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**ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITIES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF LATIN AMERICA AND  
THE CARIBBEAN**

**Response of the Government of Guyana**

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## SECTION I: GENERAL ASPECTS

1. If poverty is taken to mean the state or condition in which one is unable to acquire the basic human needs, then poverty can be said to be present in Guyana. The lack of a reliable data base makes it impossible to determine the exact extent of the phenomenon.

The economy of this country began experiencing problems from the late 1970's and by the mid 1980's the entire nation was feeling the negative effects of a declining economy so that it became absolutely necessary to introduce a programme, with external assistance, that would arrest a further decline. The Economic Recovery Programme came into being and with it came also further pressures, for, as the cost of essential commodities and services soared, salaries remained constant or moved insignificantly in the initial stages. There are signs, particularly since 1991 when the economy registered a 6.1% growth, and economic investments and activities picked up significantly.

The groups that could be described as the neediest would include pensioners, the unemployed, the underemployed, large families (especially single parent families) headed by women, new and junior members of the public services and some small-scale subsistence farmers and craft manufacturing.

Neediest Areas: (a) the low-income areas in the urban and suburban sections of the country.

(b) sections of the rural, riverain and hinterland areas.

Pressing Needs: (a) The most pressing need is for jobs and job opportunities that carry realistic wages and salaries.

(b) The other pressing need is that of housing.

2.(a) The stimulation and improvement of the national economy.

(b) The miniaturisation of the public sector and the expansion of the private sector in free market economy.

(c) Creation of more job opportunities with wages and salaries that are consistent with the cost of living.

(d) Provision of social services on a universal basis.

(e) Seeking assistance from regional and international financial agencies, where necessary and possible, to assist in the reduction of poverty and improvement of the well-being of people.

3. The Government is placing emphasis on turning around the economy mainly through the method of divestment and the encouragement of foreign investors into the country

The Establishment of the Social Impact Amelioration Programme which is helping to fund projects that will help to improve the standard of living at the community level.

The provision of income supplements to low income workers.

Increasing the benefits from the National Insurance Scheme.

Encouraging the building of housing units by the private sector and the development of available lands (infrastructure) specifically for the building of houses.

Accessing grants and other available funds from Regional and International financial agencies e.g. IDB.

Helping small entrepreneurs through agencies like Guymida, Import/Export and I.P.E.D.

Exploitation of all natural resources through foreign investments for the benefit of the nation, especially those at the lowest rungs of the ladder.

## SECTION II: NUTRITION AND HEALTH

1.1 Goals for Child Nutrition in Guyana follow the World Summit Declaration goals to be achieved by the year 2,000 which Guyana has agreed to adopt, and are as follows:-

- (a) To reduce all malnutrition levels in the 0-5 year age group by 5%
- (b) To reduce the infant and child Mortality, rates by one-third.
- (c) To reduce the rate of low birth weight (2.5 kg or less) to less than 10%
- (d) To reduce iron-deficiency levels in pregnant women by one-third.

Assessment of nutritional status of the 0-5 year old population is carried out by the Ministry of Health under its Maternal and Child Health Programme (MCH) in clinics spread throughout the country, and constitutes the main child nutrition programme in the country. A system designed to evaluate nutritional status has been instituted in all MCH clinics and evaluated based on WHO/NCHS standards.

Another major programme designed to impact on children is the School Feeding Programme supported by World Food Programme (WFP) Funds. It caters for nursery and primary level children throughout the country. However, no assessment is available on the nutritional impact of this programme although evidence indicates that the programme plays an important role in the nutritional enhancement of these children.

No specific programme addresses low birth weight as a separate entity, but preventative measures to combat low birth weight are encompassed under the educational aspects of the Maternal and Child Health Programme where food nutrition and early clinic attendance during pregnancy are emphasized.

1.2 Government has set as one of its goals the reduction of infant mortality in Guyana through effective nutritional programmes for pregnant women. This has had a significant impact on the reduction of infant mortality in Guyana.

For instance, infant mortality rate increased from 33.5% in 1979 to 49% in 1987. However, in 1990 this figure dropped to 45%, and to 43% in 1991, showing sustained improvement over the 1987 figure.

- 1.3 No problems exist in the area of neonatal tetanus to date, with no recorded case of this condition. Pregnant women are routinely given the Tetanus Toxoid vaccine providing immunity also to the foetus and infant after birth. Infants are also routinely immunized from 3 months of age with the Tetanus vaccine.
- 1.4 The Maternal and Child Health Immunization Programme has assisted greatly in reducing mortality and morbidity levels from communicable diseases in infants and children ages 0-5 years in Guyana. No cases of measles have been reported since early 1991 and Guyana, in 1991 achieved the Universal Child Immunization goal for the first time of approximately 80% total coverage of DPT, BCG, OPV and measles vaccines for children under one year old. Guyana's expanded immunization programme has contributed greatly to successful child immunization coverage.
- 1.5 The Government has pursued the policy of extending health care to all segments of the population by adopting the Primary Health Care System, comprising the Maternal and Child Health and Health Visitor Programmes. These programmes were extended to all ten administrative regions in Guyana. The Government has not only supported the extension of health care by increasing physical facilities throughout the country but by increasing training in various health professional categories to support the expansion of physical facilities and introducing new categories of health care workers to support the system, particularly in the hinterland areas of Guyana. For instance, the categories of Medex to mainly support the shortage of doctors in the outlying areas, and the Community Health Worker have been established to assist in spreading the health programmes. So far, these programmes have proven to be very successful.

## SECTION III: EDUCATION

ATTACHMENT  
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2:1 Goals re: Adult Literacy Programmes

The reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to at least 50% of its 1990 level with emphasis on female literacy.

Activities

Access to facilities and learning opportunities for 15+ children were provided with a view towards enabling them to play a meaningful role in the development of Guyana.

Encouragement and support were given the following non-formal governmental organisations.

1. Non-Formal

- i) Adult Education Association - offering numeracy and literacy skills (academics)
- ii) Churches/Voluntary Organisations - lessons in Art/Craft, Competitions debating/essay, and morals training
- iii) Guyana-Parent Hood Association - Family Planning/Health Education/Academics/Home Economics
- iv) Young Women's Association - Art/Craft/Home Management Morals, Educational Tours
- v) Early School Leavers - Home Economics, Home Management



- vi) Red Cross - Training in First Aid etc.

Included in programmes offered, organisations emphasised 'character building' as an essential ingredient to growth and development.

- vii) Institute for Applied and Continuing Education (IAC)

Activities (U.G. - sponsored)

- a) Upgrading teachers
- b) Numeracy and literary skills
- c) Organising for parents to be oriented in psychology, child-rearing skills and school awareness responsibilities.

#### 11. Schools: Primary/Secondary/Technical Vocational

Access to acquire occupational skills in keeping with one's choice is open to all students in the formal school system or at work study attachments at Private Industries or Government Ministries.

### 2.2 Goals

#### Basic Education

To provide National Access to Basic Education to at least 80% of Primary School age children through formal and non-formal education in keeping with the objectives of State Paper on Education Policy 1990.

- i) Equality of access to Education for all
- ii) Management for efficiency and effectiveness
- iii) Expansion and improvement of the Instructional Programme
- iv) Human Resource Development

In reference to (i) surveys were conducted in all regions to determine schools (a) in dire need of repairs (b) extension (c) basic facilities and equipment. Some 27 Primary Schools and 10 Secondary Schools were identified and proposals submitted to IDB for approval.

Progress had also been observed in the daily attendance of pupils at school because of the provision of a hot meal or snacks to under-privileged children of the Nursery and Primary Schools, from Prep A to Standard IV.

Added to this, necessitous cases were identified and supplied with uniforms and in some cases spectacles. The beneficiaries numbered over (7000). A substantial number of students, deserving candidates who wrote the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) benefitted from substantial assistance by way of subsidized fees.

In relation to (ii) On-going diagnostic tests were carried out to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Towards this end, Workshops/Seminars were conducted to enable teachers to cope successfully with children and school administrators to manage effectively. The following areas were dealt with

- i) the difficult child (emotional problems, training, etc.

- ii) children with physical disabilities
- iii) the slow learner
- iv) the remedial programme
- v) creation of appropriate learning aids and effective usage
- vi) evaluation - Formative/Summative, etc.
- vii) school administration and organisation.

As a consequence of the fore-going action-plans, the following progress resulted

- i) Teachers became more confident in themselves and showed more concern for their students.
- ii) Student performance in class/school at internal and external examinations showed great improvement.
- iii) Teachers were better enabled to assess their students and plan more effective programmes for growth and development.
- iv) Parents became motivated and demonstrated greater interest in the school activities/projects.

In reference to (iii) the Instructional Programme, curriculum guides were developed and are being reviewed and implemented.

August Vacation Supplementary. Tuition classes in a variety of subjects were promoted for Lower 6th Form students.

More emphasis was placed on co-curricula activities eg. athletics, drama, debating, art and craft competitions.

As a result of improved instructions students' performance at examinations both local and overseas, improved.

With reference to the development of Human Resources, through training at Workshops and Seminars, the following progress was observed.

- i) The Inspectorate was better enabled to monitor school programmes and to give expert advice to
- ii) Teachers developed skills in dealing with slow learners etc. and in the use of indigenous materials in the production of craft and the furtherance of Home Economics.
- iii) Head-teachers managed their schools more efficiently and effectively.

It is significant to note that the specific policies instituted to arrest the 'drop-out' rate are

- i) Improving school places and facilities
- ii) Improving and expanding the instructional programmes.- Academic, Technical Vocation, Co-curricular at all levels.
- iii) Training of teachers to cope with children generally.
- iv) The provision of a nutritious snack for all children: Nursery to Primary 1 & 11.
- v) Training the Inspectorate for evaluation of school programmes etc.
- vi) Printing and re-printing of curriculum Primary Texts etc.

2:3

Goals Re: Pre-Primary Education Programmes for 3.9 - 5.9  
Age group

- i) To provide maximum access for children of Nursery School age.
- ii) To provide quality stimulation and instruction in early childhood education so that at the end of the two year programme, they qualify for entry in Primary School.
- iii) To provide formal and non-formal on-going training for Nursery Education teachers.
- iv) To develop and produce appropriate materials for Nursery School.
- v) To provide a dietary programme for children of Nursery School age.

#### Achievements

- i) Ten (10) Nursery Schools have been built and the physical structure of quite a few had been upgraded.
- ii) The Nursery Field Officer System for evaluating the programmes has been introduced.
- iii) The physical facilities of some schools have been upgraded: sanitary, hetchenettes, furniture etc. for teachers and children.
- iv) Curriculum materials and instruments for use in the evaluation of students have been re-designed and appropriate documentation of materials for dissemination produced.

- v) Milk Feed continues and its impact on students' growth observed.

## SECTION IV : HOUSING

- 4.1 The Government has been encouraging the private sector to assume a more significant role in the economy, especially the housing sector. A new housing programme has been designed to ensure that private investors receive tax relief and concessions on materials and equipment imported so that construction costs could decline in the long run.

The Central Housing and Planning Agency is in the process of identifying available land for housing at concessionary prices, to build houses for the middle and low-income groups in society.

Low- and middle-income earners are being encouraged to construct their houses through the provision of tax incentives to housing developers, banks and mortgage and building societies to enable them to lend money at concessionary rates for this purpose.

In 1992 permission was granted to a private investor to begin the implementation of a **pilot** scheme consisting of prefabricated housing units. This project is expected to provide over 10,000 housing units for the low-income groups.

The Condominium Act (1990) facilitates the transfer of ownership of state rental apartments to bona-fide sitting tenants. So far, 2,527 apartments in 17 Housing Schemes have been transferred and sold. The exercise continues.

The Public Health (Amendment) Act, 1991 reduced the level of standards required for building houses and the development of physical infrastructure in order to facilitate low and middle income earners.

The Urban Rehabilitation Project is aimed at rehabilitating and upgrading the six urban centres and develop low-cost housing units to assist in increasing the housing stock.

Other policies to be implemented shortly are, the proposed implementation of a special project with the assistance of the IDB to regularise squatting areas in various parts of the country, mainly by providing and improving infrastructural drainage and sanitation facilities.

The rekindling of the Self-Help spirit which was very vibrant in the early 1970's is in the cards. Government intends to support self-help housing construction schemes by making lands available and by providing various incentives.

Finally, the Rent Restriction Act is to be revised to offer greater protection to tenants and to allow landlords a fair return to their investment.



## SECTION V: FINANCING

- I. The Government of Guyana by tradition has been strongly committed to the provision of extensive and free social services. The available record of achievement in the 1970's in the areas of education, water supply, health and housing however, could not be maintained in the 1980's due to the prolonged economic decline experienced. The quality of the service dropped. For example, recurrent spending on health dropped from 3.8% to 1.9% of GDP between 1984 and 1991. The Education sector also experienced a decline from 6.0% to 2.4% of GDP. However, most of these are being rehabilitated through the structural adjustment programme and the Social amelioration Programme.

Government intends to continue its presence rehabilitation and expansion exercise through the support of external donors and the benefits of the revamped economy.

2. Besides the Government, most of the direct assistance for poverty reduction emanates from the Non-Governmental Organizations. The extent of their assistance has not been quantified.

Whatever direct assistance the private sector provides towards poverty reduction programme cannot be quantified either. However, the private sector, which in the last few years has expanded significantly, indirectly contributes towards poverty reduction through employment income earning, and on-the-job skills training programmes. There are however, no quantitative estimates available.

It is however, noteworthy that between 1986-June, 1992, the Local Private Sector has invested about G \$3108.8 million in the Agricultural Sector, G \$1021.5 million in the Mining and Quarrying Sector, G \$6751.0 million in the Service Sector. These figures reflect only actual disbursement to the Private Sector by Commercial Banks and the Guyana Agricultural and Development Bank (GAIBANK), and not the total investment in the Private Sector

3. Like the private sector, foreign financing has not been directly aimed at poverty reduction, but substantial investment in capital expenditures have been a source of employment, and increase of incomes to the low-income workers between 1988-1992 for example, foreign private investment has been impressive, US \$ 25.0 mm in Agriculture, US\$76.5m in Forestry, US\$162.0 in Gold Mining and US 829.6m in Petroleum Exploration.

The most recent direct contribution from external sources towards the alleviation of poverty is through the Social Impact Amelioration Programme (SIMAP). Between 1990-92 a total sum of G \$270.0mm came from external sources, and G 81,280.0mm is projected for 1993-96. These are directly targeted at the most vulnerable groups in the Guyanese society who are likely to be hardest hit by the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme launched in 1989. The project types include Education and Skills Training, Income Supplement, Health and Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, Agriculture and Irrigation and Transport/roads.

## SECTION VI: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Within the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, the following programmes are pursued:

(i) through the Children's Service Unit

(a) Children from Low Income families receive free school uniforms (pants, blouses, shorts, skirts etc)

(b) A home for street Urchins- New Horizons was established in October, 1991 and a rehabilitation programme towards skills development for economic self-sufficiency is being pursued.

(ii) Through the Senior Citizens' Service Unit elderly persons on low fixed incomes are brought together in "Golden Age Clubs" to pursue economic ventures collectively. clubs in Georgetown and West Coast Berbice are making and selling salted fish, plantain chips, and craft products. Similar activities are going on elsewhere.

(III) The Women's Affairs Bureau has been targetting single mothers operating a Revolving Loan Fund for small enterprises and holding regular seminars on Small Business Management.

(IV) The Social Security Service Unit has been running Craft Development Classes and Skills Development Apprenticeship Schemes for Teenagers who had dropped out

of the school system.

These Programmes are run in collaboration with NGO's such as the YWCA, the Carnegie School of Home Economics and certain business houses.

Most of the beneficiaries are girls who were forced out of school because of early pregnancies.

The Social Security Service Unit runs a Means Tested Programme towards Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance.

(V) The National Relief Committee provides assistance in terms of cash, food, clothing, shelter, and furniture to victims of natural and man-made disasters. Periodic Assistance is also given to the aged.

Funding is obtained partly by Government Subvention and local and international charities. There is a strong linkage with "food for the poor".

(VI) The Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency operates a Job Counselling and Placement Service.

(VII) The Board of Industrial Training operates an Apprenticeship Scheme in collaboration with large Corporations and Business concerns.

2. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, was established barely a year ago in response to the problem of the scattered nature of the institutional arrangements dealing with Social Welfare affairs, particularly those concerned with the most disadvantaged groups. It brought together all these under one organizational structure and administration. So far nothing has occurred to warrant further institutional reforms. The Government is looking at ways to implementing institutional strengthening exercise to deal with the increased load of work in the Ministry.
3. The State Planning Secretariat, instituted around 1975, has as part of its functions the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating social programmes funded by the government and/or external agencies and governments in terms of fiscal accountability, technical efficiency and their relationship to the intended beneficiaries. The Budget Release Committee operates on a monthly basis, releasing funds in accordance with progress made and making recommendations to the Ministry of Finance on all fiscal issues arising from the said projects.

## SECTION VII: PARTICIPATION

1. It has always been a central policy of the Government of Guyana to encourage and rekindle the spirit of community self-help through public education and the assistance of various social organizations. Government has always supported this with the provision of financial and technical assistance. Through this various housing schemes and social programmes have been implemented. The Government plans to strengthen the grassroots organization in various communities by strengthening popular participation in local government.

A system of national dialogue is on the drawing board to bring together the major Social Partners, namely the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Organized labour and the Private Sector, to solve such issues through consultation and to find collective, generally popular solutions to various problems at the national, regional and local levels.

2. Government tends support to all the Non-Governmental Organizations such as churches and other religious and social organizations who operate in the areas of poverty reduction. Some examples are:-

- (i) the May Rodrigues School for Early School Leavers which provides skills training for Teenage girls who dropped out of the school system.

- (ii) Beacon Foundation provides free and subsidised food to the aged, the ill and the Destitute. Skills training sessions are provided for boys who are still on the streets. A Revolving Loan Fund is operated for Mothers of children who are/were on the streets.
- (iii) The Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association has a skills training scheme for sexually active teenage girls.
- (IV) The Institute of Private Enterprise Development (I.P.E.D.) offers financial and technical assistance to small business and farming enterprises, particularly those with the potential of employing labour and passing on skills.
- (V) Through the Social Impact Amelioration Programme (SIMAP), an adjunct of the Economic Recovery Programme, targeting the vulnerable group in society, Futures Fund (a canadian organization for social assistance), UNICEF etc., a number of community development projects and small income generating enterprises have developed over the last three years.

Government intends, through the cooperation of its Social Partners, to continue encouraging increased popular participation in community-based activities particularly those which target the Poor and Disadvantage for assistance.