



●THE FACES OF POVERTY – Port Louis, 2010.

Minister Duval calls poverty summit

By Mahesh Bugnath

A national summit on poverty later this year will have the task of drawing up a roadmap for the social integration and economic empowerment of the country's poor and needy.

Called by Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment Xavier Luc Duval, it will include the National Empowerment Fund, civil society, the private sector and other partners engaged in the fight against poverty.

The summit has a major challenge. There are currently 26,400 poor households in Mauritius, which represent some 106,000 people. This means that nearly 8% of households here live in poverty.

There are some 7,000 families across the island living on less than Rs4,000 a month and according to the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups (TFSIVG), the living standards of the poorest in our society are of growing concern.

Minister Duval said in parliament this week: "A gigantic task has been bestowed upon my ministry and I propose to proceed by way of extensive consultations and in dialogue with stakeholders."

The mandate that was given to this Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment is to provide assistance to the needy by exploring all possible avenues open to them to access resources and facilities.

The main catalyst for change will be through the National Empowerment Foundation, whose tasks will be to implement programmes aimed at these vulnerable groups such as the Empowerment Programme (EP), Eradication of Absolute Poverty (EAP), Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups (TFIVG).

In the National Assembly this week, Minister Duval announced that the programmes are being fine-tuned and consolidated to make them more effective, wide-ranging and results-oriented.

The NEF has undertaken a "Needs Assessment" to update its data-base on all households falling below the poverty line through individual interviews of heads of poor families. This survey was carried out a few weeks ago.

□Poverty map□

By holding a summit on poverty, a "poverty map" will be developed to provide a comprehensive view of the situation. It will also enable the NEF to redesign, strengthen and rationalise existing programmes to ensure that they address priorities such as child welfare and development, employment of the handicapped, training in demand-driven sectors, and social housing.

Computerised data-base and management information system are currently being sought to establish measurable monitoring indicators and an evaluation plan for the NEF.

In the meantime, the minister has identified a number of priorities since assuming office in May.

The first is child welfare starting as from three months to 18 years in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare.

The second is employability of disabled people in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions.

Enhancement of the "Training and Placement" Programme of the NEF, the doubling of people trained for the next 12 months are also top priorities of the ministry.

House ownership and access to housing is a major hurdle to the economic empowerment of the poor and in line with this, the government has announced the construction of 10,000 houses in its programme for the mandate 2010-15. Half of those 10,000 houses will be destined for the poor.

Other avenues are also being considered by government to help those living in poverty – some of them are novel like the Work from Home Project and fair trade opportunities for the poor.