



Duval steps up poverty fight

By Sheena Ramdonee

Another step in the battle to eradicate poverty has been signalled with the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) taken under the wing of the newly-created Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment.

Two NEF agencies – the Eradication of Absolute Poverty (EAP) and the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups (TFSIVG) – have been merged in order to improve delivery of services and increase efficiency.

The new move was officially announced by the Minister of Social Integration and Poverty Alleviation Xavier Luc Duval.

The merger will enable the NEF to target their actions at the families who are most in need and find solutions that are appropriate to their problems.

The approach adopted by the NEF since its creation has been based on the implementation of programmes, that is there would be one national programme for all beneficiaries.

This has now changed from programme-based to case management. Given that both the EAP and the Trust Fund have been

merged, officers of the NEF will now be given the task of managing the cases of individual families and ensuring their follow-up while making sure that they benefit from the appropriate help.

“It has become extremely important to review the way the institution operates. Since its inception, the NEF has immensely helped in the eradication of poverty but still more needs to be done and can be done,” said Minister Duval.

To date, the NEF has intervened in just one-third of the pockets of poverty across the island. This situation is bound to change, according to the minister, as field workers have compiled a database of families living below the poverty line.

A list of more than 7,000 families needing assistance has been drawn up and appropriate actions will be taken to reach all those in need.

A pocket of poverty is defined as any location where there are at least 14 families living below the poverty line, that is earning less than Rs5,000 per month.

“The database will enable us to provide tailor-made solutions that are targeted to suit the needs of the communities in which we are intervening,” said Minister Duval.

The officers working under the EAP and the Trust Fund will have their jobs restyled

and new wage structures will be developed accordingly. The EAP, for example, used to have one programme manager with six regional coordinators and 12 social workers. For the Trust Fund, one programme manager would have nine social facilitators and 23 field workers.

Under the new scheme, the post of field worker has been restyled as case worker with the specific task of feeding information into the NEF database, act as a focal point for all requests for NEF assistance, and prepare priority needs of pockets of poverty.

Also the approach has changed to ensure that development is not only made at the level of the family but encompasses the whole community so that problems like roads, infrastructure etc., can be looked into to ensure that those families benefit the most.

Under the new scheme, each case worker will have a pre-determined number of families under his or her responsibility. Currently this amounts to around 280 families for each field worker.

This is too high according to Minister Duval and he says that with more personnel and the collaboration of other organisations, each staff member will have fewer families to look after thus ensuring more efficiency in service delivery.