



Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
**Minister of Social Development and Family
Services**

**Contribution in the Senate to
The Finance (Supplementation and
Variation of Appropriation) (Financial
Year 2023) Bill, 2023**

Tuesday May 16, 2023

Mr President, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services as we continue to fulfil our mission of helping, empowering and transforming lives.

Mr President, only yesterday, the Ministry celebrated United Nations' International Day of the Family, which is observed on May 15 each year. Mr President, one of our core mandates at the Ministry is to protect and empower our families, make them stronger and more resilient, provide for their basic needs, and be there for them in special circumstances. Mr President, we continue to take this mandate very seriously, and I am here today contributing to this debate in this Honourable House to advocate on behalf of our families during their time of need.

FLOOD RELIEF

Mr President, I am sure everyone in this House was astonished at the unprecedented levels of flooding that occurred in 2022, particularly between October and December last year.

We were all bewildered by the level of destruction and upset by the scale of the loss and distress of many of our brothers and sisters in areas such as El Socorro South, Spring Village, Penal/Debe, Real Spring, Bamboo No 2, Mafeking, Woodland, Sangre Grande, Cumuto and Barrackpore, to name a few of the hardest-hit areas.

Mr President, as soon as we were given clearance by the First Responder, the Disaster Management Unit of The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, officers from the National Family Services Division, the National Social Development Programme, the Citizen Engagement Service, together with support from the Fire Services Division were deployed to support MPs and the Disaster Management Units of the regional/municipal corporations on the ground to take applications and assess the needs of the residents who were negatively impacted by the disaster. Altogether, as of May 8, 2023, the Ministry undertook assessments of some **4,487** households in collaboration with the Disaster Management Unit. This relief took the form of:

- Food support of **\$510** per household. This was provided to take care of their immediate needs
- Household Grants – to replace household appliances and furniture that were destroyed

- Clothing grants

So far, support to families for flood relief has been approximately **twelve million, one hundred and thirty-eight thousand, nine hundred dollars (\$12,138,900)**.

Funds were taken from the Social Assistance Vote to assist affected residents. These resources allowed them to get back on their feet quickly by acquiring much-needed fridges, stoves and furniture that were lost, as well as books and school supplies for children who were affected.

ONE-OFF TRANSPORTATION GRANT

Mr President, at the same time that all of this was happening, the Ministry was called upon again to assist the vulnerable who would have been adversely affected by the removal of fuel subsidies, in keeping with the announcement by the Minister of Finance in his Budget presentation.

The Ministry was given lead responsibility for disbursing the One-Off Transportation Grant to all our clients. These payments were made at the end of January 2023.

Mr President, **one hundred and sixty-five thousand seven hundred and fifty-one (165,751)** of the Ministry's clients who were already receiving Senior Citizens Grant, Social Assistance, Disability Grants and Food Support received the additional **one thousand dollars (\$1,000)** at an expenditure of **one hundred and sixty-five million seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars (\$165,751,000.00)**. This was a one-off short-term measure intended to cushion the impact of the increase in fuel prices due to the removal of the fuel subsidy.

As a result, all three of the Ministry's major grants: Senior Citizens Grant, Social Assistance, and Disability - experienced a shortfall. In addition, the Senior Citizens Grant was allocated **four billion one hundred and eighteen million (\$4,118,000,000)**, which is **\$182,000,000** less than the total amount allocated the previous year.

Therefore, to cover the shortfall in allocation for the Senior Citizens Grant as well as to reimburse the funds advanced from the other major grants for Flood Relief and the One-off Transportation Grant, the Ministry requires an additional allocation of **three hundred and forty-eight million one hundred and seventy-two thousand eight hundred and fourteen dollars (\$348,172,814)** to meet its commitments for 2023.

The breakdown is as follows:

Allocation (2023)	Additional allocation required
SCP – 4,118,000,000.00	314,990,068
PAG – 340,000,000.00	14,210,660
DAG- 625,000,000.00	18,972,086

Total additional allocation required - \$348 172, 814.00

SUPPORT TO SENIOR CITIZENS

Senior Citizen Grant assistance was provided to **109,687** individuals at the cost of **three hundred and fifty-nine million nine hundred and sixty thousand eight hundred and thirty-six dollars and ninety-two cents (\$359,960,836.92)** as of March 2023. The total number of recipients includes an additional **seven hundred and fifty-nine (759)** seniors who were added as at March 2023.

SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE PERSONS IN RECEIPT OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Mr President, Public Assistance is provided to persons whose household income is deemed inadequate due to several factors, including ill health, death or imprisonment of a primary breadwinner.

As of March 2023, the Ministry provided public assistance support to **sixteen thousand three hundred and seventy-seven (16,377)** persons in the amount of **twenty-five million one hundred and seventy thousand five hundred and forty dollars and nine cents (\$25,170,540.09)**, including with an additional **two hundred and nineteen (219)** new recipients.

SUPPORT TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Beneficiaries of this grant are individuals **18-64** years of age who cannot work due to a disability and have been certified by a Government medical officer to be permanently disabled.

The Ministry continues to meet its obligation of supporting persons with disabilities through our ongoing provision of Disability Assistance Grants (DAG) and Provision of Disability Assistance Grants for Minors (DAGM).

As of March 2023, **twenty-one thousand seven hundred and ninety (21,790)** persons received the DAG amounting to **forty-five million eight hundred and eighteen thousand six hundred and twenty-two dollars and six cents (\$45,818,622.06)**. For the same period, **three thousand one hundred and seventy-eight (3,178)** children received the DAGM at a total of **five million twenty thousand two hundred and one dollars (\$5,020,201.00)**.

To fulfil its obligations, the Ministry required an additional **eighteen million nine hundred and seventy-two thousand and eight six dollars (\$18,972,086).**

OTHER SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

Mr President, apart from the support provided by our major grants, which I have just outlined, we continue to assist vulnerable families, consistent with our mandates:

- Access to food support amounting to **eleven million one hundred and fifty-nine thousand two hundred and twenty-six dollars (\$11,159,226.00)** has been provided to **eighteen thousand eight hundred and fifty-one (18,851)** recipients as of March 2023;

- Since October 2022, **twenty-five (25)** clients have benefitted from the Ministry's National Social Development Programme (NSDP) at the cost of **three hundred and thirty-eight thousand, two hundred and ninety-six dollars and seventy-five cents (\$338,296.75);** and
- Additionally, during this period, eight (8) clients have benefited from the Sowing Empowerment through Entrepreneurial Development (SEED) programme at the cost of **one hundred and thirty-four thousand and twenty-two dollars and sixty cents (\$134,022.60).**

Mr President, I have presented here just a tiny snapshot of all we are doing at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to help the vulnerable and discharge the responsibilities associated with our mandate.

We continue to assure this Honourable House that the Government has not reduced the dollar value of a single grant disbursed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, thus ensuring that every single person who is eligible for a Senior Citizens' Grant, Social Assistance Grant, a Disability Grant, Flood Relief or any other grant, will continue to receive it, as they have in the past, in the same amounts, and on time.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Mr President, the Ministry takes its fiduciary responsibility seriously by ensuring the management of its limited resources in straightened economic circumstances.

We are committed to investing in the development of our most vulnerable citizens who require the Government's assistance in their greatest time of need.

I thank you, and may God bless you!