

# **EGM ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

## **National Mechanisms and the Mainstreaming of Social Inclusion in Sectoral Policies and Poverty Reduction Strategies: The Case of Barbados**

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## Introduction

Barbados is the most easterly of the Caribbean islands, located at latitude 13° N and longitude 59° 37W. With a total area of 166 square miles or 438 sq km, Barbados is designated a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). Despite its small size, it fits the United Nations criteria of a middle income country and has been ranked 31 on the United Nation's Human Development Index (UNDP Human Development Report 2009).

Much of Barbados' success in the area of social and human development is due to the mainstreaming of social inclusion into sectoral policies and poverty reduction strategies. This has been done through a number of national mechanisms whose history can be traced back to the post Emancipation period. Overtime, these mechanisms have been constantly reviewed and strengthened. This paper critically examines these national mechanisms from an institutional perspective. The discussion will be confined to what we in Barbados call the Personal Social Services Sector or the sector responsible for social provisioning and will focus on the period 1995 to present. This period has been chosen since it marks the period when for much of the world, including Barbados, poverty was recognised as a stand alone problem that needed to be tackled directly.

## Background

The concentration on poverty as a stand alone problem in Barbados was prompted by a number of developments. Firstly, there was the uncertainty of the early 1990s which forced the adoption of structural adjustment programmes. This situation threatened the sustainability of the social safety net which was unable to respond as it should to the massive job losses that occurred. This was not a situation exclusive to Barbados, and the global ramifications led to the convening of the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in March, 1995. The broad objectives of this Summit were the enhancement of social integration, the alleviation and reduction of poverty; and the expansion of productive employment.<sup>1</sup>

Barbados participated in the Summit and became a signatory to the commitments which emerged, known as the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.<sup>2</sup> Three of the 10 commitments coming out of Copenhagen have featured prominently in the structure of social policy in the Barbadian context, these are:

1. the commitment to poverty eradication;
2. the promotion of social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons; and
3. the promotion and attainment of the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, and the access of all to primary health care, making particular efforts to rectify inequalities relating to social conditions without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age or disability (Report of the World Summit for Social Development 1995).

Yet another development of the period was the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 and its outcome, referred to as the Beijing Platform of Action. From the areas highlighted at Beijing, Barbados chose five (5) as priority – women and poverty, the education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, and women in decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of these developments, the eradication of poverty was declared the number one goal on the national development agenda of Barbados. To achieve this goal, there had to be a shift in Barbados' social policy and the nature and extent of poverty in Barbados had to be known. In other words, a poverty profile for Barbados had to be formulated as this would determine the kind of policies that should be pursued. There was also the need to arrive at a definition of poverty that fit the Barbadian context.

## Definition of Poverty

Initially, poverty in Barbados had been seen as the lack of access to sufficient economic resources to acquire enough commodities to meet basic material needs adequately. This draws from Lipton's definition and uses the Income/Consumption (I/C) Approach.<sup>4</sup> This was the approach used by the Inter-American Development Bank, which at the request of the Government of Barbados undertook the preparation of a diagnostic of the extent and nature of poverty on the island. The findings of this undertaking were indicative of Barbados' poverty profile.

As a result of the diagnostic, a per capita annual average poverty line was calculated and set at BDS\$ 5,503 (US\$2751). Inflation during the intervening period now places this at around BDS\$7,500 (US\$3,750). Any person whose yearly income fell

below that line was considered to be poor. Thus estimated, poverty in Barbados was said to be affecting approximately 8.7% of the total households in the country i.e. approximately 7,000 households or 35,000 persons. This revealed that an estimated 13.9% of the total population could be classified as poor<sup>5</sup> (Poverty and Income Distribution in Barbados 1998: ii). It was also discovered that most of the poor resided in urban Barbados.

In evaluating the intensity of poverty on the island, it was concluded that extreme poverty was not a very serious problem in Barbados. However, no comfort can be taken in the existence of poverty in any country whether that poverty is pervasive or appears in pockets of the society. The variables associated with the profile, especially gender, educational attainment and unemployment, informed the formulation of subsequent policies and the strategies that were eventually pursued. The geographic location where poverty was said to be primarily concentrated was also a consideration.

The findings of the diagnostic revealed that poverty was not just about physiological deprivation but about social deprivation as well. This understanding takes into account the absence of certain capabilities as advanced by Amartya Sen and propagated by UNDP.<sup>6</sup> It cites "the capability of being able to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity self-respect and the respect for others".<sup>7</sup> It also considers the social inclusion approach as propounded by the Institute for Labour Studies at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the participatory approach as put forward by Chambers (1995) who stated that income matters, but things like the quality of life - health, security, self-respect, justice, access to goods and services, family and social life matter also.<sup>8</sup> The participatory approach involves the people in the dialogue. This understanding of poverty influenced the type of social policy that Barbados would pursue and the kind of institutional framework needed to support it.

### **Institutional Framework**

In 1996, the traditional institutional framework supporting the delivery of services was examined. This examination raised concerns over the inability of some agencies to adequately meet the needs of the poor and the length of time it took for delivery of services. This led to the decision to create new agencies with more specific mandates. The first of these agencies were the Rural Development Commission (RDC), created in 1996 to function under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Urban Development Commission (UDC), created in August 1997 to function under the Ministry of Housing and Lands. The RDC and UDC have similar goals and programmes, with the RDC focused on individuals and business in rural areas, and the UDC focused on urban dwellers.

#### ***Urban Development Commission***

With poverty in Barbados having a more urban characteristic, many poverty targeted interventions come under the scope of the UDC. UDC was given the mandate of addressing the impact of poverty on urban dwellers, the aesthetic appearance of dwellings against the urban landscape and patterns of ownership. The agency therefore seeks to eradicate poverty in the urban corridor of Barbados through physical, social and economic programmes aimed at improving the standard of living and quality of life of urban dwellers.

Through the UDC, urban districts heavily affected by poverty and degradation are renewed through the restoration/demolition of derelict buildings, with the cooperation of the owners. Subsidiary roads and drainage systems are also constructed in these areas. These programmes serve not only to beautify and uplift these communities, but as a means of preserving the national heritage and providing jobs. This commitment to urban renewal is supported by the House Repair/Replacement Programme, the Urban Enterprise Programme (UEP), the Urban Housing Loan Programme (UHLP) and the Transfer of Titles Programme.

***The House Repair/Replacement Programme*** of UDC is mainly concerned with assisting pensioners and indigent families in the area of house repairs/replacements. ***The UEP*** is aimed at reducing the high level of unemployment which exists in many urban areas through the development of a sustainable micro business sector. It provides funding and technical assistance to small entrepreneurs in the development of their businesses.

The ***UHLP*** and the ***Transfer of Titles Programme*** address issues of property ownership for low income individuals and households. The UHLP is a lending facility which provides financing for home construction and associated housing purposes. Similarly, the Transfer of Titles Programme assists dwellers in urban tenancies to purchase the lots they occupy by subsidizing the market price. As a result, these low-income groups are required to pay no more than \$2.50 per square foot for the land irrespective of the market value. These services and programmes are all designed to impact effectively on the poorest of the poor in a sustained way.

As part of the renewed approach to social policy in Barbados, institutions which were targeted to specific groups or programmes were also established. These included the National Disabilities Unit, the Poverty Eradication Committee and the Poverty Alleviation Bureau. The attention to a targeted approach reinforced the need for some measure of coordination; the Ministry of Social Transformation was thus established, as well as the Bureau for Social Policy Research and Planning.

### ***The National Disabilities Unit***

In December 1997, the National Disabilities Unit was established as the focal point for Persons with Disabilities which, according to the latest census (2000), number approximately 16,142. The Unit was created specifically to assist with the development of policies and programmes that will empower and protect the rights of this segment of society and was mandated to:

1. Assist with the formulation of national policy regarding Persons with Disabilities.
2. Develop appropriate strategies to implement those policies.
3. Provide documentation, materials, assistive devices, adaptations and technical support to Persons with Disabilities.
4. Develop and maintain a Register of all Persons with Disabilities, a Directory of Services and Support available and a Care Manual to enhance the coping skills of Persons with Disabilities and their relatives.
5. Conduct research on issues facing Persons with Disabilities.
6. Work with Unions, employers and other interest groups to ensure that more disabled persons are employed and are participating in mainstream society in order to develop their full potential.
7. Facilitate access to a range of assistive devices to meet the needs of all disability types.
8. Undertake social work intervention on issues affecting the disabled and their relatives.

### ***Poverty Eradication Committee***

The Poverty Eradication Committee was constituted to study and approve the applications made to access to the Poverty Alleviation Fund. This was a fund which was specially set aside to assist the most vulnerable groups in society - those finding themselves in acute need, particularly when the need cannot be met from traditional sources. The Committee considered requests from individuals whose income levels fell below the poverty line. Funds approved were not provided directly to individuals but rather to the agencies of the Ministry which liaised with the institutions, agencies or business houses from which services/items were to be procured by the individuals or groups. Funds approved for organisations were usually to support projects aimed at alleviating poverty within their specific communities.

### ***Poverty Alleviation Bureau***

The Poverty Alleviation Bureau was established in 1998. It was created to examine and report on the living conditions of persons and organizations making applications to the Poverty Eradication Fund for assistance.

### ***Ministry of Social Transformation***

With the introduction of additional targeting, Barbados undertook a study on the rationalisation of the social services. The study suggested the need for a more cohesive and collaborative social programme. The major recommendation of the study was the need to manage all of the welfare agencies through one Ministry.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the Ministry of Social Transformation was established in 1999. The Ministry was mandated to act as a coordinating and regulatory body to the social welfare agencies. These Agencies were:

1. Community Development Department
2. Welfare Department
3. National Assistance Board
4. Child Care Board
5. National Disabilities Unit
6. Bureau of Gender Affairs
7. Poverty Eradication Committee
8. The Poverty Alleviation Bureau
9. The Urban Development Commission which was shifted from the Ministry of Housing and Lands

The *Bureau of Social Policy Research and Planning* was added in 2006. Its creation evolved out of a need to formulate policy which was evidence-based. This department has responsibility *inter alia* for collecting and retrieving data in the sector, the compiling of reports and the publication of research papers highlighting trends, and similar analytical projects.

Through these agencies the Ministry of Social Transformation was able to place its primary focus on the most vulnerable within society: the poor, the disadvantaged and persons with disabilities. Based on the definition of poverty adopted by Barbados, its mission to eradicate poverty was not just to provide effective safety nets - for which Barbados already had a long tradition - but also included:

1. Empowerment of individuals, families and communities;
2. Facilitation of equality, equity and social inclusion of all persons in society;
3. Enhancement of social policy formulation and decision-making; and
4. Continuous assessment of the delivery of social services.

### ***Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment, Urban and Rural Development***

In January 2008 General Elections were held in Barbados, resulting in a change of Government. As a direct consequence, the Ministry of Social Transformation was re-configured and re-designated as the Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development. Some agencies have been shifted to other Ministries e.g. the Child Care Board and the Bureau of Gender Affairs are now a part of newly created Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports and the Community Development Department is now part of the new Ministry of Community Development and Culture. The Poverty Eradication Committee and the Poverty Alleviation Bureau have been phased out and their portfolio taken over by the Welfare Department. In addition, a new Department – **the *Department of Constituency Empowerment*** was established to support the Constituency Empowerment Programme which forms the new Government's platform for social development. Also added to the Ministry's portfolio was the ***Rural Development Commission***, which was shifted from the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment, Urban and Rural Development continues to lead the fight against poverty, inequality and exclusion and in collaboration with the newly created Ministries of Family, Youth, Sports; and Community Development and Culture has sought to take the fight to a new level.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Barbadian Social Policy Framework**

An assessment of the Barbadian social policy framework reveals both major strengths and encumbering weaknesses. The institutional framework used as a national mechanism to mainstream social inclusion objectives/principles into sectoral policies and poverty eradication strategies removed the threat of marginalisation of vulnerable groups and strengthened the social safety net. At the same time, the mix of targeted and universal approaches within the institutional framework led to fragmentation in the delivery of social services, duplication of programmes, and the perpetuation of unclear mandates among the agencies. The efforts to both widen and deepen the scope of social policy and programming also brought issues of capacity to the fore, including poor use of technology, an inadequate staff complement, and an underlying uncertainty as to the nature and level of poverty.

### ***Removing the Threat of Marginalisation***

With the broadening of the concept of poverty to encompass social deprivation, the quality of life experienced by all citizens has become an important consideration and has brought attention to other vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, the homeless and women.

### **Equal Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities**

As earlier discussed, the National Disabilities Unit was established as the focal point for persons with disabilities, which are estimated to number approximately 16,142. Through the Unit a White Paper on Disabilities was piloted through Parliament in 2002 and a Plan of Action is currently being finalised. A work experience programme is ongoing with the assistance of the private sector and has been an avenue through which some persons with disabilities find permanent employment. An agricultural project has recently come on stream thanks to the generosity of a local trade union – the Barbados Workers Union which has made the land available to the National Disabilities Unit. This project will provide employment opportunities for those who are mentally challenged.

The world of sports has also become more open to persons with disabilities. To date, Blind Cricket has been successfully introduced with the assistance of the British High Commission and Corporate Barbados. A vibrant programme is in place for special athletes who regularly participate in their area of speciality at home and abroad. Sport is proving to be a useful vehicle both in raising the self-esteem of persons with disabilities and in nurturing a more inclusive perspective among the general population.

The equalisation of opportunities for education is also being dealt with in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, while attention is being paid to the creation of a supportive environment in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. With regards to the latter, a ramp programme is in place which retrofits the homes of persons who are disabled to assist them in becoming more independent. There is also a Call-a-Ride Programme which Persons with Disabilities can access to keep appointments, attend church etc. Children with disabilities can also access this programme to attend school.

### Care of the Elderly and the Indigent

Barbados is now catering to an ageing population. On the one hand this points to improved life expectancy and improved health care; however, there is a significant percentage of the elderly who are poor. In response, the mandate of the National Assistance Board (NAB), which has evolved as the focal point for the elderly in Barbados, has been to maintain the dignity of elderly persons in Barbados through the provision of an innovative range of social support and recreational services which are accessible, acceptable and readily available, while enhancing their quality of life within their communities of residence.

The NAB is currently responsible for the following programmes catering to elderly and indigent persons/families, some of which are described below:

1. Domiciliary services (Home Care) for senior citizens – assistance with daily living skills for the elderly and disabled
2. Recreational and outreach activities for the elderly such as craft, cottage industries, drama, tours etc
3. Assistance-in-kind services i.e. the supply of basic household furnishings, beds, tables chairs etc
4. Residential care for senior citizens
5. Smart Clean Project (External home care)
6. Bereavement Services

The Home Care Programme is a community based programme which places trained staff in the homes of the elderly, the indigent and Persons with Disabilities to perform a wide range of tasks which the recipients experience difficulty in performing for themselves. This service is extended to approximately 992 persons annually. This service has reduced the need for institutionalisation, ensured that elderly persons remain in the community, and facilitated family members to function more effectively and efficiently.

The NAB remains philosophically persuaded that elderly persons should engage in a variety of wholesome recreational and social activities and has successfully operated sixteen "activity centres" spread across the island. These centres provide the forum for the elderly persons, particularly females to share skills in a dynamic interactive atmosphere, engage in discussions and participate in a variety of outings such as picnics as well as local and overseas tours.

Residential Care is also available for the elderly. Currently there is the Jorish Dunnah Home which has the capacity to accommodate 22 persons. Through the Ministry of Health, Government also partners with private providers to accommodate others demanding the service. The Vauxhall Senior Citizens Villages was opened in 2006 and offers residential accommodation, day care and recreational activities for the elderly. It also offers day care for children, which promotes inter-generational interaction.

### Homelessness

Mitigation against homelessness is currently being dealt with through the operation of three institutional entities administered by the NAB, namely the Black Rock Hostel for Homeless Persons and the Sir Clyde Gollop Night Shelter. The Black Rock Hostel is a twenty-bed facility intended to provide temporary accommodation prior to rehabilitation and resettlement of an individual. The Sir Clyde Gollop Night Shelter was established in 1994 in response to the homeless plight of males in Barbados. It provides a basic shelter arrangement for approximately 30 men of varying ages who are experiencing differing psycho-socio-economic difficulties. Plans are well advanced to make this shelter a rehabilitation centre. Apart from offering night shelter, there will be programmes conducted during the day aimed at facilitating the integration of the homeless back into main stream society. These

centres now work in collaboration with the appropriate authorities as the problem of homelessness has been recognised as a multifaceted one embracing such variables as drug use, psychoses, migration and deportation.

### Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

As cited earlier, gender was found to be a significant variable in the poverty profile of Barbados. Issues of gender are the purview of the Bureau of Gender Affairs. As Government's focal point for matters pertaining to Gender and Development, the Bureau's functions are to:

1. Provide advice and direction to Government agencies and NGOs on legislation and other policy matters affecting the status of women and to monitor the impact of these matters.
2. Participate in a variety of programmes to further the development of gender equity and equality in areas such as public education, legislation and human resource development.
3. Liaise with national, regional and international agencies/organizations dealing with Gender and Development and offer technical assistance to Women's and Men's Organisations in preparing project proposals, accessing funding as well as organizing seminars and workshops.
4. Prepare and disseminate information on Gender and Development issues and provide reference services through a documentation resource centre.
5. Sit on national committees to bring the gender perspective into focus.

The Bureau's stakeholders continue to be local, regional and international agencies, women's and men's NGOs and the school population. There is also a nucleus for an Inter-ministerial Committee (focal points) and a National Advisory Council on Gender.

### ***Strengthening of the National Safety Nets***

Within the personal social services sector, the Government's social safety net is maintained primarily by two agencies, the Welfare Department, which intervenes on behalf of families at risk, and the Child Care Board, which is charged with the care and protection of children.

### Families at Risk

The Welfare Department provides a variety of services to families and individuals who need assistance in dealing with financial, personal and family problems. The Department operates under the following legislative instruments:

1. The National Assistance Act Cap 48;
2. The Family Law Act 1981;
3. The Maintenance Act 1981; and
4. The Domestic Violence Act 1992.

As a result of its various mandates, the work of the Welfare Department is multifaceted and includes provision of counselling in the areas of maintenance of children, addressing access and custody problems, addressing the behavioural problems of children, counselling on relationship/marital problems, addressing issues of domestic violence, and trust administration.

The Department also makes Legal Aid available to persons with domestic problems, who may be unable to meet the usual legal expenses and intervenes in matters involving persons with disabilities as well as some aspects of care of the elderly, such as referring of persons to the Geriatric Hospital. . The aims of the Department are to:

1. Provide professional social work services geared towards the resolution of individual and family problems;
2. Enhance the personal and social development of its clientele; and
3. Empower and rehabilitate the disadvantaged and persons affected by crises and natural disasters.

The Welfare Department is also responsible for the administration of National Assistance, which takes the form of both cash and in-kind transfers to qualifying families and individuals. These services are provided island-wide through parish offices and include:

1. National Assistance Grants, which are determined by statutory provision are provided for families and individuals in need i.e. children, Persons with Disabilities, unemployed adults, elderly persons;

2. Assistance-in-kind – clothing, food vouchers, spectacles, dentures, hearing aids and emergency relief for fire and flood victims;
3. Utility Assistance – electricity and water bills;
4. Rental Assistance – house and land rent;
5. Emergency relief for victims of fire and natural disasters;
6. Educational Assistance – school uniforms, petty fees, school fees;
7. Family Services – counselling for marital problems, court conciliation, maintenance of children, domestic; violence, behavioural problems, legal aid, custody of/access to children;
8. Payment of bus fares on behalf of pensioners;
9. Administration of subventions to NGOs;
10. Investigation of claims for undrawn government pensions;
11. Burial of destitute persons; and
12. Referrals of persons to other social agencies.

Overtime the national safety net has been strengthened through increases in monetary assistance to individuals and families at risk. Special attention is given to Persons Living with HIV/AIDS who have become unemployed as a result of their illness. As school attendance is compulsory in Barbados up to the age of sixteen years educational assistance, in the form of school uniforms and a subsidised Text Book Scheme, is focused at facilitating school attendance of the poor. .

### Care and Protection of Children

The Child Care Board was established by the Child Care Board Act of 1969 to provide services for children in need of care and protection. Its goal is to improve the quality of life experienced by all children through advocacy, empowerment, counselling and the provision of residential and day care services. The Board operates under a philosophy that is based on the premise that children are to be nurtured, loved and given continuous and consistent care. The Board's practices are guided by the principle of "the best interest of the child", and are inline with the Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Barbados has signed and ratified.

In 1981, the 1969 Act was replaced (proclaimed in 1983) to allow for the Board to become a Statutory Corporation facilitating the provision of a wider scope of services and The mandate of the organization under the Act is to:

1. Provide and maintain Child Care Centres for children in need of care and protection i.e. Day Care Centres and Children's Homes;
2. Provide counselling and other services to meet the special needs of children;
3. Place children in foster care when needed;
4. Register, license and regulate Private Day Care Services; and
5. Make grants to qualifying private institutions.

Two other Acts, the Adoption Act 1955 (amended 1981) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's Act 1904 (amended 1981) also make provision for areas of the Board's work.

The mandate of the Board translates into the provision of numerous services, including:

1. Residential Care
2. Day Care (Government)
3. Private Day Care
4. Foster Care
5. Adoption
6. Child Abuse/Care and Protection
7. Early intervention, prevention and stimulation programmes with respect to those children with disabilities.

The Board has been giving priority to its Foster Care Programme. This has reduced the need for residential care and provides children at risk with a family-like atmosphere more conducive to their mental development. As a result there are only 120 children currently in care in the 11 children's homes. These smaller numbers has allowed the Board to give more individual attention to these children who often have a number of emotional problems having been victims of child abuse. Wherever possible; however, children at risk are placed with relatives. Foster parents and relatives are given an allowance for the maintenance of these children. Adoption has also proven to be a successful alternative and coupled with the other programmes, is more or less responsible for minimal issues related to orphaning.



## **Addressing the Weaknesses**

As previously outlined, many of the weaknesses within the Barbadian social policy system stem from structural and/or capacity problems. The Government has introduced several mechanisms and programmes which would eliminate these issues or at the very least mitigate their impact.

Within the past year, the Government has worked to strengthen the coordination capabilities within the social sector by establishing a Sub-Committee on Social Policy, which is a Sub-Committee of the Cabinet and comprises Ministers of Government responsible for Health, Housing and Lands, Education and Human Resource Development, Labour and Immigration, Home Affairs, Community Development and Culture; and Family, Youth and Sports. It is chaired by the Minister of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment, Urban and Rural Development. An Inter-Ministry Task Force comprising the top technical officers within these Ministries has also been established. These entities meet on a regular basis to discuss the various challenges confronting the sector and to approve policy recommendations.

On a basic logistical level, a national database has been created within the sector to permit client tracking and inter-agency collaboration on issues and trends. A Universal Intake Form has also been introduced to accurately capture data pertaining to the array of social issues handled by the various Agencies and to facilitate a more professional referral system.

With regard to the understanding of poverty, a poverty study is currently in progress. This Country Assessment of Living Conditions in Barbados will serve to more accurately inform policy makers on the nature and extent of poverty, and thus provide for more effective and efficient policies, programme and services.

## **Opportunities**

The institutional framework adopted in Barbados has presented opportunities for partnership with civil society and fostered an empowerment focus in policies and programmes.

### ***Partnerships with Civil Society***

The Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment, Urban and Rural Development is cognisant of the importance of partnering with Civil Society in the development process. To this end, protocols have been established with some NGOs with the view of enhancing the capacity of the Ministry to deliver services to the poor. For example, the Ministry works with the Salvation Army to support a Meals-on-Wheels programme and in the administration of a hostel for victims of fire and flood. Similarly, the Israel Lovell Foundation and Pinelands Creative Workshop work with the Government to develop and implement community empowerment programmes; while the Barbados Professional Women's Club is supported in its provision of a shelter for battered women; and PAREDOS is supported to provide special parenting programmes. These organisations receive subventions from the state through the Poverty Eradication Fund for their specific programmes.

### ***Empowerment Programmes***

Empowerment programmes have been facilitated by the Welfare Department, and the Community Development Department. When fully operational, such programmes will also be undertaken by the Department of Constituency Empowerment. Some of these programmes are highlighted below.

#### **Welfare to Work Programme**

It was recognized that training and/or employment barriers existed in the lives of our welfare recipients. These barriers included low levels of education, lack of adequate job skills, lack of access to transportation, exposure to domestic violence, compromised physical health, psychiatric disorders and substance abuse. The Welfare to Work Programme was introduced to address these issues and assist clients in changing their life circumstances. It targets mainly women (who make up the bulk of welfare recipients), who have been receiving national assistance grants on a long term basis, and others who are unemployed and depend on child maintenance, which is remitted through the Welfare Department. The programme focuses attention and resources on the challenges these women face in securing employment and aim to break their dependence on public assistance.

While National Assistance in cash and kind is offered to persons, training and the work interests are also explored. In this regard, training is provided as requested by clients in a variety of marketable skills. Job placements are also provided. This programme has been responsible for a significant reduction in the need for National Assistance disbursements.

### Community Art Career Programme

The Community Art Career Programme seeks to improve and strengthen the artistic abilities of young people and serve as an avenue for self-employment income generation. Most of those graduating have started their own business or have gone on to further training. Two larger scale companies have also been established as a direct result of this programme – Artworx, a company specialising in the creation of websites, business cards and graphic designs and Phantasee Interiors, a decorating company. Animation has recently been added to the programme.

### Community Technology Programme

The Community Technology Programme is designed to provide communities with access to information technology and Internet facilities as necessary tool kits for survival in the information age. This programme is one of the strategies in Government's programme to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that all persons regardless of their economic status have access to information technology. This programme also ensures that the poor would not be excluded in the transition of Barbados to an information society and all that that entails e.g. the introduction of e-Government and the ability to access services online. Over 13,000 persons have been trained since the programme's inception in 2001.

### Constituency Empowerment Programme

Since 2008, the Government, as part of its commitment to the eradication of poverty, inequality and exclusion, has introduced a Constituency Empowerment Programme (CEP), which will broaden the participatory character of governance in Barbados with the view to ensuring the equitable development of Barbadian society. It favours a "bottom-up" approach to development and provides the platform on which the social upliftment of all citizens will be pursued. As such it is also seen as an important aspect of the Government's overall poverty reduction strategy.

The CEP can be described as a local governance system, bounded by the geography of the enumeration districts. Strategically, the programme is aimed at strengthening the capacity of citizens to bring about positive change at the individual and community levels, thus contributing to sustainable development at the national level. Politically, the Programme it is seen as a platform for promoting development and an avenue through which citizens can participate in the decision-making process and contribute to national development. Socially, it is a strategy to increase the effectiveness of development programmes, since the programmes are undertaken in response to the needs of the constituency which have been identified and prioritised by its constituents. Economically, it allows for a more efficient delivery of services to the constituents and the constituency as the level of bureaucracy will decrease; and improves local livelihoods as local residents with the required skills will be on the frontline of employment opportunities within their respective constituencies.

An integral part of the programme will be the establishment of Constituency Councils. These Councils are expected to meet a number of objectives related to the pursuit of good governance and will provide the structural linkage between Government and its constituents in the overall programme for national development. Six (6) of the thirty (30) Constituency Councils are up and running. The other twenty-four should be operationalised by year end.

### **Threats**

The fragile nature of the Barbadian economy provides the most significant threat to a continued focus on social inclusion and people-centred development. Whatever approach is adopted in addressing these issues the creation of jobs and avenues for self-employment cannot be overlooked. This focus requires positive and stable performance of the economy. Barbados' economy is a small one, challenged by limited diversity. In addition the location of the island makes it vulnerable to natural disasters, a challenge with which successive Governments have had to contend. Comparative advantages are few and this becomes more significant in the face of globalisation and trade liberalisation, which have already impacted upon the country in a negative way e.g. slow growth of the domestic economy, on which the delivery of basic services to the poor depends. A shrinking domestic market induced by increased competition has only compounded the problem.

In addition to economical challenges, the threat of creating dependent pockets of the population must also be considered. Barbados remains mindful that programmes adopted must be sustainable and conducive to promoting self-reliance. Services to the poor and marginalised must always be seen as an investment in human capital with a return that speaks to the empowerment of all citizens.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Barbados is committed to transforming its social landscape; and the elimination of poverty, inequality and exclusion are integral parts of the transformation agenda. To this end there will be continuous scanning of the environment through research and analysis facilitated by the Bureau of Social Policy Research and Planning. The ultimate goal is to have programmes that lead to the empowerment of the poor and thus discourage dependency; provide for social integration rather than perpetuate marginalisation and exclusion; permit equal opportunities for participation and stamp out discrimination. An institutional framework that facilitates their seamless implementation is critical to their success.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. (1992) Convening of a World Summit for Social Development: Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/47/92). United Nations, New York

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations, (1995), *The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action: World Summit for Social Development 6-12 March 1995*, United Nations, and New York.

<sup>3</sup> The first World Conference on Women was held by the United Nations in Beijing in 1995. There were 12 areas identified as far as commitments were concerned (see Report on World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Lipton M. 1997. 'Defining and Measuring Poverty: Conceptual Issues.' In UNDP. *Human Development Papers 1997*. UNDP/HDRO. New York.

<sup>5</sup> IADB (1998). *Poverty and Income Distribution in Barbados 1996-1997*, Economic and Social Sector Series.

<sup>6</sup> Sen, Amartya K. (1990). "Development as Capability Expansion." In K. Griffin and J. Knight, Eds. *Human Development and the International Development Strategy for the 1990s*. London: MacMillan

<sup>7</sup> UNDP. (1997). *Human Development Report 1997: Human Development to Eradicate Poverty*. Oxford University Press: New York. Pp. 15

<sup>8</sup> Chambers, Robert. (1995). Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose Reality Counts?, IDS Discussion Paper . 347. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Sussex. Pp. 29

<sup>9</sup> Government of Barbados. (1997). *Rationalisation of the Social Services: Final Report*.