

Third Session of the Twelfth Republican Parliament

SIXTEENTH

REPORT
FROM

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION
OF

Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in
alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2:
Zero Hunger.

Public Administration and Appropriations Committee

The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) is established by Standing Order 102 and 92 of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Committee is mandated to consider and report to Parliament on:

- (a) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;*
- (b) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and*
- (c) *the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.*

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Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
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Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
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Mr. Hassel Bacchus	Member

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Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
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**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**



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Dr. Lackram Bodoie, MP
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Member



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Mr. Hassel Bacchus
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Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP
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Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP
Member



Dr. Sharda Patasar
Member



Mr. Laurence Hislop
Member

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report of the Public Administrations and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) for the Twelfth Parliament contains the details of the Committee's examination into **Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger**.

Background into SDG 2: Zero Hunger¹

SDG 2: Zero Hunger was established by the United Nations in 2015 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. SDG 2 seeks sustainable solutions to end hunger in all its forms by 2030 and to achieve food security. The aim is to ensure that everyone everywhere has enough good-quality food to lead a healthy life. Achieving this Goal will require better access to food and the widespread promotion of sustainable agriculture. This entails improving the productivity and incomes of small-scale farmers by promoting equal access to land, technology and markets, sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices. It also requires increased investments through international cooperation to bolster the productive capacity of agriculture in developing countries.

Sustainable Development Goal 2 Zero Hunger's Targets²:

SDG 2 has eight targets to measure progress. These targets are broken down into five outcome targets and three implementation targets.

The five outcome targets are:

- 2.1** By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

- 2.2** By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age by 2025, , and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

¹ Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture — SDG Indicators web accessed on August 22, 2023 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/goal-02/>

² United Nations - Sustainable Development Goals web accessed on August 14, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and income of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishermen, through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

The three implementation targets are:

2.A Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.

2.B Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round.

2.C Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.

Objectives of Inquiry

- i. To ensure there is a constant supply of nutritional food for the population at all times;
- ii. To assess the steps being taken to alleviate this country's food security concerns and sustain long-term local agricultural productivity levels; and
- iii. To identify the mechanisms needed to enhance and improve local agricultural investments as well as improve regional and international agricultural cooperation.

The Committee in undertaking this examination employed two (2) mechanisms:

- i. Written Submissions; and
- ii. Public Hearing.

The Committee requested written submissions from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, (MALF), Ministry of Trade and Industry, (MTI), Ministry of Planning and Development, (MPD), Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS), Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA) and thereafter focused on a review and analysis of the written submissions. Subsequently, the Committee conducted a Public Hearing with the following stakeholders on May 17, 2023:

- i. The MPD;
- ii. The MSDFS;
- iii. The MALF;
- iv. The MTI;
- v. The MOH; and
- vi. The OPM-GCA.

The approach adopted by the Committee took into account:

- i. Issues identified in the submissions received; and
- ii. Reports in the media.

The Committee made recommendations related to the issues identified. Observations and recommendations are presented in **Chapter 3**.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE COMMITTEE

The PAAC of the Twelfth Republican Parliament was established by the revised Standing Orders to:

- examine the current public expenditure, thereby capturing the full budget cycle by providing Parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the budget; and
- conduct a real-time examination of the expenditure of Ministries and Departments (M&D).

Change in Membership

1. In the Twelfth Parliament, the Members of the Committee were appointed by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 9, 2020 and Tuesday November 17, 2020 respectively.
2. Senator Clarence Rambharat's seat in the Senate was declared vacant on March 16, 2022 as such he ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
3. Senator Yokymma Bethelmy's seat in the Senate was declared vacant on March 16, 2022 as such she ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
4. By resolution of the House of Representatives at a sitting held on June 14, 2022, Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP.
5. By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on June 14, 2022, Senator Laurence Hislop was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Senator Yokymma Bethelmy and Senator Randall Mitchell in lieu of Senator Clarence Rambharat.
6. Senator Amrita Deonarine ceased being a Member of the Committee on September 11, 2023.
7. By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on October 24, 2023, Senator Dr. Sharda Patasar was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Senator Amrita Deonarine.

Chairman & Vice-Chairman

By virtue of S.O. 109(6) and 99(6) of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively, the Chairman of the Committee is the Speaker and at its First Meeting held on November 25, 2020, Dr. Lackram Bodoë was elected as the Vice-Chairman.

Quorum

Additionally, in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House, the Committee was required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, with representatives from both Houses, was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

2. METHODOLOGY

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

At an in-camera meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, November 02, 2022, the Committee agreed to conduct an examination into food security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger.

Review of Documents

The Committee deliberated and decided on an examination in public based on the content of the:

- i. Written Submissions received; and
- ii. Media reports

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines the steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outline the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC for its examination into food security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger.

- i. Identification of the entities to be examined;
- ii. Preparation of an Inquiry Proposal for the selected entities:
 - a. The MPD;
 - b. The MSDFS;
 - c. The MALF;
 - d. The MTI;
 - e. The MOH; and
 - f. The OPM-GCA.
- iii. Request for written responses were sent on **December 16, 2022**. Responses were received from:
 - a. the MPD on January 10, 2023;
 - b. the MSDFS on December 28, 2022;
 - c. the MALF on January 9, 2023;
 - d. the MTI on January 30, 2023;

- e. the MOH on January 9, 2023; and
 - f. the OPM-GCA on January 17, 2023.
- iv. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern in the responses provided;
 - v. Based on the recommendations and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a Public Hearing. The MALF, MTI, MPD, MSDFS and OPN-GCA were invited to attend and provide evidence on **May 17, 2023**;
 - vi. Following the Public Hearing, a request for additional information was made on **June 01, 2023**. The responses were received by:
 - a. the MALF on June 23, 2023;
 - b. the MTI on June 23, 2023;
 - c. the MPD on June 14, 2023;
 - d. the MSDFS on June 14, 2023;
 - e. the MOH on June 30, 2023; and
 - f. the OPM-GCA on June 20, 2023.
 - vii. Report on the Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry;
 - viii. Request for Ministerial Responses.
 - ix. Review responses; and
 - x. Engage in follow-up.

3. ISSUES, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon review of the evidence collected from the relevant Ministries, the following issues, observations and recommendations were made with regard to food security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger:

Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD)

The MPD is the national focal point for the monitoring of the SDGs. The 2023 to 2025 Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) currently focuses on nine development priorities, of which priority number three is, “Ensuring Food Safety and Security. In that regard, the MPD ensures that projects and programmes that are aligned to these areas receive priority funding under the PSIP, inclusive of those that would continue and contribute to increasing and promoting zero hunger and food security. The MPD is also the line Ministry for the Central Statistical Office (CSO), which was currently conducting multiple data collection surveys to create baselines to enable better monitoring of the progress of the implementation of the SDGs to 2030. In the Committee’s assessment of the MPD’s role in the implementation of SDG 2, the following were noted:

1. Status of National Surveys

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is a sample survey that provides statistically sound and internationally comparable data essential for developing evidence-based policies and programmes for children and women in Trinidad and Tobago and for monitoring progress toward national goals and global commitments. The MICS (2022) is currently being conducted through a partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the CSO. Data was collected from August 01, 2022 to December 18, 2022; the report is expected to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2023. While the MICS is not specifically designed tool for assessing household poverty, the report presents the survey results on a wide range of indicators for understanding women and children’s well-being including education, health and protection in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Household Budget Survey (HBS), on the other hand, would provide detailed data on household income and expenditure not available from any other source, while the Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) assesses social data on areas such as poverty, health, education, and other indicators. Both surveys have been combined and data collection is ongoing and set to be

completed by January 2024. The MPD also indicated that by August 2024, it and other relevant stakeholders should have access to data and information from the 2023 joint Household Budgetary Survey and Survey of Living Conditions (HBS/SLC). This joint survey will provide much needed data and information on incomes and expenditure as well as facilitate the establishment of a new poverty line and enable better monitoring of the progress of the implementation of the SDGs to 2030.

Observations:

- **The Committee notes the conduct of the two surveys to better:**
 - **Understand the well-being, education, health and protection status of women and children in Trinidad and Tobago; and**
 - **Present updated statistical data on household income and expenditure as well as social data on areas such as poverty, health, education, and other indicators with the aim of establishing a new poverty line.**

Recommendation

- **The MPD should submit a report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the reasons for the delay in the conduct of the HBS and SLC and the mechanisms implemented to ensure that the surveys are conducted in a more timely manner that better reflects the changing financial and social circumstances of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.**

2. Operationalisation Mechanisms to Track the Implementation, Progress and Report on SDGs

During the PAAC's Inquiry, the MPD indicated that it was keen on ensuring that all seventeen (17) SDGs are implemented and reported on, inter alia, with inter-ministerial collaboration. As such, the Cabinet-approved Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs will be configured and operationalised by the last quarter of the Fiscal Year 2023. Draft Terms of Reference have been developed for the Standing Committee, which was being reviewed for finalisation during the same period. The Standing Committee will comprise:

- a) Ministry of Planning and Development - Chair
- b) Office of the Prime Minister - Member
- c) Ministry of Finance and the Economy - Member

- d) Ministry of Social Development and Family Services - Member
- e) Ministry of Works and Transportation - Member
- f) Ministry of Public Administration - Member
- g) A representative from the THA - Member
- h) A representative from Civil Society - Member
- i) A representative from the Business Sector – Member

Additionally, the MPD has taken steps towards recruiting staff for the already established SDG Technical Coordinating Secretariat (TCS) comprising six (6) positions. The Secretariat will be responsible for providing support to the Standing Committee. In addition, a Statistical Analyst attached to the TCS had been assigned to augment the Social Statistics Unit of the CSO and will be dedicated to collecting data and information and reporting on the SDGs. At the time of the PAAC's inquiry, four (4) of the six (6) positions were filled and the TCS was expected to be fully staffed by the end of July 2023, once suitably qualified persons were hired.

Every year, the UN, in consultation with their government counterparts, produces an Annual Country Results Report. The 2022 Annual Results Report for Trinidad and Tobago reported that of the 137 activities of that year, **seven (7) were related to SDG 2: Zero Hunger**. In the face of the SDG tracking and reporting challenges, the MPD has been collaborating ardently and continuously with its partners to advance the SDG agenda. Subsequent to the 2020 Voluntary National Report (VNR), the MPD reported that:

1. Trinidad and Tobago's UN Resident Coordinator's Office retained a consultant to continue collecting data for the remaining nine (9) SDGs that were not part of the 2020 VNR Report. This consultant's work involved:
 - a data mapping exercise which identified and collected data from sources outside Trinidad and Tobago and the UN System;
 - an institutional assessment of the capacities, challenges and opportunities at ten organisations that will facilitate the production of SDG data and allowed of the sharing of statistics;
 - research which findings revealed that there were official statistics for only 20 per cent of the 234 SDG indicators;
 - a compilation of available SDG data into a spreadsheet which can serve as a rudimentary SDG Data Repository; and

- the consultant recommended that “while administrative data is the most sustainable option, information from ‘Omnibus’ Surveys may be needed until there is the sufficient institutional capacity to capture, process and share administrative data for the SDGs.
2. Additionally, through the Joint SDG Fund Project entitled “Modernising Trinidad and Tobago’s Statistical Ecosystem through Enhanced SDG Data Development,” the UN is working with the CSO to execute the national surveys from which a report will be prepared reviewing Trinidad and Tobago’s national statistical landscape.
 3. Via a procurement process, the UN engaged a consultant to build an online SDGs data repository for Trinidad and Tobago and hired a consultant to develop a mechanism for establishing a Big Data Centre of Excellence as well as other initiatives, which were to be implemented in the future.

Further, the MPD has been working closely with the University of the West Indies-Health Economics Unit, Centre for Health Economics to establish a project entitled ***The Compilation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicators for Trinidad and Tobago.*** This project is intended to ensure that SDG data can be collected and analysed on a regular basis to allow for timely and updated reporting. The MPD stated that the project could also function as the main input mechanism for the online SDGs data repository being developed through the UN’s joint SDGs fund.

Moreover, the MPD indicated that it would encourage other Ministries and the THA to accelerate progress made in achieving the targets of the specific SDGs that fall within their sector of work by establishing intra and inter-institutional mechanisms with a view to enhancing internal and external collaboration on SDG implementation. It is through the advancement of these collaborative mechanisms that the MPD seeks to improve its implementation and monitoring mandate of promoting the holistic sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Recommendations:

- **The MPD should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024, a status update on the operationalisation of the Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs including the finalisation of its Terms of Reference and the progress of any works done.**
- **The MPD should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024 a status update on the seven activities related to SDG 2.**

- The MPD should submit to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 a status update on the filling of the vacant positions in the SDG TCS.
- The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on:
 - its plans and strategies for its use of the work conducted and recommendations proposed by the UN consultant on the remaining 9 SDGs which were not included in the VNR; and
 - a status update on the creation of the SDG Data Repository and the establishment of a Big Data Centre of Excellence.
- The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the compilation of SDG Indicators for Trinidad and Tobago and whether this mechanism was a feasible input for the online SDGs data repository which is being developed through the UN's joint SDGs fund.
- The MPD should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on its intended initiatives and strategies to:
 - encourage societal SDG reporting; and
 - promote internal and external ministry/departmental/institutional collaboration on SDG implementation.
- The MPD should submit a report to Parliament by January 29, 2024:
 - identify a target date by which the Ministry will be in position to comprehensively track the implementation and progress of and report on SDGs (ii) sets out any potential challenges, threats and/or risks which may hinder the attainment of the target date.

3. Voluntary National Report on SDGs

SDG 2 has eight (8) targets and fourteen (14) indicators to measure progress, with each target having an achievement date set between 2020 and 2030. Given that the seventeen (17) SDGs were adopted in 2015, 2023 should be viewed as a midway point to measure and gauge the implementation success of all the SDGs. However, active monitoring of the SDGs or their indicators was not currently being done. The MPD is the focal Point for the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. In this regard, the Ministry indicated that it intends to

build on the 2020 Voluntary National Report (VNR), in which Trinidad and Tobago reported on eight (8) SDGs for which data and information were more readily available.

The VNR process aims to facilitate the identification of successes, challenges, development needs and lessons learnt, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 SDG Agenda. After consultation with key stakeholders, Trinidad and Tobago presented its first VNR³ at the UN's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development in New York in July 2020. The SDGs that formed part of Trinidad and Tobago's first VNR were:



During the preparation of the 2020 VNR, the MPD received Cabinet approval, inter alia, for the establishment of a Standing Committee on the Implementation and Reporting on the SDGs, along with the establishment of Multi-Sectoral Working Groups representing the five (5) thematic areas of the National Development Strategy (NDS) Vision 2030. However, the MPD stated that no meetings had ever been convened for the Standing Committee or the Multi-Sectoral Working Groups. Despite this, the MPD stated that the 2020 VNR was developed with the assistance of three (3) Consultants from the UN, using an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach involving the public and private sectors, civil society, and academia. The MPD intends to generate a VNR every two (2) years up to 2030 to assess the progress on the implementation of the 17 SDGs.

³ Trinidad and Tobago's first Voluntary National Review (VNR)
https://www.planning.gov.tt/sites/default/files/Trinidad_and_Tobago_SDG_VNR_Summary_Document_0.pdf

Observation:

- The Committee noted that **SDG 2** was not among the initial eight (8) SDGs reported in the 2020 VNR and looks forward to its inclusion in the next VNR, which is expected to be published in 2025.

Recommendation:

- The MPD should report to Parliament by **January 29, 2024**, the processes that would be followed to create a VNR that will assess the progress on the implementation of **SDG 2** including the timelines that have been proposed for the finalisation of each process to facilitate its inclusion in the VNR by **2025**.

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

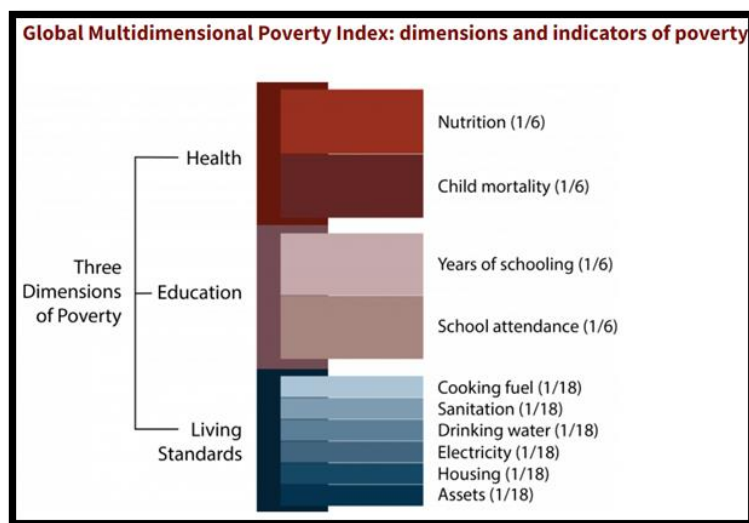
The MSDFS is mandated with the responsibility for addressing the social challenges of poverty, social inequality and social exclusion. The MSDFS considers that food security is achieved when every person and physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. As a result, the MSDFS places particular emphasis on developing and executing programmes and services to protect and assist those individuals in society who are classified as poor, vulnerable or marginalised. The Committee used, outcome target **2.1** *“By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.”* in its assessment of the MSDFS role in the implementation of **SDG 2**. The Committee noted the following:

1. Severely Outdated Poverty Line

At a national level, the poverty line is considered a monetary measure of the minimum consumption, in dollar terms, of goods and services that a household should obtain to ensure that its basic needs are adequately met. The poverty line, therefore, represents a minimum budget that a household should spend, over a defined period, if it is to meet its basic food and non-food requirements. The MSDFS utilises the poverty line to determine which individuals in society should be beneficiaries of the Ministry’s programmes and services. As such when the MSDFS distributes food baskets/hampers and allocates food cards at the current prices, an updated

poverty line is required to allow the Ministry to better provide for its clients and their needs. The MSDFS indicated that many vulnerable persons may not be able to benefit from the Ministry’s services or programmes intended to provide sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences due to the outdated poverty line.

Trinidad and Tobago currently uses the results of a 2005 SLC to determine the country’s poverty line. The results of the 2005 SLC determined the poverty line to be \$665.00 monthly with 16.7% of the population defined as “poor” and 1.2% as “indigent”. The 2005 SLC also categorised 9% of the population as “vulnerable”. Since then, attempts have been made to update the poverty line to reflect more recent changes in deprivation. The 2009 HBS and 2011 National Census showed that 21.8% of the population was living below the poverty line at the beginning of the last decade. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report for 2022, a 2011 study noted that, in Trinidad and Tobago, 9,000 persons were multi-dimensionally poor (deprived), while 51,000 were vulnerable to experiencing multi-dimensional poverty, which features “acute deprivations in health, education, and living standards that a person faces simultaneously”⁴. In the diagram below, the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, nutrition is illustrated as one of the 2 indicators of poverty under the dimension of Health representing 1/6 or 16.67% of the metrics to define the vulnerable and multi-dimensional poverty.



In March 2018, the MSDFS introduced a Standard Means Test (SMT) to standardise eligibility criteria for access to several of its social safety net programmes/grants. The purpose

⁴ Oxford University Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index. Accessed August 14, 2023: <https://ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/>

of the SMT was to improve the efficiency of targeting mechanisms for accessing social safety net programmes/grants, and to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery across the various MSDFS Divisions/Units. It is noteworthy that the poverty line is a main element of the SMT as it is used as the qualifying threshold. The MSDFS has continuously reviewed, monitored and evaluated the SMT to gauge its efficacy, as it was the Ministry's main targeting mechanism for identifying the poor and vulnerable. The SMT was last reviewed in 2021.

The MSDFS' SMT currently utilises a 2016 poverty line of \$1,439.02 (per month per adult equivalent) to determine the eligibility of persons for benefits. This updated poverty line was developed by inflating the 2005 poverty line using 2016 food prices. In 2016, the Indigence Line equaled \$553.47, and the Non-food poverty line equaled \$885.55. The 2016 Poverty Line was calculated by adding the figures of \$553.47 and \$885.55 together resulting in a total of \$1,439.02. The Ministry's review of the SMT remains an ongoing exercise but the Ministry's current effort to review the existing poverty line in 2023 is expected to be superseded by the national poverty line calculated from the next Survey of Living Conditions, which is currently underway and was expected to be completed in 2024, as previously discussed. At present, thirty-four thousand four hundred and seventy-four (34,774) clients fall below the poverty line of \$1,439.02. This comprises 16,666 Public Assistance beneficiaries and 18,108 Food Support beneficiaries who receive grants monthly.

Recommendations:

- **The MSDFS should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the factors considered when determining whether there is a need to update the Ministry's Poverty Line including how significant each factor is when making that decision.**
- **The MSDFS should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on how the Ministry calculates the Indigence Line and Non-poverty Line.**
- **The MSDFS should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the anticipated date by which the Ministry believes that it would be in a position to introduce a new poverty line.**
- **Based on the MSDFS ongoing review of the SMT, the Ministry should provide to Parliament by January 29, 2024, its preliminary estimation of the 2023 poverty line as well as the number of clients the Ministry anticipates will fall below that estimated poverty line.**

2. National Register of Vulnerable Persons

The MSDFS defines “vulnerable” as those persons who face special difficulties in supporting themselves because of some aspect of their situation. In its National Social Mitigation Plan (2017-2022), the Ministry further elaborates on this definition by characterizing the vulnerable population as "those persons who are only able to meet their basic needs currently but may not be able to do so in the event of any shocks to their income." Accordingly, the following is a list of the groups of persons whom the Ministry recognises as vulnerable:

- Persons/families living in poverty.
- Socially displaced
- The indigent (extreme poverty)
- Ex-prisoners
- Persons (children and adults) with Disabilities
- Deportees
- Senior citizens/Older persons
- Women
- Persons living with HIV/AIDS
- Children, adolescents, and youth
- Persons who are unemployed
- Persons who experienced situations of disaster
- Victims of domestic violence/ violent crime/human trafficking
- Families experiencing dysfunctional situations/crisis.
- Migrants/refugees/asylum seekers
- Single-parent households
- Substance abusers
- Persons in need of psychosocial support

Financed by the UNDP with a budget of one hundred and ten thousand US dollars (\$110,000.00), the MSDFS sought to establish and operationalise a National Register of Vulnerable Persons (NRVP) for Trinidad and Tobago. This system would assess vulnerability across six dimensions, utilising over twenty indicators of deprivation whilst also providing a clear and precise definition for vulnerability in Trinidad and Tobago. The NRVP is intended to

be a cutting-edge computerized database that would be used to collect, store, and process vital information on vulnerable persons on a single platform.

The NRVP is expected to be populated using a mixed-modalities framework. The MSDFS stated that this approach offers a superior option to utilising a single modality method and would allow the NRVP to incorporate information from new and existing data sources. By combining multiple data sources, including existing clients’ records, geospatial information, and primary data collection mechanisms (e.g., field exercises and self-registrations) and secondary data collected from the MICS, the NRVP would be a rich and nuanced database of vulnerable persons/households. The NRVP would allow policymakers to be informed in real time on how many people were poor, how many were close to the poverty line, and how many were far beyond that threshold. This information would not only enable policymakers to effectively target social programmes, but would also allow for more accurate monitoring of existing and potential clients’ graduation out of a state of vulnerability.

The MSDFS stated that it would require additional staff to assist with the population of the register as well as cleanse and update the Ministry’s existing databases as a large cross section of the population would be input onto the register before the vulnerability profile verification exercises commence. The MSDFS added that it intends to make the register mobile and online accessible allowing persons/ households to input their data directly into the register to subsequently be verified by MSDFS field officers. The following is a list of some of the core activities to be undertaken with respective timelines:

Activity	Expected Start Date	Expected Completion Date
Pilot test of the data collection instrument	Ongoing	August 2023
Data migration/merging from existing databases	September 2023	Continuous
Primary data collection such as Field Exercises and Self-Registration	September 2023	Continuous

Recommendations:

- **The MSDFS should provide a status update on the operationalisation and implementation of the NRVP to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 as including when the Ministry would allow self-registration.**

- **The MSDFS should provide a status update on the recruitment of additional staff to populate the database to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.**
- **The MSDFS should also utilise the personal information from citizens who made requests for assistance collected by Members of Parliament and local government councillors in the Ministry’s verification process of household vulnerability profiles.**
- **The MSDFS should also report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, indicating when the NRVP would be in a position to produce relevant and current baseline data for policymakers’ use.**

3. Review of the Food Support Programme’s Card Grants

The Food Support Programme (FSP) is a short-term food assistance and development programme that targets vulnerable persons and families in need. This assistance equips recipients with the ability to better purchase basic food items. The programme is currently implemented through the Food Support Card (FSC), a Debit Card like electronic cash transfer facility. As part of the administration of the FSP, an approved list of items is provided to the grocers and supermarkets where the MSDFS’s FSCs are accepted. This list includes foods that allow the recipient of the food card to be able to procure groceries that will give them at least a basic basket of food to meet their basic nutritional needs. The FSC has three (3) amounts available based on the size of the family unit:

- 1 – 3 persons = \$510.00
- 4 – 5 persons = \$650.00
- 6 + persons = \$800.00

The MSDFS calculated those figures using the 2016 costs of basic food items used as ingredients in a basic nutritional meal. Considering current inflated food prices, the MSDFS stated that, once the CSO completes the HBS and SLC, updated information would be used to calculate a 2024 poverty line. Once calculated, the MSDFS stated that it would make recommendations to the Cabinet to review and revise the FSC amounts. The MSDFS stated that whilst it could conduct a three (3)-month exercise that would validate inflating the poverty line using 2023 food prices, revising the FSC amounts per family size would require Cabinet approval. The MSDFS having recognised the increase in food prices last recommended an increase in the Food Support grant in each category by \$100.00 as a fiscal measure for inclusion in the 2019

budget. As of June 1, 2023, there were 18,109 persons enrolled in the Food Support Programme. The Annual Expenditure for the Food Support Programme for 2022 and for fiscal year 2023 as of June 1, 2023 respectively were as follows:

- Year 2022- \$193,131,331.00
- Year 2023 (June 1, 2023)- \$94,446,766.00

The Beneficiaries who remained on the Programme for the period 2019-2023(June 1) are presented in the Table hereunder:

Year	Beneficiaries
2019	22,395
2020	27,747
2021	31,548
2022	32,080
2023 (June 1st)	18,499

A breakdown of the number of new Beneficiaries who were added to the Programme for the period 2019-2023 (June 1) is presented in the Table hereunder:

Year	New Beneficiaries
2019	4,965
2020	3,036
2021	5,402
2022	5,988
2023 (June 1st)	836

A breakdown of the number Beneficiaries who graduated from the Programme for the period 2019-2023 (June 1) is presented in the Table hereunder:

Year	Beneficiaries
2019	1,973
2020	2,389
2021	2,789

2022	*12,351
2023 (June 1st)	1,120

This figure is attributed to the FSP review exercise that was conducted during the calendar year 2022

Recommendation:

- **The MSDFS should review the FSP given that the level of food prices tend to increase annually and submit this review and proposed recommendations for the consideration of the relevant decision makers. The MSDFS should provide a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.**

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF)

The MALF has a primary role in ensuring food security. Agriculture is indispensable to the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago and is therefore a major component of food security and economic viability. In this regard, the Ministry has strengthened its capacity to contribute to improved food security through the implementation of initiatives that:

- i. increased agricultural production;
- ii. created enabling environments to produce key commodities;
- iii. focused on youth in agriculture;
- iv. increased access to technical and extension support;
- v. increased access to grants for agricultural development; and
- vi. encouraged the adoption of technology and innovation to drive agricultural production.

In the Committee’s assessment of the MALF’s role in the implementation of SDG 2, outcome targets **2.3, 2.4 and 2.5** were utilized and the following noted:

1. Farmer Registration System

SDG 2 outline target 2.3 seeks to improve secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. To boost the MALF’s capacity of achieving this target by 2030, the MALF began modernizing and digitally transforming its processes that catered to farmers. The MALF indicated that it needed to change the way it captured farmer related data, populated databases and generated reports and, most importantly, the MALF needed to make decisions that are more informed. As such, the MALF began the process of operationalizing a

farmer registration system. Currently, the MALF's records indicate that the total number of registered farmers in Trinidad and Tobago was twenty-three thousand seven hundred and seventy-one (23,771) of which four thousand eight hundred and seventy-four (4,874) are women. The goal of the farmer registration system was to give farmers a voice and allow them to directly inform the MALF of their

- (i) farming needs and requirements as well as; and
- (ii) expectations of the MALF.

The system's long-term objective was to enhance farmers' productivity and harvest quality as well as to promote sustainable farming techniques. At the time of the PAAC's inquiry, the farmer registration process was a manual task requiring field officers to verify the information submitted by farmers on a yearly basis, which is a long and tedious process. The MALF also indicated that the Ministry intends to incorporate the Agricultural Incentive Programme (AIP), agricultural rebate, and soil testing requests into the farmer registration system. The MALF said that these additions to the registration system would speed up verification exercises and reduce the delays farmers currently experience.

At the time of the public hearing, the Farmer Registration System was still in its development stage and had yet to be implemented online. At this time, the registration process took approximately three (3) months. The MALF added that, whilst the younger generation of farmers was supportive of the technological innovations that increased accessibility and communication, the Ministry was cognizant that there exists those who will be resistant to the changes. As such, the MALF indicated that it planned to address the farmers' hesitancy and concerns by hosting awareness and training sessions on the use of the online system to enhance their digital literacy. The benefits of being a registered farmer include:

- Access to services (extension; veterinary and training) offered by the MALF;
- Access to the Agricultural Incentive Programme;
- Access to loans from the Agricultural Development Bank;
- Access to the Flood Relief Programme; and
- Access to high quality breeding stock (small ruminants).

Recommendations:

- **The MALF should provide a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the development, operationalization and intended launch timelines for the Farmer Registration System.**

- **The MALF should also provide a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the date/timelines by which the AIP, Agricultural Rebate, and soil testing requests will be incorporated into the Farmer Registration System as well as by which the system will be accessible online.**
- **The MALF should provide a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the Ministry's rollout of its awareness and training sessions on the use of the online system to alleviate farmers' concerns and to enhance farmers' digital literacy.**
- **The MALF should provide a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the challenges encountered with the farmers, if any, with the implementation of these new technological advancements in the local farming industry.**

2. Organic Agriculture and Organic Farming

As part of the AIP, the Ministry offers grants to agricultural producers interested in technology as a means of improving their facilities. Examples given were the:

- use of solar energy to power irrigation systems;
- use of more sustainable approaches to agriculture; and
- development of pest management techniques in partnership with the UWI. These projects involved composting techniques and assessing the use of more organic non-synthetic agricultural products such as pesticides and fertilizers.

The MALF stated that for farming and agriculture to be fully organic and for farmers to be allowed to promote their products as organic based, certification from internationally recognised bodies had to be firstly obtained. Certification would entail strict adherence to guidelines and require constant monitoring and evaluation by independent auditing bodies.

While the MALF encourages farmers to use the organic pesticides and fertilizers, based on the organic certification standards, at the time of the PAAC's inquiry there was no significant push to promote organic agriculture and farming in Trinidad and Tobago. The MALF did, however indicate that should any farmer be desirous of going fully organic, the MALF would provide whatever certification training support it had the means to provide.

Recommendation:

- **The MALF should also collaborate with the UWI on the development of pilot projects that are fully organic in nature and have those projects internationally**

certified so that the MALF could have the necessary certified technical ability to significantly push and support organic agriculture and farming in Trinidad and Tobago. The MALF should provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 including the challenges encountered and possible solutions.

3. Challenges meeting SDG Targets

From the MALF's perspective, Trinidad and Tobago was not on track to meet the specific SDG 2 target of doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers by 2030. The MALF defines small-scale food producers as persons engaged in farming on less than two (2) hectares (ha) of land. Most agricultural holdings in Trinidad and Tobago were considered small-scale family farms. The MALF indicated that this specific target could not be achieved by 2030 due to the following internal and external challenges.

Challenges internal to the MALF:

- staff shortages and
- delayed and insufficient funds to complete PSIP projects.

Challenges external to the Ministry and the initiatives undertaken to address same include:

a. The Impact of COVID-19 Hindered Supply Chains

The MALF introduced several initiatives to address the disruptions caused by the COVID-19. One such initiative was the “Emergency Food Support Measure”- an initiative implemented through NAMDEVCO-, which provided “Market Boxes” of fresh produce to citizens and permanent residents who were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Another strategic measure was the increased use of technology, which enhanced the efficiency of services of the MALF such as the online appointment and pre-order system of plants. This resulted in farmers being able to continue cultivation by having access to high quality planting materials.

b. Adverse Weather Conditions

The MALF provides technical support to farmers on measures to mitigate the effects of adverse weather conditions, such as effective irrigation methods in the dry season. The MALF also

continues to provide flood relief compensation to assist farmers in restarting their production after the adverse effects of heavy rainfall.

c. Pest and Diseases

The MALF has implemented several strategies to alleviate the prevalence of pests and diseases such as:

- Enhanced extension programmes on Integrated Pest Management (IPM);
- Increased farm visits by extension officers to offer technical advice;
- Enhanced training courses on pest and disease management;
- Introduction of Plant Clinics to provide technical support for the control and management of pests and diseases;
- Recommend Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to emphasize appropriate spacing, nutrition and pest control; and
- Introduction of a project under the PSIP whereby intensified education efforts against pests such as the Giant African Snail and vaccination drives for diseases such as Rabies were implemented.

d. Aging Farming Population

The MALF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service (MYDNS), has introduced programmes targeted at gaining the interest of Youth in agriculture and retaining their participation.

- The Youth “Fast Track” Agricultural Finance Support Programme to allow youths to access grant funding (up to \$100,000); and alleviate the inordinate delays experienced by young food producers in accessing grants, incentives, and subsidies.
- The Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme (YAHP), which is “an in-person” agricultural-training programme, intended to equip young people with skills to become successful agribusiness entrepreneurs.

e. Geo-political Instability which Affects the supply Chain of Agricultural Inputs

The geo-political instability caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine has reduced the supply and in turn resulted in higher input costs of fertilisers and pesticides. Therefore, farmers are encouraged to reduce fertiliser usage and to implement natural strategies such as composting and manure application.

f. Praedial Larceny

To address the problem of the theft of agricultural produce and farm animals, the MALF was currently implementing a Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) Project entitled “The Provision of Infrastructure for the Praedial Larceny Squad (PLS).” with the objective of procuring resources including recruiting of manpower, equipment and training for the PLS to perform its assigned duties. Additionally, routine patrols shall continue in farming areas to reduce incidences of praedial larceny.

g. Unavailability of Water for Irrigation

The MALF provides technical support to farmers on effective measures for irrigation.

h. Limited opportunity for value added production of primary products

The MALF offers training courses for the “Marketing of Primary and Value-added Agricultural Products on the Local and Foreign Market.”

i. Lack of Tenure to State Lands

MALF has sought to address the issue of land tenure by employing digital strategies to improve the length of time taken to process leases. The digital strategies are:

- the implementation of an Electronic Document Management System and
- the use of a state-of-the-art Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) provided by the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT), for the conduct of surveys and mapping and land management.

Observation:

- **The Committee notes the measures the MALF has taken to address the challenges that have affected the country’s ability to meet the specific SDG 2 target of doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers by 2030.**

Recommendation:

- **The MALF should provide a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024:**
 - **on the implementation of each initiative to address the challenges, identifying targets and evidence of the improvements measured against those targets achieved; and**

- **identifying long-term solutions and/or strategies to prevent the recurrence of failure to process leases of State Lands in a timely manner.**

4. Non-collection of Income Data from Farmers and Fisherfolk

There is mandatory requirement for famers and fisherfolk to provide the MALF with income data. Efforts to obtain data voluntarily from farmers and fisherfolk have been met with resistance. The MALF stated that farmers have told its field officers that they would not disclose their incomes or provide any data related to their earnings out of fear that such information might be used against them. Additionally as relates to fisherfolk calculating the average income of individuals engaged in fishing could not be determined, as there were too many variables such as size of boats, catch type, number of fishers per trip, and fishing sites.

One of the FAO's five (5) principles of sustainable agriculture is to 'Improve livelihoods and foster inclusive economic growth.' To ensure that agriculture is a sustainable livelihood and an activity worth getting into, its income and profit earning potential are two (2) data points worth identifying. This information not only benefits the policy makers and the policy administrators, but also all participants in the wider agricultural sector as well as the final consumers. The MALF stated that, given that the collection of income data from registered farmers is voluntary, the mandatory collection of data on income from farmers and fisherfolk will require a change in the registration process and approval from Cabinet.

Recommendations:

- **The MALF should conduct a feasibility study on the benefits of offering an income incentive grant to farmers and fisherfolk, which mandates the completion of an income means test, which would incentivise farmers and fisherfolk to disclose their incomes for easier data collection by the Ministry. The MALF should provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation by January 29, 2024.**
- **The MALF should explore the possibility of collating income related data from the programmes provided by other agencies. The MALF should provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation by January 29, 2024.**

5. Improving the number of registered farmers who utilise Resilient Agricultural Practices (RAP)

RAP entails balancing food production whilst managing and maintaining natural resources and local agro-biodiversity by employing soil and water conservation techniques or utilizing mixed cropping and IPM. The table below indicates the types of RAPs currently utilised across Trinidad and Tobago and their sustainability.

Agricultural Practices	Sustainable Yes/No
Soilless culture (hydroponics, aquaponics, grow box, grow bags, pot and trough culture)	Yes
Contour ploughing, contour draining, minimum tillage	Yes
Mixed cropping	Yes
Intensive Livestock production	Yes
Agro forestry	Yes
Shade house farming	Yes
Micro irrigation	Yes
Use of compost and manures	Yes
Use of plastic mulches or organic mulches	Yes
Use of organic pesticides (Pyrethroids)	Yes
Beekeeping	Yes
Using Class IV pesticides only	Yes
(Less and least hazardous commercial or restricted pesticides that can continue to be used)	Yes
Crop rotation	Yes
Using Indigenous cultural practices (hand weeding, moulding, staking, using animal manure)	Yes
Use of green energy devices (solar, wind)	Yes

The MALF encourages farmers to use RAPs and approximately eighty percent (80%) of registered farmers who apply for agricultural incentives implement some form of these practices. The MALF's ultimate objective is to get all registered farmers RAPs throughout their operations. To get full participation, the MALF indicated that, through its Extension Training and Information Services Division, a methodology called farmer field schools was being employed which encouraged farmers to visit other farmers' fields to get a first-hand account of the RAPs in use. During these visits, farmers were afforded the opportunity to share information on the organisation and coordination of the techniques, the challenges experienced and the differences in results observed after implementation.

Recommendation:

- **The MALF should submit a report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on all the initiatives the Ministry will undertake to secure full adoption of RAPs by all the farmers registered with the Ministry whilst also including the potential challenges incurred and/or foreseeable by the Ministry in attaining this objective.**

6. Lands no longer under Agricultural Production

The MALF estimated that only 65% of lands designated for agricultural use was currently under production. The MALF cited several reasons for agricultural lands being either underutilised or completely unutilised that included:

- lands being encroached by commercial activities;
- lands being utilised for non-agricultural activities such as housing developments;
- lands denuded by unsustainable practices being rendered infertile and uncultivable;
- inaccessibility to the lands;
- land tenure issues; and
- lack of interest by tenants to engage in agriculture.

The MALF stated that, with the revitalisation thrust including the development of programmes to target declining locally produced commodities, and to utilise idle lands for production. The MALF proposed that the following initiatives be implemented to get 100% of lands designated for agriculture under production:

- providing additional marketing opportunities;
- demonstrating agriculture can be profitable;

- improving accessibility / infrastructure;
- providing agricultural loans; and
- enforcement of agricultural lease agreements.

Recommendations:

- **The MALF should provide a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the programmes the Ministry has implemented to revitalise declining crops and include the estimated timelines by which each crop is projected to return to large-scale production.**
- **The MALF should provide a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the implementation of each of the following initiatives as a way of reverting all lands designated for agricultural use into production:**
 - **providing additional marketing opportunities;**
 - **demonstrating agriculture can be profitable;**
 - **improving accessibility / infrastructure;**
 - **providing agricultural loans; and**
 - **enforcement of agricultural lease agreements.**

7. Sustainability of the Local Fishing Industry

The MALF stated that the sustainability of fish resources has often been overlooked given Trinidad and Tobago's historic reliance on oil and natural gas and the necessary offshore explorations and drillings to uncover new reserves of same. The MALF indicated that the sustainability of fish resources should be considered an important local component of food security as it inherently means the maintenance and preservation of fish stock for future generations. To make this a reality, the MALF highlighted that conservation systems need to be implemented. Currently, the MALF stations data collectors at landing sites to collect data from the fisherfolk, which aids the preparation of annual production figures for Trinidad and Tobago. However, the current legislation that regulates fishing in the waters of Trinidad and Tobago is dated 1916 (Fisheries Act, Chap. 67:51) and therefore severely limits the MALF's ability to administer management measures capable of restraining unsustainable fishing practices.

During the Twelfth (12th) Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, new legislation in the form of the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020 was referred to a Joint

Select Committee for consideration. The MALF indicated that it was hoped that the new legislation would empower the Ministry to enact some of the management measures needed to ensure that food security and sustainability of fisheries resources for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is maintained for this generation and for future generations. The MALF added that it has received complaints from legitimate fisherfolk about the state of the fishing industry and they have been calling for controlling measures. Fisherfolk have been informing the MALF that, due to the prevalence of illegal fishing, fish stocks are on the decline. Fisherfolk have also complained about needing to venture further out the sea just to catch the same or even smaller amounts of fish than before. This is a financial burden on the fisherfolk that in turn is reflected in the increased prices charged to fish consumers. Fishing out further at sea requires sturdier boats, bigger engines, and more fuel. These increased costs are passed on to the consumer. With persons' livelihoods at stake and to ensure there is a fishing industry worth participating in, fostering a changed mindset amongst fisherfolk must be prioritised.

The MALF stated that shifts towards the US model of registered fisherfolk, implementing a fishing permit system and reporting catches will make fishing more sustainable and a viable career. In anticipation of the new legislation, the Ministry's Extension Training and Information Services Division maintains open communication with the various fishing associations on sustainable fishing practices in the interim to allay concerns and raise awareness of adjustments which are likely to be required. The benefits of being a registered fisherfolk include:

- Official Identification (fisherman/ owner certificate) which is important when conducting fishing activities at sea;
- Access to incentives such as fuel rebates, vehicle and vessel subsidies and waiver of Value Added Tax (VAT) on Marine Accessories and Engines;
- Proof of being a Commercial Fisher which supports:
 - access to loans through the Agricultural Development Bank;
 - provides proof for VISA Applications;
 - disaster relief packages (from the Energy Sector or the Ministry);
 - apply for entry on the Record of Fishing Vessels;
- Access to Training and Technical Services; and
- Access to Fishing Infrastructure.

Recommendation:

- **The MALF should conduct a sensitisation and education drive on the objectives requirements and benefits of the new legislation aimed at**
 - **highlighting the state of the local fishing industry, and**
 - **getting stakeholder buy in on the long-term benefits of a regulated fishing industry.**

The MALF should provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.

8. Outreach Initiatives

The MALF is cognisant of the need to increase the availability of food supplies and ensure sustainability in agriculture as part of its mandate of attaining food and nutrition security. Therefore, the MALF creates an enabling environment for farmers to flourish and improve local food supplies through the following initiatives:

- provision of training programmes;
- agricultural incentives to mitigate the rising input costs;
- agriculture grants for young farmers involved in modern farming technologies;
- access to improved infrastructure;
- increased digitization;
- provision of forage at no cost;
- access to technical and extension support,
- high quality planting material and breeding stock at subsidized rates; and
- provision of veterinary services.

Within the last year, seventeen thousand one hundred and twenty (17,120) persons accessed outreach initiatives offered through several divisions of the MALF. The details of the initiatives are listed in **the table** below.

Division	Outreach Initiative	No. of farmers and fisherfolk accessed
Extension Training and Information Services (ETIS)	Community training	8,648

Regional Administration North (RAN)	Services to farmers	5,292
Regional Administration South (RAS)	Services to farmers	3,000
Fisheries	Fuel training and strengthening of fisherfolk organizations	180
Total		17,120 persons

Observation:

- **The Committee notes the MALF’s use of outreach initiatives to create an enabling environment for farmers and fisherfolk to flourish and improve local food supplies.**

Recommendation:

- **The MALF should prepare a SWOT analysis of the different outreach initiatives the Ministry’s Divisions offer to farmers and fisherfolk, also providing solutions to achieve greater participation in the lesser utilized programme and provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation to Parliament by January 29, 2024.**

Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI)

The MTI is responsible for leading the drive to position Trinidad and Tobago as a manufacturing base and as a business, trade, and financial hub of the Americas. The MTI’s core responsibility is to grow trade, business, and investment, particularly through driving the non-energy sectors of the economy of which the food, beverage and agro processing sectors are a part. As a pivotal agency for trade, promotion and development, the MTI manages and coordinates the trade process to ensure access to international markets for companies located here. MTI is also tasked with stimulating domestic and foreign investment to create a facilitating and supportive environment for all businesses along the supply chain. In this regard, the MTI continuously works with, its stakeholders particularly the MALF towards ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago is food secure and is in alignment with SDG2: Zero Hunger. In the Committee’s assessment of

the MTI's role in the implementation of SDG 2, implementation targets 2.A, 2.B and 2.C were utilized and the following noted:

1. Inclusion of Fresh Produce in the Retail Price Survey

SDG 2 Implementation target 2C's objective is to *“Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.”* One measure the Consumer Affairs Division (CAD) of the MTI implements to effectively monitor commodity prices in Trinidad and Tobago is its Retail Price Survey (RPS). This price monitoring mechanism is conducted on a monthly and quarterly basis by surveying prices at retail outlets, namely supermarkets, poultry shops, hardware stores, and pharmacies. In the RPSs of food prices, the MTI conducts a comparative sample of one hundred and eighteen (118) items at forty-one (41) supermarkets in twenty-one (21) areas across Trinidad. It was noted that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) undertakes its own review of prices in Tobago. These surveys are published in print and social media. Specific prices were documented for local products, as a way of promoting these products and encouraging increased local consumption.

The MTI disclosed, however, that the RPS only compares staple food items incorporated in many local dishes such as flour, milk, sugar, meats, and cooking oil, to name a few. The RPS does not compare the prices of market products such as herbal seasonings, fruits nor vegetables therefore indicating that the survey of the 118 items was skewed towards food items without significant nutritional value. This meant that if a basic basket of food items was generated using the RPS prices as a baseline, the basket would be nutritiously unbalanced as it would have excluded fresh herbal seasonings, fruits, and vegetables.

Recommendation:

- **The MTI should incorporate market items, such as fresh herbal seasonings, fruits, and vegetables in its RPS as they are often utilised in local dishes and would provide a more nutritionally balanced meal. The MTI should report to the Parliament on the implementation of this initiative by January 29, 2024.**

2. Reducing the Food Import Bill through Import Substitution

One of SDG 2's implementation targets is 2A, which has the objective to *“Increase investment...in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development*

...in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.” The MTI indicated that it implements this objective on an ongoing basis by staying abreast of international developments and providing suitable incentives and initiatives when necessary to assist in boosting local food production and ultimately reduce the food import bill in the medium and long term. According to data from the CSO, food imports increased in 2022 when compared to the period 2018 - 2021. The table below outlines food imports, itemised by Harmonized System (HS) Chapter, for the period 2018 – 2022.

Food Imports by HS Chapter for the Period 2018 -2022

HS Chapter Description	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Meat and edible meat offal	\$544,635,564	\$572,374,194	\$529,735,753	\$595,139,139	\$744,350,384
Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	\$209,277,178	\$208,406,505	\$178,530,532	\$173,673,591	\$246,281,704
Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included	\$821,158,092	\$835,071,964	\$812,646,070	\$869,022,603	\$1,001,068,493
Animal originated products; not elsewhere specified or included	\$1,432,995	\$1,891,328	\$1,592,990	\$1,711,665	\$2,798,410
Vegetables and certain roots and tubers; edible	\$353,489,161	\$376,207,075	\$337,420,803	\$348,463,426	\$428,519,243
Fruit and nuts, edible; peel of citrus fruit or melons	\$253,529,215	\$245,827,015	\$231,846,165	\$238,433,001	\$268,576,742
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$75,285,961	\$64,093,382	\$61,592,227	\$77,195,627	\$89,250,272
Cereals	\$498,377,802	\$497,424,456	\$507,680,589	\$650,297,419	\$838,852,959
Products of the milling industry;	\$151,552,759	\$173,670,700	\$176,907,762	\$188,311,430	\$252,188,131

malt, starches, inulin, wheat gluten					
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit, industrial or medicinal plants; straw and fodder	\$87,395,433	\$92,139,998	\$99,998,387	\$95,055,412	\$103,664,193
Animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared animal fats; animal or vegetable waxes	\$381,309,607	\$358,229,581	\$343,558,098	\$469,325,232	\$714,360,456
Meat, fish or crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates; preparations thereof	\$266,239,378	\$252,072,531	\$251,072,378	\$250,101,752	\$294,784,451
Sugars and sugar confectionery	\$357,192,409	\$293,126,352	\$286,419,611	\$388,623,120	\$514,015,805
Cocoa and cocoa preparations	\$117,721,164	\$116,381,457	\$112,630,557	\$132,675,611	\$153,402,205
Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products	\$462,315,373	\$491,809,654	\$427,669,376	\$446,775,659	\$497,690,073
Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants	\$462,589,923	\$477,561,129	\$410,577,835	\$411,800,940	\$547,078,014
Miscellaneous edible preparations	\$610,405,265	\$617,222,996	\$612,964,301	\$688,094,669	\$783,912,117
Beverages, spirits and vinegar	\$475,494,250	\$495,767,489	\$394,802,100	\$384,324,519	\$500,127,767
TOTAL	\$6,129,401,529	\$6,169,277,806	\$5,777,645,534	\$6,409,024,815	\$7,980,921,419

Source: Central Statistical Office

Food prices over the past 2 to 3 years have risen due to several factors including:

- adverse weather conditions in major food producing countries,
- the slowdown of productive activity and shipping logistics disruptions due to COVID-19 restrictions,
- the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and
- protectionist strategies being employed by many countries as they responded to the Russia/Ukraine war.

As Trinidad and Tobago is a net food importer, the country is a price taker. This means that increases in international prices consequently increase the price of food products imported and sold locally. The MTI stated that reducing the food import bill requires a whole of Government approach, inclusive of a culture shift where buying local is promoted. According to the CSO, for the period 2018 to 2022, imports of:

- Wheat/Meslin (HS 10019900) totalled TT\$1,288,016,303;
- Chocolate and Cocoa Preparations (HS18069000) - TT\$320,328,170; and
- Sauces and Condiments (HS21039090) - TT\$325,558,463.

Through several grant initiatives offered by the Ministry, there has been increased production of these items locally. To ensure more local production, changing consumption patterns whereby consumers select local suppliers over foreign alternatives is the most effective means of implementing food import substitution. The MTI stated that the full effects of these measures may take time to materialise as more stakeholders in the industry take advantage of the initiatives on offer and bring their products to market.

Once such producer that is focusing on import substitution is NOVO Farms. This company launched its agro-processing facility at Brechin Castle, Couva in 2018 and, to date, it has made further investments in the local agriculture sector. More recently, the company signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Tobago Agri-business Development Company (TADCO) for the development of a cassava and dasheen flour production facility, as well as a modern agro and meat packaging facility in Tobago. NOVO Farms has also invested in procuring equipment to produce flour from cassava and dasheen.

The MTI, in partnership with the MALF, has aligned itself with the recently launched CARICOM initiative to reduce food importation by 25% by the year 2025. The MTI added that

by aggressively pursuing increased production in the revitalized rice, coconut and cocoa industries to name a few, the 25% by 2025 target was certainly achievable.

Recommendations:

- **The MTI should submit a report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the success of each incentive/initiative the Ministry has implemented to mitigate the impact of food price inflation.**
- **The MTI should submit a report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the success of the incentives and initiatives the Ministry implemented to promote the sustainable development of more local companies that practise import substitution.**
- **The MTI should submit a report to the Parliament on the necessary stakeholder collaborations, infrastructure, human and financial resources and local food consumption/marketing campaigns required to culturally shift local consumption towards buying local over foreign goods**
- **The MTI should submit a status report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024. on the yearly decreases in the volume of goods imported into Trinidad and Tobago since the Ministry began focusing on utilizing its import substitution incentives and initiatives to reduce the food import bill**
- **The MTI should also submit a status report to the Parliament on the local commodities production being promoted under import substitution initiatives and the yearly value of the corresponding HS Chapter description since the increase in the MTI's initiatives and incentives by January 29, 2024.**
- **The MTI should also submit a status update on the revitalisation efforts made on all targeted local commodities including the rice, coconut and cocoa industries.**

3. Enhanced Cooperation with the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

SDG 2 implementation target 2.A's the objective is to also "Increase investment...through enhanced international cooperation...in developing countries, in particular least developed countries." Implementation target 2.B also sets the objective of "Correcting and preventing trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round." As part of the Food

Development Plan under the Memorandum of Agreement signed in May 2022 between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for renewed and enhanced cooperation. Eight (8) priority areas of cooperation were being pursued:

- i. aquaculture;
- ii. rice;
- iii. livestock production;
- iv. corn and soya;
- v. shade house and coconut;
- vi. human resource development;
- vii. agro processing and food distribution; and
- viii. a technical task force (for the removal of trade barriers and to ensure regional food security).

In relation to the priority areas listed, the MTI was involved in the work on the priority area of food distribution as part of a Technical Task Force established under the MOU for the removal of trade barriers and for regional food security. The Task Force is co-chaired by Senior Officials of the respective Ministries responsible for Agriculture from both countries and includes representatives from the Ministries with responsibility for Trade. Two meetings have been convened to date.

The first meeting of the Task Force was convened on 23 January 2023, at which it was agreed to establish two subcommittees, one to address Plant Health (Crops) issues, and the other to address Animal Health (Livestock) issues. The meeting also discussed the Draft Terms of References for the subcommittees. The Task Force also established timelines for the preparation of a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for the Trade in Products of Plant and Animal Origin, for the next meeting of the Task Force. The MRA sought to provide a framework upon which the Parties agree to recognize the results of each other country's testing, inspection, certification and accreditation processes and procedures. In this way, it would facilitate market access for the products originating from either country and establish trust and confidence from both sides in the institutional framework present in either country.

The second meeting of the Task Force, held on 13 February 2023, discussed the Draft MRAs for the Trade in Products of Plant and Animal Origin which was prepared by technical officers from both countries. The Second Meeting also discussed the 2009 Protocol Agreement

for Trade in Fresh Agricultural Products between Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, where Guyana undertook to propose amendments to update the Protocol and share for the consideration of Trinidad and Tobago.

The MTI also participated in the First Meeting of the High-Level Bilateral Commission under the MOU on May 22, 2023, as well as the national Preparatory Meetings for the same. At the national Preparatory Meetings for the Commission, the MTI was made aware of the full scope and status of the activities being pursued by the respective Ministries of Agriculture of the Parties to the MOU, including the other priority areas listed.

Observation:

- **The Committee notes the MTI's involvement the priority area of food distribution as part of a Technical Task Force established under the MOU for the removal of trade barriers and for regional food security.**

Recommendation:

- **The MTI should provide a status update on the drafting and approval of the MRAs for the Trade in Products of Plant and Animal Origin between Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.**
- **The MTI should also provide a status report on the proposed amendments to the 2009 Protocol Agreement for Trade in Fresh Agricultural Products between Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.**
- **The MALF should provide a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the renewed and enhanced cooperative pursuit with the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in each of the priority areas listed i.e.:**
 - **Aquaculture;**
 - **Rice;**
 - **Livestock production;**
 - **Corn and soya;**
 - **Shade house and coconut;**
 - **Human resource development; and**
 - **Agro processing.**

4. Development of Standards for the Agriculture Sector

The MTI, through the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS), has developed several voluntary national standards to assist local producers to improve quality and safety in the agriculture sector and assist in raising the competitiveness of local producers. The MTI stated that the standards were developed as voluntary in the initial stage, rather than mandatory, because there is no legislation prescribing that standards be mandatory. The MTI added that standards are usually developed on a needs basis, where stakeholders of the MTI would lobby for specific standards such as those for agro-processing, manufacturing and wastewater use. Once the standards have been developed, the TTBS conducts an awareness programme for the new standard via media and print, workshops, sessions, focus groups and surveys. Trinidad and Tobago's agriculture sector has two (2) key voluntary standards developed by the TTBS:

- i. the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) – Fresh Produce: and
- ii. the Wastewater reuse – Agriculture and other applications.

Recommendation:

- **The MTI and MALF and NAMDEVCO should host stakeholder meetings with agricultural and livestock farmers, fisherfolk, food processors and manufacturers on the need to develop standards for their respective fields to:**
 - **facilitate increased trade,**
 - **benchmark against international requirements,**
 - **manage risks,**
 - **improve the quality of goods and services,**
 - **assist in improving sustainability,**
 - **ensure health and safety and:**
 - **promote more efficient and effective practices.**

5. Moruga Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park

To boost local production, investment in physical infrastructure has been undertaken, specifically with respect to the Moruga Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park. This Industrial Park is a key component in the country's thrust to promote the growth, consumption, processing and trade of locally grown produce. The Industrial Park was opened on July 14, 2020. The intention of the Park is to contribute towards the strengthening of the Agriculture Sector's value chain through increased investments and enhanced linkages. The Park consists of eleven

(11) developed land lots, five (5) of which comprise purpose-built factory shells available for leasing, while the other six (6) are available as developed sites for leasing. The five (5) factory shells are outfitted with all major utilities, offices and washrooms; and have the potential to process fruits, fish, root crops, cocoa and pepper.

To date, five (5) companies have accepted Letters of Offer for three (3) factory shells and two land lots. InvesTT Ltd is charged with the ongoing marketing of the Park with a view to securing additional tenants to further boost local production. There are currently two proposed promotional activities scheduled to market the Park. One is the **Movement of Moruga campaign**, and another is the **Moruga Accelerator Programme** which, when launched, will promote the benefits of the agro processing facility and encourage .

Recommendation:

- **The MTI should submit a status update on the letting of the Moruga Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park, also including the scheduling of the promotional activities geared towards marketing the facility, to the Parliament by January 29, 2024.**

Ministry of Health (MOH)

The MOH's mandate is to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago has a healthy population. To this end, the Ministry has implemented several initiatives that lend to the population of Trinidad and Tobago having nutritious food and provide information on nutritious foods, so that they can make the right choices to live a healthy life. In the Committee's assessment of the MOH's role in the implementation of SDG 2, outcome target **2.2** "*By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.*" was utilized and the following noted:

1. Need to Determine the Nutritional Value of a Basic Basket of Food Items

Another component of the SLC was the determination of a nutritious basket of basic food items. This was usually done in conjunction with the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute. The current total caloric composition of a basket of goods was estimated to be two thousand seven hundred (2,700) calories. As previously mentioned, the last SLC was conducted in 2005 but the 2700 caloric intake was still being used by the GCA and MSDFS when creating hampers

to distribute towards those in need. Given the constraint of the amount allocated on a FSC as well as the cost of a hamper depending on size of the recipient's family, to ensure a healthy population, the approved list of food items used to generate a hamper must be nutritious as well as affordable.

Despite the existence of an approved list of food items and their real prices, the MOH was unable to indicate whether the nutritional value of an ideal basic basket of food items could be ascertained. Attaching a nutritional value to a food basket at each FSC amount could be one of the initiatives the MOH uses to get nutritious foods in the hands of citizens as part of the Ministry's commitment to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago has a healthy population. Once the results of the SLC have been announced and a new poverty line determined, with the MOH's assigning a nutritional value of each of the RPS's 118 food items, the MSDFS's could administer a more nutritious FSP.

Recommendation:

- **The MOH should conduct a nutritional analysis of the 118 items the RPS monitors and ascertain the best value for money and nutritious basic goods that could be purchased at each FSC amount to allow for a more nutritiously sound FSP. The MOH should submit a report on the implementation of this initiative to Parliament by January 29, 2024.**

2. Collaborations to reduce Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Trinidad and Tobago

The MOH indicated that it regularly collaborates with various Ministries, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organisations as well as NGOs with the aim of addressing NCDs in Trinidad and Tobago. Formal collaborations include representation on several national Committees that involve inter-sectoral participation. Relevant Committees include:

- i. **The Resilient School Feeding Programme Steering Committee** chaired by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - In 2021, a Multi-sectoral Steering Committee was established by the FAO titled "The Resilient School Feeding Programme Steering Committee". The key aim is to strengthen the capacities of the institutions and stakeholders to implement resilient and sustainable National School Feeding Programmes and policies/guidelines that incorporate the purchase of products from local small farmers. The Committee provides a platform for inter-sectoral and inter-

institutional coordination relevant to the promotion of healthy diets produced locally, benefiting especially the most vulnerable population and children. The key representatives on this Committee include:

- a. the MALF;
 - b. the National Agriculture Marketing Development Company (NAMDEVCO);
 - c. the Division of Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries - Tobago House of Assembly;
 - d. the MSDFS;
 - e. the National School Dietary Services Limited of the Ministry of Education;
 - f. the School Nutrition Programme, Division of Education, Research and Technology -Tobago House of Assembly;
 - g. the Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Tobago Regional Health Authority;
 - h. the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI); and
 - i. the FAO.
- ii. **The Food Advisory Committee** chaired by the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division of the MOH - advises the Minister of Health and assists with food standards, labelling and other matters related to the manufacturing and distribution of food.
- iii. **The NCD Steering Committee** chaired by Director, NCD, MOH. The key representatives on this committee include:
- a. the General Managers Primary Health Care (All Regional Health Authorities);
 - b. Heads of Departments within the MOH namely:
 - NCD Directorate;
 - Health Education Division;
 - Nutrition & Metabolism Division;
 - Health Policy, Research & Planning;
 - Epidemiology Division;
 - National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programme (NADAPP);
 - Tobacco Control Unit;
 - Corporate Communications;
 - Change Management Unit; and
 - Project Management Unit;

- c. Various NGOs:
- The Diabetes Association of Trinidad & Tobago;
 - The Trinidad & Tobago Medical Association;
 - The Just Because Foundation;
 - the NCD Alliance of T&T;
 - the Trinidad & Tobago Cancer Society;
 - the Trinidad & Tobago Heart Foundation;
 - The Heroes Foundation; and
 - the Ayanna Dyette Foundation; and
- d. Representatives from Tertiary Academic Institutions.
- iv. **The World Food Day National Committee of Trinidad and Tobago** chaired by the Extension Training and Information Services Division, MALF. Since 2018, the Nutrition & Metabolism Division, MOH has provided support to this Committee and the MALF upon request and vice-versa. The mandate of this Committee is to provide leadership on the promotion of food security initiatives throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Observation:

- **The Committee notes the MOH's commitment to combating the prevalence of NCDs in Trinidad and Tobago via its membership in several national committees that involve inter-sectoral participation.**

3. Malnutrition amongst School-aged Children

The results of the 2017 World Health Organisation (WHO) Global School Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago indicated:

- i. the percentage of students who were underweight ($<-2SD$ from median for BMI age 13-17) was at 7.3%;
- ii. the percentage of students who were overweight ($>+1SD$ from median for BMI age 13-17) was at 33.5%; and
- iii. the percentage of students who were obese ($>+2SD$ from median for BMI age 13-17) was at 17.6%.

As it pertains to overweight/obesity as a form of malnutrition, the MOH and the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) embarked upon several health promotion campaigns, programmes

and outpatient clinics aimed at reducing the risks associated with and the management of NCDs. Further, several health care initiatives were implemented to support healthy lifestyles, including:

- i. the use of the WHO Child Growth Standards Chart in the Child Health Clinic to monitor overweight and underweight;
- ii. the provision of dietary requirements for meals prepared by the School Nutrition (Feeding) Programme;
- iii. the provision of equipment for physical activities in schools;
- iv. the re-launch of the Trinidad and Tobago Moves (TT Moves) initiative to promote healthy lifestyle habits through its use of theme-based days including Move it Mondays; Water Wednesdays; Fruit Fridays; and Shape Up Saturdays; and
- v. Health fairs in the communities, national events and sports days.

Furthermore, a National Food & Nutrition and Anthropometric Survey (NFNAS) was being developed at the time of the PAAC's inquiry for execution to provide data on the nutritional needs of the population as a whole and across the lifecycle. The project was in the preliminary stages of planning with data collection targeted to take place during 2024 and 2025. The MOH stated that the information from this national survey would be used to develop evidenced-based dietary guidelines and information for the development of a national food/nutrition policy. The MOH added that the survey would be conducted via a representative sample of primary school students between the ages of eight (8) and eleven (11) years from all seven (7) educational districts. The MOH also indicated that its scientific team was developing the research protocols needed to guide the data collection and analysis. The following data would be measured/taken from the participants of the study:

- Demographic variables;
- Height Measurement;
- Weight Measurement;
- Gold standard/direct methods of measuring body fat composition: Deuterium Dilution and Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis;
- Traditional methods of estimating body fat composition: Body Mass Index and Skinfold Thickness Measurements;
- Blood Pressure;
- Blood Glucose;

- Glycated Haemoglobin (HbA1c);
- Physical Activity Measurement; and
- Dietary Intake Measurement.

Recommendations:

- **The MOH should submit a status report to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on what oversight the Ministry provides over the School Nutrition (Feeding) Programme to ensure that the dietary requirements for students was adequately provided in meals.**
- **The MOH should submit a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the proposed implementation and operationalisation of the TTMoves Initiative and to monitor the initiative’s impact on school-aged children and eventually all age groups.**
- **The MOH should submit a status update to the Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the development of the NFNAS whilst also including whether the survey would be expanded to capture data from all citizens in all age groups.**

4. Addressing Nutritional needs across the Human Lifecycle

In the absence of a completed NFNAS, the MOH stated that nutritional needs of the population should include:

- i. Eating foods that provide sufficient nutrients without extra calories, such as:
 - a. Fruits and vegetables (choose several types with bright colours);
 - b. Whole grains, like oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice;
 - c. Fat-free or low-fat milk and cheese, or soy or rice milk that has added vitamin D and calcium;
 - d. Seafood, lean meats, poultry, and eggs; and
 - e. Beans, nuts, and seeds.
- ii. Avoiding empty calories: these are foods high in calories but with few nutrients, such as chips, candy, baked goods, soda, and alcohol;
- iii. Picking foods that are low in cholesterol and fat and, importantly, avoiding saturated and trans fats. Saturated fats are usually fats that come from animals;
- iv. Drinking enough liquids to prevent dehydration; and
- v. Being physically active.

The MOH, however, noted that, as it attempted to address the nutritional needs of various age groups, a significant amount of reluctance to change was noted. The MOH indicated that the reluctance to follow the dietary requirements suggested was due to:

- i. unavailable health information on the dietary requirements for each age group;
- ii. the difficulty sourcing the recommended food options; and
- iii. insufficient additional financial resources to obtain the recommended healthier food items.

When there is reluctance from persons to address their nutritional needs or follow suggested dietary requirements, the MOH indicated that it takes what is referred to as a *lifecycle approach*. In its public education outreach initiatives, the MOH targeted infants and young children, adolescents, young adults, adults (men and women) and the elderly. Families are targeted through the various national health campaigns conducted by the MOH. A whole family approach ensures that other members of a family unit are invested in the health and wellbeing of all its members. The MOH indicated that for specific groups, the following solutions were available:

i. **Regarding pregnant and lactating women:**

Ante-natal and Post-Natal Clinics are available throughout the public health care system via the RHAs; and a vital component is to provide nutrition education to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to assist them with making informed decisions about their babies' nutrition by providing updated scientific information on breastfeeding.

ii. **In the Case of School-aged Children and Adolescents:**

The MOH's School Health Nurses visit schools regularly and identify any cases of malnutrition, which are then referred to Dietitian Clinics at Community Health Centres. Targeted nutrition education is also conducted to some extent by the School Feeding Programmes in both Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, the Ministry of Education also supports efforts in the promotion of its Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Curriculum throughout the school system, which comprises a wide range of standardized and age-appropriate teachings on the topic of health and wellness, including nutrition and physical fitness.

iii. **Aged persons:**

Persons presenting in the public health care system have access to Dietitian Clinics in the primary health care network/Community Health Centres based on a referral pathway system for advice and counselling on their respective nutritional needs with an appropriate dietary guide for meals.

Observation:

- **The Committee noted the factors that can improve a person’s nutritional intake as well as the solutions provided by the MOH for persons wishing to improve their nutritional intake.**

Recommendation:

- **The MOH should report to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the initiatives implemented to remedy the reluctance within the population to focus on nutritional needs.**
- **The MOH should also submit a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024, on the mechanisms implemented to address the following issues**
 - **On NCDs and its negative impact on the population that is exacerbated by unhealthy food choices**
 - **unavailable health information on the dietary requirements for each age group;**
 - **the difficulty locating the recommended food options; and**
 - **insufficient additional financial resources to obtain the recommended healthier food options.**

Office of the Prime Minister- Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA)

The OPM-GCA approaches the issue of malnutrition indirectly through the services the Division provides to its core clients, inter alia, gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, persons living with HIV & AIDS (PLHIV) and children, as well as through the funding the Division provides to NGOs and Community Residences. As such, several initiatives within the Division’s mandate serves to reduce the number of persons categorized as being malnourished. In the Committee’s assessment of the GCA’s role in the implementation of SDG 2, outcome target **2.2** “*By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and*

wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.” was utilized and the following noted:

1. Provision of Meals at Community Residences and Private Children Homes

Section 2 of the Children’s Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act defines that the term “Community Residence” as “a Children’s Home or rehabilitation centre and includes Industrial Schools and Orphanages referred to in the Children Act”. Community residences that accommodate Wards of the State receive two streams of financial support - Annual Subvention and Payment Per Child (PPC). In the case of the subvention, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago pays a monthly subvention to meet the operational costs of three (3) Community Residences. The following are the allocations provided to these entities and the value of the projection that they made for food in their 2021/2022 request for funding:

Children’s Home	Allocation	Estimate for Food
St. Dominic's Children's Home	\$15,511,785.00	\$ 600,000.00
St. Mary's Children's Home	\$13,500,000.00	\$ 1,000,000.00
St. Jude's School for Girls	\$14,690,888.00	\$ 1,440,000.00

During fiscal year 2021/2022, twenty-eight (28) private children homes received funds under the PPC. The number and ages of children residing in the facility during each month determine the payment amount. The GCA stated that funds are used at the discretion of the homes on the general upkeep of children in their care. Therefore, no set allocation towards food could be determined. The Homes are allowed to make claims for re-imburement of medical expenses, up to a maximum of \$2,000.00 per child per month, incurred during the month. This is paid separately from the support payable for the general upkeep of the child. Costs associated with medical expenses are included in the allocation for PPC. The total payment allocated for the fiscal year 2021/2022 to private children homes amounted to \$9,918,784.00.

Observation:

- **The Committee notes that the GCA does not maintain any form of recordkeeping over the monies disbursed to the private homes.**

Recommendation:

- **The OPM-GCA should mandate that the private children’s homes that receive funding under the PPC document, maintain expenditure records similar those maintained by the Community Residences. The OPM-GCA should provide a status update on the implementation of this recommendation to Parliament by January 29, 2024.**

CONCLUSION

During the Third Session of the Twelfth Parliament, the PAAC conducted an examination into Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with SDG 2: Zero Hunger. Several areas of concern and areas for improvement were identified and a number of recommendations were highlighted to address these issues.

Throughout the Committee's examination, the Committee noted that addressing food security requires a multipronged whole-of-society approach, including short, medium and longer term strategies, involving public and private sectors, civil society, the Government's regional and international development partners, as well as the general population.

The Committee also noted that food security was a crosscutting issue which required the improved provision and accessibility of adequate, nutritious, safe and affordable food for all, and therefore be placed as an imperative objective in the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

However, the Committee observed that despite being midway through the implementation of Vision 2030 and the SDG Agenda 2030, the absence of mechanisms to track and report the implementation progress of the 17 SDGs or their 231 unique indicators due to the absence of current baseline data and information may be considered as indicative of a lack of commitment to achieve the SDGs by the expected timeframes.

The Committee is of the view that the adoption of its recommendations will contribute towards bolstering food security by expanding the food supply and non-energy exports, reinventing agricultural systems and producing sustainably as a means of achieving SDG Goal 2: Zero Hunger in Trinidad and Tobago.

This Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP

Chairman

Sgd.

Dr. Lackram Bodoë, MP

Vice-Chairman

Sgd.

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP

Member

Sgd.

Mr. Hassel Bacchus

Member

Sgd.

Mr. Wade Mark

Member

Sgd.

Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP

Member

Sgd.

Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP

Member

Sgd.

Mr. Randall Mitchell

Member

Sgd.

Mr. Laurence Hislop

Member

APPENDIX I

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:

1. Identification of entity to be examined;
2. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected entity. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
 - Description
 - Background;
 - Overview of Expenditure
 - Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and
 - Proposed Questions.
3. Consideration and approval of Inquiry Proposals by the Committee and when approved, questions are forwarded to the entity for written responses;
4. Issue of requests for written comment from the public are made via Parliament's website, social media accounts, newspaper and advertisements;
5. Preparation of an Issues Paper by the Secretariat for the Committee's consideration, based on written responses received from the entities. The Issues Paper identifies and summarises any matters of concern in the responses provided by the entity or received from stakeholders and the general public;
6. Review of the responses provided and the Issues Paper by the Committee;
7. Conduct of a site visit to obtain a first-hand perspective of the implementation of a project (optional);
8. Determination of the need for a Public Hearing based on the analysis of written submissions and the site visit (if required). If there is need for a public hearing, the relevant witnesses will be invited to attend and provide evidence. There is usually no need to examine the entity in public if the Committee believes the issues have little public interest or the Committee believes that the written responses provided are sufficient and no further explanation is necessary.
9. Issue of written request to the entity for further details should the Committee require any additional information after the public hearing.
10. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.
11. Engage in follow-up.

APPENDIX II

Minutes of Meetings

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
THIRD SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY MAY 17, 2023 AT 1:40 P.M.**

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodo	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Laurence Hislop	-	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	-	Member
Ms Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	-	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Excused were:

Mr. Hassel Bacchus	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga	-	Member

Absent was:

Mr. Randall Mitchell	-	Member
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COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 1:40 p.m., the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. Mr. Hassel Bacchus, Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy, Mr. Wade Mark and Mr. Symon de Nobriga were excused from the meeting.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Fourteenth (14th) Meeting held on March 01, 2023.
- 2.2 There being no further omissions or corrections, the Minutes as amended were confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Laurence Hislop and seconded by Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING

- 3.1 With reference to item 3.1, page 1: the Chairman informed Members that questions for additional information were received from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development (MSCD) on March 15, 2023 and was uploaded to Rotunda.
- 3.2 With reference to item 4.4, page 2: the Chairman informed Members that the following Reports were laid in the House of Representatives on March 17, 2023 and in the Senate on March 28, 2023:
- i. The Ninth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination of the implementation of the 2021 budget with emphasis on the “Green Economy”;
 - ii. The Tenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the findings of the report on factors contributing to clinical outcomes of COVID-19 Patients in Trinidad and Tobago, conducted by the Government-appointed Committee; and
 - iii. The Eleventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the Island Wide Power Outage and Blackout that occurred on February 16, 2022.
- 3.3 With reference to item 10.2, page 4: The Chairman informed Members that questions for additional information were sent to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services on March 09, 2023 with a deadline of March 24, 2023.
- Responses were received from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government on March 24, 2023 and circulated to Members via Rotunda; and
 - By letter dated March 22, 2023, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services requested an extension to April 6, 2023. The response was received on May 15, 2023.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS

- 4.1 The Chairman informed Members that the Draft Committee’s Report on the examination into the Accessibility and Availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health was circulated and uploaded to Rotunda for Members consideration on March 27, 2023 with a final deadline of May 15, 2023. A discussion ensued. The Committee agreed that the Report will be laid at the next sitting of the House and Senate.

OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 The Chairman suggested a follow-up site visit to the Diego Martin Community Swimming Pool and the North Eastern Regional Multipurpose Sport Facility (Sangre Grande). A discussion ensued. The Committee agreed.
- 5.2 The Chairman suggested that a final decision on the date of the site visit be made at the next meeting.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: AN INQUIRY INTO FOOD SECURITY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IN ALIGNMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2: ZERO HUNGER

- 6.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the purpose of this meeting was to conduct an inquiry into Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in Alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger
- 6.2 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper with possible questions on the inquiry into Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in Alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger that can be used during the public hearing.
- 6.3 Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach to be taken during the public hearing.

SUSPENSION

- 7.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 2:07 p.m., to reconvene in public.

AN INQUIRY INTO FOOD SECURITY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IN ALIGNMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2: ZERO HUNGER

- 8.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.
- 8.2 The following officials joined the meeting.

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Mrs. Nela Dwarika-Ali	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Nerissa Lucky	-	Director (Ag.) Fisheries
Mr. Nigel Grimes	-	Project Coordinator/Technical Advisor

Ministry of Health

Mr. Michael Reid	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Dr. Mark Dookeran	-	Chief Public Health Inspector

Ministry of Planning and Development

Ms. Karlene Roach	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Debra Dipchansingh	-	Director (Ag.), Socio-Economic Policy Planning Division
Ms. Erica Fortune	-	Director (Ag.), Project Planning and Reconstruction Division

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

Ms. Wendy Guy-Hernandez	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Dr. Seon Raymond	-	Director, Social Investigation Division
Ms. Christine John-Guy	-	Director (Ag.), Social Welfare Department
Ms. Angeliqye Taylor	-	Senior Planning Officer, Policy, Programme Planning and Development Division

Ministry of Trade and Industry

Mrs. Ayleen Alleyne-Ovid	-	Permanent Secretary
Ms. Candice Lackhansingh	-	Director, Policy/Strategy unit
Mr. Neville Alexander	-	Assistant Director, Trade

Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs

Mr. Vijay Gangapersad	-	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. Ian Ramdahin	-	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Makandal Caesar	-	Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator

7.3 The Chairman welcomed the officials, members of the media and the public.

7.4 The Chairman outlined the mandate of the Committee and the purpose of the public hearing. Introductions were exchanged.

Key Issues Discussed:

1. The goals of the MPD to eliminate the issue of hunger by 2030 in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger;
2. The definition of the terms “poor”, “vulnerable” and “indigent”;
3. The use of the 2005 Survey of Living Conditions results in 2023;
4. The status of the Survey of Living Conditions undertaken by the Central Statistical Office (CSO);
5. The status of the determination of the current poverty line and the method of calculation of the poverty line;
6. The inflation of the 2005 poverty line with reference to the current food prices by the MSDFS;
7. The status of the National Register of Vulnerable Persons;
8. The recruitment of additional staff for Phase 1 of the data collection for the Register;

9. The launch of the MSDFS's Computer Based Data System by the end of 2023;
10. The status of the data verification measures undertaken by the MSDFS;
11. The data sharing and data collection activities between the MSDFS and MPD;
12. The determination of the grants provided under the Food Support Programme;
13. The revision of the grants provided under the Food Support Programme given the current rise in food prices;
14. The Retail Price Survey conducted by the Consumers Affairs Division on a "basket of goods" at 41 supermarkets across 21 areas in Trinidad and Tobago;
15. The inclusion of market goods in the "basket of goods" provided by Ministries;
16. The strengthening of the monitoring mechanisms of the SDGs implementation by the MPD;
17. The status of the achievement of the specific targets of Zero Hunger by 2030;
18. The goals set by the MALF to assist in the achievement of SDG 2: Zero Hunger;
19. The benefits of being a registered farmer;
20. The status of the data capturing mechanisms in place at the MALF;
21. The timeframe between applying for an incentive and the receipt of the incentive by farmers;
22. The inclusion of fisher folk in Tobago in the MALF's registry for fisherfolk;
23. The existence of a partnership between the MALF and the Department of Marine Resources and Fisheries in Tobago on the thrust to achieve Zero Hunger;
24. The use of Bio-Pesticides and Solar by the MALF;
25. The grants available to persons interested in Agro-Processing under the MALF and the MTI;
26. The annual expenditure incurred under the Food Support Programme;
27. The mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight in the use of food cards by citizens to purchase foods that are of a nutritional value;
28. The approach of the MOH to address the number of overweight, underweight and obese students;
29. The collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and the MOH to ensure the meals prepared for students are of nutritional value;
30. The efforts taken by the MALF to encourage Organic Farming in Trinidad and Tobago;
31. The mechanisms implemented to address the challenges faced in promoting the use of a sustainable food production system by the MALF;
32. The staffing challenge at the Praedial Larceny Squad of the MALF;
33. The MTI's target to reduce the Food Import Bill;
34. The measurement of the quantity of food being produced and the amount needed to become self-sufficient;
35. The collaborations between the MALF and the MTI to reduce the Food Import Bill by 25%;
36. The monitoring and evaluation of food production from local farmers by the MALF;
37. The methods used to increase the number of farmers who undertake resilient agricultural practices;
38. The status of the 35% of agricultural lands not in use;
39. The measurement and management of the country's fish stock;
40. The education initiatives undertaken by the MALF given the impending Legislation currently before the Joint Select Committee on Fisheries and Management (No. 2) Bill 2020;

41. The timeframe for the receipt of rebates from the MALF;
42. The reasons for the absence of mandatory standards for good agricultural practices and water reuse;
43. The public awareness initiatives undertaken by the MALF and the MTI regarding the standards for good agricultural practices and water reuse initiatives etc.;
44. The status of the Value Chain Study on the Cocoa Industry;
45. The status of the Study on Strengthening Sectoral Linkages in Trinidad and Tobago within the non-energy sectors and increase non-energy sectors;
46. The status of the Regional Value Chain Study;
47. The mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of international financing; and
48. The benefits derived from the Moruga Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park.

Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission by the witnesses.

7.5 The Chairman thanked the officials for attending and they were excused.

SUSPENSION

8.1 At 5:46 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume in camera for a post-hearing discussion with Members only.

RESUMPTION

9.1 At 5:49 p.m., the Chairman resumed the meeting in camera.

POST-HEARING DISCUSSION

10.1 The Chairman sought Members' views on the public hearing. A discussion ensued.

10.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the stakeholders present.

10.3 The Chairman informed Members that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday May 31, 2023 at 1:30 p.m. when the Committee will commence an examination into the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited (aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 9 and 11).

ADJOURNMENT

11.1 The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to **Wednesday May 31, 2023 at 1:30 p.m.**

11.2 The adjournment was taken at 5:59 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

May 17, 2023

Additional Information Requested

Questions related to the Response from the Ministry of Trade and Industry

General Question:

1. Provide in detail whether the volume of food imports have decreased.
2. Based on the initiatives involved in boosting local food production and reducing the food import bill, what support, if any, from other Ministries, the MTI requires that is not currently being provided. Provide a detailed list.

Question 2.A.1 (pages 1 to 4)

1. What forms of international cooperation has been received from the following International Agencies listed i.e., the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), the Government of Mexico, and the Government of China?
2. What was the intended purpose of the technical cooperation valued at TT\$15,565,524.00?
 - a) Provide a breakdown of the amount received from each cooperating international agency.
3. What is the status of the renewed and enhanced cooperative pursuit with the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in each of the priority areas listed i.e.:
 - aquaculture; rice; livestock production;
 - corn and soya;
 - shade house and coconut;
 - human resource development;
 - agro-processing; and
 - food distribution; a technical task force (for the removal of trade barriers and to ensure regional food security)?
4. What attempts have been made with other CARICOM Member States to initiate collaborative efforts similar to the Food Development Plan under the Memorandum of Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana?

Question 2.A.3 (page5)

The MTI made the statement that ‘To encourage growth in the sector and to make a significant dent in the food import bill, the level of funding for infrastructure development must be sustained for several years. This will ensure that more of the country’s farm lands can be provided with easier access and critical water issues addressed. Generally, the funding for research, extension and outreach, and technology needs should be increased to support the MALF to deliver on its priority activities’

1. How does the MTI justify this statement?
2. What evidence is there to support this claim?

Question 2.A.4 (pages 5 and 6)

1. Since the opening of the Moruga Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park on July 14, 2020, what statistical data does the MTI have to support its statement that the *'The Park has contributed to the strengthening of the Agriculture Sector's value chain through increased investments and enhanced linkages'*?
2. Who are the five companies that have accepted Letters of Offer for three (3) factory shells and two land lots?
 - a) How many have commenced operation at the Industrial Park?
3. What will be InvestTT Ltd.'s strategy to market the Industrial Park with a view to securing additional tenants to further boost local production?
4. Does the MTI Consumer Affairs Division's (CAD) Food Price Monitoring Mechanism Survey and monitor the prices at each retail outlet in Trinidad and Tobago?
5. What metrics were used to capture price trends?
6. How and when was the Food Price Monitoring Mechanism used to promote local products?

Question 2.A.6 (pages 7 to 11)

1. How many beneficiaries have there been since the inception of the MTI's Export Booster Initiative?
 - a) How much money has been expended to date under the International Certification Fund and Labelling and Product Testing Fund respectively?
2. How many Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) have benefitted from the MTI's Grant Fund Facility (GFF) since its 2017 launch?
 - a) What process must a SME follow to gain access to the GFF?
 - b) What is the MTI's selection criteria for prospective recipients?
 - c) What is the maximum a beneficiary will receive under the GFF?
 - d) How much money has been expended to date under GFF?
 - e) How many SME's have utilised the GFF to acquired machinery to manufacture alternatives to wheat flour?
 - f) What has been the total sum awarded since July 2022 for SMEs wanting to manufacture alternatives to wheat flour?
3. How many beneficiaries have there been since the inception of the Research and Development Facility (RDF), under exporTT Limited?
 - a) What is the sum of money that has been disbursed to date under the RDF?
 - b) What new and advanced technology and innovation have been acquired by agriculture and agro-processing companies supported by the RDF?
4. Who are the key stakeholders the TTBS is collaborating with to roll out the Action Plan from the National Dialogue on Agriculture hosted in October 2021?
 - a) Who developed the Action Plan?
 - b) When is the Action Plan's roll out envisioned?

- c) Which sub-sectors of the Agricultural sector will have further value chain studies conducted on them?
- 5. How often was the verification of weighing devices in the Municipal Markets conducted?
 - a) What happens when faulty market scales were discovered?
- 6. How does the MTI evaluate the success of the Trade Missions and Trade shows local companies attend?
- 7. How many female entrepreneurs participated in the MTI's "SheTrades Hub"?
 - a) How does the MTI inform females of the opportunities the "SheTrades Hub" has to offer?
 - b) How many Trinidad and Tobago "SheTrades Hub entrepreneurs" participated in the Fruit Attraction Festival held in Spain in October 2022?
- 8. What are some of the current deficiencies in this country's National Quality Infrastructure?
 - a) State the mechanisms that can be immediately instituted to address these deficiencies?
- 9. What are all the priority sectors the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) will analyse as part of the value chain study?
- 10. What is the status of the finalisation of the Feasibility study for the Cocoa Industry?
 - a) What is the current outlook for the cocoa industry?
- 11. What are some of the legislative amendments being looked at for the Standards Act and the Metrology Act?
- 12. State the benefits derived by the Agricultural Sector to date, if the standards developed by the MTI through the TTBS are voluntary rather than mandatory?
- 13. What is the justification for having each of the following national standards being voluntary rather than mandatory:
 - a) Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) – Fresh Produce – Requirements;
 - b) Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) for the Food Industry – Requirements; and
 - c) Wastewater reuse - Agricultural and other applications – Requirements?

Question 2.A.7 (page 11)

1. What investments have been recently made in sustainable agricultural production systems?
2. What sustainable advancements in agricultural production systems has the MTI observed?
3. What level of investment in sustainable agriculture is necessary before a formal system to measure the rate of investment is to be developed?

Question 2.A.8 (pages 11 to 14)

1. Has the CAD observed any decrease in food prices in 2023 as forecasted by analysts of the Morgan Stanley Research?
2. How does the CAD protect consumers against price gouging?
3. What are some of the consumer tips CAD provides to better equip consumers when it comes to making purchasing decisions?

Question 2.A.9 (pages 14 to 15)

1. Has the CAD noticed any decrease in the quality of food produced from large and small producers, after prices were increased (to absorb the costs of the inputs they purchased)?
 - a) If yes, what can be done to correct this?
2. What does food insecurity mean and how far is Trinidad and Tobago from the position of food security?
3. What percentage of income of a “ low-income” family’s is spent on food?
4. State the employment growth that has been observed by the MTI in the non-energy sector for the fiscal years 2021, 2022 and 2023?

Question 2.B.1 (pages 16 to 17)

1. Who are the trading partners that the MTI held bilateral meetings with to discuss restrictions in export of agro-processed foods?

Question 2.B.2 (page 17)

1. What is the status of the negotiations for a Partial Scope Trade Agreement with Curaçao and Chile?
2. How will Trinidad and Tobago, Curaçao and Chile each benefit from the respective Partial Scope Trade Agreement?

Questions related to the Response from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Provide in writing:

1. The number of participants in the Youth Encouragement Programme presently working in the agricultural field;
2. The number of farmers that accessed the MALF’s outreach initiatives over the last year; and
3. Regarding the Green Climate Fund, the sum received to improve the monitoring system for climate change including a breakdown of the expenditure on the activities undertaken.
4. The breakdown of the expenditure of \$18,753,919 on the following agricultural incentives:
 - a) agricultural incentives under the AIP by category
 - b) Vehicles for Agriculture /Fisheries
 - c) Machinery and Equipment
 - d) Water for Agriculture • Land Preparation/1 Land Clearing
 - e) Soil Conservation
 - f) Soil Amelioration
 - g) Tree Crops – Citrus, Cocoa and Coffee, Coconuts
 - h) Protected Agriculture Systems • Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
 - i) Livestock - Cattle/Buffalo, Goat and Sheep, Pigs, Poultry, Rabbits, Waste Management
 - j) Marine Fisheries

- k) Aquaculture
- l) Post-Harvest Operations and Marketing
- m) New Farmers/ Farms (Youth in Agriculture)
- n) Security (Praedial Larceny) for Agriculture
- o) Agro-Processing

General Questions:

1. What are the benefits of being a registered farmer/fisherfolk?
2. How many registered fisherfolk are in Tobago?
 - a) Is there any way for the MALF to collect, collate and analyse the income of registered farmers and fisherfolk?
3. What is the reason for the MALF not collecting information on the income of farmers/fisherfolk?
4. How does the MALF evaluate the success of the initiatives it listed in response to Question 3?
 - a) What positive and negative feedback is received from farmers who access the MALF's agricultural initiatives?
5. What measures has the MALF implemented to address each of the following challenges:
 - a) The negative impact of COVID-19 which caused disruptions in the food supply chain.
 - b) Increased prevalence of pests and diseases.
 - c) Geo-political instability which affects the supply chain of agricultural inputs;
 - d) Unfavourable weather conditions.
 - e) Praedial larceny; and
 - f) Aging farming population
6. State the reasons for the use of Good Agricultural Practices and Integrated Pest Management is to be encouraged?
7. How often does the MALF monitor natural forested and protected areas to ensure the prohibiting of farming encroachments?
 - a) What happens when a farmer is found to be illegally farming in a protected area?
8. How many special meetings of the Council on Trade and Economic Development (COTED) that focused on agriculture have been held in which the MALF was Trinidad and Tobago's representative?
 - a) What percentage of the approximately 76 km of agricultural access roads, inclusive of forestry access roads, and water management projects and six (6) bridge structures under the Agricultural Stimulus Package have been developed/completed to date? Provide a completion status of each.
 - b) What digital solutions did the Regional Administration North Division expose farmers to during the COVID 19 pandemic?
 - c) What was the farmers' reception to the digital solutions and what benefits will they experience?

9. Did the Regional Administration South Division take a similar approach with the farmers under its authority?
10. How many farmers have utilised the Extension, Training and Information Services Division (ETIS) of MALF's Online Training Platform?
11. What training and information is disseminated to the farmers?
12. What is the status of each of the following technological developments under the MALF:
 - a) Upgrade of Infrastructure and Information System.
 - b) Smart Agriculture Programmes (Artificial Intelligence);
 - c) Electronic Document Management System (EDMS).
 - d) Spatial Information Management Systems (SIMS).
 - e) Electronic Phytosanitary Certification (ePhyto).
 - f) Automated Import Reference Permit (AIRS).
 - g) Inventory Management and Plant Sales.
 - h) Fisheries Vessels Tracking System.
 - i) Online Training Platform; and
 - j) Online Plant Clinic.
13. Does the MALF see the feasibility of maintaining a Livestock gene bank?
14. What does the Forestry Digitization Project entail and how will the \$4,000,000 allocation for fiscal 2023 be spent?

Question 2.A.2 (pages 4 and 5)

1. What is the status of the following PSIP projects under the MALF:

Rural Infrastructure:

- La Compensation Project at Carapo (\$4,000,000)
- Depot Road Project at Longdenville (\$4,800,000)
- Plum Mitan Project at Plum Mitan (\$15,400,000)
- La Trinidad Food Crop Project (\$5,400,000)
- J001 - Provision of Agricultural Access to Targeted Commodities and Strategic Crops (\$10,000,000)
- K003 - Rehabilitation and Development of Physical Infrastructure at Plum Mitan Project (\$5,000,000)
- K001 - Water Management and Flood Control (\$3,000,000)
- E023- Forest Access Roads (\$10,000,000)

Agricultural Research and Extension Services:

Research projects

- H553 – Coconut Rehabilitation and Replanting Programme in the East Coast of Trinidad (\$500,000)
- H542 – Expansion of Sanitary, Phytosanitary (SPS) and Food Safety Capabilities of Trinidad and Tobago (\$1,000,000)
- H561 – Surveillance and Control of Pernicious Pest and Diseases (\$7,950,000)
- F354 – Implementing a Comprehensive Crop Biodiversity Conservation Programme for Trinidad and Tobago (\$1,000,000)

- F004 – Upgrade of Infrastructural Facilities at Research Division (\$2,000,000)
- J426 – Rehabilitation of Cocoa Industry (\$1,000,000)

Extension projects

- A212 – Promoting New and Emerging Technologies to the Agricultural Sector (\$400,000)
- A213 – Expansion of Sugarcane Feed Center (SFC) Information and Communication Technology for Training and Outreach Programmes (\$610,000)

Plant and livestock gene banks:

- H548 – National Seed Bank Project (\$3,000,000)

Technology development projects:

- A 203 – Upgrade of Infrastructure and Information System (\$3,000,000)
 - A 204 – Establishment of a Spatial Information Management System (SIMS) (\$2,500,000)
 - A 208 – Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) (\$2,000,000)
 - A 210 – Smart Agriculture Programmes (Artificial Intelligence) (\$1,000,000)
 - Forestry Digitization Project – Cabinet approved funding under the Agricultural Stimulus Package Fiscal Incentives Programme for Farmers (\$4,000,000).
7. potential forward and backward linkages between the energy and non-energy sectors?

Question 2.A.5 (page 6)

1. What is the status of the following innovative technologies being implemented and proposed for implementation by MALF in Fiscal 2023:
 - Utilizing solar power for irrigation in cocoa production.
 - Use of biopesticides in the control of pest and diseases.
 - Use of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to detect pest and diseases;
 - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) funded project on Cocoa aimed at Greening of the Production and Marketing of the Cocoa Sector towards ensuring sustainability.
 - In-vitro propagation and conservation of root crops and bananas;
 - Somatic embryogenesis and heavy metal testing in cocoa.
 - Use of drones for pest surveillance; and
 - Enhancing soil analytical services to increase soil testing capabilities by providing guidance to farmers on fertilizer use thereby maintaining soil health?

Question 2.4 (Appendix I pages 4 to 12)

1. What are the non-resilient agricultural practices implemented by the 20% of registered farmers who apply for agricultural incentives?
 - a) What has the MALF done to address this issue?
2. Of the 65% of lands designated for agricultural use, how many farmers are using sustainable agricultural production systems?
3. What are the reasons for 35% of the agricultural lands not being using for agricultural production?

4. What will be done to get 100% of the lands designated for agricultural use under agricultural production?
5. State the sum of funds that was received from the Green Climate Fund to improve the monitoring system for climate change impacts on the agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago.
 - a) State the sum spent on each activity the MALF identified as part of that exercise.
6. What mechanisms were implemented by the MALF to address the following challenges the Ministry faces when promoting the use of sustainable food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices across Trinidad and Tobago:
 - a) The impact of COVID-19 hindered supply chains.
 - b) Adverse weather conditions.
 - c) Pest and diseases.
 - d) Aging farming population.
 - e) Unavailability of water for irrigation.
 - f) High input costs including fertilizers and pesticides.
 - g) Limited opportunity for value added production of primary products; and
 - h) Lack of tenure to state lands?
7. What measures are needed to ensure that the following support system are in place to improve agriculture production, productivity, and value chains in the agriculture sector:
 - a) Improved market opportunities.
 - b) Development of value-added products for non-conventional crops;
 - c) Trained staff; and
 - d) Increased post-harvest and processing infrastructure?

Question 2.5 (Appendix I pages 12 to 13)

1. When will the MALF conduct a national inventory to determine the level of risk of extinction of native and underutilized crops?
2. What is the history of the Buffalypso, or Trinidadian Buffalo and why is it at risk of extinction?
 - a) What will be done to prevent this?
3. What improvements will be made to increase the varieties of crops preserved?
 - a) What will be done in the interim to address the challenges encountered of access to finance to improve cold storage and lack of staff to characterize and multiply planting material?

Questions related to the Response from the Ministry of Health

Provide in writing:

1. A list of the equipment for physical activities in schools.
 - a) State whether the equipment were provided to all ECCE, primary and secondary schools.
 - b) The number of schools that have received such equipment?
2. The process used to address the nutritional needs of adolescents girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons .
3. The factors that resulted in malnutrition, obesity, underweight and overweight persons;

- a) The treatment available to address malnutrition, obesity underweight and overweight persons; and
- b) The public awareness outreach activities to be undertaken.

General Question:

1. Has the MOH been liaising with other Ministries e.g. MSDFS, MPD, MALF and MTI to ensure that food support and initiatives to ensure food security aligns with the Ministry's plans to target the reduction of NCDs in Trinidad and Tobago?

Question 1 (page 2)

1. What percentage of Trinidad and Tobago's childhood population has been categorised under the two broad groups of conditions of:
 - a. Undernutrition which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals); and
 - b. Overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer)?

Question 2 (page 2)

1. Since the 2017 WHO's Global School Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago, has any survey or study, been conducted to determine the number of children characterised as malnourished in Trinidad and Tobago?
 - a. How is a survey of this nature conducted?
 - b. What is the outcome of this survey?

The results from the 2017 WHO's Global School Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago only provided statistics for children between the ages of 13-17.

2. What malnutrition data exists for children under 12 years old?

The results also only displayed percentages.

3. What were the actual numbers used in the calculation?
4. In the six years after the survey was conducted, does the MoH estimate that the figures have improved or worsen since then?
 - a. Provide a justification for your response.
5. Is the MOH on track to meet the nourishment targets set out under SDG 2: Zero Hunger?
 - a. If yes, how is this being achieved?
 - b. If no, what challenges were encountered?
 - c. How are these challenges being addressed?

Question 3 (pages 2 to 3)

1. What are some of the factors that resulted in malnutrition (underweight, overweight or obese) in children in Trinidad and Tobago?

2. Since the 2017 WHO's Global School Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago, what policies have been developed and implemented to change the dietary and physical patterns of children?

Question 4 (pages 3 to 4)

4. What have been some of the challenges experienced by the Ministry of Health in the provision of health care initiatives to curb overweight/obesity as forms of malnutrition?
5. What is the healthcare procedure when a child is determined to be overweight or underweight in accordance with the Child Growth Standards Chart in the Child Health clinic?

Question 5 (pages 4 to 5)

1. In your response to Question 5, it was stated that food insecurity risks were deepening in Trinidad and Tobago, food consumption patterns were deteriorating especially among lower income households and younger persons and negative coping strategies were notably higher than other CARICOM countries since the commencement of the COVID-19 Pandemic, is the MoH able to indicate whether Trinidad and Tobago is near or far to becoming food insecure?
 - a) Provide justification for your response.
2. Is there a developing food crisis in Trinidad and Tobago where low-income households prioritise the consumption of foods that fill stomachs as opposed to those that have nutritional value?
3. What levels of investment is needed to strengthen this country's food insecurity response?
 - a. Has any solutions on how to strengthen our national and regional food systems, social protection or emergency response planning with a renewed focus on emergency hospital dietetics services been identified?
4. What does the MoH believe is necessary to promote and recover sustainable food security levels in Trinidad and Tobago?

Question 7 (page 6)

1. What are some of the public awareness outreach activities to be undertaken?
2. How many outreach programmes for the promotion of healthier food options does the Ministry of Health conduct annually?
 - a. Are these outreach programmes conducted on an ongoing basis or are they seasonal?
3. How will these be conducted at the community level?
 - a. How will the equality and equity of programmes to rural and urban areas be ensured, monitored, and verified?

Question 8 (pages 6 to 7)

1. When was the last National Food & Nutrition and Anthropometric Survey conducted?
 - a. What were some of the noteworthy results from the last survey?

Question 9 (page 7)

1. What WILL be done to address the challenges faced by the MoH when there is reluctance from adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons to address their nutritional needs or follow suggested dietary requirements?

Questions related to the Response from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

General Questions:

1. Provide the annual expenditure for the Food Support Programme for 2022 and 2023;
 - a. The number of persons currently enrolled in the Food Support Programme;
 - b. The number of persons who remained in the programme for each year for the period 2019 to present;
 - c. the number of new persons who was added to the programme for each year for the period 2019 to present; and
 - d. the number of persons that have graduated out of the programme over the last five (5) years;
2. Provide a step by step explanation, inclusive of timeline, on the activities involved in populating and update the vulnerability register.
3. For the enumerators that are being hired to conduct surveys, provide the methodology used to select persons who will be doing the survey Include the following:
 - a) - the number of persons who will be selected; and
 - b) the sampling frame/criteria being used to carry out the surveys.
4. Provide the costs associated with the establishing of the vulnerability register.
5. For any technical corporation/assistance provided by any international institutions to conduct the necessary activities to develop this register, provide a results matrix which outlines the timeline for each activity.
6. Following reports from the 2021 Auditor General Report, several discrepancies in administering food support were discovered. while working on populating the vulnerability register, provide information on what improvements have been made to prevent recurrence.
7. The MSDFS indicated that one aspect of the plan to populate the register includes targeting other members of an existing client's household who may be non-vulnerable to assess whether they will become vulnerable. Provide a detailed explanation on the methodology being adopted to complete these exercises.

Question 3 (page 2)

1. At the public hearing held on May 17, 2023, the MSDFS stated that 2005 poverty line was inflated by using 2016 food prices to create the 2016 poverty line, what are the reasons why a more current poverty line has not been calculated as yet?
 - a. Why is the poverty line not a yearly calculation given food prices have been inflating year on year?

Question 4 (page 3)

1. Based on the MSDFS's Standard Means Test which utilised a 2016 poverty line of \$1,439.02 (per month per adult equivalent) to determine the eligibility of person's or a household's eligibility to receive specific benefits from the MSDFS, how beneficiaries of the MSDFS services fall below the 2016 poverty line of \$1,439.02?
2. How does the MSDFS determine the eligibility of beneficiaries to its food support services?

Question 5 (page 3)

1. Based on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the status of women and Children in Trinidad and Tobago conducted by the Ministry of Planning and Development in fiscal 2022, how many infants were born in fiscal year 2022 into households that fell below the poverty line?
 - a. Did the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey collect data on infants born into households below the poverty line before fiscal 2022?
 - b. If yes, how many children of infant age live in households below the poverty line?

Question 6 (Appendix 1)

1. How many persons and households are permanently and temporarily on the Food Support Programme?
2. What considerations were taken when calculating the amounts awarded to persons/households on the Food Support Programme?
3. What year's calculations were used when determining the three amounts available based on the size of the family:
 - a) 1-3 persons -\$510,
 - b) 4-5 persons -\$650; and
 - c) 6+ persons = \$800?

Question 7 (page 3)

1. Does the MSDFS collect quantitative data on which factors were the cause for the poor and vulnerable status of its beneficiaries?
 - a. If yes, how many of the MSDSF's clients' status is owed to:
 - i. Lack of education.
 - ii. Unemployment.
 - iii. Drug-use and alcoholism.
 - iv. Lack of family, family support.
 - v. Bad choices.
 - vi. Teenage pregnancy.
 - vii. Inherited Poverty.
 - viii. Laziness; and
 - ix. Low salaried job.

Question 10 (page 6)

1. Is the Ministry on track to meet the social safety targets set out under SDG 2: Zero Hunger?
 - a. If yes, how is this being achieved?
 - b. If no, what challenges have been faced?

Questions related to the Response from the Ministry of Planning and Development

General Questions:

1. State how the data gathered from the MICs and SLC is unable to assist the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in its drive to update its register.
2. The Ministry's plan of action (step by step) and associated timeline to ensure inter-ministerial collaboration to work towards achieving SDG 2 by 2030. Given that the Ministry is the one with the responsibility for assessing progress towards achieving SDGs aligned with Vision 2030.
 - a) Does the Ministry have the ability to create an inter-ministerial committee to ensure deliverables/outcomes of activities/initiatives done by other Ministries are being assessed towards the achievement of these goals?
 - b. If not, which ministry does the responsibility rest with?
3. During a previous PAAC meeting held on May 17, 2023, the MPD alluded to the fact that there was a 2014 SLC done and work was being done by the consultants (KAIRI) to rectify "technical issues" with the methodology which was going to be submitted to cabinet for approval.
 - a. Provide a detailed outline that lead to the 2014 SLC not being eventually published.

Question 2 (page 1)

1. What is the timeline for the completion of the Central Statistical Office's Household Budgetary Survey/Survey of Living Conditions?
 - a) Did work commence in January 2023 as indicated in your response?

Questions related to the Response from the Office of The Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs

Provide in writing:

1. The sum allocated annually to the acquisition of food and specialise medical supplies to the upkeep and maintenance of Children and Community residences; and
2. The sum expended for the last fiscal year.

Question 4 (page 2)

1. What are the reasons for the National AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC) advocating the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to revise its Standard Means Test and how will this be linked to food sustainability?

- a. What reception has been received by the NACC from the MSDFS to its request to revise the Standard Means Test?
2. What is the sum of money allocated annually specifically towards the acquisition and provision of food and specialised medical supplies to upkeep and maintain children in community residences?
 - a) How much of what was allocated last fiscal year was spent?
 - b) How much of this year's allocation has been spent on food and specialised medical supplies?

Question 5 (page 3)

1. Have there been any challenges addressing the nutritional needs of the children in the community residences? State the solutions to these challenges.
2. Has there been any challenges faced in the acquisition and provision of food supplies faced by community residences because of rising food prices? State the solutions to these challenges.

Question 9 (page 5)

1. What selection criteria has the GCA noted as impediments for persons below the poverty line wanting to access the food related social support offered by Ministries and Departments?

APPENDIX III

Verbatim

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO PARLIAMENTARY COMPLEX, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2023, AT 2.35 P.M.

PRESENT

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoë	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Mr. Hassel Bacchus	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, LAND AND FISHERIES

Mrs. Nela Dwarika-Ali	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Nerissa Lucky	Director (Ag.), Fisheries
Mr. Nigel Grimes	Project Coordinator/Technical Advisor

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Mr. Michael Reid	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Dr. Mark Dookeran	Chief Public Health Inspector (Ag.)

MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Karlene Roach	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag)
Ms. Debra Dipchansingh	Director (Ag.), Socio-Economic Policy Planning Division
Ms. Erica Fortune	Director (Ag.), Project Planning and Reconstruction Division

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ms. Wendy Guy-Hernandez	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Dr. Seon Raymond	Director, Social Investigation Division

Ms. Christine John-Guy
Ms. Angelique Taylor

Director (Ag.), Social Welfare Department
Senior Planning Officer, Policy, Programme,
Planning and Development Division.

MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mrs. Ayleen Alleyne-Ovid
Ms. Candice Lackhansingh
Mr. Neville Alexander

Permanent Secretary
Director, Policy/Strategy Unit
Assistant Director (Ag.), Trade

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER GENDER AND CHILD AFFAIRS

Mr. Vijay Gangapersad
Mr. Ian Ramdahin
Mr. Makandal Caesar

Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Permanent Secretary
Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon, and welcome to the officials from the Ministry of Planning and Development; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; the Ministry of Trade and Industry; and the Office of the Prime Minister. My name is Bridgid Annisette-George and I am the Chairman of the PAAC of the Parliament.

The Committee on Public Administration and Appropriations, PAAC, has the mandate to consider and report to the House on:

- (a) the budgetary expenditure of government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;
- (b) the budgetary expenditure of government agencies as it occurs, and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and
- (c) the administration of government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.

The purpose of this meeting is to conduct an enquiry into food security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. The Committee's role is to determine whether the stakeholders present will:

- (a) ensure a constant supply of food of a nutritional value for the population at all times;
- (b) alleviate this country's food security concerns and sustain long-term, local agricultural productivity levels;
- (c) identify mechanisms needed to enhance and improve local agricultural investments, as well as improve regional and international agricultural corporation; and
- (d) make recommendations for the improvement of this country's food security.

The meeting is being held in public and is being broadcast live on Parliament Channel 11

and Radio 105.5FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel *ParlView*. Viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today's topic via e-mail, parl101@tpparliament.org, facebook.com//tpparliament and twitter@tpparliament.

At this time, I would invite members of the Committee to introduce themselves starting from my furthest right.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, members. And I will now invite the representatives from the various Ministries to introduce themselves, starting with the Ministry of Planning and Development.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And may I invite the representatives from the Ministry of Health next.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. We move on to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And can we move on to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Ministry of Trade and Industry.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: And finally, the Office of the Prime Minister.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you all. Might I ask maybe if some of the representatives could shift their chairs a bit because we are in direct line, and some of you, we really cannot see. Thank you very much.

Okay. So, at this stage, I would invite the Permanent Secretaries from each Ministry to make a brief opening statement, if they wish. So, again, we could go in the same order, and we will start with the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Ms. Roach: Thank you and good afternoon, again, everyone. The Ministry of Planning and Development welcomes the opportunity to participate in this enquiry into food security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal, Zero Hunger, by 2030.

The provision of access to adequate, nutritious, safe and affordable food for all persons at this time is an imperative for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago. Food security is a crosscutting issue and is therefore embodied in the strategic objectives of our National Development Strategy 2016 to 2030, also known as *Vision 2030*.

Also incorporated in the *Vision 2030* are the roadmap to recovery and the community

recovery reports which were produced by the multidisciplinary committees established by the hon. Prime Minister with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. These committees were tasked with addressing and mitigating the hardships inflicted by COVID-19, restarting the economy and laying the foundation for sustained economic recovery.

Now, both of these documents were accepted in 2021 as part of the Government's medium-term policy strategy. The roadmap to recovery specifically speaks to bolstering food security by expanding the food supply and non-energy exports, and reinventing agricultural systems and producing differently, among other things.

Addressing food security requires a multipronged whole-of-society approach, including short, medium and longer-term strategies, involving public and private sectors, civil society, the Government's regional and international development partners, as well as the general population.

Now, the 2023 to 2025 Public Sector Investment Programme currently focuses on nine development priorities, of which priority number three is, "Ensuring Food Safety and Security". In that regard, the Ministry of Planning and Development continues to ensure that projects and programmes that are aligned to these areas receive priority funding under the PSIP, inclusive of those that would continue and contribute to increasing and promoting zero hunger and food security.

A rough estimate indicates that approximately \$100million from the current PSIP has been allocated to projects that contribute to food security, including those to assist in minimizing the constraints facing the agriculture sector.

From a climate change perspective, the Ministry, through the Environmental Policy and Planning Division, is collaborating with our development partners and engaging in local, regional and international endeavours to implement adaptation and mitigation measures to combat the negative impacts of climate change on Trinidad and Tobago as a small island developing state, including the negative impact of extreme events on food production.

Now, we are in 2023, and we are midway through the implementation of the *Vision 2030* and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry has a national focal point for the monitoring of the SDGs. It is not currently in a position to report on the progress due to the absence of current baseline data and information.

Fortunately, however, by June/July of this year, the results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which is a MICS survey, conducted in 2022 by the CSO in the latter part of last year, should become available. This survey focuses on women and children, including data and information on nutrition. Also, by August next year, the Ministry and other relevant stakeholders should have access to data and information from the 2023 joint Household Budgetary Survey and Survey of the Living Conditions currently being conducted by the CSO. The survey started in February of this year and would be completed by February of 2024, with approximately six months for the production of the report. This joint survey will provide much-needed data and information on incomes and expenditure, which will facilitate the

establishment of a new poverty line and enable better monitoring of the progress of the implementation of the SDGs to 2030.

In the very near future, all the relevant elements, including up-to-date data and information from the CSO surveys, inclusive of mechanisms for consulting with all our stakeholders as well as robust systems for data collection, monitoring, and reporting will be dovetailing as we seek to eliminate hunger by 2030. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam PS. And may I now invite the PS from the Ministry of Health to make a brief opening statement, if he so wishes.

Mr. Reid: Good afternoon again, Chair, and members. The Ministry of Health is committed to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago has a healthy population. And to that end, the Ministry has several initiatives that would lend to the population of Trinidad and Tobago having nutritious food—information on nutritious foods, so that they can make the right choices to live a healthy life.

The Ministry is happy to be able to participate in this meeting, so that we can bring whatever information to the Committee to move forward in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much, PS. And might I invite now the PS of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Chairman, members of the Committee, fellow colleagues from the other Ministries, viewers and listeners tuned in to this session, good afternoon. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services welcomes the opportunity to meet and discuss with the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee this important issue of food security in Trinidad and Tobago, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger.

As a Ministry, we are mandated with the responsibility for addressing the social challenges of poverty, social inequality and social exclusion. As a result, particular emphasis is placed on developing and executing programmes and services to protect and assist those who are classified as poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, socially displaced persons, families and persons living with HIV/AIDS, just to name a few.

The matter of food security remains one of paramount importance to the Ministry, which seeks to support our country in meeting its international obligations in keeping with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. Moreover, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in its effort to support food resilience to the poor and vulnerable citizenry, is ever mindful of the prevailing socio-economic circumstances as well as the global impacts of climate change on food security. The Ministry notes that food security is achieved when everyone has physical, social and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

In closing, the Ministry looks forward to today's discourse and welcomes the opportunity

to expound on some of our current intervention measures and those plans for the near future in treating with food security. We will continue to remain guided by the recommendations of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee as we seek to improve our programmes and services. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam PS. And may I now invite the PS in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. Agriculture is indispensable to the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, and is therefore a major component of food security and economic viability. As enunciated in the Government's roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago post-COVID-19 pandemic, a concentrated effort is now placed on boosting the food and nutrition security of the country through investment in agriculture, expanding the food supply and in reinventing agricultural systems.

Of the four pillars of food security, food availability, food access, food utilization and food stability, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has a primary role in ensuring food availability. Food availability implies increasing agricultural production and this is currently being supported through actions, including creating an enabling environment for production of key commodities, increased focus on youth in agriculture, access to technical and extension support, increased access to grants for agricultural development, and encouraging the adoption of technology and innovation to drive agricultural production.

In this regard, the Ministry continues therefore to strengthen its capacity to contribute to improved food security through initiatives, such as the provision of high-quality planting material; training of farmers in good agricultural practices; enhanced agriculture infrastructure to support food production; enhancing biodiversity; and nationally, collaborative efforts with the development partners, including FAO which is the Food and Agricultural Organization, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, IICA, and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, CARDI, supports the achievement of SDG number 2. An integrated whole-of-government approach is therefore indispensable in working towards improving food and nutrition security in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Agriculture therefore thanks the Committee for the opportunity to encourage the discussions as we work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, PS. And may I now invite the PS from the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Chair, and members of the Committee. It is a privilege to come before this Public Administration and Appropriations Committee this afternoon as we discuss this very important topic of food security in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly as it relates to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2: ending hunger and achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry is responsible for leading the drive to position Trinidad and Tobago as a manufacturing base and as a business, trade and financial hub of the Americas. The Ministry's core responsibility is to grow trade, business and investment, particularly through driving the non-energy sectors of the economy of which the food, beverage and agro-processing sectors are a part.

As a pivotal agency for trade, promotion and development, the Ministry manages and coordinates the trade process to ensure access to international markets for companies located here. The Ministry is also tasked with driving investments, inward investments, in a number of sectors. In this regard, the Ministry continues to work with, across the public sector, but particularly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries towards ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago is food secure and is in alignment with Sustainable Goal 2: Zero Hunger.

The Ministry now welcomes any questions and will seek to make available any necessary information. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Madam PS. And finally, the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Ramdahin: Thank you very much, Chair. Members of the Committee, colleagues, good afternoon, again. Ending hunger is one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and is defined as the objective to ensure that everyone has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences, and that all people have the ability to acquire the food they need, without compromising their economic, social and environmental well-being.

Data however is suggesting that although there is more than enough food produced today to feed many people, there are upwards of 828 million people that remain chronically undernourished and that malnutrition is taking a heavy toll across developing and developed nations. This may not be our story, but in Trinidad and Tobago this could easily be the case. Here, the Government is making significant investment in the social sector, mainly in support of the most vulnerable in society.

At the Gender and Child Affairs Division alone, more than \$1 billion was invested in childcare and protection over the period 2015 to 2022. Over the same period, from data, over \$33 billion was spent on grants administered by the Social Development and Family Services. And this investment is just for two arms of the State and for selected programmes. The solution may not necessarily be about how much is being invested to end poverty and hunger and the many other social ills in this country, but rather on how we choose to do business in the sector.

The issue of poverty and hunger are extremely important issues which must be confronted. It is for this reason that we welcome today's meeting and look forward to the outcomes of this session. I thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much all. I think I would like to start off the discussion with a statement made by the PS of the OPM, if I remember well, it is not a question of how much but how we choose to spend it. And therefore, I turn to the PS of Planning and Development. And I really would like us to put into context for the discussion how we define

poor, how we define vulnerable, how we define indigent.

Ms. Roach: So, good afternoon, again. Based on our response to the question, we would have indicated that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, they would have adapted the international definition to suit the circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago. So we would have indicated that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services described the vulnerable groups as those groups or communities which experience social exclusion, discrimination, inequality and marginalization.

Poor individuals and/or persons in vulnerable situations include populations that live in poverty without access to safe housing, water, sanitation and nutrition, and those who are stigmatized, discriminated against, marginalized by society and even criminalized in law, policy and practice. And, of course, examples include the impoverished children and youth, women, disabled persons, the elderly, migrants and transient workers.

Madam Chairman: So I get the impression from the very definition that poor individuals and/or persons—so, what makes you poor as distinct from vulnerable? Because this definition, which we were given here, it seems that poor and/or vulnerable people are one in the same. Okay? And from the submission, I tend to get the impression that vulnerable might be a wider category than poor, but the statistics do not seem to show that; the statistics that you have provided. So I am trying, for the discussion, for us to sort of flesh out what we are talking about for the benefit of the Committee and the listening public.

Ms. Roach: You said the vulnerable is broader than just poor. Okay. Well, according to the Survey of Living Conditions, a poor person would be described as someone whose income would have been below a certain figure. Now, we do not have recent data and information. We are using data from 2005, and I believe it was US \$1.25 that we were looking at as the persons below a certain income level.

A vulnerable person may not necessarily be poor in terms of income, but they are discriminated against because of their persuasion. They may be dependent, like a child would be dependent.

Madam Chairman: So basically, from a purely theoretical perspective, poor, we are looking at income. Right? And is that the poverty line? So if you are beneath the poverty line, you are poor?

Ms. Roach: So if you are below a certain level of income and you are unable to purchase a certain basket of goods—

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Ms. Roach: You are considered poor.

Madam Chairman: And what determines that level? Is it the poverty line?

Ms. Roach: The poverty line. And there is the indigent, which is considered even poorer than poor, because you cannot even afford basic items. Right? And as I indicated, we will have information from the CSO's Survey of Living Conditions by next year, probably around August

next year, where we would be able to establish a new poverty line and we should be able to compare with the 2005, which was the last official set of data that we would have had.

Madam Chairman: So, at this current time, the Ministry of Planning and Development is still working with the 2005 figures of the survey—

Ms. Roach: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—of what is poor.

Ms. Roach: That is the official—

Madam Chairman: Okay. So somewhere in the discussion somebody spoke about the all-of-government approach. I think it may have been the PS in Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. And I just wanted to ask the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, since we have an all-of-government approach, how does what the Ministry of Planning and Development defines poverty lines up with what you do and your business? Because 2005 is a very long time ago. And you are in the business of providing grants which would bring relief to people who are considered poor. So, how does that line up with what your definition is of the poverty line?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: In the interim—because the last official figure we had was, as stated, a 2005 figure. Our Ministry would have put together or use the same food basket and look at the current prices to come up with a figure that would allow us to have a poverty line that would be realistic to treat with our clients and their needs.

3.05 p.m.

I will ask Mr. Seon to elaborate on that for us.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Dr. Raymond: Thank you, DPS. And through you, Chair, as our colleagues would have mentioned earlier, the current SLC, the official SLC, the Survey of Living Conditions report 2005, has a poverty line of \$665 currently.

At the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we utilize the poverty line in the implementation of our standard means test to qualify persons for specific social intervention initiatives. During this—currently, we utilize a poverty line of \$1,439.02. How we came up with that figure is that we would have inflated the poverty line that is included in the 2005 SLC report, by looking at current food prices to determine the indigence line. That line would then be further inflated to include a nonfood component. And that is how we came up with the poverty line of \$1,439.02.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Is it Dr. or Mr. Raymond? Which one?

Dr. Raymond: Doctor.

Madam Chairman: Doctor? Dr. Raymond. So in terms of—again, I am coming back to the all-of-government approach, you know, how does the Ministry of Planning and Development line up its position with the position of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services? Because that is a great difference, eh. How do you—because I expect this information is shared. So is it that it is not accepted as a position with respect to what the poverty line is? Is it because

it is not official from your survey that—so, you know, I want to get some sort of clarification on how the Ministry of Planning and Development views this poverty line that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has had to innovate for them to really reach the people who are in need of funding?

Ms. Roach: Certainly, I think it is important to come up with a more realistic measure of poverty, because the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is close to the ground and they are the ones that are offering these services, the food cards and public assistance to the population. We have no issue with the imputation of a poverty line in the absence of something official. Because 2005—I mean, a lot has changed in terms of prices and so forth. So we have no issue with that.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. So coming back to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in your submission, you referred to this National Register of Vulnerable Persons. If you could tell us a little bit about where that has reached, what it is intended to do, and whether that register would also include poor—people who are determined as poor based on your definition of the poverty line.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Thank you for that question, Chair. The National Register of Vulnerable Persons is a tool that is expected to allow the decision-makers in this country to have the relevant data that would put them in a place of knowing who, or how many people are poor, how many persons are close to the poverty line, and how many people are way beyond that.

At this time, I am going to ask Dr. Seon, who is one of the officers we have at the Ministry working on this project, to give you an update on where they are with the project.

Dr. Raymond: Thank you, DPS. And through you, Chair, the National Register of Vulnerable Persons is a computer database system that the Ministry is currently working on that will be used to collect, store and process information on the vulnerable population of Trinidad and Tobago. What we plan to do is to have a standardized assessment of vulnerability for individuals and households across the country. And that will help the Ministry and all partners within the social sector better target persons and households for social intervention initiatives.

Where we are at currently, we are hoping by next month, June of 2023, to finalize the solution. Subsequent to that, we will have the official handing over from the United Nations Development Programme to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and we anticipate that we would have the launch of the system before the end of 2023.

Madam Chairman: So I understand it is computer-based. How do you then gather the data for input? Because I always remember learning computers in the days of DOS and learning this term, “GIGO”. Okay? So how do you gather, verify, the information that is going to be inputted? And this standardized assessment, how does—it is going to be ahead of the national survey. So how are the two things going to line up eventually?

Dr. Raymond: Through you, Chair, currently, we are looking at assessing vulnerability across six dimensions, utilizing over 20 indicators of deprivation. In terms of populating the National

Register of Vulnerable Persons, we were currently looking at several options, in terms of modalities, for populating the National Register of Vulnerable Persons. And this will be done through several phases.

We are hoping at some point we can work with the Ministry of Planning and Development, through the CSO, because the CSO currently conducts studies on vulnerability via the Survey of Living Conditions, as well as some vital information will also come from the national population census.

That information will then be supplemented by further, what I will say, field exercises where we can collect additional data points to satisfy the vulnerability profiles that will be included in the vulnerability register. So that are some of the ways that we are looking at currently in populating the register at this time.

Madam Chairman: So—and you will forgive me. So it means that the manner in which the data is going to be gathered for populating the register, that has not been settled—that is what is going to be settled by June?

Dr. Raymond: No. We—yes, we are currently looking at a MICS modality whereby we will collect data by going out into the fields. We will also be utilizing data, as I mentioned, that the Ministry of Planning and Development currently is in the fields collecting from the SLC, as well as the national census.

We also have existing databases at the various Ministries and social sector agencies that would have information that would be vital to determining the vulnerability of persons and households. So it is MICS modality whereby we will be continuously updating the information stored in the vulnerability register to make sure that we are able to assess persons in real time.

Madam Chairman: Might I ask if your Ministry has field officers, or you have to recruit field officers?

Dr. Raymond: The Ministry currently has field officers in our Social Welfare Division that collects data on our clients, and that data is stored in existing databases which we will utilize. We also anticipate that at some point in time we will have to employ additional staff to assist with the population of the register because we anticipate that we would need data on a large cross section of the population to populate the register. So at some point in time we would be looking to employ additional staff.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And that has not reached anywhere as yet. Because my understanding, I might be getting this wrong, you said by June of this year?

Dr. Raymond: Yes, by June we will have the finalization of the solution.

Madam Chairman: Right. And it is next year you would have had at least the register up and running? Did I get that right?

Dr. Raymond: Yes, before the end of this year.

Madam Chairman: Before the end of this year. So the employment of staff and all of that, where is that?

Dr. Raymond: Yes, that is currently in train, where we are looking to hire persons to start phase one of the data collection, as I said, and cleansing of the data within our existing databases at the Ministry which will form phase one of the exercise.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And you have an idea of how much staff you need and have the ads gone out? Where have you actually reached in that?

Dr. Raymond: Yes, we have a proposal and we are awaiting approval of the proposal. And as I said, we hope to implement subsequent to that.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Might I invite Dr. Bodoë?

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to follow up with regard to the vulnerability register and to say, well, you know, it is something that, as an elected representative, Member of Parliament, I look forward to because we are very familiar with the vulnerable out here. So in terms of your data gathering, is any consideration being given to collecting data from Members of Parliament, for example, and local government councillors who would not only have many requests but would have also done some field work to verify that some of these persons are indeed poor and vulnerable? So that it is first question. And the second would be, when this register is completed, will it be easily accessible by MPs and councillors?

Madam Chairman: Will the PS answer that, or Dr. Raymond? I think this is for you.

Dr. Raymond: Through you, Chair, in terms of the response to the questions, the general population, meaning individuals as well as all members of households, will have access to input data directly into the register. And subsequent to that, the officials from the Ministry will conduct an exercise to verify the information before it is utilized in calculating persons' and households' vulnerability profile.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. So you said households will have access. Will it be online, in terms of using their phones and stuff like that?

Dr. Raymond: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Well, I suspect that the question kind of caught you off guard, but in terms of that, can I ask if consideration can be given to that very valuable source of data as you go forward? I can direct that to the PS.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: The Ministry would consider your recommendation, through the Chair.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. And this is to the PS in Planning and Development, with regard to the 2023 Household Budget Survey and the Survey of Living Conditions, can you indicate whether that has started? And if so, when is it expected to be completed, Madam PS?

Ms. Roach: So, good afternoon, again. Yes, the joint survey of the Household Budgetary Survey and Survey of Living Conditions has started. It started February of this year and it is expected to be completed February of 2024, and the report is expected six months thereafter. So around August next year we expect to have the reports.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member Deonarine.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, again, everyone. So I am asking this question, I do not know who specifically is going to answer, but so far what I have been hearing, when each of the PSs gave their introductions, is that some way or the other each Ministry before us here today is dealing with vulnerable parts of the population, vulnerability in some way or the other. And the subject of the discussion today is food security. So some way or the other, all of us here are dealing with food security, or addressing this problem of food security to meet that SDG of Zero Hunger.

So my first question is, when was the last time or when was the last meeting with all PSs across these Ministries to discuss this issue of food security?

Ms. Roach: None that we are aware of. During the development of the *Vision 2030* document, food security is definitely one of those areas identified as a priority area, and the Ministry of Planning and Development would have gone out to the various Ministries, agencies, for discussions and so, but not on just the particular issue of food security. We have about 10 areas, I think, identified as priority areas.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you so much, PS. PS, I asked that question because while I heard the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services answering the Chairman's questions, as an economist, what I was hearing was a duplication of the Survey of Living Conditions taking place—it sounds as if. Because on one hand, you have the Ministry of Planning and Development in the process of doing the Survey of Living Conditions to gather the internationally recognized data that will form that internationally recognized poverty line vulnerability indicator and also the indigence—I am not too sure if I am pronouncing that word correctly—population. That would be internationally recognized data based on a specific survey, a cluster sample and so on, design your sampling frame—I will not go through the technical details—to get that data, right?—to define what the poverty line is and how many persons are vulnerable or are poor in Trinidad and Tobago.

But then I am hearing that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is in a situation where they need to allocate—they have been giving out grants because they need to deal with a short-term, a current situation, and they simply do not have the data. So they need to do something. And what they have been doing is getting—trying to find a way, first, to deal with the existing data, the existing poverty line that exists, which is the \$665 per month which works out to—and they have inflated it, from what I understand, to \$1,439 per month. That is correct? Right. And when you work that out per day, that is working out to TT \$7 per day, when the international poverty line is US \$2.15 per day. So we are already not across international standards.

But what I am hearing, through you, Chair, is that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is also doing their own data gathering exercise to build—they are building six dimensions across 20 indicators to establish a database so that you all could pinpoint more efficiently who are vulnerable, and who are very much deserving of these grants to satisfy the

means test. Is that correct? Is that correct? Please clarify, PS.

Dr. Raymond: Yes, you are correct in terms of we will be assessing vulnerability across six dimensions, utilizing just over 20 indicators of deprivation.

Ms. Deonarine: Through you, Chair, to me, this sounds like a duplication of effort. Would it not be a little more efficient to have the data from CSO that falls under the Ministry of Planning and Development? Because the data from CSO will be available by June next year, mid next year, and then—

Ms. Roach: Yes, by about August of next year. And the MICS survey, which collects data and information on women and children, will be available by June/July of this year.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. All right. I just want to make sure that we are not duplicating efforts here to achieve the same result. And I am not too sure if that is happening, which is why I am asking the question—which is why I asked the first question, when was the last meeting across all PSs, across these Ministries, to discuss this issue food security, and how we are dealing the vulnerable population.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Through you, Chair, respectfully, what you have happening here is not a duplication of effort. CSO gathers data, but correct me if I am wrong, what we are try to do for the national vulnerability register is to compile information on the vulnerable. Now, while you have samples being taken, in some instances, what we are trying to gather is the family—all information you want to gather on the clients. That would allow us to treat with a family holistically.

While the data gathered by CSO would provide you with percentages and the like, this data in the vulnerability register will actually provide you with the information on the client, the name of the clients, where they live, how many people are in the household; information that is unique to the work that we have to do when treating with the vulnerable.

I am not taking away from the work that CSO does, that is very important work and we depend on them for their data, because that data is an input into us getting our standard means test, and it is data that allows us to do our work right now, and many organizations within this country depend on that data. What we are trying to build goes a little further than what is provided by CSO. It allows us to drill down to where the need is. It allows us to look at instances where you have families, they are not yet vulnerable, but when you have little shocks, these people could be thrown into a state of vulnerability. It allows our Government—it will allow our Government be able to plan for these things and be able to not be taken off guard, as we might have been with COVID. Right? Instances of the floods and stuff that like that, all that information we should be able to have that there. The location of these people, where you have more vulnerable people, people's income, all of that information is valuable information that we would need to allow us to make decisions, to plan for how many people we might have going to need, how many people might be coming off, or what programmes we could put in place to mitigate these risks that we see.

Ms. Deonarine: Through you, Chair, if I may continue? Thank you so much, PS, for clarifying. But you also indicated that—so is it that persons who come to you seeking help, information that you are gathering? Because from what I understood the Doctor said in the back was that you all are going out to gather data as well.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Through you, Chair, as Dr. Seon would have indicated, we have some data in our system that will be used. But in order to be current, we would definitely need to go out to update it. It should be understood that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has a wide base of clientele. Now, that allows us to, right now, be able to get information, and as Seon would have indicated, through data cleansing, to update this information. That would provide us with a base of valuable information.

But based on how we have been treating with clients in the past, we need to go a little further. So it is not just about somebody who might need a particular grant. You want to look at it holistically. So you want to look at the entire family, not just the one person who comes to you for maybe a disability grant or a senior citizens' grant. You want to look at everybody in the household, their whole story. You want to get all that information on it.

So, yes, we have information on our database which we would utilize. But there will be a need for us to go out to get additional information to ensure that it is up to date, and it would allow us to do what we want to do with the data.

Ms. Deonarine: Chair, I do not want to belabor the point, but I am having difficulty in understanding, so I will just ask one more question—two more question to clarify. One to the PS in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and one to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Planning and Development.

So, PS in Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, from what I gather, you are updating your existing database by going out and seeking additional information on that household, and what you are also doing—are you also going to seek additional information from other households, from your analysis, that you perceive to be in a vulnerable position? Because what I am trying to gather is how are you selecting your sample.

So I understand if it is you are already zero—if you are going to already zero in into the existing household from your existing clients, that would make sense. But if you are going outside to seek information on people who may become vulnerable, who are not vulnerable and may become vulnerable, then we are talking about the Ministry of Planning and Development's work here.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Thank you for that question. I am going to start and I will ask Dr. Seon to help me out. Now, we are not going to be doing a sample. We want to have information that would allow us to know what the situation is across the country, right? This country—I do not have all the information right now, but this country is not the only country who would have done an exercise like this. I think it was Colombia that has done an exercise like this, that has worked for them, and that is the model that we are using. So this is not a situation where you just look

at a sample. We want to know what is happening straight across. And yes, it might sound confusing and it might sound like we are duplicating what CSO is doing, but that is not the case.

Now, if at the time we were embarking on this we would have moved quickly enough, we might be able the partner with CSO, where you would have had all the various indicators that they want to take into consideration on their instrument when they were going out, so that that part of it would not need to be replicated, but that is not the situation that has happened. Right? So we still have need for data that they would not be capturing when they go out. Yes, it would seem like a duplication—I would think so too if I did not know that their instrument would not capture everything that we need. It is not a duplication.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. Last question, Madam Chair. PS in the Ministry of Planning and Development, from your understanding from this discussion and, of course, through your exchanges prior—I am sure you all exchange work and strategies, methodologies and so on—do you see that the information that is being gathered from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is information that the Household Budgetary Survey can provide?

Ms. Roach: In respect of the timing, the data and information from the HBS/SLC will be available August next year. There are persons who are in need of assistance. I am not seeing a major issue at this point in time with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services using their existing database. They are the ones who are on the ground who would be able to identify persons who would be in need of assistance, maybe those who are on the verge of falling into poverty, or becoming more vulnerable. I am not seeing it as a major duplication.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. Thank you.

3.35 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. So what I think we would like to find out from Social Development and Family Services, in terms of your means test, in terms of your current scenario with having defined the poverty line, could you give us an idea of how that meets—your system, your calculations, your formulae—how that really meets and treats with people, the actual numbers of people who are in need of assistance, either because they are poor, they are indigent, or they are—what is the other word?—they are vulnerable? How, you know—because we are hearing systems, but I think what we are looking for is reach. You understand? I think that is what is missing for us and I think that is why we are having a little problem.

Because one, I think it is clear, we do not have a system that really identifies people. Okay? And what we are talking about is people. We are not talking about formulae. Okay? I think I understand from somebody we are spending a lot of money. How do we know, okay, we are only filling 10 per cent of the need, or we are filling 100 per cent of the need? How do we know that? Or it may not be that we intend to meet 100 per cent but by this system we have, what are we targeting and how are we able to measure how far off we are in the target, or we have exceeded the target? I think this is what we are trying to find out and it is only you all could tell us that.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Thank you for that question, Chair. Now, based on what you are asking us in order for the Ministry to know what is the percentage of the persons who are in need, needs that we are meeting, we need to first have a baseline for that. Without a national vulnerability register, we would not be able to pinpoint actually how many people in the population of Trinidad and Tobago falls below the poverty line.

Based on the data—the last set of data we have—and that is outdated by now. I think it was 2011. Based on our responses that we would have put up, we had some figures on the percentage of persons in the country that were vulnerable. And that is only a percentage. All right? Okay. And that was the 2005 figure. I am seeing here, Central Statistical Office in 2011, we had a figure that showed—all right. It had a 15.5 per cent of the persons were considered poor, and then it had a 1.2 that were considered indigent.

Now, it should be understood that that is data from since 2005 that was gathered based on the information we had. So now, for us to be able to accurately have a base and work with it, we would need additional information telling us what percentage of the population is poor, what percentage is indigent, and we would be able to work from that base. Considering our data, we will be able to tell whether or not we have met at least that or we are actually serving a greater percentage of persons who are actually poor or vulnerable. We could only say how many people are actually accessing our grants and how many clients we have on the books.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So let me use a figure you gave me. This is page 3 of your submission where you are saying:

According to the United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 study...—

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Madam Chairman: I accept you taking that as credible if you gave it to us.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: “Mm-hmm”.

Madam Chairman: Right?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Madam Chairman: You are saying there are:

...9,000 people who are multidimensionally poor...—

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: “Mm-hmm”.

Madam Chairman:

...with 51,000 who are vulnerable to multidimensionally poor.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Right?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Right. So that would have been information they provided. I want to ask my colleague, did we calculate based on the population at that time?

Mr. Raymond: Through you, Chair—

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Mr. Raymond: —that is the figure that we mentioned here came from—

Madam Chairman: No, I did not mention, that is the figure you mentioned.

Mr. Raymond: Yes, the figure that we mentioned here from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, that came from a 2022 United Nations Development Programme report. But that report utilized 2011 data to calculate the Multidimensional Poverty Index for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Okay. How do you measure against that?

Mr. Raymond: Right. So if we can—through you again, Chair, in terms of your initial question, what—the Ministry would do some projections. We did some projections concerning the poverty as well as the indigent population, utilizing the most recent data we have from the SLC, as well as the national census report.

So back in 2005, when the SLC would have been conducted, it was estimated that, let us use for example, that 1.2 per cent of the population was considered to be indigent. And if you utilize the population census data for that time, which would have been the 2000 census data, we get approximately around 15,000—just over 15,000 persons utilizing that 1.2 per cent.

Now, if we utilize the same 1.2 per cent, and we look at the 2011 census report, that would give us an average of 15,936 persons would have been considered indigent utilizing the same 1.3 per cent. And if we use the midterm population estimates for 2022 that the CSO has on its website, it will give us a figure of just over 16,000 persons if we utilize that same 1.2 per cent.

Now, if we utilize that figure in terms of our Ministry's coverage to that particular population, we will focus on our food support grant. And currently, as at April 30, 2023, our Ministry's clients total 18,499 persons, which is over that estimated 16,390 persons. So—and if you also look at that figure, it does not just speak to individuals because it considers households as well, which could include more than one individual. So it gives you an idea of the Ministry's coverage in that particular area.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So let me ask you, how effective you are then?

Mr. Raymond: Yeah. So that gives us a good understanding of where we at but the survey—

Madam Chairman: How effective are you? You rate yourself. You rate yourself. How effective are you? And I mean the Ministry, I am not—you understand?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Chair, considering the information that has been brought to the fore, it will appear that we have far gone beyond what is expected of us. But we need to understand that that is outdated information and when CSO is finished with their work, we would really have a true picture of what the poverty line is and what the indigence is. Because when that is presented to us, we might very well find out that maybe—

Madam Chairman: You are throwing away money.

Mrs. Guy-Hernandez: No. Maybe we need to do more. But, of course, we have to wait for that data to come.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Okay, I think we get a full picture. You have a mandate and you have to find a way to fulfil your mandate. And you have tried to work as best with some projections and therefore, it will be a wrong conclusion to say—because you are meeting 18,000 people and this figure, gives you 16,000 people, it will be wrong to say you are doing good or better than better. Right? And therefore, quite frankly, you cannot rank yourself. Okay. I think that is what we understand. All right. Okay. So, Dr. Bodoë, I believe you wanted to come in the conversation.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair, I would stay on the Ministry of Social Development and just to go into the grants, which is in the appendix, just for the clarity of the public and for the Committee. With regard to the General Assistance Grant—and there are several items listed here—and, of course, one of the expenses that households and persons incur, which can impact on their ability to buy food, would be other expenses like medical equipment, prosthetics and the Pharmaceutical Grant. So can I enquire through you, Madam PS, the limit for medical equipment or the amounts for medical equipment, prosthetics and the Pharmaceutical Grants, and whether those are one-time grants in a year or, you know, can the—how is it available?

Ms. John-Guy: Okay, yes. Through you, Chair, prosthetics—most of these grants are one-off grants. They may be one-off for a period, for example, two years—every two years or every three years depending on the grant. Prosthetics, the amount is up to 40,000—

Dr. Bodoë: 4-0?

Ms. John-Guy: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: 40?

Ms. John-Guy: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay.

Ms. John-Guy: 40,000 medical. Pharmaceutical is 2,500 for a supply of three months. And that is once—

Dr. Bodoë: Once every three months.

Ms. John-Guy: That is once every two years.

Dr. Bodoë: Oh, you can get—okay. So you get three months once every two years.

Ms. John-Guy: So it is like a two-year cycle.

Dr. Bodoë: All right.

Ms. John-Guy: But you get for a maximum of three months at one time.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. And the limit for medical equipment?

Mrs. John-Guy: Medical equipment is 7,000.

Dr. Bodoë: And that is a one-time—how often?

Ms. John-Guy: And that, again, is every three years of three-year cycle.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. As we on this appendix as well, if we can go back to the first page with regard to the Food Support Programme and if we look at the figures for the one to three persons, four to five persons, and six-plus persons, and we see the figures there 510, 650, 800, can you indicate, you know, how you would have come up with those figures?

Ms. John-Guy: So the one to three persons—through you, Chair, we are referring to household size and the amount there. Based on policy, we looked at the cost of basic food items that will provide a nutritional meal for a family and based on that we—the Ministry came up with these figures.

Dr. Bodoë: In view of the current situation, where you might have increased food prices and so on, is any consideration being given to revise these figures?

Ms. John-Guy: Well, that is a matter to be taken up at the executive level. We will certainly probably look at reviewing those figures.

Dr. Bodoë: So you intend to make those recommendations, is that what you are saying, Madam PS?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Through you, Chair, when we have updated information that will inform the real poverty line in the country, recommendations would be made to our executive and it would be taken from there.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: So two questions I want to ask, and maybe Ms. Fortune, you could help me—“ah hoping this is ah mistake”. Public Assistance Grant, it tells me:

It is also granted on behalf of necessitous children where the father is or both parents are dead.

What happens if a mother is involved? It is page 1 in the table. Tell me it is an error.

Ms. John-Guy: No—well, it is how it is worded. It is not—it can be paid either to a father where the mother has died, or to mother where the father has died. It is just that it is not stated here. So it is an error. It really is an error.

Madam Chairman: Okay, good. Thanks. All right. And the second thing—and I think maybe it might be more in line with what Dr. Bodoë was asking. In terms of, if you all have been very innovative in trying to meet your lack of data, in devising a mechanism to define a poverty line, how come you do not do it more regularly? How come we are still in 2016? Because whatever gave you the latitude to inflate the 2005 position and bring it to 2016, I would expect that that same authority, for want of a better word, should allow you to make your figure a little more realistic. You are already off the mark because you do not have baseline information, so that is what I am watching. How come you stopped at this 2016? And particularly, everybody is talking about pandemic and how the pandemic exacerbates everything. How come we are waiting on next year, all things being equal with CSO?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Thank you for that question, Chair. The Ministry is presently reviewing our data. But considering what is happening with CSO, by the time we are finished reviewing they might very well have that information out for us. But it should be noted that we are presently reviewing our figures. We have been actively being doing that.

Madam Chairman: And you expect your exercise to take how long?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Well, we are hoping that it is concluded before CSO is finished.

Members: [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: No, no, but seriously, I mean, CSO tells us—

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: —August as all things being equal. Okay? You have recognized that, hear what, you cannot wait on them or else you will still be working with a 664, I think, figure, or 669, whatever it is, figure, right? You have recognized that well prior to now.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Because in coming up with your 2016 figure, right, you started before that. And therefore, what kind of projection you have for your exercise?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Okay. Now, in line of the figures—the 510, 650 and 800—for those figures to be changed, that will have to be a Cabinet decision.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Okay? Now, in respect of the poverty line—

Madam Chairman: “Mm-hmm”.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: —that we are looking to look at the basket and see what is really realistic right now, in 2023, that exercise might take us next three months or so.

Madam Chairman: You have started?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes, we have started looking at it. However, while we might be doing that, because CSO is presently, actively doing their work, I believe a decision might be taken to wait for that data. Because we would be able to get official data as against going down the road again of getting a basket and doing something in the interim. Because their exercise has already started.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Let me ask Ministry of Trade and Industry, you do something with a basket of goods too, yes?—where you go to groceries and—I think it is 40 groceries or something like that. You see, what is missing for us is this all-of-government approach. And the question that member Deonarine asked about duplication, while her’s might be specific to a particular thing, it appears to us that there may exist in your various Ministries information and data that could help solve issues that the others are dealing with. So her first question is, when last you all met? So I think, Minister of Trade and Industry, you might be able to help us out here.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Thank you for that question, Chair. And through you, Chair, the Consumer Affairs Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry is tasked with monitoring the consumer environment. And what that division does, they conduct a retail price survey on a monthly basis. They look at 180 items—

Madam Chairman: “Mm-hmm”.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: —basic food items at 41 supermarkets, across 21 areas in Trinidad and Tobago. And this data is published every month on the Ministry’s website, and quarterly in the

newspapers. So there are a specific number of items that the Consumer Affairs Division would look at.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And let me ask Ministry of Health, based on 118 items that Ministry of Trade and Industry looks at regularly, have you been able to identify whether those are—any of those will make a basic basket of goods, or if there are luxurious ones? Have you been able—because then you should be able—if you could say, well, these are what will be a basic nutritional basket of goods based on their prices, we know what it costs, that the information could go to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I mean, I am really bad at math but tell me, have you looked at what they are have—what they do?

Mr. Reid: Chair, I am unable to answer that question at this time.

Madam Chairman: Maybe I should ask the doctor, the Chief Public Health Inspector, Dr. Dookeran.

Dr. Dookeran: Likewise, my function is based on food safety.

Madam Chairman: Oh, yes, yes.

Dr. Dookeran: So I likewise do not have that information in terms of whether the Ministry would look at it from a nutritional standpoint.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Dr. Dookeran: Unfortunately, the Chief Nutritionist should have been here with us today, but she had an emergency that she is dealing with.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. So let me ask then, I do not—PS, you know, I always think Planning and Development notes everything and could solve everything. Can that work?

Ms. Roach: Just to clarify, Chair, when you say, if that can work, you mean, each Ministry, agency seems to be working in silos? Is that what you are asking?

Madam Chairman: Well, I do not know, I do not want to make a determination like that. What I am hearing is the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has an issue in really seeing what the poverty line is. Okay? And they use an income marker that they are depending on you to give them since—we do not know however long and for whatever good reasons. Right? It is an income marker based on what will be a basic basket of goods. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is collecting data—how often you told me again, PS? Every month? Every quarter?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Every month.

Madam Chairman: Every month, telling us more than what is a basic basket of goods, because I cannot think 118 items in a basic basket of goods. But, of course, we understand that what I think is basic, you might not think is basic. But we are looking at nutrition. I think the Ministry of Health is the entity who could give us some credible information about nutrition. So, to me, what I am asking is, could the Ministry of Health look at the information that Ministry of Trade and Industry is gathering to advise the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services what will be a basic basket of goods that will cost \$10 or \$15 based on the information, which is every month, which, if I listen to the radio, it seems that it moving in every month, I do not know,

but, of course, their data will tell. And therefore, we have some kind of scientific basis for looking at a poverty line when we might not have money to do, or resources, or COVID, and all those things, to do a survey. Can that work?

Ms. Roach: I am not sure how representative the—it is the two supermarkets in a particularly area—

Madam Chairman: Okay. Can the three PSs—the four PSs have a discussion about that?

Ms. Roach: Yes.

Madam Chairman: “Huh”?

Mr. Reid: Certainly, Chair.

Ms. Roach: Yes, definitely.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Ms. Roach: Definitely have a—*[Inaudible]*

Madam Chairman: I thought you were going to tell me the law, because I was going to say then therefore what Social Development and Family Services doing with this \$1,400 is—

Ms. Roach: No, no, it is—

Madam Chairman: Okay. We do not want to get anybody in trouble here. But—

Ms. Roach: And certainly the Ministry of Health can advise on what are the nutritional items, so maybe they can advise on probably—*[Inaudible]*

Madam Chairman: The PS said their mandate is healthy population, initiatives to nutritious foods. That is what the PS said to me. I did not make that up. Okay? So I think one of the things we will ask is for that discussion to take place, and for us to come back and give us some guidance with respect to what a nutritious basket of goods at the basic level should look like and what it should cost. I think that could be done. Yes. Thank you. Help me again, this is Ministry of?

Mr. Gangapersad: Office the Prime Minister.

Madam Chairman: Office of the Prime Minister, thank you very much.

Mr. Gangapersad: So, Chair, through you, my understanding is that these things do take place. I think when they begin to do the Survey of Living Conditions, they come up with a basket of goods and they usually depend on several entities. The Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute is one such agency that helps them to determine the calorific value that is contained in various food items. And as a result of those discussions, they proceed to create a food basket albeit the SLC, the food basket, is not necessarily only on food, but some other items as well. Yeah?

And in fact, the Gender and Child Affairs Division, as well as the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services usually rely on that basket of food when making determination as to what goes into a hamper, because they do distribute hampers, as well as when calculating the cost of the basket—what goes into that basket. So that body of information—and usually the SLC would explain how they come up with that and the caloric intake. I think the caloric intake is probably usually 24 or probably 2,700. In other countries it varies. And usually we have a

listing of the food items that are usually contained in those baskets. So it is usually available and it is possibly in the reports in the Survey of Living Conditions as well.

Madam Chairman: But I think it is—thank you. It is outdated, but I think what Mr. Ramdahin, yes? No, this is Mr. Gangapersad? Yes? I think what you are telling us is, there is a model to be followed. Okay? And I think just based on the innovative ways Social Development and Family Services has operated, I think a discussion with their colleagues will help. We will help them much more. Okay?

So I just want to ask, I find it astounding, is this country on track to meet the specific target by 2030? Ministry of Planning and Development.

Ms. Roach: Good afternoon again. Chair, I would hazard to say it is difficult at this time to say definitively whether Trinidad and Tobago is on track, because we do not have the baseline data to measure progress. But I must say that there are a lot of initiatives that are taking place, public sector, private sector, civil society, even our international development partners, the UN has been working with civil society and I know that a lot is happening. It is just that we have not been able to measure the progress as yet. We are hoping to put the mechanisms in place shortly to be able to do that.

4.05 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Might I ask a time frame for “shortly”? What year are we in again? I think we are in 2023, so it is seven, six years to 2030. So what is “shortly” in terms of getting the data?

Ms. Roach: Well, as I indicated, the MICS survey, the results would be available in a couple of months.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Roach: That will report on women, children, and we will have information on nutrition and so, that can be used almost immediately. We are just a couple of months away from that.

Madam Chairman: “Mm-hmm.”

Ms. Roach: The Survey of Living Conditions and the Household Budgetary Survey however would not be available until August next year, which is why I indicated I did not have a problem—

Madam Chairman: Then we have five more years left.

Ms. Roach: Well, five or six, yeah.

Madam Chairman: Five.

Ms. Roach: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: “Eh-heh”.

Ms. Roach: So we are a little more than midway through. I would want to hazard a guess and say that we can still achieve the target because a lot, as I said, is being done. It is just that is it not being measured.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Roach: So once we have the mechanisms in place to be able to measure—and currently the

Ministry of Planning and Development is liaising with the UN to have a consultant work with us to develop a data repository for the SDGs. We are also looking at having a dedicated statistical officer within the CSO to collect and report on the SDGs, and we are also looking to strengthen the Ministry of Planning and Development's SDGs, but we do not really have a unit, we have a person, so we are hoping to hire a couple of persons. We are looking to do that within the next month or so to be able to have that dedicated monitoring of the SDGs.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Roach: "Mm-hmm".

Madam Chairman: Sen. Hislop.

Mr. Hislop: Thank you, Madam Chair. A lot could be happening but without data, we could be shooting in the dark. But I think we could segue a little bit to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries because food sustainability, you are the backbone of that. And one of the things I would like to ask, first and foremost, how do we get to the place where you are fully aware of whether you are adding value to the conversation of food sustainability? You have questions about—simple questions, what is the benefit of being a registered farmer? What is the benefit to the farmer? But more so, what is the benefit to the Ministry? Because we know all the incentives that go into—that farmers receive as being registered, but what is the benefit to the Ministry of registered farmers and what is your data collection mechanism? Because we cannot know where we are going if we do not know what we are dealing with.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Okay. Thank you, member. And in terms of data collection—and I am hearing from my other colleagues, we are all into this "data-driven". It is an issue that we have at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in terms of how we capture data, but we are trying in terms of—now we are trying to get a farmer registration system. We are digitalizing into how we capture data and that will enable us, of course, in our database, we would be able to generate the reports that will allow us to make more informed decisions. But in developing those systems, what we really try to get at is the voice of the customer. Well, they will identify their user requirements, what they expect of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. And in so doing, when we have met their requirements, of course, that would enhance their production, their quality, et cetera, which of course will fade into having more—in terms of achieving our food security.

So it all ties in. And I am saying our thrust for digital transformation, of course, would only help that process. But in terms of the farmer and how the Ministry would help them, you mentioned incentives, but there are the incentives for the registered farmer. The issue sometimes with the farmer in being registered is in terms of—it is a manual process, so it takes some time. So, as I said, we were trying in terms to have farmer registration online. We would also like to integrate to that system where they can access the Agricultural Incentive Programme, because it is a long and tedious process where our field officers will have to go and verify the information every year when there is a flood or when there are other grants that will be offered to them. We

have to verify the same information everywhere.

I know one of the members spoke of duplication of effort, so we are trying to avoid that in terms of our digitalization. So they would be able to register online, they will be able to access their incentive online. And, of course, in terms of processing the incentive, we would have to look at our work processes to see how best we could improve on that in terms of timely processing of those incentives and grants.

Mr. Hislop: What is the average time between applying for—or as a registered farmer, what is the average time between your receipt—your application for your incentive and your receipt, and also online? So I am going to ask these two questions. I am a farmer out in the field, we are talking about registering online, how many farmers in these rural communities have access to the ICT services to be registered online and then how long does it take for me to receive an incentive?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Okay. So, firstly, we have not implemented the online system yet.

Mr. Hislop: Okay.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: It is still in development stage. But presently, the registration process takes approximately three months. However, the incentives might take sometimes a bit longer.

Mr. Hislop: How much is a bit longer?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: I am not sure of the time frame. I will have to provide that information to you.

Mr. Hislop: So, Madam Chair, are the farmers saying that they want the services for them to be registered online? Are they saying that?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Some of them, because we have some very young innovative farmers and they, of course, will like the accessibility. So some of them, they of course, they are resistant to change. But in terms of progressing, we will always have resistance to change. But how would the Ministry address that, we would have to, of course, have awareness and training sessions, et cetera, to be able to help them to be able to even use the system online because that would take us into literacy.

Mr. Hislop: Okay. So when we talk about the SDG of Zero Hunger, has the Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, has the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries set goals or pathways to assist the country in achieving that?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Yes. We have set some goals and some initiatives, and we have a memorandum of understanding presently with Guyana. And through you, Chair, I would ask our Technical Advisor to give us some more details on our initiatives in terms of revitalizing the rice industry, the coconut industry and cocoa. Mr. Grimes.

Mr. Grimes: Good afternoon. Through you, Madam Chair, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we would have certain goals set over a period of time with respect to achieving certain levels of production for certain commodities that we see as key. So, for example, we look at the local rice industry and we have zeroed in on rice as a staple, an important staple. And even

though we have rice being imported, we have a number of acreages available for rice production locally, and we feel that we should be able to meet at least 30 to 50 per cent of our rice requirements, local rice requirements. And therefore, we have set a target between now and 2025 to increase local rice production to meet at least 30 per cent of what we require. So that is the model in which we using for other key commodities where we set particular targets, and those targets will allow us to reduce our imports and help us to be in a more food secure position.

Mr. Hislop: Madam Chairman, when we talk about the food basket, how much of that food basket is set aside for fresh fruit and vegetables? Because we are not only talking about basic food items but we also need to look at food items that assist our population in living a healthier life. So how much of that is set aside for fresh fruit and vegetables?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Member, I am unable to answer that question. I am not sure what the food basket comprises in terms of the fresh fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Hislop: So, Madam Chair, to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, when you do your surveys at groceries and you put out the list of items, does it include fresh fruit and vegetables?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Chair, through you, member, it does not. It would include items, basically your flour, your milk; those types of items that you use to prepare meals but not—we do not pick up, what we would call, like market products, such as your vegetables and citrus, and so on; it does not. We do pick up poultry. Yeah.

Mr. Hislop: So the reality for us is that we are still focused on basic staples which gives us a skewed—it really gives us in terms of what—the pricing. So when you put out your pricing and as a consumer, I look at your price and I say, “Okay, fine, my grocery bill is X”, I would still have to add something onto that so that my basket is now balanced. So I do not know if, Madam Chair, we could make a recommendation. I do not know that when the Ministry of Trade and Industry does its survey, that it also looks at market items, so that the consumer’s basket could now be balanced. Because it is not only about food but it is about what kind of food.

And just for me to—I will finish up with Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in a bit, Madam Chairman, but what—in your submission, you gave a number of registered fisherfolk for Trinidad. Is it that you have—I know the division of agriculture and fisheries and so on, in Tobago, treats with the management of agriculture and fisheries. But is it that the Ministry has no data as it relates to Tobago? And just a piggyback on that, do you have partnerships with the division in being part of this entire thrust to zero hunger?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Through the Chair, can I ask the Director of Fisheries who will be able to answer that question.

Mrs. Lucky: Thank you, Chair. Yes, we do have very close relationship with the Department of Marine Resources and Fisheries in Tobago. The figure that we quoted is a joint Trinidad and Tobago figure. We do assist with the processing of fishermen’s IDs and vessel records for Tobago. The on-the-ground information is collected in Tobago, but there is a parallel system where we work with the Department of Marine Resources and Fisheries because there is a need

for national security intervention with respect to vessel records. So we do have a joint system where we work with the Department of Marine Resources and Fisheries, and these are combined figures. Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Might I invite member Deonarine at this stage to join the conversation?

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, Chair. Chair, I just want to ask a question based on what member Hislop asked with respect to the basket of goods, just by way of recommendation. The basket of goods that CSO uses to calculate the inflation rate includes vegetables and it may very well be easy for just the Ministry of Trade and Industry to take that same list and just do the pricing, the monthly survey on that list, which includes vegetables. And the RPI methodology usually includes this basket of goods which meets the health requirements and standard, so it is well balanced. So that is just one recommendation that I would give.

With respect to the question that, Madam Chair, you asked to the Ministry of Planning and Development, whether they are on their way to achieving zero hunger and food security by 2030, and the PS did indicate that she is very skeptical but quite optimistic that it still may be possible, I would like to ask, when the data becomes available, that will be your baseline data, you still have to do another Survey of Living Conditions or Household Budgetary Survey to get up-to-date data to find out, to evaluate your progress, whether you have reached Zero Hunger or achieved that Sustainable Development Goal by 2030, so how soon plans would start? Because look how long it took us to get from the last to SLC to this SLC. We should already maybe be thinking about putting things in place for the next SLC, so that we will—after we have the baseline by next year, we will have the next survey already going in, so that we could see—assess whether we achieved that target.

Ms. Roach: Thank you. And through you, Chair, I did have that conversation with the Director of CSO. He indicated however that the cost of the surveys, the Survey of Living Conditions, the HBS—and most likely it will be conducted joint again. It is normally done every 10 years. He indicated 10. It can be done—the HBS can be done in five years, of course permitting the resources to be able to conduct. I think it is a good suggestion, if we really want to measure the progress by 2030, to probably have another HBS in five years rather than the 10. However, we were hoping the Ministry of Planning and Development would have worked with our stakeholders to produce a voluntary report—a voluntary national report on eight of the SDGs, not including hungry. So we are hoping to probably include SDG 2 in the next report which we are hoping to probably conduct by 2025.

So we would have some markers that, you know, we can be able to assess the progress outside of the big HBS/SLC survey. Right? And we are working with a consultant with the UN, as I said, to develop that data repository and see if we can work with the Ministries. Because there is already a listing of indicators—right?—that we can use. It is just that we are not currently collecting data and information on some of these, which is why we would have only reported on eight of the SDGs in 2020. So we are hoping to use that international listing and work with the Ministries, agencies, to try to, you know, begin collecting data and information on

those, so that we can report every two years up to 2030.

Madam Chairman: Might I invite Mrs. Morris-Julianto join the conversation?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, not to be selfish or anything but under “rural infrastructure”, a compensation project at Carapo, I would just like to know the status of the PSIP projects under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, please.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Through you, Chair, I will ask our Technical Advisor to share the information.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much.

Mr. Grimes: Yes. Good afternoon, again. I think that particular question, we actually received updates from our engineering division, I think, within the last week on most of all of our infrastructure projects. So I would kindly ask if it is that I could probably provide that information to you at that particular time?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you. I would appreciate that. Also, Madam Chair, just to ask a question, I am always interested in climate change, what is the Ministry doing towards our food production with regard to solar along with biopesticides?

Mr. Grimes: Yes. We have introduced a number of projects with respect to providing technology and technological support through our incentive programme. We have a special grant that we provide to persons interested in technology, on providing technology to improve and upgrade their facility. So, for example, with respect to irrigation, they can utilize solar energy in powering and energizing their irrigation systems.

So you mentioned solar and biopesticides. Again, there are a number of projects that we have been involved in; some projects with partners like the University of the West Indies where we are looking towards using things like compost and composting projects, using inputs to agriculture that are non-synthetic, in terms of pesticides, that are more organic. And we have been working with our farmers through our training division of the Ministry and encouraging farmers in terms of utilizing the more sustainable approaches to agriculture and to pest management.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Okay. One last question I have regarding agro-processing, what are the grants available? Are there grants available?—that aspect, because it is not just “farm to table”, right? Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Grimes: Yes. While we do provide agro-processing grants, and we do provide some, and also our sister, our partner agency, Ministry—the Ministry of Trade and Industry, they also provide grants for agro-processing. But we have—in terms of our Agricultural Incentive Programme, we have establishment of facilities, we give \$50,000; refurbishing facilities, we have a \$20,000 grant; and in terms of packaging material, we have a \$15,000 grant. But this is with respect to persons who may be doing primary agricultural production and they probably want to get into small-scale processing. They want to do, what we call, some value-added activities, the

packing facilities, et cetera, in preparing the items. So these are small grants that we provide for agro-processing, but those persons who are interested in accessing larger grants and larger scale agro-processing facilities, the Ministry of Trade and Industry would be the Ministry that they would access those grants from.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Madam Chair, could the Ministry of Trade and Industry also expand on agro-processing grants?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Chair, I would allow Mr. Alexander to respond.

Mr. Alexander: Thank you, Chair. And, member, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we have several initiatives that we are executing in support of the agriculture sector and agro-processing. One of the major ones that we have in place is the Moruga facility which provides infrastructural support to agriculture and agro-processors. We also have a Grant Fund Facility that provides support to different manufacturers, including those from the agricultural sectors to access plant and equipment and machinery to help their competitiveness. We also have a programme called the International Certification Fund. What this fund does is help our manufacturers meet international standards. Many of the applicants and successful recipients of the ICF programme are able to get support to meet standards, such as a HACCP compliance and ISO standards, to be able to export to markets that they would not have access to before, as well as to meet the standards of some of our international companies locally who require our agricultural produce that feeds into their production and so on, to meet certain standards.

They are able now to satisfy those requirements and displace products that would have normally been imported. Interestingly, under that ICF fund, more than 50 per cent of the successful applicants have been in the food and beverage sector. So we see a lot of support going there to kind of help those companies that manufacture food and food-related products to be able to do better locally as well as internationally. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Dr. Bodoë.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are just two areas I want to explore. I just want to take us back to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and to follow up on a point that you raised, Madam Chair, and other committee members raised in terms of the nutritional value of the basket of food. But I want to go a bit further to look at the Food Support Programme—and I am just throwing it out because I not know how feasible this is. Of course in the age of technology anything is possible.

Now, in terms of the expenditure—I want to link this in terms of the expenditure annually on the food support programme. So my first question, Madam Deputy PS, is, can you give us a ballpark figure as to what kind of expenditure taxpayers incur in this Food Support Programme annually?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Chair, through you, I have some data before me that I would give you, but I would also ask permission to provide current data for you. Food support, in 2012, food support for that year, I am seeing here was registered as \$239 million; in 2013, \$224million—

sorry; 2012, 239; 2013, \$224, that is, million. And let me go to the last two, 2020, \$314 million; and 2021, \$217 million. Right? I am asking to provide updated information in writing.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. That is fine. Thank you, Deputy PS.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Okay.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted a ballpark figure. So we are looking at over \$300 million spent annually. So my question is this, if we look at the description for the Food Support Programme, it says—it is really to provide vulnerable persons with access to:

“...basic food items necessary to meet their daily nutritional requirements...”

So, is there a way to ensure that these amounts that are given on the food cards, you know, are actually utilized at the groceries to ensure that a nutritional basket of food is purchased? Are there any guidelines, or is that something that we can give consideration to? Because we are looking at providing support, but we do not want that you use the food card, you know, for purposes that may not impact directly on nutritional support. I do not know what your thoughts would be on that, PS.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: There is actually an approved list of items that is provided to the grocers or supermarkets where our food cards are accepted. Therefore, items such as alcohol and cigarette, and the like, are not expected to be purchased with food cards. The list would include foods that allow the recipient of the food card to be able to procure groceries that will give them at least a basic basket of food that will meet their basic nutritional needs. I must say that the food support is assistance. Based on the cost of living, it is not expected that a 510 or 650 or 800 would be able to adequately provide all that is required for the client. Hence this is assistance that is provided by the Ministry towards ensuring that they have at least access to the basics.

Dr. Bodoë: Understood, Madam Deputy PS, and I am happy to know there are certain guidelines. Is there any way of ensuring that these guidelines are actually met at the retail outlets? Is there any sort of follow up from the Ministry?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Presently, the most that—well, it cannot be expected that we will have persons at each checkout point—

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez:—to ensure that our clients—because we have a substantial amount of clients—

Dr. Bodoë: Point is taken. Yeah.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez:—actually purchase what is expected.

Dr. Bodoë: Point is taken. And you are saying—so there are guidelines.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: So I just want to move on—

4.35 p.m.

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: These guidelines that the grocers have is what we hope that they would actually stand by what is expected of them.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Thank you. Madam Chair, if I can just move on to the Ministry of Health's submission. This submission here on page 2 speaks to the 2017 WHO's Global School-Based Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago. Now, I know we are talking about hunger and so on, but if we look at that survey of the students who were overweight and obese, which also qualifies as a form of malnutrition, and if you were to add those two figures here—I am hoping this is not a typo error. So we are looking at 33.5 as overweight and 17.6 as obese. That gives us a figure of 51.1 per cent of the students surveyed as falling in a category of overweight and obese, unhealthy. So that is quite startling.

So, Deputy PS, if I could ask you just a few questions related to these startling figures. Of course, the strategy, I would imagine, would be to ensure proper nutrition in schools as well as to encourage loss of calories by exercise and so on. So can you give us some indication as to, overall, what the approach of the Ministry has been, and will be going forward, to address this very alarming situation in our school children?

Mr. Reid: Thank you very much. And through the Chair, the Ministry has worked with the Ministry of Education in providing the nutritional requirements for the menus that would be served in the school feeding programme. The Ministry has been encouraging the students to get away from sugary drinks that would lead to obesity.

The Ministry has also been involved in providing exercise equipment to schools, so that—we all know that good health entails a proper diet and also activity, exercise. So we are encouraging that by providing these exercise equipment in the schools.

Dr. Bodoë: So with regard to the School Nutrition Programme, is there a process or is there someone who monitors that the dietary requirements are met for these meals? How do you monitor that the meals that are provided by the suppliers are actually meet the requirements? Is there some sort of check and balance on that?

Mr. Reid: I cannot remember the exact name of the company, but I think it is the school nutrition company—

Dr. Bodoë: Feeding programme.

Mr. Reid: For whatever—so they are the ones who would monitor and ensure that the meals that are provided meet the requirements.

Dr. Bodoë: I know from an administrative point, this possibly may come under the Ministry of Education, that is perhaps what you are going to tell me. But again, from the input of the Ministry of Health, is there any sort of link-up between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education with regard to overseeing that this programme, the meals that are provided, are in fact nutritious and appropriate for these children?

Mr. Reid: I cannot say with any certainty that the Ministry does that, so I would have to get back to you.

Dr. Bodoë: Is that something, Deputy PS, you think the Ministry of Health should be doing?

Mr. Reid: Certainly.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. So I will just move on in terms of the—

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Oh, Madam Chair—

Dr. Bodoë: I am sorry.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: —just to answer, yes, there is a relationship. I just felt the need to say that.

Members: [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Unfortunately, I am not a witness.

Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Morris-Julian: I just felt the need, yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, member. So, Deputy PS, if I can ask just about the physical activities. I am very happy that the equipment is being provided. Can I ask whether this is being provided at all levels, the ECCE, primary and secondary schools?

Mr. Reid: I do not have that information with me.

Dr. Bodoë: Is that something you can provide to us in writing?

Mr. Reid: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Also, if you can tell us how many schools have received such equipment? I ask this in light of the recent supplementation of the budget to the Ministry of Health last week, and I note that some of these programmes would have come under the health initiative programmes. So if you can provide that for us in writing, through you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Reid: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: And just ask a last question on the TT Moves initiative, can you give us an update on that programme and how it is administered?

Mr. Reid: The TT Moves programme encourages persons to move, to walk more, drink more water and to eliminate unhealthy food stuff, in favour of fruits and vegetables. It is a campaign that is run via social media, our social media pages, newspapers ads and so on. It is geared towards behaviour change in persons. But as we all know, behaviour change is something that is not easy to come by. So with all the outreaches that we may have, with all the promotions that we may have, it is to move persons from a position of not knowing, to knowing, to actually doing something about it. And we continue to roll out this TT Moves programme, and we will be escalating it in the near future.

Dr. Bodoë: It is a very commendable programme, but it also sounds like something that is difficult to measure. Is there any plan, anything in place to evaluate the effectiveness of such a programme? Is that part of the—

Mr. Reid: The monitoring and evaluation would be part of the programme, so that would be done.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I now call on member Hislop.

Mr. Hislop: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do not want to seem as if I am picking on the Ministry

of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but just a couple of questions. As it relates to—I heard the Technical Advisor treat with the pesticides issue. Is there a push, or are there any plans in place by the Ministry to focus on organic farming? I visited a country recently and saw acres—the acres are maybe as big as Tobago—of blueberries, and the farm was completely organic, no pesticides, no chemical fertilizers, fully organic. And the produce, the reaping, the harvesting was significant. So is there any desire from the Ministry to push towards—well, a significant push towards organic farming?

Mr. Grimes: It is quite an interesting question, member. Organic agriculture and organic farming internationally requires a lot of certification, certifying bodies, et cetera. A lot of persons promote their products as being organic based on their promotion of it being organic. You need a lot of monitoring and evaluation, and some independent auditing body that is internationally recognized to really certify your produce as being organic.

I am saying all this to say that we do encourage farmers, in terms of the use of pesticides and the use of what they utilize on their farms, to be as sustainable as possible, to be environmentally friendly, and also to be safe for human health. To encourage farmers into organic agriculture, then we need to provide them with the support, in terms of certification, in terms of training, et cetera. But if persons are desirous of entering into organic agriculture, we can provide that sort of guidance and advice to them based on our technical capabilities within the Ministry. So that is basically the answer to your question.

Mr. Hislop: So there is not a significant push?

Mr. Grimes: No.

Mr. Hislop: Okay. You highlighted five areas—I am concerned that there is not a significant push towards that, eh. Because that also aids in nutritional value and also health. So I think it is something that the Ministry can consider, to create a programme, whether it is as a pilot project—to create a programme to show the benefits, as tedious as it may be and as all the certification that you may require, I think it is something that the Ministry can spend some time with, to look at ways to encourage farmers. Not just wait for someone to say, “We want to do organic farming,” but to encourage farmers to get into organic farming.

But you highlighted five areas in your submission. There are challenges that the Ministry has faced, that the farmers are facing:

Praedial larceny and aging farming population, unfavourable weather conditions, geopolitical instability, increased prevalence of pests and disease, and the negative impact of COVID-19.

What measures has the Ministry implemented to address each of these following challenges?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Member, in terms of the COVID-19 and disruptions in the food supply chain, well, of course, that affected the entire country and not only the Ministry. But in terms of the pests and diseases, some of you all would be aware of the issues with the locusts and the Giant African Snail. So that is being addressed, and a lot of research has been done by our research

department in terms of what are the measures that would be undertaken in terms of helping to eliminate or at least mitigate these problems. In those areas we are asking assistance from the Ministry of Health, in terms of the pesticide use and what is safe in terms of for humans.

In terms of the GAS project, which is the Giant African Snail, we are into phase two. What happens, usually when the rain begins, maybe in June/July, these snails they emerge from hibernation as it is. So we are targeting, in terms of looking at from July to December. The programme right now, we are developing the programme. So that should be implemented soon in terms of communication to the citizens.

Of course, the geopolitical stability would affect the supply chain of agriculture inputs. And we all know about the Ukraine and Russian war, and how it affects our wheat, which is one of our main commodities that we use. We are trying to change persons' perception in terms of what they use. We use a lot wheat, but we are looking at value added products in terms of how we use our cassava, et cetera—like cassava flour, et cetera.

In terms of the climate change, well, that would have affected our farmers a lot last year in terms of the flooding. So we are trying to help them, not only in the grants, but in terms of mitigating the adverse effects of the flooding, in terms of irrigation and floodgates, I believe—Mr. Grimes, do you want to help me?

Mr. Grimes: Yes, member. One of the things that we have recognized with respect to the recent frequency of certain weather events, extreme weather events, rainfall in particular, traditional methods of preparing their land—farmers, because of the fact that in the dry season the issue is a lack of water for irrigation, therefore they would dam their drains and prepare their areas to kind of catch water for the dry season. Many farmers in the rainy season now need to do the reverse. They need to ensure that their drains are properly cleaned.

But also in addition to their land preparation, do they plant on raised beds now, as opposed to planting flat, traditionally; how is their land preparation, et cetera; how do they design their farms based on the experiences and their topography, et cetera. So these are things that we are working with farmers, to help them in terms of awareness. We partnered with the FAO, and the FAO provided a number of awareness and sensitization programmes with farmers in different counties, with respect to building resilience to climate change and the effects of climate change.

Extreme flooding and drainage and those issues was a key factor. And again, the incidence of pests and disease, they normally increase with increased rainfall. So how they do their cultural practices, weed control, timing of planting; whether you plant disease-resistant varieties, as opposed to varieties that would be more susceptible to pest and disease; how do we approach our pests and diseases. These are all part and parcel of us and the programmes that we have in training farmers, and making them more aware and sensitizing them.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Thank you, Mr. Grimes. In terms of praedial larceny, that has been highlighted a lot in the media recently, our present squad is seriously depleted in terms of human resource. Currently, we are in a recruitment drive. We aim to be completed at least by August into September, where we would have a full squad complement of just over 100 persons, from

inspectors, corporals, constables. We are hoping, positively, that that would, of course, impact and help mitigate all these issues and reduce the issues of praedial larceny.

Of course, the ageing farmer population, a lot of our registered farmers are probably beyond the age of 60, or even older, so we are trying to encourage the youth into agriculture. In doing that, there is the youth incentive programme where we collaborate with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service to be able to encourage the youths, and there have been a lot of positives in that programme. Thank you, member.

Mr. Hislop: Madam Chair, my final question is, could you say, Deputy PS, that agriculture is ready and able to assist in us achieving our goal by 2030?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: As with any Ministry, member, we have our challenges. All my colleagues, you all would have identified with the challenges of human resource in terms of our staffing and, of course, in terms of funding, because currently we have some PSIP projects, and sometimes in terms of releases we do not get sufficient funds to complete our projects.

But I must say the staff at the Ministry, despite all the challenges, we have some really hard-working—we have some people with a lot of passion for agriculture and what they do. So in terms of us reaching our goal, we may not reach it by 2030, but at least we will be on target maybe for a bit further than 2030 and, of course, with the collaboration with other Ministries, that will assist us.

Mr. Hislop: I see. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: So, PS, is there an option to not meet the target by 2030? I was going to ask what steps you are going to take to realign yourself to get there by 2030.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Realistically speaking, Madam Chair, I am not sure we could commit to 2030, especially with all these unpreventable issues with climate change, et cetera. Of course that will be a factor in us meeting our deadline for 2030.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Member Deonarine.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, Chair. I have a follow-up question to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. First, let me ask the Ministry of Trade and Industry, what is the Ministry of Trade and Industry's target to reduce the food import bill? So I know very much the ambitious report by the Roadmap to Recovery Committee's report, which in Pillar 2 focused on, "Making Food Security a Reality in Trinidad and Tobago", and there are several initiatives under there. In the Ministry of Trade and Industry's submission, you all also submitted several initiatives that you all are engaging in, and also I am sure you all are collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to help them increase the number—the amount of food being produced.

So my question first is, what is the target to reduce the food import bill? I think it is above \$4 billion right now. And also, the second thing is, who exactly is measuring the quantity of food being produced, and how much more we need to produce to reach to a point where we could say we are at least close to be self-sufficient? I first want to hear from the

Ministry of Trade and Industry, because I know in the Ministry of Trade and Industry's submission you all emphasized the drive, the policy towards import substitution. So I would like to hear some insights on that, please.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Thank you, member. Through you, Chair, with respect to decreasing the food import bill, there is the recently launched CARICOM initiative, which speaks to decreasing the regional food import Bill of the CARICOM member states by 25 per cent by the year 2025. So having said that, the Ministry of Trade and Industry would have partnered significantly last year with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries with respect to the Agri-Investment Forum that was hosted in August 2022.

Now, this initiative is engaging the attention of member states in various areas through the COTED, the Council for Trade and Economic Development, and there are several sectoral working groups that are looking at reviewing the Common External Tariff, as well as regional studies on identified agricultural products. These would more or less be the remit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Trinidad and Tobago also partners with its CARICOM partners at special meetings of the COTED on Agriculture and several other initiatives in support of the agriculture sector. And the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, again, leads the discussions.

Now, with respect to some of the specific initiatives that you referenced, I think my colleague would have mentioned the International Certification Fund which seeks to provide fish and fish processors, agro-processors with grant funding to allow them to become certified to export. The thrust of this is both for export, to increase our ability to be able to export, to be certified to export, as well as import substitution. So if those producers, agro-producers, can be certified to produce products that we no longer need to import, that is the thrust with import certification. I think as my colleague would have mentioned, approximately 50 per cent of the beneficiaries thus far of that International Certification Fund have been from the agricultural sector, and the food and beverage sector.

There is also—I think they would have mentioned the grant funding with respect to supplies and equipment, and I think the grant funding is up to \$250,000 per recipient, to be able to invest in equipment and tooling, and retooling to be able to do agro-processing. So I think those are two of the main areas for the Ministry of Trade and Industry. But with respect to target, it is 25 per cent by 2025 to reduce the food import bill.

Ms. Deonarine: And that is within the region or in Trinidad and Tobago alone?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: So it is for CARICOM member states, that is the goal, 25 per cent by 2025. So Trinidad and Tobago, that would be our target.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, PS. Through you, Madam Chair, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, in collaborating with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, do you see this target being an achievable target, based on the challenges that you would have alluded to? Because praedial larceny is a serious challenge. Also, what is a serious challenge is that the age of farmers

who are engaged in farming, and also the rate at which farmers are becoming discouraged to produce because of the praedial larceny problem. So based on those three challenges alone, do you see this target of reducing the food import bill by 25 per cent, collaborating with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, do you see it being feasible?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Member, despite all the challenges that we spoke of, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has initiated certain collaborations with, as we have said before, Guyana in terms of the rice industry, which would help us achieve the 25 by 2025. I will let our Technical Advisor share some additional information

Mr. Grimes: Thank you, DPS. So, member, with respect to that overarching CARICOM initiative of reducing imports into the region by 25 per cent, Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, would have identified areas where we are actually looking to target that 25 per cent and achieve that 25 per cent goal by 2025. Therefore, we are aggressively pursuing increased production of certain commodities locally, which will help us achieve that 25 per cent.

In addition to that, we have now looked at certain programmes that we would like to initiate locally, identifying certain key commodities of focus where we would be setting particular targets, annual targets, between now and 2025, to actually increase production; what is required to increase production in terms of infrastructure; the human resource required to support the farmers; marketing opportunities, just along the chain. We have identified those areas and we are working assiduously to achieving that.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you. A follow-up question. So based on what I am understanding is that a lot of incentives and encouragement are going toward providing farmers and agro-processors with the input, so the machinery and equipment that they need to produce. Are you all engaging in any sort of targets to measure that they are producing and the amount by which they are increasing production over a period of time?

Mr. Grimes: Through our agency, NAMDEVCO, the National Agriculture Marketing and Development Corporation, most of the local produce is sold through the NAMDEVCO markets, either the wholesale markets or the retail markets. In addition to that, a lot of farmers actually are registered with NAMDEVCO and they have field officers who—they would go out and monitor farmers' production. NAMDEVCO has a very robust database with respect to production and therefore, we are able to monitor and evaluate in terms of the output from these local farmers.

Ms. Deonarine: So then has food production locally been increasing?

Mr. Grimes: Yes, generally speaking yes, especially over the last two to three years during the pandemic, I think there has been a focus on increasing local production to meet demands. We participated in supporting the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services with those hampers and food baskets, et cetera. So that has actually catalysed a lot of agricultural production. Despite the issues with flooding, et cetera, I think there has been a number of areas

where farmers have actually increased production.

Ms. Deonarine: Through you, Chair, despite food production having increased over the last couple of years, so let us say three years, we still see an increase in the food import bill, generally because of global increases in food prices. So, I mean, how are we managing a situation like that? I do not know if the Ministry of Trade and Industry would want to say something.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Through you, Chair, we can agree that there would have been increases in food prices over the past two to three years, and this would have been largely due to some of the issues that my colleague from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would have mentioned, which would have been adverse weather conditions in major producing countries, COVID-19 restrictions, as well as shipping logistics disruptions, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as some of the protectionist strategies being employed by many countries as they responded to Russia/Ukraine war. But what we have noticed—so as a result, as we are a net food importer, prices would have reflected—there would have been increases in prices due to those market conditions.

What the Ministry of Trade and Industry would have attempted to do, besides the monitoring that we always do to be able to have an idea in terms of the trending of food prices, would have been to do the things that would have been within the remit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. One of them was to propose the zero-rating of a number of items with respect to value added tax.

So there was a list of basic items that would have been subjected to zero per cent VAT, and the Ministry would have proposed in late 2021 to increase that list to include a number of other items that would have been zero-rated with respect to VAT. Some of these items that would have been suggested would have been some of your oils, some of the healthier oils, the olive oil, canola oil. Some of the other basic things that families would use, such as oats, orange juice, apple juice, and some of these—this list would have been some of the items.

Additionally, because the Ministry of Trade and Industry participated in Council of Trade and Economic Development, a subset of CARICOM, we would have recommended the reduction of the Common External Tariff on a number of basic food items, and this is something that we do every year. We review it. We consult with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and we seek to get those items, if not 5 per cent, at least zero-rated in terms of when they are imported there is no CET, or as we call it, Common External Tariffs, on those items.

In 2022, we would have gone back and had the CET assessed on 19 essential food items to remove that, as we also as well—I mean, it is not really food-related, but in terms we also look at a number of pharmaceutical items as well, to reduce the cost to consumers. Approximately 3,000 pharmaceutical items every year, the Ministry would seek to have the CET reduced on those. So I think those are some of the basis positions that we do.

Ms. Deonarine: Chair, just one more question to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Are you able to say that with these initiatives, were you able to at least achieve a declining trend in the

volume of food imports, as opposed to the value? So because of the global pandemic and the Russian/Ukraine war and the surge in food inflation around the world, generally the price of food would have increased, and our food import bill would have increased as well. My question is even though—just to take into consideration the inflationary impact, remove that inflationary impact, did the volume of goods, food imported into the country decrease?

5:05 p.m.

I am just trying to understand if we are at least achieving partially some of our objectives, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is increasing food production, that the Ministry of Trade and Industry is achieving a decline in food imports.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Chair, through you, I can say generally in some areas there would have been, but to be specific we would have to provide that information.

Ms. Deonarine: I will appreciate that information in writing, through you, Chair. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I just want to ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, you had indicated that you do not collect data on the average income of fisherfolk, of women in farming, and some other groups, and I am wondering why—family farmers.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Chair, when I asked that question to my colleagues, the field officers, I think what they said, the farmers really do not like to disclose that sort of information. I am not sure if they think that we are using it, you know, against them but the information is very difficult to gather in terms of the income.

Madam Chairman: Okay. But is there not any other way? Because what I am looking at—and I am asking that question in the context of sustainable agriculture and the five principles, and one of the principles being:

“To improve livelihoods and foster inclusive economic growth”.

So I would figure that income is one of the measures of that. So, how then do we look at the principles of sustainable agriculture if we do not have, or we are not collecting data?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: I agree, it is important. But maybe one suggestion that maybe we could look at, to consider, is that, in terms of offering an incentive grant. So you would have to disclose your income, so based on your income and means test then you will be allowed to access the grants. So maybe that is some way of collecting that data.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And I also wanted to find out from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, in terms of two things: one, in talking about your resilient agricultural practices, and you indicated to us about 80 per cent of your registered farmers practice, you know, the resilient agricultural methods. I want to find out in terms of, what, if any, initiatives or methods you are utilizing, or in the process of designing, to see how you improve on that 80 per cent figure?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Through you, Chair, could I ask our Technical Advisor to share some information?

Mr. Grimes: One of the things, with respect to persons utilizing and adopting technology that

is recommended, would be in terms of showing them the example of those who are utilizing those technologies. And there is a methodology called farmer field schools, where farmers are encouraged to actually visit other farmers' fields, organize and coordinate it, and therefore they can talk to other farmers and see the results of them utilizing that particular technology.

So our Extension Training and Information Services Division, they are actually involved in that sort of activity, working with farmers and working within the different counties, to encourage them with respect to the uptake. As it is with most technologies, you have the early adopters, people who will jump on it early, then those who will wait and see. And then there are others who may have certain challenges in adopting it, and it is for us to be able to identify what is the specific challenge that they may have, and then try to see how we could work with them to be able to overcome whatever their particular challenge may be in adopting the technology.

Madam Chairman: But in terms of—thanks, Mr. Grimes. In terms of targeting, okay, you reach 80 per cent, do you then have some sort of plan to say, “Okay, by 2025, I should reach 82 per cent,” and going about it in that sort of systematic way, is that done, or under consideration at all?

Mr. Grimes: Yes. Because I think annually we review our activities and review the impact of the activities. And while it may not be articulated directly, I think inadvertently the objective really is to get 100 per cent of the farmers actually utilizing new technologies, climate-resilient technologies, because it is affecting all farmers. And therefore, we probably would prefer farmers adopt the resilient technologies, as opposed to being impacted negatively by these extreme weather events, and you have to pay reliefs and stuff like that so.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you. And then what we are being told here is that:

65 per cent of lands designated for agricultural use are currently under production.

Meaning in production?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes? Okay, fine. So what happens with the 35 per cent? Is that lost to building construction? Is it that it is just lands that are lying fallow? What is the position with respect to that?

Mr. Grimes: Chair, a number of reasons, for example, there are lands that may have now been encroached by commercial activities, agricultural lands that were designated for agriculture being utilized for other activities, whether it be housing and stuff like that. There are lands that may have been denuded based on practices of farmers and therefore, there are industries that may have been in decline over a number of years, so—the rice example is a classic example. Rice is large-scale mechanized activity and therefore, one farmer may have 300 acres, 400 acres under rice production.

Over the years, there have been a decline since around 2015/'16, but there is a revitalization thrust towards rice. So therefore, we will see, by say in 2025, about 5,000 acres involved in rice production again. Currently, it is about 800 acres. So there is a programme to

actually bring these lands that are idle, are lying idle, back into production. So for different reasons lands may not or may be underutilized, or not fully utilized, or unutilized totally. So the example of rice was an example of large acreages not being utilized, that we intend to target to bring those lands back in production.

Madam Chairman: And would it be rice or other—

Mr. Grimes: Other commodities.

Madam Chairman:—other diversified crops?

Mr. Grimes: Yes, other commodities also, you know, so.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. And could you tell us a little more, I do not know if it is you or the PS or your other colleague, about this—the rebates for the gap and the IPM, environmental practices?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Chair, I—

Madam Chairman: I am talking about specifically renewable energy.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Yeah, but that response, I believe it is related to the Board of Inland Revenue, the incentive that they give, in terms of investing in solar energy.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that is annually?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: That is not the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Madam Chairman: It is not really the Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: No, no.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. So, all right—

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Maybe we should have been clearer in our response.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right, thanks. Okay, I will allow member Hislop to come in while I find the other question I wanted to ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Fisheries. Member Hislop.

Mr. Hislop: I want to treat very quickly with Fisheries. A good meal should involve a nice piece of fish, right? Yeah. What is the situation with our fish stock? How do we treat with that? Do we have annual surveys? Do we have a situation with overfishing? Do we also have a challenge with the size of catch? Should there be a regulation of the size of catch that you bring to the boat? Because sometimes these guys catch everything once it bites the hook, right?

How do we treat with that, so that we have a sustainable fishing industry? Because if you “catch out” all the fish now, down the road, with all the industrialization and all that is happening in the sea, then we are going to have a challenge. So, do we have a way, a mechanism, to keep track of our fish stock? Are we looking at fish seasons? Is there a penalty if a fisherman brings in a fish that is not of a required size? How are we looking to treat with those things?

Mrs. Lucky: Okay. So well, yes, to some extent, I will answer your question. You know, we are a country that is based on oil and gas. And, you know, historically we have not recognized, to a larger extent, the importance of fishing and, of course, sustainability and food security. Sustainability of resources, fish resources, equates to food security because sustainability,

inherent in its definition, means fish for future generations. And therefore, you are required to put in place the systems to ensure that fish is maintained for future generations, for your kids and my grandkids, and that is also inherent in the need for food security.

We do collect some data, we have data collectors at landing sites that collect data from the fishers, and we do produce annual production figures for Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, our current legislation is 1916, it is the oldest in the world, and it severely limits us in terms of administering the type of management measures that we need to put in place to reign in sometimes some unsustainable practices. We are currently before a joint select committee of Parliament and we are moving very quickly along with this Bill, because internationally we are recognizing that we need to play catch up. And in that regard, we are coming with new legislation which we hope will be passed. It is radical legislation, moving from 1916 to current, so it is a mindset change with respect to fishers and how people operate.

But we hope that we will be able to have that basis for enacting some of the management measures that are required in order to ensure that we have food security and sustainability of fisheries resources for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, because the resource belongs to all of us and we have a responsibility to ensure that it is maintained for this generation and for future generations.

Mr. Hislop: Madam Chair, through you, it is just a follow up, we know that the legislation is before a joint select committee, and say you “radical legislation”, have we started any significant education drive with our fishermen? Because we know if we come with radical legislations from 1916 to 2023, “I am accustomed doing things a particular way and I have benefited from that particular way from 1916 to now,” so how is that—how is this new legislation going to help me as a fisherman, and also what incentives are there in place for a young person to see fishing as a viable way of—as a viable career?

Mrs. Lucky: Noted. So, as you said, it will require some change in mindset. This is a change process, a change management process. Fishers, legitimate fishers—and you have to understand that there are activities involved in the fishing industries, that may be legitimate or illegitimate, right? But legitimate fishers will tell you that they spend more money going out to fish, that they have to buy bigger engines, they have to go further out to sea, and therefore without even—and we do have some stock assessments done, a bit dated, but even from a practical perspective, fishermen themselves will tell you the stocks are declining, they have to spend more in terms of inputs in order to catch the same, or less fish.

I think that, you know, impact on their livelihoods, that manifestation of that loss of income. The legitimate fishers are beginning to see the need for controlling, because when we say “radical”, we mean regulating. In the past, we have had an open access fishery, persons are free to fish at anytime, anywhere, you know. We are not accustomed as a people to applying for a permit, to reporting our catches, you know. We may go to the US or we may go to the States and buy a permit and go out and fish, and understand the need to do it in the US, but in Trinidad, there is not that mindset that we need to understand that change in shift, that shift in perception

and that change in culture. And I get your point that it will take some work, we have been trying, and it is a process.

Mr. Hislop: Just finally, Madam Chair—but I think within this period where the legislation is in the JSC, I think this is an ideal time for the Ministry to really ramp up its education drive with the fishermen about what the new legislation is going to bring to the industry. So that by the time it gets into the debate, that we do not have a situation where the fishermen are striking, are protesting, because, “This Bill is going to kill my livelihood.” Now is the time to have a sit down with them, so that by the time it gets into the Parliament and all the acting happens, that the fishermen are not out there as well protesting.

Mrs. Lucky: Yes, I understand your position. If I may, Chair, if I may? Yes, we acknowledge that. We do have an extension and training unit, and we do interact with fishing associations. And we have been trying for a very long time, in the absence of legislation, to create an understanding of the need to, you know, take fish of a certain size, ensure that buried lobsters are not taken, you know.

So I think there is a movement towards that trend. However, we are in a little bit of a catch-22 situation because we are in a legislative process, and the outcome of the Bill—we cannot go into specific details. But certainly the intent of the Bill, we can, and we have been trying to discuss with fishers and get them to buy-in. I am not saying it is an easy process at all by any means.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I still—thank you so much, Mrs. Lucky. I hear your passion about the Fisheries. So I just want to ask this, in terms—and this is to Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. You had said to us that you:

Provide soil testing to farmers with guidance and recommendations for maintaining soil. And it seems that you do a lot of outreach to farmers, training and that kind of thing. And you may not be able to give us the answers now, but if we could get that in writing to see what kind of reach. So within last year, how many farmers would have accessed your services, so that we get an idea of impact. Okay? So that—

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Okay, Chair, we will provide that at a later date.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Right. Thank you. And the other thing I wanted to find out is about the green fund, because you had spoken about the Green Climate Fund and I wanted to get an idea of how much funding was received to improve the monitoring system for climate change impact on the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. You have identified some activities, so how much funding overall, and a breakdown in terms of the spend on each activity.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Chair, could I provide that information at a later date?

Madam Chairman: Yeah, for sure.

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: All right. Okay. All right, so I see I still have member Morris-Julien.

Mrs. Morris-Julien: Madam Chair, I just wanted—I looked at challenges faced by the Ministry

of Health, because while I know that, for example, in schools there is no soft drink allowed, no junk food, but in particular with the maternity clinics, you can still obtain all these very lovely items that I miss so very much. Can you tell us when there is a reluctance from adolescent girls; pregnant, lactating women; and older persons to address their nutritional needs, what is the process? What is the Ministry of Health doing for this in particular? Because I think that we all agree that a proper nutrition should start from the womb.

Mr. Reid: Unfortunately, as was said before, our Chief Nutritionist who was supposed to be here was unable to be here. But I could provide that information—

Mrs. Morris-Julien: Okay.

Mr. Reid: —for you, in terms of what specifically the Ministry does.

Mrs. Morris-Julien: Thank you. And through you, Madam Chair, could we also get in writing the factors that cause malnutrition, and underweight, overweight, or obese, as well as information on all the different clinics that are available, as well as, Madam Chair, through you, the social media outreach, in particular for these groups, the communication aspect? Right? Because I know, Madam Chair, we would have seen the Minister of Health being very active in these various things, but what else is there for the public to know and to follow. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And Member Deonarine.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, Chair, I just have a last bit of questions. To the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, you all spoke the rebates and the soil testing services that you all provide to farmers. Having several farmers in my family, one thing that I have noticed is that it takes a long time to get rebates and also to get back the results of the soil testing. Sometimes it takes two to three months, sometimes even more. Is there anything that is being done to have these rebates refunded at a faster pace, and also to have the turnaround time for the results for the soil testing to be a shorter space of time?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Okay, member, in terms of the rebates, sometimes in terms of the verification process, if the farmer is qualified to receive whatever grant he is applying for, sometimes that takes a process. Because, as I said before, in terms of our staffing, agriculture and the farms, it is a widespread area sometimes that they have to visit. So sometimes that is one of the reasons.

And also, in terms of the processing—and I am speaking only about digitalization, where we did digitalize the process in terms of applying for these grants and also processing the grants. So in terms of verifying every year that you are a farmer and you still produce this amount of produce every year, that information would have already been captured. So even every year you would not have to be asking for the same information, so hopefully that will help in terms of speeding up the processes. But we are trying in terms of meeting the farmers requirements because they need the incentive, we know that, especially when they incur losses.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you. And I ask this question because I remembered that you said earlier that you have a specific youth encouragement farming programme. And from what I understand,

my experience, the youth who get involved in farming, they usually rely on these rebates, right? And sometimes when you are young and you enter into farming, you have to deal with praedial larceny, you have to deal with pests, the locust problem, you have the Giant African Snail, and then you apply—you use your money out of pocket to get these equipment that you need, and then it takes like six months. That in itself serves as a disincentive for the youth to get involved in farming. So my question is, since the launch or the start of this initiative, the youth incentive encouragement program, how many youth have you all been able to get into agriculture, and stay in agriculture?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Member, I do not have that information right now, so I can provide that. Because we would have to liaise with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, because it is collaborative programme.

Ms. Deonarine: And my last set of questions is with respect to Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Now, I know you all alluded to the fact that the value of the Food Support Programme is approximately 250 to \$300 million on an annual basis. My question is, over the past couple of years, the number of persons accessing food support, how has it changed? And like those persons—how many persons—I am trying to get an understanding of how many persons have remained on food support, and how many persons have graduated out of food support?

Ms. Guy-Hernandez: Chair, through you, the Ministry would like to provide that data in writing.

Ms. Deonarine: Sure. Thank you so much. And could you provide it on an annual basis?—annual basis, the number of persons receiving, the number of persons remain and, of course, the number of new persons who are added onto the programme on an annual basis from 2019 to present. Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So thank you very much. I just want to ask a question to the Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs, in terms of this, if you could give us an idea of how much money is allocated annually, specifically for the acquisition of food and specialized medical supplies to the upkeep and maintenance of children in community residences. So if you could give us an idea of how much is allocated for that, and like the spend on that, let us say, for last fiscal.

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair, Mr. Caesar would provide the answer to that.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Caesar: Chair, we would like to get back to you on that. I do not have that data with me at present.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Mr. Caesar my one attempt to get you in the conversation.

Mr. Caesar: That is no problem. I am here, I am still here.

Madam Chairman: But thank you, we will get that in writing. Okay? And I just want to ask some questions to the PS of Ministry of Trade and Industry, and it ties into Agriculture, Land

and Fisheries. And even if it is that we get this in writing, but what we could answer, if we could get the answers for it. So, one, I have seen that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has established certain good agricultural practices, good manufacturing practices, water reuse, and I want to know—I see there are voluntary standards and I want to ask, why are they not mandatory standards? And therefore, what is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries doing to ensure that these standards are adopted and become mainstreamed in agriculture?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Chair, I would allow my colleague, Director of Policy, to respond.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please. We may have to talk about it because it may have the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Fisheries in a vacuum.

Ms. Lackhansingh: Thank you, Chair. In terms of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, as you are aware the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards is an agency of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. And therefore, the TTPS is actively developing standards in the agricultural sector, and other sectors of relevance, to what we are developing. And so all of the standards that we have developed in the initial stages are voluntary standards, once it is not mandated by legislation to become mandatory.

And so based on demand, based on the stakeholders of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, based on our focus on agro-processing, and our focus on food and beverage sector, this is why we have developed standards in good agricultural practices; good manufacturing practices; waste water reuse; cocoa beans; cocoa sampling; cocoa specifications; and we are also in the process of developing standards in hot peppers, pineapples, pumpkins, dasheen leaves, and melongene.

Now, when we develop standards, we have a standards committee that is used to develop these standards, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would be a key stakeholder in the development of these standards. So they are the aware that the standard is being developed, they are involved in the process. And the other stakeholders involved, depending on the topic, are at part of this committee as well. So they are initially voluntary and, of course, as you directed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, it is when we put it into legislation, or we want to make these now mandatory standards, then we can go through that process.

Madam Chairman: Okay. But why I am asking, legislation is one thing, we know it is slow, and that one might be saying something about us but I do not mean it that way. We know it is slow. But, you know, I am wondering why can we not try to get more buy-in, okay, public education? And it happens in everything, gates are falling and killing children. But you all have standards on gates long—but I am not going down that road, all right? But that is just one of the extremes. What is the education process, the public awareness process, which, to me, could be a collaboration between you all and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Ms. Lackhansingh: Of course. And I think the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards has recognized, because of how technical standards are and understanding standards, they have

advanced in terms of an awareness programme. Through a particular project, we are looking at different ways to bring awareness, not only just through the media and print, but through workshops and sessions, and focus groups and target groups, et cetera.

And one of the discussions that we had was a national dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Fisheries. So the Ministry of Trade and Industry; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; and the TTPS, that is one of the dialogues that we have had. And it is through this dialogue that we established what are the areas that need developed standards. So I agree that we need to do more promotion, we need to do more collaboration, but we have started, and we have recognized the need for more awareness and we have started putting programmes in place to push that.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, PS, Bureau of Standards, their budget for publicity and promotions and so, is controlled by you, or they have that as their own line item?

Ms. Lackhansingh: They will have it as their own line item, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So it means that that is totally under your control, Bureau of Standards. I was trying to get a little protection for you but you are on your own with that. Okay? All right so, let me ask—PS, I do not know if this is you. I had seen under the implementation of the National Quality Policy—again, this is Bureau Standards, this is the value change study, where there is a feasibility study for the cocoa industry. And I mean, these submissions were done a lil while ago, right? What is the current status of that feasibility study?

Ms. Lackhansingh: So in terms of the value chain study, it is called a Calidena study, and what it is, it is looking at different aspects of the value chain and introducing service standards or processing standards throughout the value chain. And so in terms of this study, the cocoa industry was identified as one of the priority sectors, and there were a number of stakeholder sessions with the Cocoa Development Company, and a feasibility study is still currently being finalized. So that is where we are. So in terms of that being completed, then we will move on to the other step of actual implementation once feasible.

Madam Chairman: So how close are you to finalization? Because this is about—this submission should be about four months old?

Ms. Lackhansingh: Within this fiscal we would finalize and then—

Madam Chairman: Within this fiscal?

Ms. Lackhansingh:—of course, moving into the next fiscal, we would move the project forward with the appropriate funds.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. And I also want to find out about the study to identify the value chain between the non-energy sectors and the increase in non-energy exports.

Ms. Lackhansingh: So we have two studies, we have a sectoral linkages study and a regional value chain study. These studies came about—during COVID, we recognized, because of the difficulties to access supplies and inputs internationally and the delays that came about, there is a need to build the capacity domestically as well as regionally.

And so domestically, with the sectoral linkages study, it looks at particular sectors between the agricultural sector, and the manufacturing sector, and the retail sector, and being able to make those linkages for our manufacturers and exporters. Now, it also links back to the International Certification Fund, that we are also providing the support to certify particular agro-processors. So from the agriculture sector, you identify your primary products. It comes now into the manufacturing sector where we make that link in terms of which agro-processors you can link to. We help through the different grants and certification funds to certify. And then we link you to the retail sector and then the export sector. So domestically.

And then, of course, we want to look at nearshoring and your regional partners, and how we can establish regional value chains where we can source inputs throughout the region, as they mentioned with Guyana. One of the MOUs that we have is with Guyana in terms of inputs into the agricultural sector, as well as into the agro-processing sector. So the outputs are a creation of the sectoral map to show what the sectoral linkages are, and a list of recommendations in terms of how we move this forward. This is currently being done, and this sectoral linkages project will be finished in the end of August—by the end of August. Once we have the recommendations then we move forward to implement.

In terms of the regional value chain, the consultant is also completing this study and this would be done in July. And once this is done, again, we would look to implement the recommendations.

Madam Chairman: Those sound very exciting. Let me just ask you something that is off the—how is this financed? Is this some grant from an international partner?

Ms. Lackhansingh: Okay. So there are two sets of financing. So in terms of the regional value chain, it is financed by a grant by the technical corporation, through the Inter-American Development Bank. And then the other study, which is the sectoral linkages, is financed through the PSIP.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And this might be a little off guard too, if you could answer, you could answer, how do we ensure transparency and accountability? Because these are off-budget sources of funds, right? Financing, this is off budget, this is not coming from the Consolidated Fund and so on. How do we ensure transparency and accountability in the use of these funds, value for money? Who monitors that?

5.41 p.m.

Ms. Lackhansingh: Okay. So the first one, the sectoral linkages is a PSIP fund.

Madam Chairman: Right.

Ms. Lackhansingh: And so therefore, in terms of PSIP funding, we have the consultant, we did the right procurement process in line with procurement regulations, and we do monitor deliverables. And, of course, it goes to the Permanent Secretary for approval and it is approved in terms of the deliverables meeting our targets, and then we distribute the funds.

In terms of the Inter-American Development Bank, we follow the same process. It does

not differ from the PSIP funds. We follow the same process, in terms of the output and deliverables must adhere to what we want based on our TOR, based on our discussions, our stakeholder sessions. It is then approved internally and then we inform via non-objection to the Inter-American Development Bank that it is okay and we are satisfied with the deliverable before they can make the necessary payment.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And the last thing I wanted to find out is, again, about this Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park. And there is a statement that says:

The park has contributed to the strengthening of the agriculture sector's value chain through increased investment and enhanced linkages.

That is a conclusion. Okay. What can you tell me that I can also share that conclusion? Okay. Because I see that the park is not completely rented out. Okay? So how do I come to that conclusion?

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Thank you for that question, Chair. Now, the focus of this agro-processing park is to be able to support the production of value added exportable products, utilizing inputs from our agricultural sector. And what we would envision is that this park is going to strengthen the agriculture value chain through increased investments, as well as the enhanced linkages, which both my colleagues would have mentioned previously.

If I were to—the facility is going to really encourage increased production, both for export as well as for local consumption, as well as supplying the local market. It is true that the park is not fully occupied right now. There are six lots available, out of the 12 lots that would have been developed. Six lots comprise of factory-built shelves. Shelves of which four—one—five of the shelves have been occupied and there is one available. And out of the land lots, out of the six land lots, four have been utilized and there are approximately, is it?—six lots available. Two lots available, sorry.

And to promote the park, we have InvesTT which is one of the agencies, investment promotion agencies, under the Ministry of Trade and Industry—is aggressively promoting the park. And there are two proposed activities, one is movement of Moruga campaign and another is the Moruga accelerator programme, which is going to be launched in the next few months to promote the benefits of this agro-processing facility and to encourage tenanting of said park.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So the statement that I have read as a conclusion, a fait accompli, is really a statement of intent. So I have misread it.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Good. So you will in time show us the realization of the intent.

Mrs. Alleyne-Ovid: Correct, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. And the last thing I want to ask—I think this is my second to last. But I wanted to find out, and this may be the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, where you are talking about in fiscal 2022, payments in the sum of \$18.7

million were made under your Agriculture Incentive Programme. Okay? And you have said—well, this comes from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, but I guess you are the source of the information. Right? So you have said your various agricultural incentives and you have listed them out there from the vehicles for agriculture, fisheries, machinery and equipment right down to agro-processing. Could we get a breakdown of how this \$18.7 million has been allocated among these various grants?

Mrs. Dwarika-Ali: Chair, this information will be provided to you in writing.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And, member Hislop, I think you wish to engage the—

Mr. Hislop: This is my final question on this. Final, final question. I am going to jump to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. How many persons and households are permanently and temporarily on the Food Support Programme? I do not know if that is question member Deonarine asked.

Ms. Deonarine: Yes.

Mr. Hislop: Okay. Fine. So I think we are good because that information was already given. Right?

Ms. Deonarine: They are going to submit it in writing.

Mr. Hislop: In writing? Good. So—

Madam Chairman: Member Morris-Julian?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So if there are no further questions, I want to, at this stage, bring the public hearing to a close. There are certain questions we still have and the Committee will—the Secretariat will write to you all for all the commitments, the assurances, to remind you all and give you a certain deadline. But I really want to thank the representatives of all the various Ministries, Planning and Development; Health; Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; Social Development and Family Services; Office of the OPM; Ministry of Trade and Industry. I want to thank you all for a very, very enlightening discussion on a very important area. We know the importance of the SDGs and, Madam PS, I assure you, we are going to meet all those 17 goals by 2023. As the PS for Planning and Development says, a lot is happening, we just do not have the empirical evidence that we are meeting the target, and she is confident in the six years. So we will all be whipped into shape. But I thank you all for your cooperation, your participation. I want to thank the members of the listening public and the member of the media who have remained with us. I wish you all a pleasant journey home. Good afternoon—good evening. It is late, evening.

5.47 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*