



OECS Secretariat, Castries St. Lucia January 7, 2010: Social Policy officials in the OECS have recommended a reform of Social Safety Net Programmes as Member Countries seek to design more efficient strategies to help the region's most vulnerable persons, including those who are suffering from the impact of the world economic crisis.

This is the priority emerging from a recent meeting to discuss the development of a Regional Social Protection Framework. Director of Social and Sustainable Development at the OECS Secretariat, Dr. James Fletcher, says the reform of social safety nets in the region is expected to begin in early 2010. "Member States are not suffering from a lack of safety net programmes. Probably where there is an issue is a lack of focus of safety net programmes, a lack of proper targeting of safety net programmes and a lack of evaluation of the impact of those safety net programmes. So one of the very important considerations moving forward is a reform of safety net programmes in the OECS with a view towards consolidating and rationalizing them so that we deal with issues like errors of exclusion - meaning those who really should be benefiting from safety net protection and are not and also errors of inclusion where persons who really should not be benefitting from safety net programmes are right now benefiting from those programmes."

Persons employed in the Hospitality and Agriculture Industries as well as those affected by the fall out of the Sugar Industry in St. Kitts and Nevis were identified among the most likely to have suffered or will suffer



the impact of the current global economic challenges. The recent meeting in Castries, reinforced the necessity of creating a culture of evidence based decision making to help ensure that the right people are targeted and benefit from a Social Protection Programme. Dr. Fletcher says it is an area that needs to be worked on much more closely with Member States and Development Partners, because it will not happen overnight: "It will take time. Many of our Member States don't have the adequate resources to deal with the collection and analysis of data, so we have to really see how best we can put in place a mechanism for information management in our Member States." The Development Partners who participated in the meeting (World Bank, UNICEF, UNECLAC, CDB, and UNDP) pledged overwhelming support for collaborative approaches that would effectively assist the most vulnerable groups.

The need for a coordinated Regional Social Protection Framework is part of an eight (8) point plan endorsed by the OECS Heads of Government and the OECS Monetary Council. This will help to reduce duplications and build on best practices among OECS Member States in addressing the plight of the neediest. Dr. Fletcher further points out that although Social Protection is administered by many ministries and many agencies in-country, very often there is no one-coordinating mechanism and quite a bit of beneficiary fatigue." He says the process needs to be coordinated: "That coordination has to take place at two levels. First, the national level with the Public Service and at the national level also, between the Public Service and the Private Sector. This is because you also have some non-state actors who are involved in social protection in one way or the other. So we have to find a way to ensure there is greater collaboration and that the very scarce resources we have are being channeled in the right direction. At the other level there is the regional collaboration that must take place so that we can be aware of what the various Member States are doing."



The development of a Regional Social Protection Framework is expected to strengthen the capacity of the region to withstand another crisis or shock. The OECS Secretariat says there is need to position the OECS and its people in such a way that mechanisms would have been put in place to develop the sort of resilience to buffer the impact of future crises.

Dr. Fletcher adds that discussions on the Regional Social Protection Framework are essential to the effective functioning of an OECS Economic Union.