MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

National Social Policy Forum II
Improving Policy - Improving Lives

REMARKS

ON BEHALF OF MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

HAIMDATH RAMOUTAR
DEPUTY PERMANENT SECRETARY

TUESDAY 12th JANUARY, 2016
CABILDO ROOM
ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE
ST. VINCENT ST.
P.O.S

8:00 AM
SALUTATIONS

• Heads of Divisions of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

• Members of the Inter-Ministerial Social Policy Committee

• Representatives of Social Sector Ministries

• Members of Staff from the Ministry of the Social Development and Family Services
Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning and Welcome!

As many of you know the core mandate of this Ministry is to initiate and execute sustainable programmes and services that protect and assist vulnerable and marginalized persons in our society. One of the principal functions here today is to better improve our capabilities to develop, implement, execute and measure our ability to develop such programmes.

The first National Social Policy Forum on Wednesday 6th August 2014 identified several challenges experienced in developing and implementing social sector policies in Trinidad and Tobago. These included:

1. Lack of standardisation in the development of social sector policies;
2. Limited research and information available in an easy to reference format to inform policy development;
3. Limited institutional capacity to monitor and evaluate existing policies;

4. Ineffective communication of existing policy information to relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and the general public;

5. Lack of synergy and coordination among social sector policies;

6. Duplication of efforts among Ministerial personnel;

7. Limited expertise available within the public sector in the area of social policy development and analysis;

8. Limited resources available to conduct nationwide consultations;

and

9. Bureaucracy in obtaining the necessary policy approvals.

Many of these issues still plague us today. We understand that as a result of this many of our social programmes are not properly articulated, developed and or implemented in a sustainable manner.
Therefore it is up to us to change that. Given the economic circumstances facing us, it is imperative to operate more efficiently and our programmes and services must be more specifically targeted. If we are to achieve our goal of improving the lives of marginalized and vulnerable persons in our society, we must inculcate a culture of research and evidence based policy and decision making into everything that we do.

In the public sector we must work to provide structure and consistency to the policy development process, improve the quality of polices being developed and promote evidence-based policy making. This will facilitate more comprehensive policy implementation and by extension monitoring, review and evaluation. We simply do not have the time or the resources to ignore the benefits that will arise from adopting this approach.
Many of us will recognize that the state cannot do it alone. At the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we already partner with community based and non-governmental organizations and this will continue.

The policies we develop seek to reduce poverty, which in spite of ongoing efforts and extensive programming is on the increase across Trinidad and Tobago. We are also seeking to improve gender equality, education, penal reform and the creation of a new social compact.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu once said, “The right combination is between a free economy and social policy that addresses the needs of society and creates equal opportunity.”
As enablers of the state it is up to us to lead in the development of a sustainable social policy that follows international best practice, yet remains relevant to Trinidad and Tobago.

Our policies must lead the way in protecting the elderly, persons with disabilities, children and the other vulnerable groups in society. Consequently, the Social Sector Policy must be central to the reduction of poverty with the objective of ensuring a more stable society.

In fact ending poverty in all its forms is number 1 on the list of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals agenda. Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the community of nations committed to achieving these SDGs.

Thus it is essential that we continue our efforts to design programmes that address the root causes of our most pressing social issues.
Evidence-based policies are key to the design of any sustainable social programme. With this in mind, today’s forum signifies our understanding of the critical need for a nexus between research and policy development.

It is our hope that today’s discussions will enable synergies among social sector Ministries, reduce duplication, improve the framework for social policy and enhance evidence-based policy development and decision making within the social sector.

We want you to embrace the opportunity that today’s forum presents, and take the time to provide open and honest feedback. Now is not the time for any of us to sit on the side-lines. This is important and essential work that is critical to our ability to continually improve our delivery and execution of sustainable social sector programmes. We owe no less to our country at this moment in our development.

Thank You. God Bless You and God Bless our nation!