MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

ON THE OCCASION OF

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION ON POVERTY REDUCTION

THEME: No One Left Behind- Fostering Collaboration to Combat Poverty”

DATE: Tuesday April 19, 2016
VENUE: Port of Spain City Hall
SALUTATIONS

• Mr. Richard Blewitt, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Representative
• Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
• Mrs. Joanne Deoraj, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning and Development
• Mr. Gary Tagallie Director, Poverty Reduction and eradication Research and Policy Unit and all other Heads of Divisions at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
• Representatives and Staff from the UNDP;
• Technocrats and Representatives from the various stakeholder Government Ministries and Agencies
• Members of the Government Information Services Limited (GISL)
• Other invited Guests
A pleasant good morning.

Let me begin by thanking all persons for being a part of this very important Consultation which targets the technical staff involved in the various Poverty Reduction Programmes from Government Ministries and Agencies, as well as the UNDP and other key stakeholders.

At the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services we believe in taking an approach that is collaborative, sustainable and meaningful for all stakeholders involved in addressing the poor and vulnerable in our society. Today therefore provides an opportunity to create a shared vision for mainstreaming our efforts and ideas towards a National Poverty Reduction Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago.

The theme for this initiative: “No One Left Behind – Fostering Collaboration to Combat Poverty” is also testament to this.

From a country perspective we have, over time, been advised by various national directives towards poverty reduction and eradication. It should also be noted that poverty reduction programmes, be they social protection, or safety nets, are delivered by a wide cross section of stakeholders public, private and civil society.
At present, the national development framework speaks to:

1. Better targeting of social programmes by greater consultation with those for whom they are intended;
2. Independent and scientific monitoring and evaluation procedures;
3. Promotion of access to well paid, sustainable employment as the only way to achieve upward social mobility away from a life of poverty, while dissuading dependence on social assistance as a form of long term sustainability;
4. Focus on prevention and early recovery in social programmes, rather than the current focus on maintenance which offers no assistance in lifting persons out of poverty;
5. Emphasis on social impact studies and feedback to help formulate government policy;
6. Focus on the needs of the elderly, children, disabled people and other disadvantaged groups.

As a matter of fact, since 1995, the country has implemented over thirty (30) programmes and services to address poverty and vulnerability. While these programmes continue to be implemented at the various levels we feel, however that a lot more is needed to
sharpen the precision of our interventions and so, a clearly outlined national strategy should be developed to guide national programming.

There is a saying that “When it seems that goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goal; adjust the action steps.”

So today, our discussions, our dialogue and our opinions will all be framed around adjusting our action steps to facilitate the process of a multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral effort to articulate a national strategy - that will allow for the rationalization, improved targeting and monitoring and evaluation; of the country’s poverty reduction Interventions. This is particularly relevant at this time of economic downturn and in view of the fact that over the last decade, based on statistics, we seem to be losing the fight to reduce poverty.

Moreover, ladies and gentlemen, this consultation is intended to, among other things:

1. Provide an opportunity for sharing lessons and experiences from the implementation of programmes from the various Ministries and agencies;

2. Contribute to the formulation of a localized definition of poverty for Trinidad and Tobago;
3. Facilitate the setting of national baselines for poverty targets, as well as for identifying initiatives best positioned to deliver desired results;
4. Identify gaps in programme delivery that will inform the need for new programmes.
5. Ensure overall consistency within the macro-economic environment, in cognizance of the needs of the poor, with a view to reduce the levels of inequity and vulnerability across the country.
6. Inform the preparation of the 2030 national development plan for Trinidad and Tobago and the development of a National Poverty Reduction Strategy for the country.

It is proposed that the revised Vision 2020 poverty reduction strategy will be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a localization process and be articulated within the Vision 2030 document. This will chart a new direction for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago towards the reduction of poverty, vulnerability and inequality by 2030.

But as we examine mainstreaming our approach to the development of a national poverty strategy, I wish to highlight a few issues and propose the following questions for deliberation:
The first question is.....

1. How often do you, as Programme Facilitators and Implementers come together to review the major policies and programmes that impact the poor and vulnerable, and highlight the challenges faced in implementing them?

2. Secondly, what will a National Poverty Reduction Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago really mean for us as a developing nation?

3. To what extent do the successes of the range of national poverty reduction programmes provided in T&T allow for making progress towards sustainable poverty reduction?

4. How should our current programmes and activities be re-framed for a clear philosophy, and an adaptable framework and approach to the development of a national poverty reduction strategy?

5. Finally, what should be the mechanism for developing a national poverty reduction strategy within a national philosophy that transcends political administrations?

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to remind this gathering that in September 2015, the global community, under the leadership of the United Nations, moved towards adopting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). As a UN member country, Trinidad and
Tobago committed to realizing the 17 goals, three (3) of which focus on poverty, namely:

- **SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.**
- **SDG 2: End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.**
- **SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries**

Specifically Goal 1.2 speaks to: “By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”. This therefore means that all Poverty Reduction Plans from 2016 onwards are expected to reflect these targets as well as localized targets.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, I once again wish to thank you for your participation in this very important exercise over the next two days. Let me remind you that we are meeting, not because we have changed our goals, but because we have appreciated the need to adjust our actions and approach.

I am personally excited and I look forward to all of the contributions coming out of this consultation.

I thank you.