



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Tenth Parliament

FOURTH REPORT

of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries,
Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises
(Group 1)

on

**THE ADMINISTRATION AND
METHODS OF FUNCTIONING OF
THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS DIETARY
SERVICES LIMITED**

Ordered to be printed with the
Minutes of Proceedings and Notes of Evidence

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THE COMMITTEE

Establishment

In pursuance of the directive encapsulated at section 66 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the House of Representatives and Senate on September 17, 2010 and October 12, 2010, respectively agreed to a motion, which among other things, established a **Joint Select Committee to inquire into and report to Parliament on Ministries with responsibility for the business set out in the Schedule as Group 1, and on the Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises falling under their purview with regard to:**

- **their administration**
- **the manner of exercise of their powers**
- **their methods of functioning; and**
- **any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions.**

The business, as well as the entities which fall under the purview of the Committee is attached as *Appendix I*.

Membership

The current membership of the Committee is comprised as follows:

- Mrs. Corinne Baptiste-Mc Knight - Chairman
- Prof. Harold Ramkissoon - Vice-Chairman
- Mrs. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, MP
- Mr. Emmanuel George
- Mrs. Verna St. Rose Greaves¹
- Dr. Delmon Baker, MP
- Mr. Jairam Seemungal, MP
- Ms. Stacy Roopnarine, MP
- Mr. Danny Maharaj

¹ Mrs. Verna St. Rose-Greaves was appointed to the Committee on September 09, 2011

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- Dr. Amery Browne, MP
- Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, MP
- Mr. Faris Al-Rawi

Secretariat Support

Secretarial support for the Committee was provided by:

Mrs. Nataki Atiba-Dilchan	-	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	-	Assistant Secretary
Mrs. Katharina Gokool-Mark	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Powers

Standing Orders 71B of the Senate and 79B of the House of Representatives delineate the core powers of the Committee which include *inter alia*:

- to send for persons, papers and records;
- to adjourn from place to place;
- to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not otherwise readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference; and
- to communicate with any other Committee of Parliament on matters of common interest.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The School Nutrition Programme (SNP), managed by the National Schools Dietary Services Limited, (NSDSL) is the nation's largest food and nutrition assistance programme. In 2009, the NSDSL provided over 27,000,000 meals in 854 pre, primary, secondary and technical/vocational schools in Trinidad at a cost of \$253,737,537.56M TTD.

As a result of their comprehensive and indispensable scope of work in providing meals to the nation's children, your committee decided to launch an investigation into the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme and by extension the management functions of the NSDSL.

Objectives

Your Committee identified the following as the objectives of the inquiry: -

- to understand the organizational structure of the Company;
- to gain an appreciation of the procedure for the selection of all caterers (tendering process);
- to determine the expansiveness of the operations of the Company re: quantum of meals, number of schools, the geographical areas covered etc.;
- to determine what measures are in place to ensure the safety of food for students;
- to ascertain how the nutritional content of meals is determined;
- to ascertain what steps are taken to ensure that proper standards are adhered to and maintained by independent caterers;
- to determine what effect the increase in food prices has had on the operations of the Company;
- to determine what consideration is given to providing meals suitable for all students with respect to factors such as allergies and religious beliefs;
- to ascertain what measures are in place to curb wastage of meals; and

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- to determine what measures are in place for the monitoring and evaluation of the operations of NSDSL.

Conduct of the Inquiry

A public hearing was conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Education and the National Schools Dietary Services Limited on Friday November 18, 2011.

As part of the preparatory work for this meeting, the inquiry objectives of your Committee were communicated to the Ministry to solicit initial written responses.

These responses were used as the basis for supplementary questioning pursued at the hearing.

The representatives from the Ministry of Education and the National Schools Dietary Services Limited comprised:

Ms. Kathleen Thomas	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education
Ms. Anjanie Benjamin	Chairperson
Mrs. Ingrid Herrera	Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Vanessa Martina	Manager, Nutrition Services
Ms. Stacey Barran	Programme Manager
Mr. Mick Ollivierre	Manager, Corporate Services
Mr. Marlon Francis	Research Officer
Mr. Nicholas Cumberbatch	Board Member (NSDSL)
Mr. Gobin Kantarsingh	Board Member
Mr. Garvin Diaz	Board Member
Ms. Rita Mooloo	Board Member
Mr. Michael Cachie	Board Member

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Mr. Anthony Price (Tobago Representative) Board Member

This single meeting with the officials from the Ministry and the Company was informative enough to prepare a Report.

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee with regard to this inquiry are attached as ***Appendix II.***

The Notes of Evidence of the hearing held on Friday November 18, 2011 are attached as ***Appendix III.***

THE EVIDENCE

Based on the areas detailed in its inquiry outline, the Committee was provided with the following information:

The Company- National Schools Dietary Services Limited


Vision:
To be the region's lead provider of the highest quality nutritious meals, engaging research and resources in food sciences and technology.

Mission:
To provide services and information that promote health meals choices and lifestyles.

Motto:
Improving the quality of life with nutrition.

About the Logo

*The Logo for the **Nasional Schools Dietary Services Limited** is based on the concept of nutrition and the effect it has within the school, the community and beyond.*



*The **NSDSL** is committed to improving the quality of life of the school child, by providing services and information that promote healthy meal choices and lifestyles. The concept of the logo reflects that commitment.*

The base of the logo is a redesigned food pyramid, which is an internationally recognized guide to healthy eating habits. The pyramid is again used, upside down, as the graphical representation of a child.

*The **NSDSL** introduces the child to healthy meal choices, which that child can carry from pre-school to high school and into adulthood. The three rings around the child on the logo, portrays the rippling effect the Company has on the child and ultimately the community at large.*

The school child and by extension the community rest on the pyramid of good nutrition encouraging better eating habits for a healthy lifestyle.

Background

School feeding has always been an integral part of the landscape of Education in Trinidad and Tobago. The Milk and Biscuit Programme funded by the World Health Organization, (WHO) was administered by the Ministry of Education in the early fifties and sixties. In the

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early seventies, the Government of the day embarked on a study focusing on the development of a large scale School Feeding Programme, fired by the vision of every child in the school system receives a meal at school.

The School Nutrition Company was established in 1980 and was responsible for the preparation and distribution of 54,000 school lunches and 63,000 milk drinks to children in primary schools throughout Trinidad. The company owned and managed 13 kitchens, and supervised the operations of 54 contracted caterers.

The Programme evolved throughout the eighties, beginning with the Restructured School Feeding Programme (1989-1996) and the School Nutrition Programme (SNP), (1996 to present). A government policy was established in the 1980s to feed only underprivileged children. In 1993, the pre-school population was integrated into the Programme, and in 1994, under the aegis of an International Development Bank Loan, Secondary Schools were included in the meal distribution programme. During this period, changes were made to the operation of the Programme.

The the total production and distribution of the meals is provided through contracted caterers located throughout Trinidad. These contractors operate under guidelines set by the Programme's administration, and are monitored by Field Officers to ensure the highest meal quality. The Programme is also responsible for the supply of disposables: sporks, spoons, napkins, boxes, and garbage bags for the schools.

A Breakfast Programme was instituted as a pilot project in 2000 with 1,000 recipients and as of June 1st, 2010 the figure stood at 55,858 meals.

The National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL) was incorporated as a limited liability company by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Cabinet Minute No. 943 of May 16, 2002) to manage the School Nutrition Programme (SNP) on behalf of the Ministry of Education.

The NSDSL was mandated to:

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- Develop a strategic direction for the SNP and to oversee its implementation;
- Develop policy guidelines for the management and operation of the Programme in respect of meals to be served, to ensure that the meals cater for the nutritional needs and dietary differences of students;
- Develop quality control mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of the highest standards and monitoring enforcement; and to
- Plan new initiatives.

The over-arching policy in the establishment of the NSDSL sees the development of the country's human capital through an education system which has as its Motto, "No child left behind".

Currently, the SNP is responsible for the provision of approximately 98,000 lunches and 56,000 breakfast meals in Trinidad, making it the largest single provider of meals in the country, and the largest school meal service within CARICOM. In 2009, CARICOM took a decision to have the SNP accepted as one of the effective models for school meal service in the region, following a presentation on the SNP at one of its meetings.

Organizational Structure

The staff of the NSDSL comprises less than 50 persons. Although the staff complement is small, they are well qualified in the areas of nutrition and quality control.

The cadre of qualified staff includes Quality Assurance Specialists, Nutritionists, Food Service Systems Management Specialists and Culinary Management Specialists.

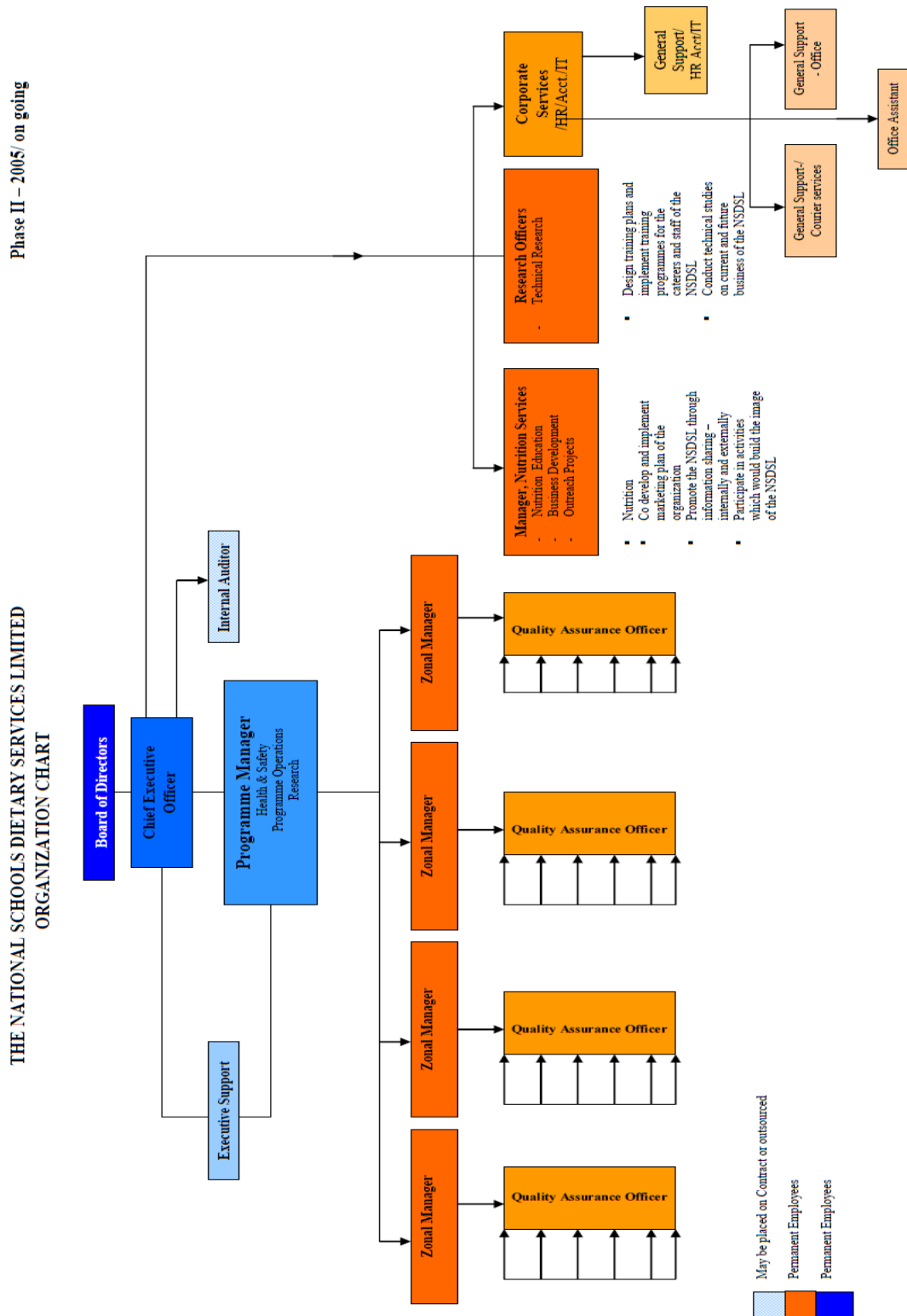
All organizational and staffing needs are approved by the Public Sector Negotiating Committee. The Board proposed to redesign the existing organization in order to achieve its Strategic Objectives. Consent from the Public Sector Negotiating Committee for the terms and condition for the First Phase of the Organisation's structure was approved and it was agreed that a review of the Company's structure would be undertaken after one year.

On completion of the Strategic Plan 2009 to 2012, the Board agreed to review the Company's performance for the previous period and to review the Company's structure in

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line with the Strategic Plan for the next three (3) years. Redesigning the Organisational Chart to match the Company's Strategic Objectives to the Human Resources was considered necessary in achieving these objectives (*see tables below*).

The NSDSL is structured as follows:



The NSDSL proposed a new organisational chart in Phase II – 2009/ ongoing as follows:

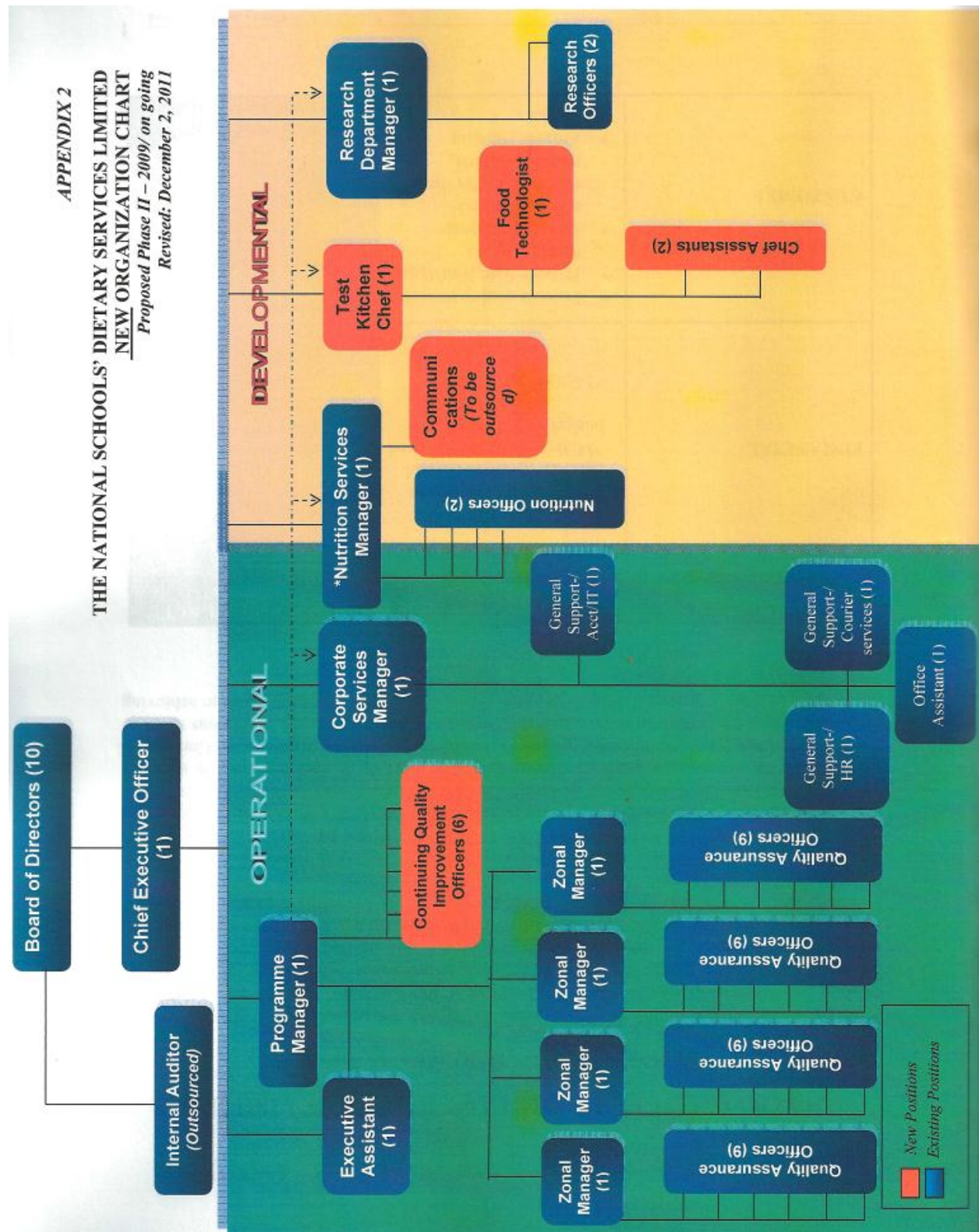


Table : Framework of Organisational Chart

KEY PERSPECTIVES	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	HUMAN RESOURCE NEEDED
<p>FINIANCIAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fulfill mandate and statutory requirements as outlined by the MOE and *MOF within the stipulated budgetary allocation *Ministry of Finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Services Manager • General Support – Corporate Services HR & Accts/IT) • General Support – Corporate Services – Courier
<p>CUSTOMER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide quality products ▪ Provide Safe Nutritious Meals ▪ Increase customer satisfaction and appreciation for the meals presented ▪ Provide superior services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programme Manager ▪ Zonal Manager ▪ Quality Assurance Officer ▪ Continuous Quality Improvement Officer

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KEY PERSPECTIVES	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	HUMAN RESOURCE NEEDED
INNOVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop new and improved products and services ▪ Increase research initiatives (independent and collaborative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Test Kitchen Chef ▪ Food Technologist ▪ Chef Assistant ▪ Research Department Manager ▪ Research Officer
OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT (CATERERS)	<p>Optimize caterers operation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality of End products 2. Food Safety 3. Delivery Times 4. Overall management of the business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programme Manager ▪ Zonal Manager ▪ Quality Assurance Officer ▪ Continuous Quality Improvement Officer
OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT (NSDSL)	<p>Improve efficiency of Operations</p> <p>Maximize Human Resource Efficiency in problem solving Efficiency in reporting and communication at all levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Executive Officer ▪ Programme Manager ▪ Corporate Services Manager ▪ Zonal Manager ▪ Test Kitchen Chef

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KEY PERSPECTIVES	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	HUMAN RESOURCE NEEDED
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	<p>Increase nutrition education and health promotion efforts</p> <p>Participate in community based initiatives geared towards enhancing the quality of life</p> <p>Ensure that the organization has a code of ethics and operates honorably</p> <p>Enhance employee well-being, job enrichment and job satisfaction</p> <p>Protect and preserve the environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nutrition Services Manager ▪ Nutrition Officer ▪ Chief Executive Officer ▪ Corporate Services Manager ▪ Programme Manager
HUMAN CAPITAL	<p>Ensure readiness of strategic jobs</p> <p>Provide opportunities for training and development of employees</p> <p>Ensure proper job fit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Executive Officer ▪ Programme Manager ▪ Corporate Services Manager
INFORMATION CAPITAL	<p>Ensure the availability of strategic information to all employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Executive Officer ▪ Programme Manager ▪ Corporate Services Manager
ORGANIZATION CAPITAL	<p>Build a cadre of leaders</p> <p>Best practice sharing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Executive Officer ▪ Programme Manager

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The redesign has the following features:

- activities grouped by common functions throughout the organization;
- human resource, financial management, information technology and administrative services which are to be consolidated and managed by one resource;
- the creation of executive support in the position of Programme Manager allowing the Chief Executive Officer to focus on the strategic direction of the organization; and
- the option of outsourcing where it is not deemed feasible or necessary to engage personnel on a day to day basis.

In order to achieve model SNP status the company has envisaged the development of new functions such as:

- the expansion of Nutrition Services to develop the outreach programme in the schools, and the deepening of the research and teaching capability;
- the creation of the position of Chef/Trainer and Chef Assistant for recipe development and refinement and the enhancement of the training process for staff and Caterers;
- the creation of the positions of Continuing Quality Improvement Officers to report to the Programme Manager; and
- the creation of the position of Food Technologist to work alongside the Chef/ Trainer

The NSDSL implemented a strategy to staffing by identifying key areas or gaps that can improve the operational effectiveness of the Programme which is under active consideration by the Human Resources Committee of the Board. The strategy has not yet been approved by the Public Sector Negotiating Committee but were identified as:

- The creation of a minimum of eight hundred (800) employment opportunities for unemployed women within various communities, in the area of monitoring of distribution of the meals - which is seen as integral to meal service:
 - to eliminate possible wastage;
 - to improve the consumption of fruit and vegetables; and
 - to reach clients and to encourage better eating habits.
- The creation of positions for the Test Kitchen - to standardize quality throughout the Programme.

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- The creation of a Continuing Quality Improvement Team to enhance the present quality assurance functions of the Programme.

Board of Directors

A new Board of Directors was established on January 13, 2011 to ensure the success of the School Nutrition Programme. The Board is comprised of the Audit Committee, the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee and the HR Committee of the Company.

Recent matters considered by the new Board include:

- rebranding of the NSDSL Programme by using the programme as an educational instrument to provide the product;
- contributing to the overall improvement of the nutritional content the child receives in order to promote enhanced learning abilities;
- conducting and implementing evaluations on the Programme - reviewing the monitoring systems for all areas of the programme and submitting recommendations to the company;
- strengthening the relationship amongst the stakeholders such as schools, caterers, suppliers, the company (NSDSL), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture in order to foster better communication and faster feedback;
- implementing a more effective and efficient policy for the distribution and delivery of meals through the Whole School Approach; and
- providing an avenue to sustain and stimulate the agricultural sector by utilizing locally produced fruits and vegetables in meal plans.

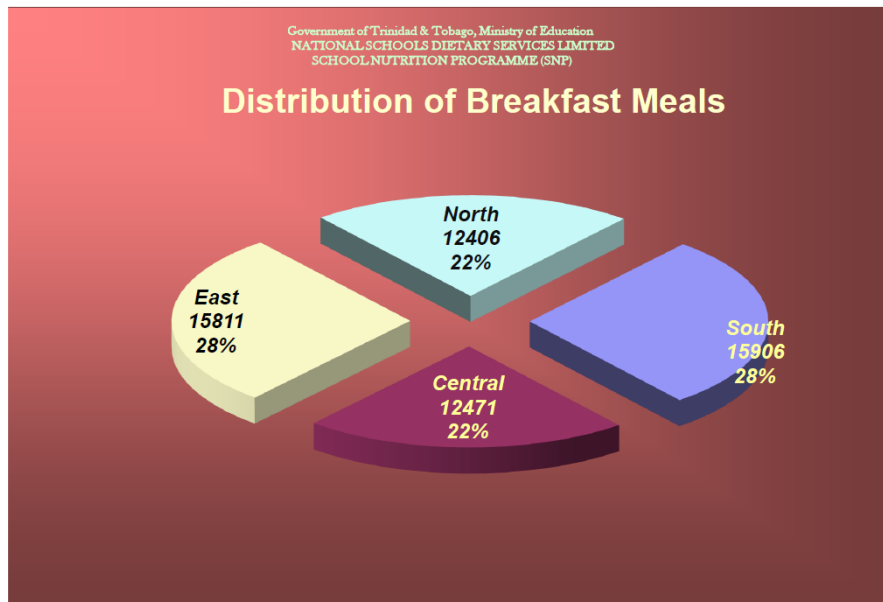
The School Nutrition Programme

The management of the School Nutrition Programme is a significant part of the operations of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited. Through the programme, breakfast and lunch meals are provided to students in order to improve their nutritional status. Breakfast meals are designed to meet one quarter of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) while lunches are designed to meet one third of the RDA per diem.

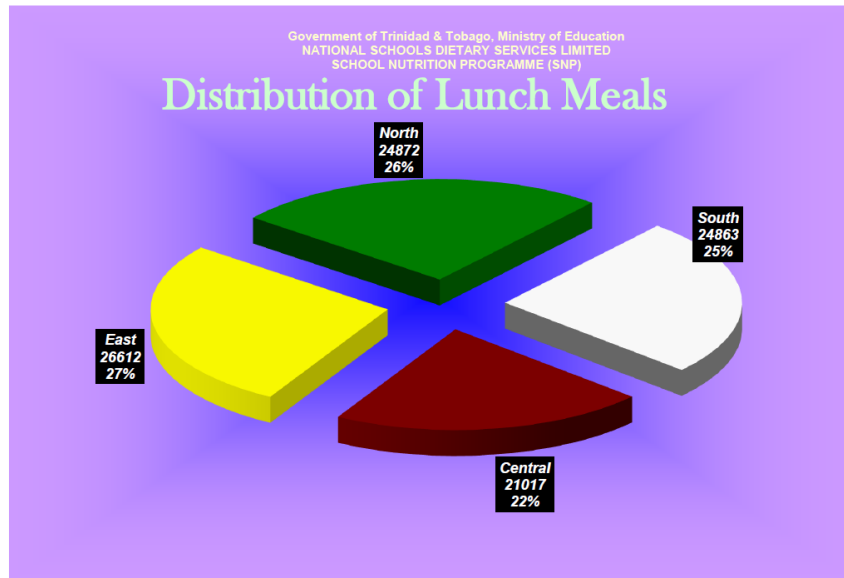
The Ministry of Education determines the recipients of the meals and the number of days students are fed. Recipients of meals range from Early Childhood Education Centers to Secondary Schools. For Preschools and Primary Schools with student populations below 100, meals are provided for all students. However, only a percentage of students at larger primary schools and secondary schools are supplied with meals. Meals are provided approximately 181 days per year.

The NSDSL operates with a structured menu planning and adheres to strict food and safety guidelines. The Company has designed a 20 day or a 4 week cycle menu which is rotated throughout the term and menus are revised every term. All caterers are provided with standardized recipes to produce meals at the best quality and local products and foods are utilized when available.

The distribution of breakfast and lunch meals in March 2011 is portrayed by region below:-



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Period Ending March 2011

As at October 31, 2011, approximately 59,000 breakfast meals, 7000 preschool lunches and 90,366 regular lunches were supplied to students in 196 preschools, 475 primary schools, 144 secondary schools and 58 vocational and technical schools. A total of 156,000 meals are produced per day.

The costs of meals were identified as follows:-

- ✓ Preschool lunch \$7.50
- ✓ Regular Lunch \$8.15
- ✓ Breakfast \$6.00

Ethnic and religious requirements are also taken into consideration. The NSDSL facilities by design ensure a clear separation in the preparation of vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals. There has not been a need for a strictly vegetarian kitchen because that function is separated in the kitchen and care is taken with regard to storage. There has never been any reported breach with respect to preparation of meals.

Sample Menus

<p style="text-align: center;">B1 <i>Creamy Cheese spread Sandwich</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fruit</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B2 <i>Cornmeal/ Oatmeal Porridge</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fruit Or Cereal & Milk</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B3 <i>Hot Tuna Salad Sandwich</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fruit</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B4 <i>Asian Wrap (Curried Channa with Cucumber Chow)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Juice Drink</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">L1 <i>Chicken/Lamb/ Turkey Stew</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Steamed Rice</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Callaloo</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">L2 <i>Oven Fried Fish On Hamburger Bun With Hot Slaw</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Juice Drink</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">L3 <i>Roasted Chicken with BBQ Sauce</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pink Beans with Pumpkin</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Vegetable Rice</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hot Cassava Salad</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">L4 <i>Curried Channa With Potato</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Paratha Roti</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pumpkin/Bodi</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mango Amchar</i></p>

The Company has been forced to adapt its menus to meet the challenges brought on by the steady increase in food prices. In earlier years a fruit or fruit drink accompanied each lunch. Today this service has been stopped and juice is only served with a sandwich type lunch. A fruit or fruit drink is always served with breakfast. With the recent re-introduction of liquid UHT milk in the breakfast menus, the opportunities for calcium intake are improved.

Financing of NSDSL

The NSDSL is funded through the Ministry of Education. Budgets are presented on an annual basis. There are monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place, the NSDSL accounts to the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and other stakeholders.

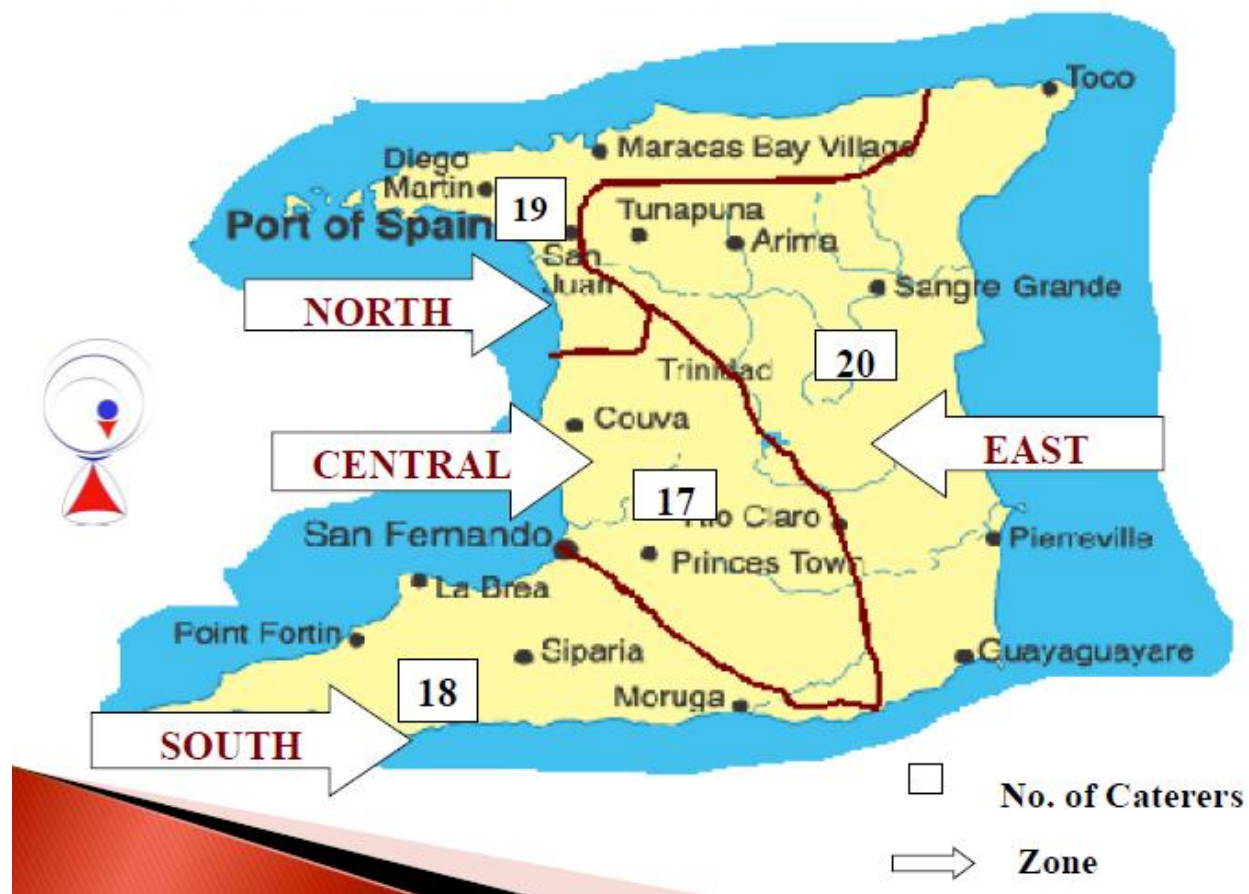
Caterers/ Food Producers

The NSDSL has been mandated to utilize local produce in the menus served to its clients. To this end, the Company has sought to develop linkages along the supply chain and has collaborated with NAMDEVCO and TTABA in providing outlets for processed foods produced by these organizations.

NSDSL together with NAMDEVCO are in the process of establishing packing houses to engage in food processing for the programme. The NSDSL has been successful in offering frozen cassava produced by the TTABA in the form of a hot salad which was well received by students while NAMDEVCO is in the process of developing convenient frozen packaged spinach, bodi and dasheen leaves for use in menus. These products promise real savings both in labour and cost.

The services of 74 locally contracted caterers are used to provide the meals to students across the country. Some supplies are outsourced such as paratha, roti, fish and bread.

Zonal Boundaries of the SNP in Trinidad



Caterers work with very slim margins and encounter problems with sourcing produce particularly in times of flood and famine. As a result, food substitution pilot projects were conducted with breadfruit and channa to replace imported Irish potato and these were very successful.

The Board of the NSDSL is responsible for the awarding of contracts which is mandated by law to be opened to the public. The award of a contract is a four-step process which entails:

1. Pre-qualification through an assessment of an application form submitted by the Tenderer;
2. An interview conducted by the Tenders Committee;
3. Inspection of premises with a team comprising of Public Health Inspectors and NSDSL Field Officers; and
4. A final evaluation and recommendation by the Tenders Committee.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The company engages in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and depends heavily on School Principals through the Ministry of Education to provide feedback on the programme at the schools.

Quality Assurance

Some of the quality assurance provisions that obtain with the NSDSL are as follows:

- All contractors are equipped with a copy of the manual detailing food safety standards . This manual forms part of their contract with NSDSL.
- Quality assurance officers or field officers monitor kitchens and schools on a daily basis to ensure that standards are maintained. Each officer is assigned three kitchens. Structured forms are used to determine whether guidelines regarding the kitchens are followed.
- The NSDSL Field Staff seeks to curb wastage whenever it is identified through investigation, observance of meal-time consumption and discussions with the Principals.
- Quality Assurance Officers report to the Zonal Managers who meet each week to review the activities at kitchens and schools.
- Zonal managers also do spot checks and report to the Programme Manager on a weekly basis.
- In some jurisdictions meetings are held with the Public Health Department annually.
- The Company also engages in random sampling of meals, officers are equipped with swab test machinery.
- The Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standard for food safety is applied. It is an international standard which looks at all the areas of potential risks and develops procedures to mitigate or eliminate those risks.

Relationship between the NSDSL and Other Bodies

The Company interacts closely with its line Ministry, the Ministry of Education but also engages with other bodies such as the Ministry of Health which drives the daily activities related to surveillance, prevention and testing. The Company also engages with the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs through NAMDEVCO and TTABA to source supplies.

Regionally, the company interacts with Caribbean countries such as Jamaica and Antigua by way of offering assistance on the School Nutrition Programme to successfully manage the programme in their respective countries.

School Nutrition Programme in Antigua

In 2006, the NSDSL assisted the Antiguan Government in establishing their school nutrition programme. The Programme was used as the model for a research project to establish a SNP in that country. By using the findings of the research project the Antiguan Government was guided as to how best all local produce could be utilized in their menu design. A Central Kitchen with the capacity to produce 5,000 meals was established to provide the service to Primary Schools in that country. Also, a Field Cohort was employed to monitor acceptance and quality. Serveries were constructed at all the schools receiving meals.

Research Initiatives

The research department at the NSDSL has created systems for monitoring supplies of disposables used in the service, linkages for support data for the programme and has designed training brochures for workshops conducted for caterers and staff. The department collaborated with the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine to enhance the capability of research in the area of nutrition and nutrition related matters.

The NSDSL also conducted in-depth research project, such as:

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- Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI):-

An Evaluation of School Meal Option study was prepared by the Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute in relation to non-communicable diseases and its impact on students. Some of the main findings of this CFNI 2009 Annual Report consisted of the following:

- The School Nutrition Programme (SNP) was identified as the most popular option at the primary level and to a lesser extent at the secondary level.
 - Students, parents and teachers were generally positive about the SNP in terms of the types of food available, taste and general operations.
 - Some secondary school students opted for other school meal options such as canteens, tuck shops, restaurants etc. some students had permission to leave the school compound.
- The effects of a School-Based Invention Programme on Dietary Intakes and Physical Activity among Primary-School Children in Trinidad and Tobago *by Marlon Francis, Selby S.D. Nichols and Nequesha Dalrymple.*
 - A Baseline Study of the School Nutrition Programme, Trinidad: 2009 *by V. Martina, M. Spencer and I. Herrera.*
 - A Profile of the Recipients of the School Meals Service in Trinidad, *by M.A. Spencer, I. Herrera, National Schools Dietary Services Limited, School Nutrition Programme, Trinidad, W.I.*

Study into consumption and nutrient requirement for the Caribbean

According to NSDSL there has not been a Regional study on Food Consumption for the Caribbean. However, in its annual report 2009, the Caribbean Food Nutrition Institute (CFNI) reported on studies done in the region such as Anguilla, Antigua and Montserrat. The data received from the report is being analyzed to generate nutrient standards for these countries.

Food Security Project

The NSDSL has been invited by the University of the West Indies to be one of the collaborators on a regional Food Security Project to be implemented in Trinidad, St Lucia, Guyana and St Kitts over the next three (3) years. An objective of the project is to effect positive behaviour modification in school-aged children and their households with regard to food choices and physical activity levels. The project aims to reduce the prevalence of obesity in the targeted population.

Challenges and Issues

The following challenges/issues in operation were highlighted by the NSDSL:

Financial Challenges

- The approved budgetary allocation for fiscal year 2012 is \$248M TT which is \$80MTT less than the company's proposed budget to the Ministry of Finance.
- Over the past few years, the company has seen huge price increases in a range of food items, e.g. a 44lbs block of cheese four years ago which cost \$250.00 has now increased to \$950.00, similarly, the price of chicken has increased approximately 300 times more than its previous cost. Also, the Company's daily expenditures include 15% VAT which further exaggerates the financial position of the company forcing it to compromise in terms of menu planning.
- Increased prices impact the type of meals offered in the Programme. Consequently, it is expected that the existing structure with regard to meal pricing could become viable for 2011/2012:-
 - ✓ Primary and Secondary School Lunches from \$8.15 to \$9.00 + VAT
 - ✓ Pre-school lunches: remain at \$7.50 + VAT
 - ✓ Breakfast from \$6.00 to \$7.50 + VAT

Policy requirements

The NSDSL identified the policy requirements to strengthen the company's legislative framework:

- A Food and Nutrition Policy – to enhance the efforts of the School Nutrition Programme to encourage the population to make better food choices.
- A School Wellness Policy- to create the environment for the establishment of better eating habits in the school population, and impact on the issue of items for sale at School Cafeterias.
- The revision of Public Health Laws of Trinidad and Tobago – to ensure a safe food supply chain.

Poor Student Nutrition in Schools

Students are confronted with the battle of choosing unhealthy meals from the Schools Canteen as opposed to healthy meals from the School Feeding Programme. A committee chaired by a member of the curriculum division along with teachers was established within the home economics departments in the schools and mandated to determine what items should be allowed for sale at school cafeterias for consumption by students.

A base line study on the programme with a sample size of over 300 students revealed 4% of students were underweight, while an alarming 10% were overweight with 8% being obese. Another study undertaken by the Ministry of Health discovered that out of a sample size of 5,301 students, 25% were overweight or obese.

Accordingly, visits are made to schools to teach students as well as parents about planning healthy meals to correct this problem. As well, the Company through its Nutrition Services Department engages in providing nutrition information particularly to Secondary Schools where the issue of poor meal consumption is prevalent. Activities such as interactive sessions with the NSDSL team and the distribution of brochures during these presentations are some of the tools used to address this issue. Similarly, the Ministry of

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Education through its Curriculum Division has embarked on engaging students in nutrition-related material in a number of subject areas such as Technology Education, Food and Nutrition and Health and Family Life Education (HFLE).

Meal Acceptance

One of the major challenges is the change in the nation's eating habits which impacts negatively on the service particularly in schools where the supervision of meal service is indifferent or minimal. Fast food type menus seem to be the most enjoyed and better consumed by students while traditional meals and vegetarian menus with the exception of soup and roti receive mixed acceptance by students. Moreover, increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables continues to be an uphill struggle. Accordingly, consideration is being given to explore the benefits and costs of having staff in schools to supervise the service wherever necessary and strategies include improving meal presentation and masking vegetables in the meals served by including it with the staple dishes.

Dining Refectory and Dining Etiquette at Schools

There are presently three schools with excellent dining facilities namely the Icacos Government Primary School, St. Mary's and Marabella Secondary School. Teachers are encouraged to sit and dine with students. There are plans to provide dining facilities also at the Biche High School. Apart from those mentioned above, no other school is equipped with an assigned eating area for students to have their meals nor is basic etiquette training taught at any of the schools. It was suggested that single mothers or members of the community could be employed as servers in order to promote an excellent opportunity for employment within the programme.

The Whole School Project

The Company is currently giving consideration to the Whole School Approach which was originally proposed five years ago. It was designed to implement kitchens and dining room facilities on school compounds. A discreet measure by which students could access their

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meals with use of a ATM card at school kitchens was also under consideration as well as the arrangement where all students access the same menu with absolutely no distinction. Although, one school was outfitted with the new kitchen the project remains under consideration by the new Board of Management at the NSDSL.

Contracting of Caterers

Over the last three years the company has not engaged any new contracts for caterers because consideration was being given to the Whole School Project. However, the Board is in the process of deliberating new contracts.

Quality Assurance Regime

The Programme has had a successful period of meal production for the first and second terms of the academic year 2010/2011 since the statistics showed incidents involving food contamination representing .00001% of total meal service and incidents of food poisoning represented 0%. The Company acquired some minor testing equipment to identify potential areas for further testing. However, the issue of consistency in food quality continues to challenge the NSDSL. The difference in capabilities of contracted caterers and the labour pool attracted to employment opportunities in the kitchen further highlights the need for continual assessment and training. This need is exacerbated by the high turnover of staff, experienced in some kitchens. As well, the quality of training available locally for Quality Food Service is poor at best and does not equip staff to handle quality food production in an environment as vulnerable as school meal production. However, there are certified individuals within the NSDSL with the capacity and licensure requirement for internationally recognized safety training.

Storage of Meals to be Distributed

A constraint of the company is serving cold items together with hot food items in lunch boxes because it is packed into an insulated tote for distribution.

Budget Plan of NSDSL 2011/ 2012

The NSDSL adopted the following objectives as part of its Strategic Plan for the period 2009-2012 :

- To define and prioritize the NSDSL services by:
 - establishing an independent website from that of the Ministry of Education;
 - creating an internal network system to streamline communication and to aid in reporting; and
 - developing an electronic library with web page accessibility.

The Management Board intends to achieve its objectives by providing \$150,000.00 for the dedication of Information Technology purposes and \$300,000.00 to employ the services of a Consultant to market the company.

- To achieve model School Nutrition Programme status:

The new structure is aimed at strengthening the following areas:

- Recipe Development and Testing
 - Nutrition Services Department
 - Field Officer Grouping
 - Quality Assurance System
- To engage its sponsors, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education.
 - To build a programme to ensure that every school child has access to safe and nutritious meals daily.
 - To develop an integrated marketing approach to secure stakeholder commitment, disseminate information to facilitate sustainable adoption of healthy lifestyles and communicate the SNP's national impact and benefits.
 - To define the key performance measures and indicators.

The NSDSL Budgeting plan 2011/2012 also includes:

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- An increase in salary costs, reflected in the budget for 2011/2012 under staffing costs at an estimated \$11,115,066.00 inclusive of total administrative cost.
- The NSDSL is exploring areas of revenue generation for instance through:
 - generating activities in areas of product development which could benefit the SNP and the wider population.
 - NSDSL becoming the central provider of Catering Services for the government of Trinidad and Tobago and also the champion marketing of Gourmet Local Foods given the new Test Kitchen and the array of Caterers contracted under the Programme.
- An estimated \$250,000.00 has been provided for Special Projects inclusive of those exploratory attempts described above.
- The 2011/2012 budget envisages \$75,000.00 for Research Projects as follows:
 - A longitudinal study on recipients of meals giving consideration to the recipients progress throughout the education system, revealing the impact on long-term health issues and its effect on cognitive ability would assist the company in achieving higher standards while validating Government's expenditure on the Programme.
- The 2011/2012 budget also includes \$75,000.00 for continuous sampling of suppliers and meals under heading Testing of Samples.
- To continue to educate the population on proper eating habits \$50,000.00 is allotted under heading Nutrition Education Services in the 2011/2012 budget.
- Payments to Caterers represent 87% of the total budget for 2011/2012 at \$284,340,375.00.
- To cover the cost of material supplies provided by the programme for the meal service such as boxes sporks, thermal containers and so on \$27,898,600.00 is allocated under heading Purchase of Material and Supplies.

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- Training is integral to the Company. Workshops for all caterers continued in the year 2010 and one-to-one sessions were held with staff of individual kitchens. Training tools and literature, disbursement for attendance at School Nutrition Conferences and further Serv-safe and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) training were allotted \$150,000.00 in the 2011/2012 budget.

OBSERVATIONS/FINDINGS

From the oral evidence and the written submissions received, your Committee has been well informed of the operations of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited and the School Nutrition Programme. The following observations were made:

Organization and Management of the Company

The Committee was satisfied that the employees of the NSDSL were well qualified in the field of nutrition and quality control. The School Nutrition Programme has a commendable record. Nonetheless, the Committee remains concerned about the capability of the Company to effectively monitor the facilities under their purview given the limited staff complement.

Finance of NSDSL

The Committee established from the information received that NSDSL cannot function to its effective capacity given their reduced budget for 2012 coupled with the rise in food prices. Likewise, it was noted that the company's daily expenditure is subjected to 15% Value Added Tax which should not be since the company provides one of the most basic of services to our nation's school children.

Legislative Requirements

There is urgent need for approval of the policy requirements as identified by the Company that will address the critical issues such as the removal of unhealthy items for sale in school cafeterias.

Dining Facilities and Dining Etiquette in Schools

While recognizing that three schools were furnished with dining facilities, the Committee was concerned about the eating arrangements for students in other schools and agreed that

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all students require an appropriate designated place for consuming meals. Also, it was established that students should be taught basic dining etiquette skills to enhance their overall development and that of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having regard to the foregoing, your Committee makes the ensuing recommendations for the improvement of the NSDSL:

Recommendation 1:

Organization and Management of the Company

The Board of the NSDSL should endorse the hiring of additional staff to fulfill the monitoring requirements of such a dynamic and essential organization.

Recommendation 2:

Financing of NSDSL

- (i) The budget of the NSDSL should be revised by the Ministry of Education and by extension the Ministry of Finance to take into consideration the increase in food prices.
- (ii) The NSDSL should be VAT exempted considering the type of service being provided.

Recommendation 3:

Legislative Requirements

Urgent attention should be paid to the legislative requirements suggested by the NSDSL to promote a more effective service.

Recommendation 4:

School Refectories and Basic Dining Etiquette Training

- The Ministry of Education should:
 - (i) consider equipping schools with proper eating areas; and

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- (ii) adopt the practice of teaching students basic eating etiquette to improve their social skills.
- Teachers should also be encouraged to dine with students.
- Additional staff should be employed to facilitate the management of equipment eg., doing the dishes that students would be required to use.

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Your Committee respectfully submits the foregoing for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.
Mrs. Corinne Baptiste-Mc Knight
Chairman

Sgd.
Prof. Harold Ramkissoon
Vice-Chairman

Sgd.
Mrs. Carolyn Seepersad Bachan, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Emmanuel George
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Verna St. Rose Greaves
Member

Sgd.
Dr. Delmon Baker, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Jairam Seemungal, MP
Member

Sgd.
Ms. Stacy Roopnarine, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Danny Maharaj
Member

Sgd.
Dr. Amery Browne, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Faris Al-Rawi
Member

June 04, 2012

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APPENDIX I

BUSINESS ENTITIES

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List of Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises that fall under the purview of this Committee:

1. Arts and Multiculturalism

- Archaeological Committee
- Carnival Institute
- Naparima Bowl
- National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA)
- National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Cultural Commission
- National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS)
- National Museum and Art Gallery (Royal Victoria Institute)
- National Theatre Arts Company
- Queen's Hall Board
- Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Symphony Orchestra

2. Office of the Attorney General

- The Law Reform Commission
- Environmental Commission
- Council of Legal Education
- Hugh Wooding Law School
- Industrial Court
- Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau
- Equal Opportunity Commission
- Equal Opportunity Tribunal
- Tax Appeal Board
- Central Authority
- International Law and Human Rights Unit

3. Community Development

- Association of Village and Community Councils
- Village Councils
- National Commission for Self-Help Limited
- Export Centres Company Limited

4. Education

- Local School Boards
- National Commission for UNESCO
- Education Facilities Company Limited
- National Schools Dietary Services Limited

5. Energy and Energy Affairs

- Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited
- National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
- National Quarries Company Limited
- Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (PETROTRIN)
- Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited (NP)

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- Alutrint Limited
- Alutech Limited
- La Brea Industrial Development Corporation
- National Agro Chemicals Limited
- National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
- NATPET Investment Company Limited
- NATSTAR Manufacturing Company Limited
- NGC NGL Company Limited
- NGC Trinidad and Tobago LNG Limited
- Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited
- Powergen
- Trinidad and Tobago LNG Limited
- Trinidad and Tobago Marine Petroleum Company Limited
- Trinidad Nitrogen Company
- Trinidad Northern Areas Limited
- TRINMAR Limited
- TRINTOC Services Limited

6. Finance

- Central Tenders Board
- National Insurance Appeals Tribunal
- National Insurance Board
- National Insurance Property Development Company Limited (NIPDEC)
- National Lotteries Control Board
- Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation
- BWIA West Indies Airways Limited (New BWIA)
- Trinidad and Tobago (BWIA International) Airways Corporation (Old BWIA)
- First Citizens Holdings Company Limited
- National Enterprises Limited (NEL)
- Rum Distillers Limited
- Sugar Manufacturing Company
- Trinidad and Tobago Forest Products Limited (TANTEAK)
- Taurus Services Limited
- Caribbean Investment Corporation
- Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO)
- Trinidad and Tobago Development Finance Limited
- Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited
- Caribbean Development Network Limited
- Caribbean Microfinance Limited
- Colonial Life Insurance Company Limited (CLICO)
- First Citizens Bank Limited (FCB)
- First Citizens Mortgage & Trust Company Limited
- First Citizens Investment Services Limited
- Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Agency Company Limited

7. Food Production, Land and Marine Resources

- Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago
- Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI)
- Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board
- Livestock and Livestock Products Board
- Caroni (1975) Limited

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- Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited (EMBD)
- National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO)
- Agricultural Development Bank
- Caribbean Food Corporation
- Sea food Industry Limited

8. Foreign Affairs

- Board of Film Censors
- Caribbean New Media Group Limited (CNMG)
- Government Information Services Limited (GISL)
- National Broadcasting Network (NBN)

9. Health

- Boards regulating the Practice of Medicine and Related Professions
- Children's LIFE Fund Board of Management
- Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA)
- North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA)
- North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA)
- South West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA)
- Dental Council of Trinidad and Tobago
- Drug Advisory Committee
- Emergency Medical Personnel Council of Trinidad and Tobago
- Food Advisory Committee
- Medical Council of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Emergency Ambulance Services Authority
- Nurses and Midwives Council of Trinidad and Tobago
- Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Board
- Pharmacy Council of Trinidad and Tobago

10. Housing and the Environment

- Environmental Management Authority
- Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA)
- Sugar Industry Labour and Welfare Committee
- Land Settlement Agency
- Housing Development Corporation
- Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
- Community –Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Company Limited

11. Justice

- Legal Aid and Advisory Authority
- Police Complaints Authority
- Sentencing Commission
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

12. Labour and Small and Micro-Enterprise Development

- Broilers Examiners Board
- Minimum Wages Board

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- Registration Recognition and Certification Board
- Friendly Societies
- Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies
- National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO)
- Occupational Safety and Health Authority
- National Productivity Council

13. Legal Affairs

- Law Revision Commission

APPENDIX II

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**MINUTES OF EIGHTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT
APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES (GROUP
I), STATUTORY AUTHORITIES AND STATE ENTERPRISES FALLING UNDER THOSE
MINISTRIES, HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, RED HOUSE, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY
NOVEMBER 18, 2011**

PRESENT

Mrs. Corinne Baptiste–Mc Knight	Chairman
Mr. Emmanuel George	Member
Ms. Stacy Roopnarine, MP	Member
Mrs. Carolyn Seepersad–Bachan, MP	Member
Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, MP	Member
Mr. Danny Maharaj	Member
Mr. Jairam Seemungal, MP	Member
Mr. Faris Al-Rawi	Member
Mrs. Verna St. Rose-Greaves	Member
Mrs. Nataki Atiba-Dilchan	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Asst. Secretary
Mrs. Katharina Gokool-Mark	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Prof. Harold Ramkissoon	Vice-Chairman (Excused)
Dr. Delmon Baker, MP	Member (Excused)
Dr. Amery Browne, MP	Member (Excused)

ALSO PRESENT

**Officials from the Ministry of Education and the National School Dietary Services Limited
(NSDSL)**

Ms. Kathleen Thomas	Permanent Secretary
Ms. Anjanie Benjamin	Chairman
Mrs. Ingrid Herrera	Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Vanessa Martina	Manager Nutrition Services
Ms. Stacey Barran	Programme Manager
Mr. Mick Ollivierre	Manager Corporate Services
Mr. Marlon Francis	Research Officer
Mr. Nicholas Cumberbatch	Member of the Board
Mr. Gobin Kantarsingh	Member of the Board
Mr. Garvin Diaz	Member of the Board
Ms. Rita Mooloo	Member of the Board
Mr. Michael Cachie	Member of the Board
Mr. Anthony Price (Tobago Representative)	Member of the Board

COMMENCEMENT

1.1 The meeting was called to order at 9:34 a.m.

1.2 The Chairman advised Members that Mrs. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan had indicated she would be late. The following Members asked to be excused from the day's meeting:

- Professor Harold Ramkissoon
- Dr. Delmon Baker, MP
- Dr. Amery Browne, MP

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES (May 06, 2011)

2.1 The Committee considered the Minutes of the 7th Meeting held on May 06, 2011. There being no corrections or omissions, the Minutes were duly confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Jairam Seemungal and seconded by Mr. Danny Maharaj.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3.1 The Chairman referred Members to the following matters arising from the Minutes:

- **Page 2 Paragraph 4.1** – The Second Report was laid in the House of Representatives on June 03, 2011 and in the Senate on June 13, 2011.
- **Page 2 Paragraph 4.2** – Additional responses received from the Ministry of Health were circulated by letter dated November 08, 2011.
- **Page 3 Paragraph 5.4** – On November 15, 2011 Ms. Bridgemohan submitted further information related to her oral presentation on May 06 2011.
- **Page 3 Paragraph 5.5** – Letters were sent to Professors Narinesingh, Ramsewak and Saunders for written/oral submissions. The response received from Prof. Saunders was circulated.

OTHER BUSINESS

Draft Third Report – Legal Aid and Advisory Authority

4.1 The Committee agreed that comments and or suggestions would be submitted to the Secretariat by Friday November 25, 2011.

Next Inquiry Hearing

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4.2 The Committee agreed to continue the examination of the Ministry of Health re: Primary Health Care Services at its next meeting on January 20, 2012.

Pre-Hearing Discussions

5.1 Members reviewed the written submission from Mr. Stefan Annamunthodo. The Committee agreed on a format for questioning.

(The meeting was suspended)

EXAMINATION OF THE OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS DIETARY SERVICES LIMITED (NSDSL)

Re: Inquiry into the Administration of Methods of Functioning of the NSDSL

6.1 The meeting resumed in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room at 10:10 a.m. and introductions were made on both sides.

6.2 The Chairman was invited to provide an overview of the organisation. Members were briefed on the efforts made by the organization to rebrand the programme. The challenges affecting the programme were also highlighted.

6.3 The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) through a powerpoint presentation gave a brief history of the development of the programme over the years and outlined its main objectives and how these objectives are achieved.

6.4 The Permanent Secretary informed the Committee that the funding of the NSDSL was provided by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry also determined the recipients of the meals, i.e. breakfast and lunch. Members were also informed that while all students from the Early Childhood Education Care schools receive meals, only a percentage of primary and secondary school students receive meals. Over the years the programme has been expanded from a few days during the week to everyday of the week.

6.5 The following topics were also discussed:

(a) Staffing at the NSDSL

The organization structure of the NSDSL is relatively small and the staff at the NSDSL numbered under 50 persons, however, they are well qualified in the areas of health and nutrition and receive continuous training.

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A proposal is currently before the Public Sector Negotiating Committee to train persons specifically in meal preparation. In light of this the organization has set up a small test kitchen in order to achieve at least 95% client satisfaction.

The officials were asked to provide details on the number and skill sets of the persons reflected in the organizational chart, the human resource requirements and perceived shortfall, as well as the ideal budget requirements.

(b) Quality Assurance

In order to ensure and maintain a high level of quality assurance the NSDSL has hired field staff to monitor the kitchens of caterers on a daily basis. The international grading system known as HACCP is utilized in maintaining high standards. This system identifies potential risks and methods to eliminate them. The officers also use swab test machinery to test the hands of the caterers and to ensure that the safest standards are maintained in the kitchen.

The field staff report to the zonal managers who also conduct spot checks of the caterers food preparation. These managers, in turn, report to the Programme Manager on a weekly basis.

The organization maintains a relationship with Public Health Officials and host annual meetings with NSDSL staff and contractors.

(c) Opportunities for Employment within the NSDSL

Questions were asked regarding the opportunities for employment at various levels of the school feeding programme. It was noted that more public education is required to inform citizens about the programme and the job opportunities that are available. This was not only in the area of catering, but also in the supply of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat.

(d) Use of Local Produce

All vegetables used in the School Nutrition Programme were provided by local producers. The School Nutrition Programme had a close working relationship with the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, the National Agriculture Maintenance Development Company (NAMDEVCO) and the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association (TTABA). TTABA, for example, produced frozen cassava which the programme utilized when there was a shortage.

(e) Proper Eating Facilities at Schools

The Permanent Secretary informed Members of an initiative within the Ministry as a part of the Whole School Approach to provide schools with dining facilities, plates and cutlery, and also to encourage teachers to dine with the students in order to develop proper social interaction.

This programme was recently commenced in three newly constructed schools - Iacos Government Primary School, St. Mary's School and the Marabella Secondary School.

(f) Challenges

During the discussion the officials identified the following as challenges within the Programme:

- Increased food prices, over the past years, have resulted in the elimination of certain foods from the programme
- Students preferred “fast food” to eat rather than a well-balanced meal. Reference was made to a survey conducted on schools in the Central area where out of 212 students only 12 thought they should eat callaloo or pelau while the others preferred foods such as pizza, hamburgers and chicken and chips.
- The plethora of snacks and unhealthy foods at school canteens competed with the meals served.

6.6 The officials were urged to take action with regard to the removal of snacks from school canteens and to continue to promote nutrition education.

6.7 The officials were also requested to forward documentation on the following:

- the legislative requirements of the Company
- details on initiatives being undertaken in the secondary schools to address issues with poor student nutrition
- details on the locally produced foods utilized by NSDSL and the quantum
- details on the progress of the School Nutrition Programme in Antigua
- findings of the study conducted in conjunction with the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute in relation to non-communicable diseases and the impact on children
- findings of the study conducted into consumption and the nutrient requirement of the Caribbean population

6.8 The Chairman thanked the officials for their attendance, wished them the best and adjourned the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

6.9 The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

I certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

November 22, 2011

APPENDIX III

NOTES OF EVIDENCE

Meeting resumed at 10.10 a.m.

Madam Vice-President: Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. This morning we have to welcome the representatives of the Ministry of Education and the National School Dietary Services Limited to our hearing. I would be very pleased if you would introduce yourselves, and then we would do likewise before we launch into our inquiry. Thank you.

Ms. Thomas: Thank you. I am Kathleen Thomas, Acting Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education.

Ms. Benjamin: Good morning, I am Ms. Anjanie Benjamin, Acting Chairperson of the board of the NSDSL. At this point I will introduce my board members and then after I will introduce the management staff of the NSDSL programme.

Ms. Anjanie Benjamin	Chairperson
Mrs. Ingrid Herrera	Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Vanessa Martina	Manager, Nutrition Services
Ms. Stacey Barran	Programme Manager
Mr. Mick Ollivierre	Manager, Corporate Services
Mr. Marlon Francis	Research Officer
Mr. Nicholas Cumberbatch	Member
Mr. Gobin Kantasingh	Member
Mr. Garvin Diaz	Member
Ms. Rita Mooloo	Member
Mr. Michael Cachie	Member
Mr. Anthony Price (Tobago)	Member

Members' Committee introduction

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Now I would like to invite the Chairman or whoever may decide who makes the primary presentation for your side. So I now invite you to give us an overview of your service.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chairman. First of all, let me say it is a pleasure, on behalf of our board, being here this morning, for you allowing us the opportunity to address you.

Our board is a newly appointed board. We were installed on January 13, 2011. Upon receiving our instrument of appointment, the board accepted the role and responsibility to ensure the success of the school nutrition programme. The board recognizes a number of areas which require our immediate attention in order to strengthen this programme and to fulfil the needs of all the stakeholders involved.

The areas which we have started to address would be our rebranding of the NSDSL programme,

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using the programme as an education tool to provide the product and to contribute to the improvement of the nutritional status of a child and to enhance learning inabilities, to conduct and implement evaluations on the programme thus far in achieving the objectives of the programme. This independent evaluation would also highlight and guide the current board and the company as to the areas which should be addressed ensuring smooth running of this programme.

- We would be reviewing the current monitoring system for all areas of the programme after which recommendations for improvement of these systems would be submitted to the company.
- We would be improving and strengthening the relationship amongst the stakeholders, that being schools, caterers, suppliers, the company; NSDSL, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture of the programme as to encourage better communication and faster feedback.
- We will be implementing a more effective and efficient policy for the distribution and delivery of the meals to the students at the schools.
- We will also be providing a vehicle that will sustain and stimulate the agricultural sector by utilizing locally produced fruits and vegetables wherever possible in our meal plan.

In closing, I would like to quote something from Ms. Pearl Bailey, who said hungry people cannot be good at learning or producing anything except, perhaps, violence. And at this point, I would like to pass on to our CEO who will do a power point presentation on the NSDSL programme. Thank you.

Mrs. Herrera: Thank you, Madam Chairman for the opportunity to demonstrate to your members, a small insight into the programme operations. It is a PowerPoint presentation called the overview of the school nutrition programme.

It is a brief history, we talk about the years ago, in the 1940s we had a milk and biscuit programme, and in the 1970s a school task force committee looked at the establishment of a programme that would have met the needs of the entire school population. A company, the SNCL was established in 1980, and that was wound up and in 1986 the restructured school feeding programme, a division under the Ministry of Education was started. At that time, the programme started with about 63 caterers who were from the community and who in some instances we had voluntary organizations who were always involved in the programme, notably the Coterie of Social Workers.

In 1996, the programme was changed from the restructured food school feeding programme to the school nutrition programme and in 2003 the NSDSL; the National School Dietary Services Limited was established to oversee the school nutrition programme in Trinidad. Our vision: we are ambitious as a programme. We want to be the lead provider of the highest quality nutritious meals utilizing all of the research and the technology that would ensure our quality. We wish to provide services and information

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that promote healthy choices and lifestyles and our slogan is improving the quality of life with nutrition.

10.20 a.m.

Our main objectives outlined are:

- to provide approximately one-quarter and one-third of the recommended daily allowance of students for the child through breakfast and lunch respectively.
- to contribute to the improvement of the nutritional status of the child; and
- to enhance learning ability.

Our mandate has always been to simulate the agricultural sector by utilizing local produce wherever possible.

Our logo, designed in-house, demonstrates the impact that we hope that we achieved and continue to achieve through the School Nutrition Programme.

As of October 31, 2011, our daily production levels, we do almost 59,000 breakfast meals; 7,000 preschool lunches and 90,366 students receive lunch meals.

Our profile is, preschools 196; primary schools, 475; and secondary schools 144; and vocational and technical schools, 58. We utilize the services of 74 caterers contracted throughout the country. The cost of meals: a preschool lunch, \$7.50; a regular lunch; \$8.15 and breakfast, \$6.

As you can see, our reach goes from Matelot in the extreme north/east, Cedros, Moruga and in the very extreme north, Blanchisseuse. We have divided the country for administrative purposes into four zones: north, south, east and central.

How do we achieve our objectives? We do this through structured menu planning; and through adherence to strict food and safety guidelines. We design a 20-day/four-week-cycle menu, which is rotated throughout a term. Menus are revised termly. Through our menus, we try to meet the objectives that I have stated before and, as far as it is possible, utilize whatever local produce and food that are available. We have a very diverse society and we try to meet the ethnic and religious needs of our

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population. For example, beef is not served to Hindu schools and only Halal meats are served in Muslim schools. We provide our caterers with standardized recipes to produce meals at the best quality. There are some sample menus available.

How do we monitor? As part of our contractual arrangement with caterers, there is a manual that is provided which details all of the food safety standards that are necessary to conduct a programme like ours. We have field officers that we call “quality assurance officers” who are out every day to monitor the kitchens and schools to ensure that standards are maintained and, of course, the public health which is, in fact, the legal body responsible for public health in the country, they are involved in the monitoring process.

Again, how do we achieve our objectives? We operate in an environment where it is absolutely necessary that we keep on evaluating, and the evaluation needs, of course, is continuous training of ourselves—that means the staff within the company—and with our providers.

Though we are a small company, we thought that it is important we involve ourselves in research and have, in fact, conducted, at least, three in-depth research projects.

We are not alone in the country, and it is so important for us to maintain the kinds of relationship with important stakeholders. So we have relationships with the Ministry of Health and relationships with the Ministry of Agriculture. We have had the opportunity to demonstrate to a few of our Caribbean neighbours, and they have had the opportunity to come in and look at our programme. We have had teams from Jamaica, our sister island Tobago and we are in constant touch with them. Four years ago, the company was involved in the setting up of a School Nutrition Programme in Antigua. That gives a little insight into who we are and what we do. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, so much. Is there anything that the Ministry of Education would like to add at this point? I note the Ministry of Health—I do not know whether they are absent or present.

Ms. Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chairman, only to indicate that the programme is determined by the

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Ministry of Education with respect to the identification of recipients of the meals; the number of days to be fed because, previously, we fed on fewer days when schools were in operation. However, within the recent past, we are feeding every day of school. So, presently, we offer meals for approximately 181 days every year to the students.

We also cover the entire spectrum of the education sector, that being Early Childhood Education; primary and secondary. So, they are all recipients of meals. We have indicated that at the early childhood level, we feed 100 per cent of the students. At the primary level where the schools are small, for example, where the population is say 100 and below, we also provide 100 per cent of the meals at those schools. For the rest of the primary sector and secondary, there is just a percentage in terms of the meals that we provide.

The financing to the NSDSL is via the Ministry of Education. They have to present their budgets on an annual basis. It is scrutinized like everything else. We are engaged in discussions with the Ministry of Finance and, at the end of the day, they are provided with a sum of money to operate their programme.

We do have a monitoring and evaluation mechanism in place at the Ministry of Education where we get feedback with respect to what is happening on the ground. We depend heavily on our principals to provide us with that data. We are strengthening that evaluation process by introducing a policy. We do now have a draft policy document. We are in the process of reviewing the draft policy in the context of all that we are hearing—establishing our guidelines so that every school will be required to adhere to those guidelines, and will be monitored with respect to the delivery of the programme in their schools.

Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I now invite Members of the Committee to interface with the guests.

Mr. George: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, and thank you very much members of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL) and Ms. Thomas from the Ministry of Education.

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Now, there are several areas that one could focus on here in terms of questioning. There is the whole area of staffing; there is the area of quality assurance; the methods and means by which you contract your caterers; the issue of the nutritional value of the meals; the whole issue of whether the children are receiving the appropriate nutrition from their meals or whether they are being fed in a manner that creates additional obesity problems for them; and there is the issue of your relationship with the Ministry of Agricultural and, by the extension, the farming community and the production and use—or the increased production—so that you will have increased use of local produce in meals, in particular, fruits which seems to be very seasonal or use seasonally as you had indicated in your document.

I want you to focus first on the area of staffing and whether, because there are so many risks involved in an operation such as yours, one will need to be appropriately staffed, both in terms of numbers and the level of skills to be able to monitor the programme adequately. I want to know if you consider that you do have the appropriate level of skill and the number of staff to do this. If you do, what methods do you have in place to ensure that those people do their work and, actually, do the monitoring and supervision of the kitchens and the schools in terms of delivery of food to the schools. How do you address, in that context, the issue of waste, because one has to know whether the food that is being delivered to the children is actually being consumed and so forth? There is where I want to focus. Do you think that you have the numbers and the skills to adequately monitor this programme and your staff? What mechanisms do you have in place to ensure that monitoring and supervision is actually taking place?

Mrs. Herrera: At this particular point in time, our organization is small. We have not reached 50 members, but we have a staff that is highly qualified in areas of nutrition and quality control.

Our new board has come in, and we are looking at strengthening the areas, particularly, the question of our Continuing Quality Assurance Programme, because as I pointed at the very start, the question of continuous training is an absolute must for us. As I said, we operate in an environment where we have no organization that trains people to produce meals at the kinds of qualities that we do. So, there

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is, in fact, in the pipeline an approach and a proposal, because all the organization and staffing needs are to be approved by the Public Sector Negotiating Committee. So, we are now working and looking at expanding into areas that we think are absolutely necessary.

We just established a small test kitchen, an area that we really would like to expand some more, especially, since we think that quality is the goal. A 95 per cent client satisfaction is our goal.

How do we monitor? We got field staff that monitors our kitchens daily. They are assigned basically three kitchens each, so they are at kitchens every single day. There is a reporting function. The forms that are used when we look at the kitchens are followed. With respect to the whole question of HACCP, HACCP is an approach to food safety. It is H-A-C-C-P. It is used internationally as a standard, and it is the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, which is a procedure that looks at all of the areas of potential risks and develops particular procedures to either mitigate or to eliminate that risk. So, we have these officers who report to our zonal managers. I think we sent you our organizational chart. They meet each week to review the activities at kitchens and at the schools.

10.35 a.m.

The zonal managers also do spot checks and they report to the Programme Manager again on a weekly basis. I myself usually attend our weekly meetings just to keep a hands-on on the programme. Our relationship with the public health, they in fact in some jurisdictions hold meetings with our staff and our contractors on a yearly basis. We ourselves do random sampling of our meals, and our officers are also equipped with swab tests machinery so that we can go into a kitchen and do hand swabs of the caterers.

We are almost providing 150 meals on a daily basis and maintaining a safety standard—it is a very, very daunting task and we always are in the process of looking at what we do, and evaluating what we do and looking to make it better.

Mr. George: I had asked the question based on the organizational chart that you had presented in the document but there were no numbers, and I know that numbers are important in this particular case and qualifications, so that is why I asked about the skill sets as well as the numbers and whether you did have them, because from the organizational chart one would not get that information. You should forward that to the committee—could you?

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Mrs. Herrera: Okay.

Mr. George: The numbers and the skill sets to fill the organizational chart so that we would have a sense of what is on the ground.

Mrs. Herrera: Okay. So shall I start then from the top?

Mr. George: No, you do not have to do it now because that will take up too much time, and I do not want to dominate the meeting so much. But if you send it for us we should be all right, through you Chair.

Madam Chairman: Definitely, to the secretariat. Thank you. Senator Al-Rawi?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Good morning everyone. Thank you Mrs. Herrera for the explanations a short while ago. May I first of all say that in terms of presentation of documentation having been received by this committee, that this is a most excellent package, and I want to compliment you all for providing as much detail as you have. It is very, very, very thorough and I think that you clearly spent a lot of time in preparing as much detail as you could and I want to give you a very open compliment—I am sure on behalf of us all—it is really a spectacular package.

The second point that I would like to celebrate is on page 18 of 23 of your document entitled “SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMME TRINIDAD BACKGROUND, CHALLENGES AND ISSUES”, 27 million safe school meals is by no means a small feat. You are feeding our—primary, secondary and special needs—children’s needs and that is a most laudable task both for your predecessors and your current members, and indeed, the engine forces who do not change; those people who are constant despite political cycles. So again, a sincere congratulations to you all.

You have mentioned in your report that there is not much publicity to the accomplishments of this particular division, indeed, the coordination and efforts of the Ministry of Education with the special purpose entity itself, the management by the Board of Directors, and the many, many, many people that comprise the system are really to be complimented, they are truly heroes in our system. With that said—no, there is not too much of a sting in this tail—I noted with concern it is very difficult in an interview exercise such as this to interrogate the position in terms of coming up with recommendations, and indeed, when you provided us in that same document I referred to at page 23, with recommendations and way forward you confined yourselves to eight areas for development to meet your concerns. One of the benefits of attending before an entity like this which is non-partisan in the manner in which it is comprised and the way in which it works, there is no politics on this table. There is a need to understand what your difficulties are and to try to assist you in so far as our perspective may allow:

- (1) interrogation; and
- (2) pursuit of your recommendations directly back to the Ministry.

Your eight challenges were phrased very politely, and I was a little bit concerned that you are not

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taking advantage of the forum that you are addressing. Of course it is that you need to be careful in how you say it, but it does help us to help you to help the nation, if we understood with better particularity the areas of focus that you are looking at. One of them my colleague, Senator George has touched on is the organizational structure. We have your organizational structure which is very much a pyramid structure, but in terms of a needs analysis of the type of human resources that you require, you have not communicated that in any form of specificity. And it would help us to understand the goals as to the type of legislative coordination that you need firstly, and secondly, the manpower requirements that you have, because unless we understand that we cannot build out your process with proper clothing by way of legislation to allow you to get the correct manpower and resources.

I heard the answer come with respect to budgeting and how it is you receive the monies that you do, and that is of course through the Ministry of Education which in its national budgetary presentation receives—I would imagine only a percentage of what you realistically would want to get.

So if I could ask you, through the Chairman—and mind you, I take exception to the word “Chairperson”. “Chairman” refers to the hand in the chair not the gender in the Chair, but anyway, the point is if you could through our Chairman communicate what your human resource requirement would be to meet perceived shortfalls to better your system that would help us to understand it in the dynamic of the budget which you request.

The second aspect is in fact the budget. We do not have an indication of what budget you require because it is not stated here. We know a budget is presented; we know a budget goes to the Ministry of Education and then the Ministry of Education has to fight toe to toe with the whole national budget to try and get its slice of the pie.

The third aspect in terms of coordinating: Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education and any other entity, for instance the Children’s Authority, perhaps. That coordination package would lead to a legislative development, so the question is in terms of a needs analysis do you require legislative clothing, if so, what is the purpose of your legislative clothing and how is it structured to be recommended? There is a very powerful tool available to you which is to recommend to Parliament that a Joint Select Committee be comprised to consider the development of a legislative proposal or agenda to suit your needs and purposes, because it has been agreed by all governments prior and this one as well, that the needs and cares of its children and its student population are primary.

So there is no division in that aspect at all. So I have seen mentioned here with no form of specifics your request for coordination and legislative clothing. It is in the introduction documents that you have given but it does not go into the drill-down detail. So I want to confine myself to general observations.

(1) Could you please through our Chairman and secretariat provide us with your request in respect of

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what legislative aspect would meet your best purposes, because that would communicate to us what your aim is going to be and what your method of achieving it is going to be.

- (2) Could you communicate to us what your actual budgetary request is for, because you would have it from budget to budget. What your budgetary request is for and that would provide us with the details in respect of it, so we can see what magic you have been weaving in performing what you have with the budget that you have been given with respect to what you have requested and therefore what your need is, so that a better prioritization of resources can be had by the people who pass the budgetary allocation issues. When it hits Parliament, you do not see that form of detail, you only see one number line literally amongst thousands of pages which is discussed over a two or three day period, so you are going to be buried in the pack if you do not provide us with the specifics of what you require in terms of the budget, and then why you require that in terms of budget obviously understand that state welfareism is a very difficult thing to manage and to balance.
- (3) The last point that I would to observe and this attracts to the larger societal issue of difficulties which we experience with our young in secondary school. You noticed that the percentage figures that you provided us with respect to primary school and preschool; preschool has the least percentage because parents obviously feed their preschoolers in a better and more sustained fashion. But when you hit up to secondary school level you noticed that the percentages are in the teens or twenties, and it is in the secondary school that you are facing a heavy challenge in terms of the anger management and social difficulties that many of our secondary school students suffer, and then you are also faced with the stigmas approached to children who need assistance but are somehow afraid to ask for the assistance from the so called best schools to the so called least performing schools; there are children because of our SEA structure that access all schools and their needs may be hidden, so we may be walking around with a hidden hunger because of shame or other social stigmas. So the attention relative to the secondary school aspect, for me in particular, I am particularly interested in because that hits a very strong social dynamic.

I know many of my colleagues have lots more to contribute, so if I could ask you to take a note of what I have suggested and to communicate the details through the Chairman, through the secretariat for us because it will assist us when we are making our recommendation report to have a better and more truthful appreciation of your difficulties, bearing in mind that it is the squeaky wheel that gets the oil, so could you squeak a little bit more for us please. Okay, thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Would you like to confirm that you will send this information to us.

Mrs. Herrera: Yes, Madam Chair, I mean we really would grab the opportunity to do so. And I am

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grateful that the challenges and issues document you did have an opportunity to understand a little bit of the challenges that we face, and we will in fact take the opportunity to really put our needs and assessment for your committee. We will do that as quickly as we can.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Mr. Seemungal?

Mr. Seemungal: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me join my colleagues and thank you all very much for joining us here this morning. I would keep my presentation very short so that I may have some longer answers. My contribution really deals with contractor's location and the cost of production. Can you advise over the last eight years how many contractors have you engaged into the programme, and can you be specific with respect to the last three years, 2009, 2010, 2011, how many new contractors joined your programme? Would you like them one by one or would you like all the questions first?

Madam Chairman: No, do your complete set of questions.

Mr. Seemungal: Secondly, this programme is a live programme and the nation is looking on and quite of bit of potential contractors and meal suppliers or chefs or cooks with kitchen may be looking on as well, can you guide them through the process in which they themselves can get involved in your tendering process, and they themselves can get involved in your catering programme? Because one of the focus of this Government is to create employment, and not just create employment for a limited number—I have seen here 47, 74 contractors, 74 caterers—but create employment as much as possible for the young people of this nation, especially.

I know a lot of the programme have been dealt with have been carried out recently, and even this catering school in Chaguaramas have produced a lot of young caterers over the years which I am sure they would like to get involved in some meaningful employment that would pay as well.

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Can you also give me an example of the cost, for their sake, of how much it would cost to set up a kitchen, and what is the average income they may expect if they got involved in a programmes like yours, on an annual basis, so they can see themselves writing up proposals, and fruitful ones, to get into your programme?

Ms. Martina: Over the last three years, the NSDSL has not ordered any new contracts.

Mr. Seemungal: Could you give me the reason?

Ms. Martina: There was a consideration at one stage, given all the steps I have talked about and the challenges and issues documented, the question of stigmatism, et cetera, that we should have used what we call “the whole school approach”. So there was a proposal advanced to the Ministry of Education. Because we found that there were problems, especially with the adolescents—who needed the meals—that there was this feeling they were stigmatized, that they were identified as needy children, et cetera,

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there was an approach that we suggested where in an entire school—the plan was for the new schools—there were at that time I think 19 new schools on the drawing board—what we were trying to do and what we had suggested was what we called a “whole school approach”, where kitchen and dining room facilities were established in a schools. Since the Ministry of Education was at the same time doing an identification process for all their students, we could devise a type of ATM card where the kitchens in schools would have been equipped to, in fact, offer meals to all their school population, and the children on the programme would utilize this discrete card—we called it discrete—an ATM card, to swipe to receive a meal.

During that period, we had discussions with the Ministry of Education. We were asked to provide floor plans for kitchens, et cetera. In fact, there was one school we were aware of that came out of it. Our consideration was then that new contracts would therefore be different, in that sense. It would no longer be a kitchen providing meals, a satellite type of situation; you would actually have a kitchen within the school. So at that time we decided that we would wait until that entire thing came through, because there would have been new opportunities presented; that is one.

Basically then, we were kind of on a hold pattern, until something like that came into being. That was our way; we did not award new contracts.

Mr. Seemungal: If I may, that “old school” process or thinking as you put it, how long ago was that.

Ms. Martina: I would say about five years ago.

Ms. Martina: What is the thinking now?

Ms. Martina: We have got a new board now, so that we are going to be proceeding—

Ms. Martina: The Chairman of the board may be able to help.

Ms. Benjamin: The proposal and the plans for the whole school approach were presented to the new board. In terms of prioritizing the immediate needs of the NSDSL programme, we are looking into it, and we have not made a firm decision of whether that would be the first recommendation we make. We are looking at expanding more on the programme also.

Mr. Chairman: Let me just see if I am not confused in the process. Are you saying that the “old school” approach—

Hon. Members: Whole school. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Seemungal: The whole school approach—that was to create kitchens in the schools, five years ago?

Ms. Martina: Yes.

Mr. Seemungal: It is five years later, and we are still considering the whole school approach, when we have 74 contractors, and the average income roughly about \$3 million a year—if I did my calculation?

Ms. Martina: The new board, in fact, has been looking at the contracts that were developed for the programme since we have become a company. The board met up to yesterday to look at the new

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contracts. The board is, in fact, looking at the question of creating new opportunities for more contractors. I do not think that there was ever a deliberate attempt to exclude contractors at all; it was never deliberate. I think it was a question of our looking at what was the best approach.

Mr. Chairman: I find it very difficult, even for me to comprehend that five years we are planning one type of project, and 74 contractors have been there for the last five years. Why am I going down this direction? We are here now creating opportunities for young people, and they are the ones who have been retaliating over the years, because opportunities are not being created for them. These are some of the approaches we can use to create these opportunities for young people. They would gladly like to get on board, not at \$3 million a year, even at any lower cost, but they would be happy to receive employment where they could keep themselves out of trouble as well. And to have people attending these catering schools for two, three or four years and not knowing where they could create self-employment for themselves, rather than to continue working for people. This is an ideal opportunity for you as a board to create that type of environment for young people in this country.

That being so, contractors may now be looking on and thinking to themselves, “I want to get involved,” can you guide them through the processes of how they could get involved? I know we have it in documentation form, but for their sake, because they would not be privy to these documents that we have—in a synopsis.

Ms. Martina: We have got a little brochure that is available at our office. The process is that as soon as we decide—and your sentiments have been appreciated by our board and our company—and as soon as the decision is made there is usually a process whereby we advertise in the print media. That is the first step. The brochures we have available for perspective caterers outline in some detail the kind of design and layout that we expect in our facilities.

Mr. Chairman: Can you give them the office address?

Ms. Martina: Our head office is at No. 6 Newbold Street, St. Clair.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Do you have a website?

Ms. Martina: On the Ministry of Education website.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Maybe I am assisting my colleague. The key is access to information for all who may be interest, so that the perception of exclusion or static existence does not become a reality. The question is really for those entrepreneurs—we have a catering school up at Chaguaramas—“How do I access the information?” It would help if you had a site where the information was literally accessible, apart from print and other media, because there may be some people who are just too busy to observe those things. I am hoping you are going to tell me that there is, in fact, a website and that the information is available as well.

Ms. Martina: I am sorry to say that we do have a website, but that particular bit of information is not

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available, and we will correct that as soon as possible.

Mr. Al-Rawi: If I may join my colleague in his excellent observation that perhaps that information ought to, for transparency sake and for access purposes, the PDFs can easily be posted there, and you could direct people, “Check our website.” It would help in your delivery.

Mr. Seemungal: Maybe if we could also send it to all Members of Parliament Offices, we could make it available to 1.2 million people literally overnight.

Ms. Benjamin: Just to make a comment to your colleague, yourself and the entire committee. One of the main areas that the board recognized about the NSDSL programme is that we are not educating the public enough about the programme, one. The programme has not had a lot of marketing or PR in the programme itself; two. Three, we need to make the website more useful friendly, whereas anyone: principal, parent prospective suppliers or prospective caterers, interested in the programme could easily access it through technology and get the data and information they need. It may not be all the details in terms of the finance, et cetera. Guidance as to how you become a part of the programme, be it by the final recipient or by a supplier of the programme, will be on that particular site. We do recognize the need to upgrade what we have and bring it more up into the technology world, so that everyone can access it.

Mr. Seemungal: You may continue with the process to the contractor. In the confusion, just to summarize the process for the contractors—come to your office. While you are finally deliberating on the process forward, the way forward, they can come to your office, pick up one of those brochures where they could prepare themselves for that time when we open up this entire engagement for public participation.

Ms. Martina: And we are prepared to speak with anybody who comes into the office.

Mr. Seemungal: Excellent. Just finally, because I know my colleague would be touching on it. My main concern is the amount of local agricultural produce that is being used in your programme. I have an agricultural background where I spent 20 years in the Ministry of Agriculture, and I have been throughout the entire country. I literally know most of the farming areas. For instance, there is an area in Rio Claro which produces over 600 acres of cassava, and a lot of times they are struggling for markets.

You are producing something like—how many meals do you produce a day?

Ms. Benjamin: 156,000.

Mr. Seemungal: Can you give me an idea, maybe for the farming population as well, where they could sell this produce or access the market within your organization for selling some of their produce, from vegetables right back to ground provisions, and whatever is required in your meals?

Ms. Martina: Madam Chair, may I present Stacey Barran who will respond to this particular question.

Just one thing, I am sure that some of your farmers in Rio Claro must be involved in supplying to

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TABA and, in fact, we have been using TABA's diced cassava in our programme, in our menu cycles at least twice per month. We finally got our children to eat cassava. We served it diced, like a potato salad and they eat it. We cannot get them so far to eat six ounces as yet, but we are really getting them to eat cassava. In fact, in the soup packs that are available, that TABA has worked on, we worked first with NAMDEVCO on that, now TABA has a soup pack that we use within the programme. We do serve soup with our root vegetables, and we have been very lucky for a little while to get some really nice corn.

Over the years the programme has met, I think, farmers in almost every constituency. But I will ask Stacey to respond. Stacey Barran is our programme manager, our quality person with an MPhil in food production, so she is our main point person when we are talking agriculture.

Ms. Barran: Madam Chair, thank you, members of the committee. We continue collaboration with both the Ministry of Agriculture. Our line Minister would meet with the Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh. We are working with the commodities that the Ministry of Agriculture has put forward now as their priority listing, which is the staples; cassava is one of them. Just before I came here I compiled the list, we have used 30,000 pounds of cassava, and that is just for one month.

We have had problems with availability. I have been meeting with farmers. I also wear another hat, I sit on the board of NAMDEVCO, so I continue that work in terms of NAMDEVCO with the farmers, seeking that market. We collaborate all the time. All our vegetables in our programme are actually sourced locally. The programme has the projections for every term in terms of how much produce we use. I will just go through a few.

11.05 a.m.

Ms. Barran: Pumpkin 50,000 pounds per month, tomatoes 25,000 pounds per month, sweet peppers 25,000 pounds per month, cabbage 25,000 pounds per month. Basically we try as much as possible to meet that, however, in times of flood you know when you know we have the shortages we have to of course seek other markets, however, also in terms of the food safety we try to look at the microbial in terms of the vegetables.

So we have been working with the Ministry of Agriculture, with NAMDEVCO, with TTABA to increase and we continue to increase. One of our recent initiatives as a matter of fact, the Minister has asked that we look at sucrier, the small banana, and we have done a pilot, every child actually preferred the sucrier to the gros michelle because it is a very nice little banana, very suitable for the lunch kits and our Minister of Agriculture has been speaking about the sucrier.

So we are going to introduce, hopefully we will get the amounts because on our breakfast programme we have a fruit per day, however, due to unavailability, we cannot always find the fruit per day. We have watermelons that we serve, everything that we could find, we serve it. Other than that you know we are subjected to the quantities produced on a daily basis by our farmers but we continue

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collaboration with our farmers. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Mrs. Mc Intosh?

Ms. Barran: And a list is available.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Good morning again. As a former educator—well as an educator, I will always be—and former principal, I am really concerned about the direct impact of the programme on the students and student outcomes.

One observation I would like to make is that is noticed that you said in your document, which I must say that I much commend you for, in terms of its very comprehensive nature, very detailed and comprehensive, we could not have expected any better, I noticed you said that the nutritional value of the meals are about one third to a quarter per cent of what the student needs per diem. I am wondering, is that value sufficient to enhance a student's cognitive ability and cognitive development? Because we have this relationship between nutrition and cognitive development, and I would like to see that that level be elevated to ensure that all students really have a chance. Because some of them come from homes where what they are given, their diet, is sadly lacking in nutritional value. And they might get their quarter per cent in terms of needs from you all during the day, and when they get home, as my Chairman and myself were discussing, they might get a piece of bread, they might get a dumpling, they often get a dumpling, the intention is to fill their stomachs so that they would not cry in the night, so they will get a dumpling; sometimes with nothing, a dumpling.

I do not know how you feel; and having said that, probably you are facing—I know you have a section, I was reading on page of 6 of challenges, but I would like to know, what are major challenges, operational and financial challenges that your company is facing in terms of providing a higher caliber of meal to all students?

One last point I would like to make, well I was going to go to local content but see that was taken care of. I would just like to ask this last question. Let us say since 2000—let me put a timeframe on it—have you experienced any incidents of food contamination or food poisoning? Is it noted? All right, I missed that. But probably for the benefit of the listening public we can itemize. And in what area, probably it is there, what was the food served and what was the cause really, if that is available?

Mrs. Herrera: I would ask Stacy to respond to that part of the question because she was involved in the investigation.

Ms. Barran: Okay. The investigation—well let me just go through the procedure involved. If there is any allegation from any school which we had on November 28, 2008 at the Cap de Ville Government School, which no-one seems to forget, we have tried to forget because it was not because of us. There was in fact a microbial analysis done on the food, we can present that data to you at a later date, we have it. The meals were not contaminated.

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The report coming out from that investigation actually shows that it was mass hysteria. One child vomiting and leading to the other, that was the report that Public Health provided. Coming out of that as well, we got some recommendations by Public Health for the programme because even when they looked at the school, the area for the meals was not appropriate, the area was not appropriate, next door there was this piece of agricultural land where chemicals were being sprayed, a number of issues came out of that, and recommendations of course followed, the Ministry of Education the main one being the area for service.

In addition to which I think that coming out of that as well was need for supervision at the school. They were recommending that probably, and we are talking about employment in terms of servers, getting the community, maybe single mothers to come in to each school. We have 800 close to 900 schools—853 that we feed. If we have probably two persons coming in there that would be an excellent opportunity for employment within the programme.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: On that point, I wonder if the Permanent Secretary will recommend to the Minister that schools be outfitted with eating places, proper eating places. We have that problem you see in the schools where I was an administrator and I am speaking from Point Fortin—Point Fortin Junior, Point Fortin Senior and I am speaking through central; Gasparillo Composite, Marabella Junior, I am speaking to Port of Spain, Belmont Junior, St. Francois Girls College and a short stint at Princess Town Senior Comprehensive and another short stint at San Fernando Government Secondary. There are no real eating places assigned to students to have their meals, and really it is not right. And I would to see the Ministry of Education address this problem so that we can have proper eating places where children can sit.

And I will tell you something, also learn basic etiquette. When I went to school we were taught that, you sat and you ate and they taught you, first to begin, in your own way, as your religion required, you were asked to say your prayers before you ate, and you asked to knowledge basic eating etiquette. And that would be nice as a start for teaching our children good manners, basic manners.

Madam Chairman: Could I just add to that? This is something that I happen to feel very passionate about, that we are producing a breed of Trinidadian who thinks that a “spork” and a box are what consist of a meal, and I really think that in a day and age when you are taking people up to tertiary education and guaranteeing them, if they are bright enough a Phd., we are producing Trinidad and Tobago, intelligent Phds who turn to a box and “spork”, and outside of that you have the prevalence of fast food which continues this.

So I would like to emphasize what has just been said, proper eating areas have to be provided. In addition to that, you have staff who will wash the plates and cutlery that the children would be required to use. If we are talking about providing jobs, these are very good jobs which would probably be more acceptable than some of the other jobs that are being created, and in addition be long-term jobs because

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schools tend to be in session for at least nine months a year, and during the period when children are not in class, one would expect that these people can be employed in looking at the crockery to see that none of it is chipped, making sure that it is replaced, taking care of the cutlery.

Can we ask that both the board, the CEO and Ministry of Education take these recommendations on board and feed back to us what the response is from your political directorate? Because our problem is not only feeding the children's stomach, we have got to improve their social skills as well. Can we have a comment on that please?

Ms. Thomas: Thank you Madam Chair and other Members. I am heartened for the support of an initiative that we do have within the Ministry of Education. We actually started at some of our schools where we have provided excellent dining facilities with the cutlery, with plates we have a facility existing, and we have also been encouraging the teachers within the school to also sit to enjoy a meal with the students. You understand how important it is to share, to have the social interaction as you dine. We provided all the plates, glasses and cutlery everything that was necessary for the programme. That was actually the beginning of the whole-school approach because it started in one of the newly constructed schools, we provided to the school with the necessary equipment for the preparation of the meals at the schools, as well as furniture for the dining area.

With respect to the expansion however, we have quite a lot of work to be done but again I welcome the support that we have gotten this morning from the committee, and we can ensure that we look at it also in the context of employment. Thank you.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Yes, I would just like to ask, in how many schools this has been initiated—this dining in a refectory, that is what we call it a refectory—

Ms. Thomas: To date there are three schools.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Do you know what schools they are?

Ms. Thomas: The Icacos Government Primary School, St. Mary's and we have just outfitted the facility at the recently reconstructed Marabella Secondary School.

Madam Chairman: Was the opportunity not taken to do this at Biche that we heard so much talk about?

Ms. Thomas: Madam Chair, not as yet. The reason being Biche was constructed using a previous design concept, and what was done recently at Biche was a refurbishment of the school. Now, we do have the facilities and we can in fact ensure that it is adequately equipped to accommodate such—to provide for that, yes.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, just to corroborate to the issue that is going on and something my learned friend mentioned. When you are giving us your feedback relative to issues that you think that could help you to address, could you please make two recommendations, one following upon my learned colleague's submission relative to procurement because that is what it was all about. How do we procure and achieve

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savings and spread the base as best as we can because there is a legislative proposal relative to procurement being considered in a joint select approach right now, one.

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Al-Rawi: The other issue is the fact that your daily expenditures include 15 per cent VAT, yet you are providing the most basic of services, which, potentially ought to philosophically be VAT exempt, so any recommendations that you have relative to VAT would be very much appreciated, because that would certainly help my learned friend's concern which we share in providing opportunities for smaller people in the system.

Miss Roopnarine: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me just join my colleagues in commending you for the excellent presentation as well as package put together here this morning. My question is simply a spinoff of my colleague, Mr. Seemungal, but more in terms of ensuring value for money. Because this is a million-dollar project, a million-dollar budget is spent year after year, and if I follow the thread of events correctly, we are saying that over the last three years we have not engaged any new caterers. Does that mean then that we are quite satisfied with the 74 caterers that are in the system and that we believe then that our monitoring and evaluation of these caterers are sufficient so that we continue with it year after year?

I ask that because, the idea is to ensure that not only are we getting value for money but at the same time that we are getting proper meals for the children, which was raised, I think, by several Members here this morning. I do recall, even when I went to school, in the then school feeding programme, which was what we knew it as, sometimes the students just did not want the meals because it really was not appealing and, perhaps that is why we have the problem later on in society where people just turn to the fast food.

So, I do not know, if perhaps; one, you can address the issue of ensuring value for money; two, ensuring quality food from these caterers who are in the system; and three, I was also wondering if there are any geographical stipulations in seeking these suppliers or caterers as the case may be. So, for example, do we have caterers from north supplying foods in south? How does that geographic location of the caterers work?

Mrs. Herrera: Madam Chair, if I may? We are really sensitive to the facts that there is a need for expanding the base with regard to suppliers and contractors and I am sure with our new board there is going to be some progress in that area pretty soon. We are also extremely concerned about value for money and that is why I think we spend so much time looking at menus, developing menus; our new little test kitchen and sending our people out from the test kitchen, because value for money.

I think we all feel very, very strongly; this is my tax money at work and we all, who work in our company feel very, very strongly about that. We are the first ones to look at our meals and to criticize

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them. One of our challenges, obviously, is the question that we deal with a clientele that, one, they have been used and they are becoming more and more used every single day to chicken and chips, hamburgers, et cetera. Some time, a few years ago, we had done a survey in some schools in Central and I personally went through 212 forms that were filled out by children and I found that there were 12 children from the 212 children who thought that they should eat “callaloo” or eat a “pelau”; everybody else was asking for pizza, asking for hamburger and asking for chicken and chips. That is one of our challenges. I mean, it is ridiculous to the extent that, for instance, we serve a fish sub. Okay? That is the only way we get our children to eat fish and it is well accepted, so we serve this fish sub and we want to serve it with a hot slaw, because one of our constraints is the fact that we cannot serve cold salads in that hot box, because it is packed into an insulated tote. So, we serve this fish sub with a hot slaw, dare not put that hot slaw on top of that fish, because when you put the hot slaw on top of the fish this is what happens—[*Slams hand on desk*—you understand?

So, that is part of our challenge. Part of our challenge is getting our children to eat properly, to understand the benefits of eating their vegetables. You understand? But our concern for value for money—and we are very, very aware of it, certainly even in terms of our menu planning. Again, we have a constraint because, over the last few years we have seen huge, huge price increases in a whole range of products. To give you an example, a 44-pound block of cheese four years ago cost \$250, it is now \$950; chicken, which our children love, it is the one meat that is acceptable, chicken has gone up about 300 times. You understand?

We are aware of that and we really do try to reflect the consideration in the way we approach our menu planning, in the way that our people, our contractors operate, so, that is part of the challenge that we have got to deal with. Especially now with rising prices, we are forced to, in fact, commit some compromises in terms of our menus because we would love to serve a fruit with every single thing as Stacy pointed out. But, one, you do not have the fruit and, two, it impacts on our cost. In fact, our caterers, I tell people when they come into my office, that our catering business is not the kind of thing as business tends to operate in Trinidad where it is what the market can bear. Our caterers work with very, very slim margins. I tell people when they come to ask us to supply something; this is the cost that we expect, because our people work with such extremely small margins. Okay?

So, I think we will continue to, in fact, work on the question of improving our profile in terms of value for money, because we are acutely aware of it. It is in our face and we face it every single day. You look at a meal and you assess what it looks like. You understand?

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I know the time is late so I will be very quick, most of the issues have already been raised and I think that speaks to the whole issue of the nutritional value of meals.

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One of the things that has come out so far is that there are several contributing factors that impact on the nutritional value: One, being the cost that you just mentioned; two, the availability of the local produce; and thirdly now, the preferences of our children in terms of their likes of meals. I just want to raise quick questions on that, because you spoke about a fruit bowl which has failed. It was not a success, and this is exactly what confused me when I was reading the report, what contributed to the failure of that fruit bowl that was not accepted. Was it because of the lack of the availability of the fruits? Was it because of the cost? Because you are also saying here that you were not able—over the years you have had to drop juices, I think it is from the—and I found that rather alarming that you had to drop a juice because of the cost. So, this was not because of the availability, but it was because of the cost.

Thirdly, when you looked at it, it is because of what you just said, our student preferences. There are some simple issues here: one, the canteens in the schools, are there any recommendations in place, through you, Madam Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, to assist, because we have to get back, we have to almost encourage, so we have to provide incentives and disincentives. Is there any legislation—and you know, it has happened in other jurisdictions where you have legislated now in terms of what the canteens can sell, because they are now competing with your school meals, so therefore, the snacks are cut out, the soft drinks are cut out. I just wanted to find out where are we in terms of that, because I know, I have children of my own and I remember the principal and the PTA complaining about that, the canteens compete, even, with what is in the lunchbox, so I would just like a comment on that.

The second issue is, I noticed as well that in 2006, I think it was in your report, this report on the background and challenges, the Antiguan Government, I think it was, studied the Trinidad and Tobago programme and they adopted the best components of this programme, but they did not adopt all of it, they adopted the best components, one of the issues you raised earlier today is stigmatization in terms of these meals and not getting every child—and what I noticed from their programme is that they were able to offer meals to everyone, for those who are underprivileged, yes, that is free; for those who are not underprivileged and can afford, it is at a cost. Has the board, Madam Chairman, made a recommendation or so considered this matter and made such recommendations to the Ministry of Education where this is concern?

Thirdly, through you, Madam Chair, I noticed that there are a number of studies referred to in the reports: firstly, there is an evaluation of the school meal option study, which was embarked on by the Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute, again, with respect to the whole issue of non-communicable diseases and the impact of this on children and therefore, can you tell us what are the findings of this study and was it incorporated at all, if there are findings of that study, have any of these findings found its way into your school nutritional programme?

There is another study that I noted as well, and we do not have time today to get all of that, so

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through you, Madam Chair, I do not know if the board can provide us with this information. There has been another study, a consumption study I think it is, the nutrient requirement of the Caribbean population, current guidelines and adaptations and so on. I am wondering as well if you can provide us with the findings of that study.

I just have one other question and that is on the issue of management, governance issues, with respect to the company—the National Schools Dietary Services Company Limited. I just wanted to find out if you have in accordance with good governance practices and in accordance the requirements of the company itself, I think it may be in your bye laws; do you have an audit committee of the board and therefore, is there a programme that you approve every year, annually at the beginning of your fiscal year, whatever your financial term, to ensure that you have a proper audit function and an audit programme for the entire year?

Because of the questions that I have raised here in terms of value for money, Ministry of Education, Madam Permanent Secretary, do we have some way of an independent review of the operations of not only the National Schools Dietary Services Company Limited, but the entire SMP programme in order to determine if there is value for money?

Ms. Benjamin: I will answer two of your questions right now—the information based on the Antiguan programme that was adopted: just to highlight, I lived in Antigua for two years. It is a very small population, 84,000 persons; adults and children included, and my experience there is that you can have one business person that can supply the entire island with food for one year. What we would forward to you is exactly what is happening with that programme. Why did they not adopt the entire programme. As for the audit committee on the board—

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Just before you leave the Antigua issue, really the issue I am raising there in the Antiguan model is that they were able to adopt a whole programme for the whole school, not just for the underprivileged children, but you have the parents paying a cost to subsidize the cost of the meals, so you are not carrying the whole school yourself.

Ms. Benjamin: One of the things I think the board is also going to have to look at is areas of our programme that have been extremely successful, for example, with the Antiguan population we should have some method of follow up and communication where there is a complete alliance that, what might work for them may not work for us and something that they must have implemented that is really working may also work for us.

So, we also need to keep that communication going, because based on our discussions with the CEO when the board came on board, we did understand that our programme, the Trinidad and Tobago model of school feeding has been looked at by many other countries within the region, which is an admirable thing for us and it says a lot about the programme.

11.35 a.m.

Ms. Benjamin: To answer your question on the audit committee, yes we do have an audit committee on the board. We do have a monitoring and evaluation committee on the board; we do have an HR committee on the board. As for the independent review, the board has already decided that we will be carrying out an independent evaluation of the entire programme with the actual school nutrition programme, with the feeding process and with the actual running of the company. To satisfy your questions so that you will rest assured that you are getting a lot of value for your money.

Thank you.

Ms. Thomas: Madam Chair, through you please, with respect, I will respond to two questions again, the juries. One, with respect to the cafeteria and other, the independent evaluation of the programme by the Ministry of Education.

With respect to the cafeteria at the schools, we have recently established a committee chaired by a member of our curriculum division along with teachers, and so within the home economics department of schools, to establish what really we should be providing or allowing within our cafeterias at the schools for consumption by our students. So that is currently being actively pursued.

With respect to the overall evaluation, I would have alluded earlier to our draft policy, in that policy we had all the steps set out for the evaluation of the programme, not only on an annual basis, but extending it, even as we look at the benefits to our student population.

So again that is now brought to the table once more. What has not as yet been brought to the table which is in the possession of the Ministry of Education is that Whole School Project. When we commenced discussions on that project whereby, we would use—as Mrs. Herrera quite eloquently articulated earlier on—the card, and those children particularly within our secondary sector, who were unable to pay for a meal they had to be provided with the meal free of charge. So again that will be met by the State. We had another band with respect to those who may not be able to afford the full cost that can meet some part of it and the Ministry would meet the other part and then we would have been looking at those who would be able to meet the full cost. But everybody would be accessing the same menu, the same meal in the same fashion. There would be absolutely no distinction. That we can bring forward once again.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: I think that is an important area.

Mr. Maharaj: Good morning once again. My question is a very simple but important one, in the context of our very multi-religious society in Trinidad and Tobago. As such, my concern is, does your institution ensure a clear separation in the preparations of vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals, example, the use of cutting boards, spoons, storage of goods within freezers. This would be a concern to the national public given our diversity and additionally, have there ever been any reported breeches to that

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end relating to this? Furthermore, just additional thought, was any consideration given in terms of setting up contractors especially for producing vegetarian meals solely?

Ms. Barran: By our design of the facilities, we have a vegetable area, we have a meat area. So that is taken care of and I think in terms of our schools, our schools make the requests on vegetarian meals and we have separation, all our storage in terms of freezer storage, chillers, the individual items are stored, so that is taken care of. There is no cross contamination. We respect every religious group, and we abide by that. There has not been a need really for a vegetarian kitchen because we separate that function in the kitchen.

Mr. Maharaj: Has there ever been any reported breeches?

Ms. Barran: No.

Mr. Maharaj: Never.

Ms. Barran: No. I just remembered looking at your neighbour there—[*Laughter*]. Sorry Senator, sorry. In terms of our suppliers—my apology [*Laughter*]

Mr. Seemungal: Mr. Jairam Seemungal is my name.

Ms. Barran: In terms of suppliers, we also outsource certain supplies and that is of course by itself, paratha roti is one of them. It is one of our biggest, and when we are looking at what opportunities to the programme—is fish—all these people are suppliers in addition to outsourcing some of the cooked items, which is wraps. We have done the paratha suppliers. Paratha suppliers actually, we have about 12 paratha suppliers on board. We invite people—I know people are looking on so with that forward—I wanted to make that point because I am begging people to come on and I think people do not understand that you can come into the office, there we will guide you, there are certain contracts like the catering, but the outsourcing that is almost immediate. We will work with you, together with public health. The MPs, if you have people coming in —only this morning a Member called me in terms of getting that kind of information.

So I would like to say it publicly, that we are working with the community in terms of supplies. Bread supplies, we have small contractors, bakeries, but of course the standards are important. We will like public health approval. We would like that they comply with the guidelines because we suspend very quickly.

Mr. Seemungal: What about breadfruit?

Ms. Barran: We have done some pilot with breadfruit and channa instead of potato to substitute the imported irish potato. And it was very successful. I do not know if anybody could recall when we had a shortage of potatoes we had in fact—I know the East Indian community—myself I would have used the breadfruit and it is very, very —and I think Minister of Agriculture has put it on the priority listing. Thank you.

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Mr. Seemungal: May I just—last input because I know we are running out of time now. I have heard quite bit in term of supplies. But is it at all possible to look down the road in terms of setting up some cold storage where we can maybe preserve some of these items—cassava for instance, could last a year and a half in the fridge. Breadfruit I know can last six months. A lot of these items can last very long and we could keep them so we can cost relatively stable throughout the entire year.

Ms. Barran: With the initiative from NAMDEVCO we are setting up packing houses. I do not want to take the reign too much from the Minister of Agriculture in that. But that is an initiative where we are looking at processing and processing for the programmes. Further processing of course is on our agenda. This is why, actually, we have looked at the cassava. The cassava is not taken in the raw form of course because of soil micro-organism and all of that. So they do a number of people together with TTABA, they do the further processing for us. They deliver it on our doors at the facilities without that—so it is a process item together with other things that I could [*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: I have been hearing about packing house for the last 10 years.

Ms. Barran: You will hear differently very soon.

Mr. Al-Rawi: You know all of that is in my procurement aspects. I give you the broad umbrella but you know that is the procurement I am looking for.

Madam Chairman: I would really like to ask a question that has not been touched on so far. In your mission statement you say that—well your vision, is to enhance learning opportunities. And do research in order to help you to do this. I am wondering whether any research has been done in terms of the nutritional deficiencies in the school population that can possibly be ameliorated by the school feeding. I am thinking particularly in terms of international studies that have been done that tend to show that school populations have deficiencies in iodine, Vitamin A and a lot of the time Iron Deficiency Anemia. I am wondering to what extent this sort of research has been taken into account in providing your school menus.

Ms. Martina: Madam Chair, if I may answer you, Vanessa Martina, Manager, Nutrition Services. When we sit and design our menus we take those things in consideration. For example when I did my base line study—we did a base line study on the programme—we had a sample size of over 300 children and within that grouping we had actually 4 per cent of those children who were under weight and all of them were on the programme. But also alarming was the fact that nearly 10 per cent of them were either overweight or 8 per cent was obese. The research that would have been carried out by the Ministry of Health that the Member referred to, found that at least 25 per cent of our school population at this point in time is either—25 per cent is either overweight or obese and that is in a sample size of 5,301 children. So when we sit and design our menus—and I know the question was asked previously, about whether we think a third and a quarter is appropriate. Those benchmarks that we are referring to are the ones used by

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the USDA Programme for their school feeding programme. Because it is thought that if you divide—for example, the number of meals you are going to have for a day it means that if we give you a third of the RD for lunch and a quarter for breakfast it will be sufficient for that meal.

Now, the challenge of them not getting access to other meals at the rest of the day, that is an issue as well, which is something that probably could be given consideration. So we are very cognizant of the fact that we want our meals not to contribute to the obesity problem that we have, and therefore, part of the responsibility that my department has, is to strengthen the efforts made by the schools teaching nutrition education with their students.

So we go to school to teach children as well as parents about planning healthy meals, which are the same principles that we used in terms of approaching our menu planning process as well. In terms of other micro-nutrient deficiencies, there is not a lot of data available in the region right now. There are international projects that have found, that children under five years are from iron deficiency and anemia as well as a Vitamin D deficiency. Those are two areas we do not have a challenge which in term of a menu planning. We are challenged for example, calcium intake, but which we have improved during the last few terms by reintroduction of liquid UHT milk on the programme with cereal—we serve porridge for breakfast as well. We also used dairy products, for example, cheese in our lunch menus as well.

Madam Chairman: Do I understand you correctly to say that your current menus take into consideration the possibility of iron deficiencies and Vitamin A and iodine deficiencies.

Ms. Martina: Yes, we cover those things. And iodine is not normally—you find in term of the fact that we use iodized salt in our menus that should not be a problem. But I am saying, calcium is one of the areas that we are challenging and we are really trying to get more of. There was a point in time we served UHT milk with a lunch meal, but the cost does not allow us to do that at this point in time. Yes, with lunch, but we serve it for breakfast now.

Madam Chairman: You said a word there that triggered something, salt.

Ms. Martina: In terms of meeting our requirements for the day or in terms of our menus not exceeding the quantity?

Madam Chairman: In terms of encouraging habits that lead to hypertension.

11.50 a.m.

Ms. Martina: Well, when we plan our menus, as I said, we try to meet the one-third for the day. So if it is, for example, it is 2400 milligrams of salt you should have for the day, we ensure that when we do our menus, it does not exceed 800 ml for lunch or about 600 for breakfast.

Madam Chairman: Wonderful. And in terms of sugars, is there any way that we can drastically reduce the sugar intake in our young population?

Mrs. Herrera: Okay. As I said, we would love to serve fruit all the time for breakfast but we do not

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always; we serve a juice drink. We can cut back. We do not serve sugary items for breakfast. We serve a muffin, but a muffin is—although it is a sweet item it also is a nutrient-dense item because it contains carbohydrates, fats, which the child needs. One of the things that children need is calories for functioning, which they get from their carbohydrate, which is a source of sugar as well. But in terms of having excess amounts of it, we try not to when we are planning our menus, because we understand that, of course, it could contribute to the issue of obesity, that sort thing that you are referring to.

I am glad that the PS mentioned the whole issue of looking at what should be served in cafeterias, because that is part of our challenge, that some of the items available to children are horrific. I did not bring it; there is actually a liquid candy drink that is being served. It is in a miniature soft drink bottle; there is a straw attached to and it is liquid syrup. What happened was, some children got sick; public health was called in and, of course, you know, immediately they thought we were the problem, but it was not us; it was the fact that children--nobody's body was designed to take in a liquid syrup. So that is part of challenge as well.

Madam Chairman: Can we suggest that you think very seriously about recommending to the Ministry that the soft drink coolers and the snacks be banned from the school cafeterias? The Government schools are your property and you can determine what goes in there. If you start it in the Government schools and you make a strong recommendation to the denominational schools, I think that is a start, because if the children do not have access to these unhealthy foods for six hours of the day, I do not think that in the remaining hours they can make up for what they did not get during school time.

Mrs. Herrera: Good recommendation, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: It is a matter of sending a message to the parents and you ban the snacks from coming into the school at all, so that if find any wrappers from these snacks on the school premises, you take action, because it is a banned item. I get the impression that you all realize the responsibility that you have to the population to help us to correct our own bad habits, and this is really very welcome to me, and I get the impression from my committee, this has been a very positive experience for us and we look forward to receiving the information so that we can produce the kind of report that is going to help you to move forward at the pace that you would like.

Now I offer the floor to you for any closing remarks that you would like to make.

Ms. Thomas: I would just like to offer the commitment of the Ministry of Education to continue to work with the NSDSL. We are actually including them as we review our policies and our guidelines, and even they are to be a part of the committee as we review the operations and the management of the cafeterias within our school compound, and starting again with the Government schools, because we do have jurisdiction within that sector.

Thank you.

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Ms. Benjamin: In closing, I would like to express to the committee that you have a complete buy-in from this board with the School Nutrition Programme. The entire board has been privy to the taste and the menus that have been supplied to our school children, and the board members as not just a sitting board—which I would like to advise our committee on—our board members have taken the opportunity to visit the schools and the caterers and it is an ongoing process, where there is a true picture that comes back to us at the board level, ensuring that the mandate is being carried out; the policies are being adhered to. So we will continue to work with Education and educating the children on good eating habits through the School Nutrition Programme.

Madam Chairman: I thank you very much, indeed; wish you the best, and adjourn the meeting.

Thank you.

11.55 a.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*