



Statement Senator the Honourable Donna Cox Minister of Social Development  
and Family Services sixtieth (60th) Session of the Commission for Social  
Development February 7- 16, 2022

***“Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods,  
well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms  
and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda.”***

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege to bring greetings to this Assembly on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services serves as the lead social sector ministry with the responsibility for addressing the needs and concerns of the poor, marginalized and vulnerable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many socio-economic challenges which have affected many lives and livelihoods. Hence, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago established the Roadmap to Recovery Committee, to chart the way forward in light of the pandemic. The Committee recommended several strategic areas that are most directly related to the Ministry namely: a social protection mechanism to ensure that no one is left behind, retention and creation of jobs, particularly through SMEs, maintenance of supply chains, as well as boosting aggregate demand, so as to trigger local economic activity. Digitalization of several government services is now critical and serves as a key factor to functioning in the new normal.

Under the pillar of **‘Social Protection - Leave No One Behind,’** the core objective identified was that of ***‘Protecting the Vulnerable and the Displaced and Using the Social Safety Net to build a stronger Trinidad and Tobago’***. This pillar aligns with the **Government’s National Development Strategy (2016-2030) (Vision 2030)**, which itself is heavily aligned to the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development

Goals agenda, in which the first of the five (5) pillars is “*Putting People First – Nurturing Our Greatest Asset.*”

The Ministry continues to deliver social support measures to cushion the repercussions of the pandemic to ensure that persons who are affected can maintain a basic standard of living. In addition to the provision of the Income Support Grant, the Ministry provided food support in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, as well as Faith Based Organizations aimed at assisting families in providing the nutritional requirements for their dependents. Furthermore, the Ministry’s Food Support Programme provides short to medium-term assistance, up to a period of two (2) years, to disadvantaged families through financial access for the purchase of food items. Food support cards were issued to families based on family composition, as well as the rate of inflation. Part of the programme includes a psychosocial mechanism which focuses on uplifting the family members and providing them with the skills and tools to develop themselves so that they eventually become sustainable.

In recent times, there has been an expansion of the Ministry’s mandate to one which encourages resilience and self-sufficiency. As such, focus has been placed on initiatives which would help beneficiaries move to a place of empowerment and independence while keeping with the recommendations of the Roadmap to Recovery Committee.

Amongst these initiatives include the Government's thrust towards complete digitalization of Government services, particularly in the social service sector, which has been recognised as a primary driver of economic efficiency, productivity, and improved living standards in Trinidad and Tobago as we continue to build resilience to secure and nurture our society.

It is envisaged that this shift would contribute greatly towards the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services realising its vision of being *a dynamic, service-driven organisation that delivers premium social services towards achieving sustainable human and social development.*

In this regard, in 2021, the Ministry's Website was recommissioned and a Microsite was launched specific to persons with disabilities. The site ensures that persons who are visually impaired could now feel included on the website. The microsite is in direct support of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, which speaks to Government's intent to establish an inclusive and nurturing environment for all persons. Specifically, it will cater exclusively to the needs of the blind, visually-impaired, deaf or hard-of-hearing thereby ensuring equity in opportunities for learning and advancement.

Additionally, the Ministry in partnership with iGovTT signed a Memorandum of Understanding to utilize the Ministry's call center and chat robot to assist with queries about the Ministry's grants and

services. The Ministry also launched the online Senior Citizens' Pension (SCP) application, through ttConnect, which allows persons who qualify for the SCP to apply for this service without leaving the comfort of their homes.

### *The Way Forward*

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is working towards employing the latest business and artificial intelligence tools to coordinate social services through a 'one door' approach. This approach utilises a modern design to meet persons where they are and provide a range of services through the use of a digital platform, known as the Integrated Social Enterprise Management Systems (ISEMS). ISEMS, an ICT-solution aims to transform the social services delivery system of the Ministry, focusing on creating a centralized database that will have clients' information readily available to facilitate the decentralization of social services. Once fully implemented and operationalized, the system will allow for real-time data sharing, reporting and analysis.

ISEMS will also aid in the connectivity between the Ministry and external entities including ministries, agencies, NGOs, and other private sector organizations as well as facilitate solutions to allow for the 'single door approach' in accessing social services. The major programmes administered by the Ministry's delivery units are being

merged as part of the Social Support and Empowerment model which will be operated by the proposed Social Support Empowerment Unit (SSEU). The SSEU utilizes an overall case management method to take clients from dependency to a state of self-sufficiency.

Concomitantly, the Ministry is also working towards improving coordination and enhancing the efficiency of the social protection system in Trinidad and Tobago, to facilitate the rapid response to emergencies/shocks and adverse situations of vulnerable groups. This involves the development of a National Register of Vulnerable Persons (NRVP), to easily identify citizens in need, the programmes and services available, and interventions required. At present, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is working in collaboration with the UNDP to develop a Terms of Reference for this institutional strengthening project.

Finally, as we move forward, the Ministry continues to chart a course for the development of a National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) that will result in an expansion of the Ministry's portfolio into one which encourages resilience, enabling clients and beneficiaries to graduate from social support and transition into a more sustainable quality of life.

As I close, I wish to acknowledge that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to work diligently towards the social

development and well-being of all persons. Through these measures and others, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that no person is left behind.

I thank you all for the courtesy of your attention. God bless you!