



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

FEATURE REMARKS

RE-COMMISSIONING OF THE MINISTRY'S WEBSITE

Monday, October 19, 2020

**Sixth Floor, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain**

10.00 a.m.

Salutations

- Permanent Secretary (Ag) Sheila Seecharan
- Deputy Permanent Vijay Gangapersad
- Mr. Michael Reid, Chief Technical Officer
- Mr. Paul Kanneh, Director, Information Communications Technology Department
- Other Managers and staff of the Ministry
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media

Good morning!

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been contemplating the best way forward for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in terms of its thrust to ensure that the scope of our services is more widely known to the national community, that our services are more accessible and user friendly, and that our most vulnerable are able to communicate with us in a more timely manner, thus improving our own effectiveness. The solution, as most solutions are, was easily within our grasp, and today it is my distinct pleasure to formally launch the Ministry's new website.

Allow me to begin then, by conveying my sincerest appreciation to the Internal Website Team comprising the Information Technology Unit and the Corporate Communications and Education Unit, who represent the engine room of this new development, as well as the other stakeholders, like iGovTT, for the infrastructure to host the website. The fact that the website was developed in-house is testament not only to the level of creativity and innovation that exists in our Ministry, but also to the fact that the Ministry is prepared to play its part in doing a whole lot more with a whole lot less.

Ladies and gentlemen, especially those present from the media, I am certain you are aware of the many complaints you receive on a daily basis from persons who, for a multitude of reasons, some of which are beyond this Ministry's capacity, are unable to access the Ministry's services, or who have tried repeatedly to contact the Ministry without success. This new website was therefore developed with three (3) principal functions in mind:

- 1) to offer a more desirable, user-friendly service to our clients;
- 2) to facilitate greater and easier collaboration among our partners, and
- 3) to support the work of our internal teams.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's unveiling of this new website represents another milestone along the Ministry's journey towards a multi-faceted and responsive social services delivery system. It also contributes to the realization of the Ministry's vision of being *a dynamic service-driven organisation that delivers premium social services towards achieving sustainable human and social development*. It is also in alignment with the Government's thrust towards the complete digitization of all Government's services.

Among the website's capabilities is its capacity to facilitate e-learning and the digitization of all our social grants and services.

Another one of its key features is that it will allow us to interface with all Ministries and State agencies, and thus its ability to participate in the exchange of real-time data in a secure environment. This is a quantum leap in terms of a “whole of government” approach, as it will not only result in immediate and measurable improvements in customer relations and service delivery; but also contribute to saving the time and resources of the average citizen, especially during these COVID-19 times.

Ladies and gentlemen, the website’s enhanced capacity has also made it a very valuable resource centre for students, graduates and other interest groups within the society.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce that a microsite for primary use by Persons with Disabilities (PWD) is also being simultaneously unveiled. This microsite can be accessed via a link from the website's landing page and represents even further evidence of the Ministry's commitment to an inclusive and nurturing environment for all citizens.

So often, we have heard the complaint of a lack of involvement from the end-user in the development of services and programmes that are specific to certain communities.

I am elated therefore, to indicate that representatives of the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) community, specifically the Statutory Boards, supported by the Ministry, were intimately involved in the review and development of this particular microsite.

It would be remiss of me though if I did not, at this point, acknowledge the contributions of Digicel Foundation towards ensuring that the content for the Disability microsite was up to date and consistent with established standards.

I am therefore proud to say that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) continues to make good on government's promises to *revitalize the social services sector* and by extension, *reset* our national economy *for growth and innovation*, through the strategic use of technology to bring our grants and services several steps closer to those considered the most vulnerable amongst us.

Ladies and gentlemen, within the recent past and certainly going forward, the country will witness an explosion of ICT enabled services being made available to the wider citizenry, in keeping with Government's thrust towards the complete digitalization of the economy.

Already we have seen:

- the establishment of this country's *first smart space* at the Queen's Park Savannah West, in partnership with *B-mobile*;
- The provision of *TTconnect* kiosks, to provide free computer and internet access to citizens, especially those from marginalised communities. In fiscal 2019, this Ministry also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with *iGovTT* to utilise its call centre and chat robot to assist with queries about the Ministry's grants and services.

- The pilot launch of mobile assistive devices by the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the deaf, hearing impaired, blind and visually impaired. This was done in partnership with this Ministry and,
- Free computer literacy courses and associated ICT studies through programmes like this Ministry's Adult Education Programme. As a reminder, a few weeks ago, this Ministry commissioned Trinidad and Tobago's first *wholly owned and operated* ICT lab by government for participants of the Adult Education Programme.

These are all timely reminders that the Government's decision to forge ahead with the digitization of services, is more than mere rhetoric. This Government has a clearly articulated plan and this website will aid in its advancement.

Years ago, it might have been enough to launch a website simply to be a presence on the web. However, in today's fast-paced IT enhanced world, users need quick and convenient access to information, the ability to receive answers to frequently asked questions, and process information requests immediately online, whether someone is in the office or not.

The Ministry's website has therefore been recommissioned with specific functionalities that will be accessible to vulnerable populations with strategic focus on the goal of *leaving no person behind*, particularly in the rapidly changing digital community to which we all now belong.

As we seek to do more with less, it is imperative that our decision-making process be data driven. This is what will allow us to become more strategic, more agile and certainly more responsive in our drive to helping, empowering and transforming the lives of those who are considered to be the most disadvantaged amongst us.

It is for this reason that this new website will be an important tool to both connect with and receive feedback from our audiences, while simultaneously disseminating information about the Ministry's efforts to enhance and transform the social sector. To this end, we will be able to successfully demonstrate to taxpayers that the Government's investment in the social sector is yielding significant returns.

Once again, I applaud the tremendous efforts of the Ministry's Staff in delivering on their mandate. It is often said that the reward for hard work is more work, and I therefore take this opportunity to further encourage you to take very seriously your role as the lead government body for the social services sector.

I now take the opportunity to officially recommission the
MSDFS Website: www.social.gov.tt

I thank you.

May God bless all of us gathered here today, and may
God bless our nation.