



Feature Address

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

SEED DISTRIBUTION CEREMONY

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

6th Floor, CL Building
St Vincent Street, Port of Spain

10:00 a.m.

Salutations

- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers;
- Deputy Permanent Secretary, Mr. Vijay Gangapersad;
- Deputy Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Esther Pilgrim-Soanes;
- Director of the National Social Development and SEED programmes, Mrs. Patricia De Leon-Henry;
- Other Heads of Divisions and Staff of the Ministry;
- Recipients of the SEED Grant Funding;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

I am pleased to welcome you today to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' distribution ceremony, which celebrates the Ministry's investment in the beneficiaries of the Sowing Empowerment through Entrepreneurial Development (SEED) Grant. Today's ceremony reiterates the Government's commitment to the expansion of the economy by supporting those who are most vulnerable amongst us.

As a nation, we continue to grapple with the effects that the economic uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. In spite of this, we continue to see evidence that our citizens have and continue to demonstrate their perseverance and innovation in these challenging times.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, tasked with leading the charge for addressing the social challenges of poverty, social inequality and social exclusion in society, is dedicated to providing support, as we forge ahead in recovery mode as a nation, charting a new direction for the economy and the nation, in the context of the new normal.

The Ministry has prioritized building a secure social safety net system with the intention of guiding the transition from that of beneficiary to that of a self-sufficient income earner. Hence, the retention and creation of jobs, particularly through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, is expected to lead to an enhanced quality of life for our vulnerable population.

The Ministry, through the SEED grant, continues to provide much needed support through advocacy, advice, start-up initiatives and funding; to those desirous of starting a small business, growing an existing one, or engaging in skills training and development.

This Programme targets micro-entrepreneurs within our communities who cannot access traditional loan facilities and provides grant funding in the sums of a maximum of \$15,000.00 TTD for the purchase of goods and/or equipment, as well as, up to \$7,500 TTD in further funding to facilitate skills training at a recognized / accredited institution. Training is provided in Financial and Records Management, Marketing, Customer Service and Entrepreneurial Mindset.

Just a few days ago, the Ministry acknowledged the global observance of the United Nations' Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) Day 2021. This commemoration seeks to encourage increased awareness about the contribution of MSMEs to sustainable development and promoting creativity and innovation.

According to a recent report by the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there seems to be a direct and indirect link between MSMEs and their role in realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Numerous Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises locally have demonstrated their resilience by making the adjustments necessary for business continuity. Several have begun to digitalize their operations and services, while others have seized the opportunity to diversify their products and services.

This has endorsed our view that Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are central to the revitalization of our local economy and we are delighted that our SEED grant can serve as a catalyst to the development of these small and micro entrepreneurs.

The SEED grant aligns seamlessly with the objectives of our National Social Mitigation Plan, which lays out a strategy to lessen the impact of the economic downturn on vulnerable citizens while simultaneously fostering a spirit of resilience amongst our people.

The Ministry believes that in keeping with its mandate, there is an obligation to partner with NGOS, FBOs and other stakeholders to ensure that vulnerable individuals, groups and families receive the assistance they require.

As such, the necessity for collaboration with regard to our SEED programme is no different and several opportunities are being explored to enhance the offerings under the programme. These include possible partnerships with YTEPP, NEDCO and the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

I have been made aware that the beneficiaries of this programme include persons who are recipients of welfare grants and who live in unfortunate situations of lack and are interested in establishing a micro-small business venture or receiving skills training. I commend these participants for their willingness to work towards improvement of their current circumstances, especially considering our present economic climate.

Even as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago works diligently to plot a path to a brighter future following the economic impacts posed by COVID-19, entrepreneurship is regarded as a way to respond to the social needs of citizens during this time.

The Ministry has implemented a multifaceted response, whereby programmes such as SEED are seen as opportunities for participants to become more self-sufficient. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are an essential component in supporting the strengthening of the safety net for our most vulnerable, as together, we move our country forward towards a path to full recovery.

Please allow me to share with you a story of success of another SEED recipient, which I hope would encourage you to be persistent in your entrepreneurial pursuit.

Mrs. Kimbale Rogers-Mc Lean received assistance from the SEED programme to purchase sewing materials for her business. At the time of her application, she was self-employed. However, her business earnings were insufficient and upon assessment, her household, which includes one (1) minor child, was deemed to be below the poverty line.

Since receiving the SEED grant in 2020, the client was able to transform her business. While there was reduced demand for bridal and formal wear, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mrs. Rogers-McLean adjusted her business model and took advantage of the restrictions by designing and creating professional wear for persons who gained weight during the stay at home measures and needed to return to work. (*I think I might have to check her out*).

Her business started becoming so successful that she was able to purchase an additional sewing machine. She has since extended her business to create ready to wear styles and is now advertising through her business Facebook page VES Styles. Mrs. Rogers-Mc Lean is very appreciative of the grant and what it has done to transform her life. When reassessed, her business earnings now put her above the poverty line.

Ladies and gentlemen, you too can be like Mrs. Rogers-Mc Lean and the many other grant recipients who have used their grant and their determination to succeed and made a quantum leap in their socio-economic situation.

Your acceptance of this grant today, serves as a display of your commitment to yourselves, your families, communities, and the nation at large, that you desire to transform your lives and build a better future for your loved ones.

You are declaring today that you are not limited by your present circumstances, and that in spite of the challenges that lie ahead, you are motivated by an unquenchable determination to thrive. I therefore encourage you to work closely with the Case Officer assigned to you, not only during the difficult times, but also to share news about your progress.

Once again, I congratulate all recipients of this grant.

May God's blessings be upon you as you grow from strength to strength.

I thank you.