunities and income security and facilitate empowerment to reduce vulnerability of target groups
- Improve household capacities and assets (against agreed indicators)
- Facilitate entrepreneurial training and small-scale income generating opportunities in collaboration with partners etc.

Some social indicators include:

- % of social programmes for which a means test is applied
- 10% reduction in the level of poverty
- 10% reduction in the vulnerability gap
- % of persons graduated out of social programmes within an established timeframe
- No. of and % of persons rehabilitated
- No. and % of persons re-integrated by programme

It was MSDFS’s intention to begin the implementation of the NPRS in the first quarter of the 2021, however, due to the setback precipitated by the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Ministry is still in the process of undertaking preparatory work to inform the NPRS. As such, the implementation of NPRS will be more feasible in the third quarter of fiscal 2021.

4.52. The Committee recommends that the On-The-Job Training Programme implements a ticketing system similar to the MSDFS' ticketing system in order to facilitate efficient follow-up for applicants to the Programme.

In September 2019, the Ministry implemented a Ticketing System at the ten (10) Social Welfare Offices as a customer management system to help keep track of its open cases and a mechanism to improve customer service delivery. The Ministry welcomes the opportunity to share its learnings and assist the On-The-Job (OJT) Training Programme with the implementation of a ticketing system similar to the one currently in use at our offices. The MSDFS' Monitoring and Evaluation Division recently completed an evaluation of the system and the findings would be useful to assisting the OJT Programme in designing an efficient solution. In first quarter fiscal 2021, the Ministry will engage the OJT Programme with information sharing.

4.53. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS complete the implementation of the recommendations from the rapid assessment report of the UNECLAC on the implementation of the Standard Means Test (Appendix VII) by December, 2020.

The Ministry has commenced addressing the concerns and recommendations contained in the UNECLAC review of the Standard Means Test. The Ministry is presently revising a Cabinet Note for submission within the first quarter of fiscal 2021. The Ministry is also taking the opportunity to revisit some of the recommendations within the review to implement within the first and second quarters fiscal of 2021 in keeping with its implementation of Phase 1 of the National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP).

4.54. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS recruit additional staff and provide the requisite training for the 45 vacancies within the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS.

The MSDFS agrees with this recommendation and has already commenced the process to ensure that the above vacancies are filled within the Social Welfare Division (SWD). A recommendation has been made to Service Commissions Department for qualified officers in the MSDFS to act as Social Welfare Adviser I (SWA I) and for the Ministry to advertise and fill all vacant posts. The Ministry is currently awaiting a response. Subsequently, training will be provided. In addition, a Cabinet Note has been prepared to create additional contract positions to supplement the established positions.

4.55. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS increase the staff complement of its ICT Solution team in order to provide additional support for the implementation of technological initiatives such as the SSCMS and the ISEMS.

The MSDF is committed to ensuring that it has the requisite cadre of staff to support the implementation of its technological initiatives. The recruitment and selection process commenced for the filling of the undermentioned contract positions in the ICT Division:

- IT Analyst Programmer (1)
- ICT Security Specialist (1)
- Manager, Solutions Development and Implementation (1)
- Senior Network Specialist (1)
- Senior Information Systems Specialist (1)
- Senior Information Systems Support Specialist (1)
- Information Systems Support Specialist (1)

Web Content Specialist would be advertised when next an advertisement is issued.

4.56. Given that ALTA is a key NGO in the provision of literacy instruction, the Committee recommends that the Adult Education Programme Unit of the MSDFS establish a MOU with ALTA to refer students who have completed their literacy classes at ALTA to the services of the Adult Education Programme.

The MSDFS agrees with the recommendation that an MOU be established between the Adult Education Programme and ALTA. The Ministry will commence discussions on this partnership within fiscal 2021.

4.57. The Committee recommends that during the implementation of national poverty strategies that the MSDFS collaborate with various NGOs, CSOs and State agencies that provide programmes and services to the vulnerable groups living in poverty in Trinidad and Tobago and give consideration to the inclusion of non-MSDFS programmes and services within the directory of the social services.

The MSDFS acknowledges the critical role that civil society organisations play in the social protection system and commits to the inclusion and collaboration with NGOs, CSOs and other social sector co-creators in implementing programmes to address the risks, needs and vulnerabilities of vulnerable groups living in poverty. The Ministry also wishes to clarify that the Directory of Social Services is a work in progress. The first edition of the Directory will contain all social programmes available in Trinidad and Tobago at the level of government. However, the intention is to include all programmes including those from non-government organisations in subsequent editions. The first edition of the Directory is expected to be e-launched in August 2020.

4.58. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS expands its outreach activities and utilise a targeted approach to ensure that the persons who are living in poverty and extreme poverty are aware of the available programmes and services.

As part of its external communications plan, the Ministry schedules regular engagements with stakeholders of the Ministry. Accordingly, the Ministry accepts the recommendation to expand its outreach activities and to adopt a more targeted approach to persons living in poverty and extreme poverty. The Ministry, as part of its fiscal 2021 outreach campaign will also seek innovative ways to promote greater awareness of the Ministry's programmes and services and will tailor its strategy to improve targeting to this vulnerable group.

4.59. Given the negative customer service experienced when applying for programmes and services at the MSDFS identified by many of the NGOs as a challenge, the Committee recommends that the MSDFS conduct continuous training with all members of staff on customer service.

The Ministry is aware of the negative reviews regarding customer service identified by varying stakeholders. In 2017, the Ministry launched an internal Client Care Service Initiative entitled "Premium Client Care". The initiative was implemented Ministry-wide by an inter-divisional team and targeted all staff in the Ministry. Following, the success of that initiative, the Ministry continues to provide customer service training to staff during orientation and has also initiated customer feedback forms at all district offices. However, the Ministry recognises the need for continuous staff training and will commit to designing a refresher-training course that will be

periodically conducted, particularly with front office staff. The Ministry will also seek to strengthen its recruitment processes to facilitate the best candidates for the positions required.

In 2019, the Ministry also conducted a Client Satisfaction Survey as part of the Diagnostic Assessment of the Social Welfare Division and continues to conduct ongoing surveys using the 2019 survey as a baseline to assess improvements in customer service. Customer Service Representatives have also been introduced in all the Social Welfare Offices to improve the experience of clients.

4.60. The Committee concurs with the recommendation of FEEL that there is a need for the MSDFS to determine the existing programmes provided by NGOs and State Agencies and the accessibility of these programmes in terms of cost, location or time.

The Ministry through the implementation of the Cabinet-Approved National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP) 2017 – 2022, will address these concerns through several of its recommendations. In the first instance, the NSMP has as one of its recommendations the conduct of an Assessment of the Civil Society Sector, which intends to examine the role and contribution of civil society organisations to national development. Through the launch of the Social Services Directory, the Ministry will also develop a feedback mechanism for stakeholders to provide input to the second edition of the document; thereby allowing the Ministry to be aware of organisations not included, as well as improve its contents. Finally, through the recommendations to Conduct a Review of Current Social Programmes, as well as, Implement Measures to Minimise the Transaction Costs of Participating in Social Programmes, the Ministry will be better poised to respond to these programme design issues. These critical research studies are expected to commence within fiscal 2021.

4.61. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS finalise and commence implementation of the Draft Policy on Ageing by December 2020.

The completion of the National Policy on Ageing remains a priority responsibility for the Ministry. At present, the first policy document is under review by an internal inter-divisional working committee. However, given the policy development process the conduct of stakeholder engagements to facilitate comprehensive feedback to inform revisions and finalisation of the document is necessary. Accordingly, due to restrictions associated with curbing the spread of COVID-19, the conduct of these sessions would be impacted. The Ministry proposes that the Draft Policy and Action Plan will be completed by final quarter of Fiscal 2021 and stakeholder engagements will be facilitated thereafter.

4.62. The Committee recommends that the MSDFS note the recommendations from stakeholders in Appendix VI to improve the programmes and services of the MSDFS and to reduce and mitigate poverty and extreme poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry welcomes these detailed recommendations by stakeholder-partners and commits to examining how these can be incorporated into our current strategic agenda. Accordingly, as a precursor to this exercise, the Ministry has reviewed its Strategic Plan (2018 – 2023) and aligned these recommendations to its strategies and going forward will continue to explore further opportunities for achievement **(see Appendix**

APPENDIX I

Re: Appendix III - Recommendations from Stakeholders

The following stakeholders provided feedback to the MSDFS during the Inquiry on Poverty and Extreme Poverty:

1. Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA)
2. Single Fathers Association T&T (SFATT)
3. Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women
4. The Salvation Army
5. SERVOL
6. SMATT
7. Living Water Community
8. MOLSED
9. United Way Trinidad and Tobago
10. Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI
11. FEEL
12. Is There Not A Cause
13. NCPD
14. The Cotton Tree Foundation
15. NCSHL
16. Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development, THA
17. OPM
18. Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI
19. United Nations Country Team
20. MOE

The following provides a thematic representation of recommendations from the Stakeholders¹ with responses based on the current strategic agenda of the Ministry²:

1. *Public Awareness, Sensitisation & Outreach*

- Accessibility – a comprehensive directory of services available could be useful, not only electronically (on the websites) but also at the level of the offices (for e.g. Members' of Parliament offices) as persons in some communities may not be able to access information online;
- The need to determine what programmes exist and the accessibility of same in terms of cost, location, time etc.
- A comprehensive directory of products and services offered and working to address poverty;

¹ The recommendations were realigned based on themes rather than stakeholders for the purpose of analysis.

² I.e. the Ministry's Cabinet Approved Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023.

- An increase in outreach sessions by the relevant Ministries to inform citizens in all areas of the country about the assistance that is available to them;
- Conduct more Outreach and Educational programmes that directly connects the external stakeholders with the offerings of the institution, while at the same time educating the public about the products and services on offer and the role it plays in impacting the poverty eradication objectives of the government.
- Increased awareness programmes of programmes and services available under the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development (DHWFD), THA;
- Improved implementation of outreach services to all key population groups including the homeless, persons with mental illnesses and substance users;
- Scaled-up programming outreach to the elderly and ex-prison population;
- Increased national support using existing institutions.

MSDFS Response:

The MSDFS' Strategic Plan highlights the ongoing public sensitisation and outreach direction of the Ministry for the period 2018- 2023. Under Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan – “*to Protect, Empower and Transform Families*” - the MSDFS is committed to increasing the level of support provided to families by 30% (10% per annum) through information and advocacy services, as well as building awareness and access to services for positive family development, in collaboration with partners via public education and sensitisation.

As previously indicated the Ministry also conducts regular Public Information Education and Sensitisation Sessions and its Social Outreach Caravan. These initiatives allow the MSDFS to partner with various social sector agencies to visit communities to bring services to the residents. The Ministry will continue these initiatives in fiscal 2021 and will reach out to the stakeholders herein for their support and collaboration.

2. Improved Efficiency of the MSDFS' Administration/Offices

- For State delivery of services, non-judgmental, compassionate approach by trained personnel;
- Reduce bureaucracy to ensure more prompt delivery of services especially in emergencies;
- Lack of understanding of poverty by those in state agencies working with vulnerable people;
- Training and retraining of Officers to treat with vulnerable groups to ensure officers are up to date with modern information and technologies as to enhance the quality of service delivered throughout the organization.
- Improve networking within the DHWFD to direct clients to be available programmes within the THA;
- Increased number of trained staff to disburse programmes and support services.

MSDFS Response:

In keeping with its strategic agenda, “by 2023, the Ministry will be a best-in-class organization, characterised by a culture of service excellence, innovation, effective resource management and resilience.” As such, the Ministry will focus its attention on three wide ranging, interoperable lines of action:

1. Improve organisational performance by 50% against agreed management and efficiency indicators;
2. Improve Client Perception of the MSDFS by 50%;
3. Establish a culture of continuous learning, innovation and operating for results.

To achieve these results the Ministry has identified that it will be reviewing and enhancing HRM systems and processes; improving performance management; designing and implementing an employee engagement strategy; modernising the ICT infrastructure; and upgrading the MSDFS Corporate Communications Strategy and systems. The Ministry is of the view that these critical initiatives will assist in creating a better working environment, characterised by increased employee morale and motivation which will translate into greater efficiency at our offices.

3. Stakeholder Partnerships

- Official Stakeholder partnership with the TTPS and NGOs e.g. Workshops on applications and the administration of means testing for issuance of public grants, public assistance and food cards;
- A partnership between the Adult Education Unit and ALTA.
- Providing resources to charitable institutions to adequately fund and expand current services;
- Network and collaborate with charitable institutions in designing special services for the elderly, mentally challenged, and homeless;
- Financial assistance to charitable bodies towards building repairs and maintenance;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the work of Civil Society Organisations to include documentary evidence of support provided to an individual/ household;
- More concrete partnerships with the three sectors (public, private and civil);
- Better recognition of the role played by civil society organisations
- Establish Partnerships with Agencies of the State where they do not currently exist and strengthen the partnerships with State agencies where they have been previously formalized.
- A system for monitoring the number of individuals and organizations that request donations for one-off events; and
- Greater coordination among social sector Ministries/agencies and civil society organisations that serve this group;
- Sharing of knowledge among agencies and Ministries that would positively impact this group;

- Meaningful engagement and collaboration with civil society groups which address poverty.
- Consider the opportunity for integrated projects to address risk reduction and access to services with the Ministry of Health and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs);
- Review NGOs receiving annual subvention in alignment with the services and numbers served.
- Work with Social Work Department at the UWI, and with the IGDS, to promote more in-depth understanding of the structural impact of gender norms as drivers of poverty and social vulnerability;
- Stronger, functional dialogue mechanisms which requires that constituency groups are appropriately prepared to participate; (ILO)
- Civil society needs sustained funding in order to continue their work to reach the most vulnerable; (UNFPA)
- Strengthen intra and inter-ministerial coordination or integration of programme across the public sector; (UNICEF)
- Review of the qualifying criteria for the Disability and Public Assistance Grants
- Increase in the Education Grant to \$650.00 per secondary student and include Primary School students
- The Special Child Grant should be reviewed to mitigate costs incurred for specialist services
- Increase the number of student aides needed to support student with Special Educational Needs in schools
- Increase collaboration with the MOH to facilitate the efficient and effective delivery of mandatory health care services

MSDFS Response:

The MSDFS remains committed to fostering strong, beneficial collaboration among social sector partners compliant with international standards good governance for the social sector through:

- ✓ Establishment and maintenance of stakeholder collaboration and partnerships
- ✓ Coordination of the Social Sector Committee for the Vision 2030
- ✓ Conduct of periodic assessments of NGOs to build their capacity to effectively reach target groups
- ✓ Development and implementation of a shared research agenda in collaboration with partners that promotes social innovation and informs, services delivery excellence and good governance
- ✓ Utilisation of shared ICT systems (e.g. SSCMS/ISEMS to facilitate effective coordination among partners

This addresses a critical requirement for efficient and effective delivery of services – the capacity of delivery partners. Therefore, these initiatives are a priority in the first phase of the roll out of strategic plan as a pre-requisite for enhancing the quality and expanding the range of social services.

4. New Programme/Service/Initiative Recommendation

- Education for fathers on financial management and family planning.
- Introduce women and girls to programmes, which help to improve their knowledge and skills in ICTs; and help bridge the digital divide.
- Introduce the ALTA Online web-based, learn-to-read software in community centres, skills training centres and poverty alleviation initiatives.
- Remand/ incarcerated persons should be provided with parenting training;
- Based on a case by case basis Parents in breach of child maintenance can be placed on community service and parenting training as a less punitive approach.
- Incarcerated parents are unable to pay outstanding penalties;
- House to house outreach utilising local government network to access the poor;
- Scholarships should be put in place especially for the single parent homes.
- More emphasis and assistance towards self-help projects;
- Undertake a national drive towards eradicating illiteracy in primary and secondary schools and amongst the adult population;
- Implement a programme for rural employment support
- Poverty alleviation measures take a holistic look at the barriers to healthcare, as well as opportunities for enhancing the delivery and quality of healthcare accessed by those living in poverty in Trinidad and Tobago as persons living in poverty and extreme poverty may experience challenges related to the cost of transportation to the facilities, location of the facilities, opening hours, waiting times etc.
- Re – evaluate current poverty reduction strategies and design programmes informed by solid, fact-based evidence at both the macro and micro level;
- Provide trained teacher aids for students who attend secondary schools/vocational technical institutions;
- Help the adults understand their children and respond helpfully to both their positive and problem behaviour; Help parents develop their own skills and confidence via workshops targeting Life skills;
- Contribute to the development of the next generation of young community leaders through the Youth Support Projects;
- Identify talented youth early, ie primary years and provide enrichment opportunities. Also identify youth with behavioural and literacy challenges early and provide remedial and therapeutic services;
- Increase psychological support services in schools and communities (assessment/counselling/therapy);
- Design specialist programmes for specific areas;
- Establishment and implementation of the National Children’s Registry which will track children and their achievement of the standard development goals.
- Build and foster gender-sensitive community approaches to poverty reduction
- The payment of stipends to tertiary level students from households who are economically challenged

- The implementation of shelters for men and boys become a priority, to assist men transitioning out of extreme poverty into a state of financial stability;
- Shelters or short-term accommodation that can cater for Families as well as women and their children (including girls and boys)
- Provide more family shelters and safe houses.
- Establish convalescent homes for managed care for the mentally challenged who need supervision

MSDFS Response:

The MSDFS is committed to increasing the inclusion of vulnerable groups in its support systems by 25% through the development of programmes (in collaboration with stakeholder partners) for the rehabilitation and recovery of vulnerable groups for integration/reintegration into families.

In addition, the MSDFS intends to continue building awareness and access to services for positive family development in collaboration with partners e.g.

- ✓ Public education and sensitisation
- ✓ Restorative programmes
- ✓ Parent education, participation and support groups
- ✓ Mental health, mediation and crisis intervention
- ✓ Training in areas/issues related to the family
- ✓ Building family resilience – ability to adapt and cope with stress and adversity

5. Improvement to the Delivery of Existing Programmes/Services/Initiatives

- Make literacy screening, and improvement where required, a pre-requisite for access to all free government skills training programmes.
- More effective appeal service for persons who experienced/perceived discrimination in their application for State services.
- Improve accountability of individuals seeking assistance;
- The establishment of an electronic system for use by all organisations working in this sphere;
- Improve accountability to the public via a system for monitoring proceeds of fundraising events and requirement to publicly state revenue, expenses, profit or loss and use of proceeds.
- Need for a better system flow for those accessing social grants;
- Simplified application process.
- Examine the process to access low-income housing to ensure its accessible by those who need it;
- Adequate funding should be provided to promote entrepreneurship through training programmes or incubator systems
- Advocacy for improved financing of preventative programmes of Government and funding of service delivery.

MSDFS Response:

The MSDFS is committed to critically reviewing and enhancing service delivery systems and processes to continually improve client care at the point of interface. Accordingly, the Ministry has implemented and will continue to implement initiatives geared toward the improvement of its service delivery. The establishment and implementation of the STEP-UP Model. This is an important initiative to guide client groups towards self-reliance and resilience. It emphasises a holistic approach that is geared toward the client becoming self-reliant and who can then graduate out of the programme. In that regard, the Ministry will seek to secure the buy in of social sector partners to adopt shared systems. An important part of this initiative is the introduction of the quality management function which will support all service (and management) units to establish standards, SOPs, assess quality levels, and maintain (even surpass) agreed standards.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the programmes and services;
- Ensure equitable distribution in the provision of and access to public assistance for children for single fathers and mothers as there were incidents where single fathers were told that male heads of household were not eligible for public assistance by staff, at the MSDFS;
- Ensure there is no abuse in poverty alleviation programmes and that there are clear criteria and processes to access these;
- Continuous needs assessment;
- Assess current programmes for effectiveness in targeting the various forms of poverty and support mechanisms for transitioning out of this status;
- Improve monitoring and evaluation systems;
- Constant monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects geared to address the challenge of poverty;
- Expand the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of existing poverty alleviation initiatives to ensure gender equity in the distribution of resources to all vulnerable groups

MSDFS Response:

The Ministry is working arduously towards the development and implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework through:

- Strengthening the M & E Division and quickly build capacity to develop the M & E system
- Developing supportive policies for effective M & E across the social sector
- Building capability for M & E across the whole Ministry and its agencies through training

- Reviewing and finalizing the targets and indicators in the Implementation Framework
- Determining how and by whom, data for the system will be collected in a timely manner and with integrity. To this end, the Social Investigations Divisions in collaboration with the M & E Division will develop standardized processes and tools

7. Research and Policy

- Create a policy on compulsory examinable Parenting and Agriculture programmes for Secondary schools, Tertiary institutions and other training institutions with the objective to changing attitudes values and behaviours;
- Create policies for employers to mandatory provide names of new employees as a preventative measure to curtail abuse of social services.
- Collection of data on a regular basis on the situation of poverty and extreme poverty in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Mainstream decent work in all national policies and programmes, especially national poverty reduction programmes
- Establish a national social protection floor as guided by ILO Recommendation No. 202, Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012;
- Address the needs of the ‘working poor’ i.e. Persons who live in poverty but are gainfully employed;
- The definition of poverty versus extreme poverty for T&T;
- Reliable data on poverty/ extreme poverty;
- Conduct research on the inextricable link between poverty and education and the extent to which poverty may sometimes act as a barrier to accessing education—especially by vulnerable groups and at-risk children;
- Clear definition of the term non-profit organization and mechanism for monitoring and enforcement of applicable guidelines/ code of conduct;
- A revamp of the social service grant policies;
- Conduct the Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) on an annual or bi annual basis so that poverty and changes in poverty and general living conditions can be monitored;
- Evidence based information is required to facilitate the formulation of poverty reduction strategies, or targeted policy, and serve as a general guide as to the direction of welfare trends;
- Poverty needs to be measured differently to focus on the capability of the person to function in society rather than in monetary terms;
- Rethink the Ministry of Education criteria for funding special needs students in private special schools;
- Review and modify framework to reduce wait times;
- Rationalization of the programmes and services provided by Government Ministries that are intended to aid the poor to reduce duplication in the provision of services and enable better use of limited financial and human resources;

- Greater understanding of the phenomenon nationally (poverty). This requires up to date research;
- Policy and legislation addressing family and parenting;
- Expand current social statistical data sets to include the collection, collation and analysis of sex-disaggregated demographic and socio-economic data.
- Conduct the Household Budgetary Survey and the Survey of Living Conditions;
- Renew national commitment to the counting of unremunerated work;
- Adopt Broad Approaches to development;
- Rights-based approaches that foster economic growth and reduce gender disparities are critical;
- Recognizing the place of domestic labour as a means of holding up the economy;
- Recognizing persistent inequalities such as women's triple burden, must inform public policy;
- Poverty eradication must not be treated only as a macro-level intervention, communities, meso and micro level actors across sectors;
- Build the capacity of Gender Focal Points within the public service to identify sector specific emerging poverty-related vulnerabilities;
- Strengthen the social protection system to account for Gender, and become more user-friendly;
- Social protection must seek to develop systems that will facilitate contributions from small and micro producers, and self-employed persons, as a means of expanding the availability of retirement benefits to a wider cross section of the population.
- Further mapping and analysis are needed to identify the most vulnerable on an ongoing basis. This is the task of the proposed Population Council as outlined in the population policy. If stakeholders are equipped with this information, they can better target their support; (UNFPA)
- The inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national policies and legislative reform; (UNHCR)
- Conduct multi-dimensional child poverty measurement and analysis to understand the deprivations children face; (UNICEF)
- Conduct an assessment or evaluation of existing social protection programmes/ system to identify opportunities for strengthening coverage to poor and vulnerable populations and to ensure best value for governments investment; (UNICEF)
- Addressing multidimensional poverty methodologies as well as calculations of vulnerability to include the marginally non-poor and vulnerable populations; (UNECLAC)
- Updating the poverty line using current data, and the need for some empirical analyses of the poverty line; (UNECLAC)
- A more in-depth appraisal of the social protection architecture is needed to address the coherency and rationalization between and within social safety net programmes. (UNECLAC)

MSDFS Response:

According to the MSDFS Strategic Plan, “interventions must be supported by quality research, including regional and community needs assessments...” The MSDFS is strengthening the strategic management of the Ministry for forecasting/research, analysis, visioning, planning, work programming/ implementation, monitoring, evaluation (outputs, outcomes and impacts) and agile management.

The MSDFS is also in the process of finalising the National Parenting Policy which will guide programmes and services that are intended to assist parents and guardians in accessing resources for parenting such as parenting classes/workshops, day-care among others.

The preparation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy is the opportunity to establish the current benchmark indicators for poverty, assess those programmes that work and the amend/discard non-productive programmes, and establish a basis for calculating return on investment of key social programmes. In addition, the Strategy will establish a basis for increasing emphasis on poverty prevention.

In addition, the Ministry will have clear work assignment and resources allocated to advance the approved policy and research agendas through its respective inter-ministerial bodies. The Research Council is expected to coordinate the National Social Research Agenda, institutionalise the conduct of the Surveys of Living Conditions (SLC) and encourage data sharing across Ministries. The Inter-Ministerial Social Policy Committee (IMSPC)’s focus includes:

- ✓ Educating and informing public sector stakeholders of draft policy initiatives to address social challenges, in line with Government’s social objectives;
- ✓ Promoting synergy among social sector policies and reduce duplication of effort by Ministries;
- ✓ Monitoring the policy activities of all social sector Ministries and report periodically to Cabinet;
- ✓ Enhancing evidence-based policy development and decision making within the social sector; and
- ✓ Conducting ongoing activities in the social sector that still need to be implemented and monitored.

8. External Agencies/Ministries

These recommendations are those that do not fall directly under the remit of the MSDFS:

- Remove Value Added Tax from ALL books as was requested by a group of reading NGOs prior to the recent budget.
- The decriminalisation of non-payment of maintenance;
- Encourage Local Government Reform, which assumes some responsibility for support for vulnerable groups.
- Increased tax benefits to individuals and businesses who contribute in cash or kind towards charitable institutions and activities;
- Policies and support from Government- tax right offs to companies who help smaller proven NGO's;
- Inclusion of domestic workers in the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01; (ILO)
- Compulsory registration of domestic workers in order to ensure that employers comply with paying national insurance contributions for employees; (ILO)
- Repeat the registration exercise and to extend it to all nationalities of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, resident in the territory. The work exemption period of six months up to one-year should be extended beyond the one-year maximum duration; (UNHCR)
- Administrative barriers that prevent asylum-seeker and refugee children from attending public schools should be removed; (UNHCR)
- Develop a humanitarian approach to the arrival and stay of all asylum seekers and refugees (UNHCR)