

**ECLAC International Expert Meeting
on
Towards the Consolidation of a Welfare State in Latin
America and the Caribbean: The Future of Social
Protection in an Era of Uncertainty**

**“Universal Social Protection Systems with a Life Cycle Approach to confront the
Impacts of Disasters and Crisis: The Antigua and Barbudan Experience”**

By

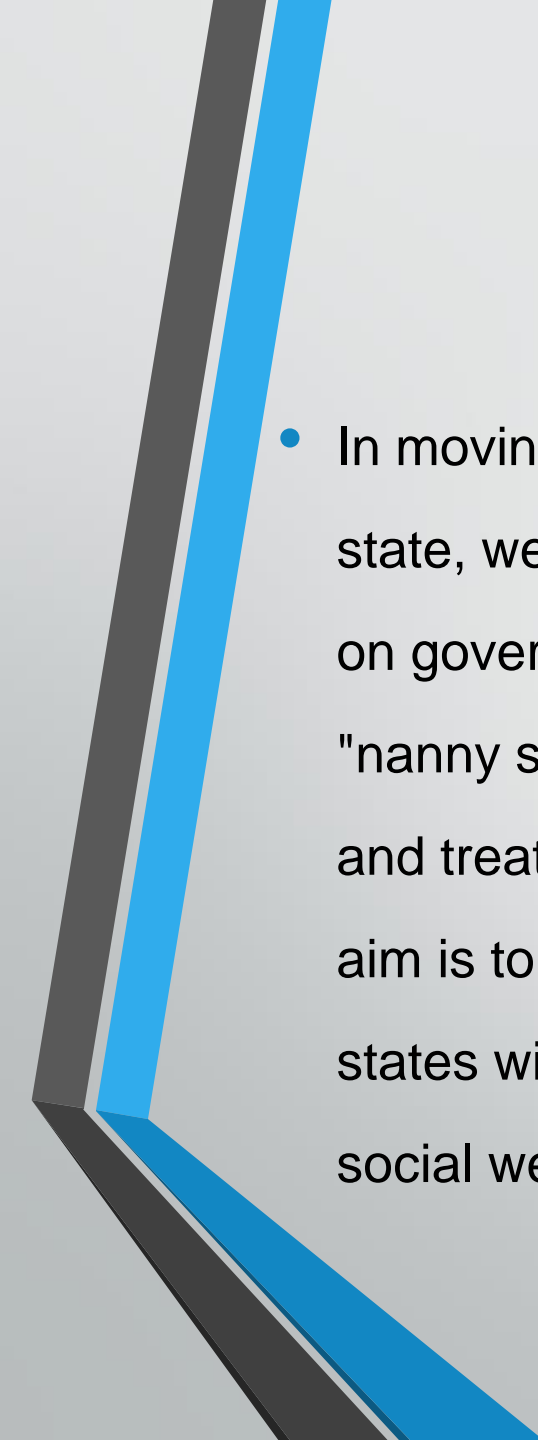


**Hon. Dean Jonas M.P., Minister of Social Transformation, Human Resource
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Social Protection Systems


- Social Protection contributes to effective social cohesion and stability which are essential features for overall sustainable development. Moreover, fragile societies, specifically small island developing states (SIDS) with high inequalities, high debt burden, limited government savings and catastrophe risk insurance coverage are normally inflexible when faced with external shocks, such as disasters/emergencies, or a protracted crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As the International Labour Organization (ILO) notes, “social protection is about people and families having security in the face of vulnerabilities and contingencies, it is having access to health care, and it is about working in safety.” Achieving adequate social protection, as a right for all, with a life cycle approach, ideally supports the term of providing social protection from the cradle to the grave.

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- In moving towards a consolidated welfare state, we are not promoting dependency on governments or as some refer a "nanny state" in which adults are coddled and treated like children. However, the aim is to strive towards modern welfare states with a focus on the economic and social welfare of its citizens.

- This commences at the social protection floor, the first level of protection in our national social protection systems. Here, states undertake to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions, and other benefits.

- The poorest and most vulnerable in our societies are usually the most in need of social protection and support. Regrettably, they are the least protected.





Some of the Gaps that became even more evident during the Global Health Pandemic were:

- Lack of coordination among social protection systems, agents and mechanisms
- Lack of effective contingency planning; ad hoc planning approach
- Poor data collection and harmonization
- Lack of mental health and psycho-social support
- Lack of systematic universal unemployment benefits
- Accessibility to sustainable social protection financing
- Limited or poor accessibility to telecommunications systems
- Social exclusion of some vulnerable groups




COVID-19: What emerging needs have surfaced?

- Demand for effective mental health assessments, evaluations, and counseling.
- Better coordinated emergency relief efforts inclusive of human and capital resources.
- Facilities (Shelters, Homes) for children and women in crisis.
- Accessible and affordable telecommunications systems for teachers/students to facilitate remote/hybrid learning.
- Increased demand for additional resources and efforts by government, non-governmental agencies and civil society.
- The need for increased accessibility to sustainable Social Protection Financing for shock responsive social protection.
- The establishment of an Economic Impact Payment or Stimulus mechanism for instances such as COVID-19 or any health pandemic, natural or man-made disaster, and future economic crisis.

Experience in A&B that can be Replicated or Enhanced throughout the Region

- With the recent enactment of the Social Protection Act 2020, the flagship social protection non-contributory cash transfer programme has been reformed to offer assistance to households/families, rather than previous individual support, while still considering the individual specific needs of its members.
- The new act incorporates the establishment of a Social Protection Fund to provide financial assistance to poor and vulnerable households.

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- Current individual support in terms of the cash transfer value is being revised to reflect household level support. These future interventions at the household level would consider factors such as high cost of living, marginal inflation and external shocks; and as a result, will expand the purchasing power of the targeted households and increase the positive impact of the intervention.
 - The threshold for household level support based on a determined scientific formula, would be applied based on household size e.g.
 - 1 member
 - 2 - 3 members
 - 4 + members
 - New interventions can be implemented in line with the parameters of the Social Protection Act 2020, and further work can be done to optimize the cash transfer being provided to maximize impact, whilst being cognizant of the fiscal space available in Antigua and Barbuda.

This concept can be replicated or enhanced regionally, as global and regional best practices include:

- Reviewing the transfer values as a percentage of expenditure required to meet household essential needs;
- Identifying periodic intervals (i.e. every 5 years) to review the purchasing power and adjust accordingly;
- Reviewing the transfer value to consider individual needs, for example the additional costs borne by people with disabilities, or additional requirements for pregnant and lactating women, or for children under 5; and
- Pre-determining the value of top-ups which would be applied in times of external shocks.

Social Protection Systems

- There are several universal and targeted contributory and non-contributory social protection programmes, which provides cash and in-kind benefits to individuals and households; whether pre or post disaster or emergency crisis.



Some social protection programs/benefits for families, children in A&B which existed prior to and during COVID-19 pandemic

- Social Protection Assistance – non-contributory cash transfers (Social Protection Board)
- Petro Caribe People's Benefit Programme – non-contributory in-kind transfers, food subsidy
- Petro Caribe Senior Citizens Utility Subsidy Programme – non-contributory cash transfers/utility subsidy
- Over 80yrs Utility Subsidy program – non-contributory cash transfers/utility subsidy
- Medical Benefits Scheme medical assistance – contributory in-kind transfers
- Social Security old age pension – contributory cash transfers
- Government pension - non-contributory cash transfers (public servants.)

Some social protection programs/benefits for families, children in A&B which existed prior to and during COVID-19 pandemic, cont'd.

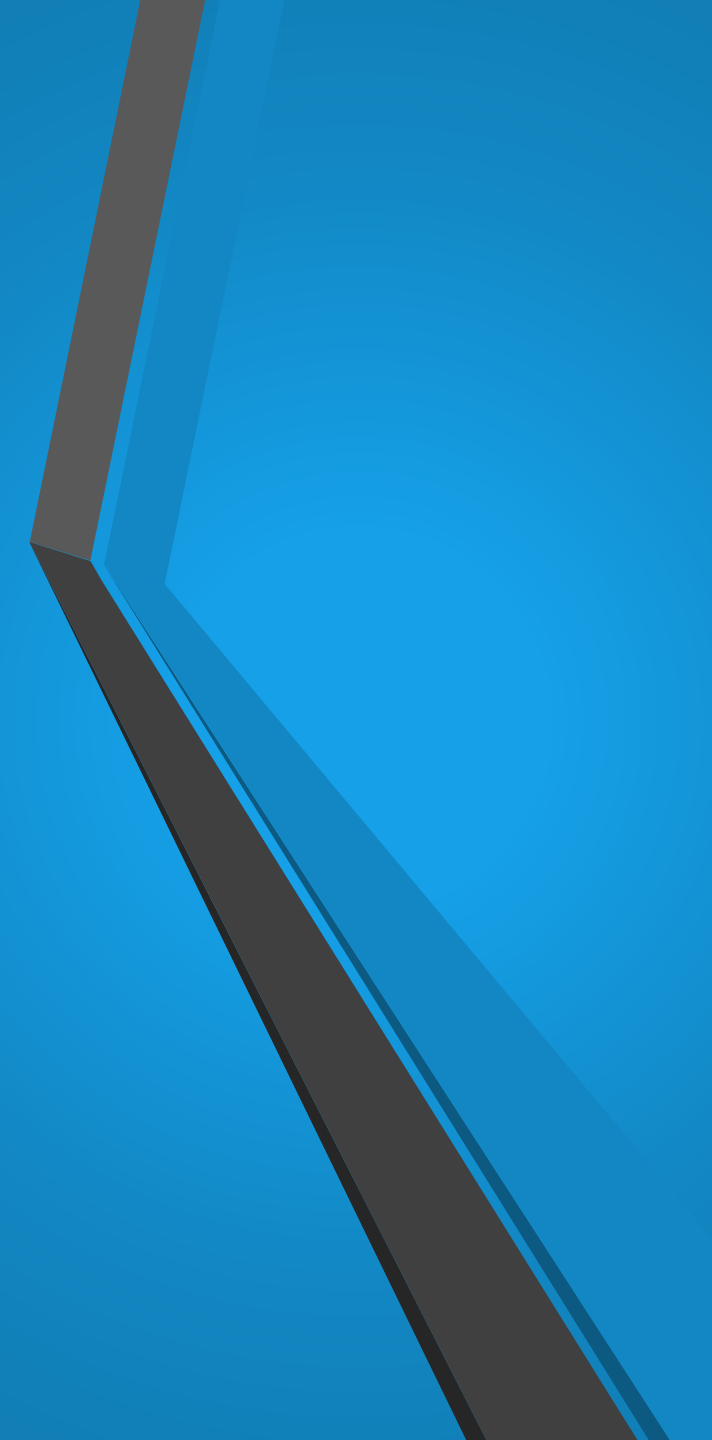
- Fire victims Assistance - non-contributory cash transfers
- Funeral grant assistance - non-contributory cash transfers
- School Meals Programme, School Textbooks Scheme, School Uniform Grant, School Transportation System all universal non-contributory in-kind transfers/subsidy
- Home Advancement Programme for Poor and Indigent – non-contributory social/public works
- New Work Experience Job Programme – non-contributory cash transfers
- Government Residential Assistance and Care for Elderly and Eligible (GRACE) Programme – non-contributory in-kind transfers.

During COVID-19 some Additional Emergency Programs were Established

- ❑ Government of Antigua and Barbuda COVID-19 Emergency Food Programme Assistance (EFPA)
- ❑ Government of Antigua and Barbuda COVID-19 Government Assistance Programme (GAP) – Cash Transfers and Food Packages/Vouchers
- ❑ Ministry of Agriculture ‘Farm Ah Yah Yard’ National Seedling Distribution Programme
- ❑ EnGenDER COVID-19 Support for Survivors of Gender-based and sexual violence – Cash Transfers
- ❑ EnGenDER COVID-19 Tourism Sector and Sex Workers – Food and Personal Care packages
- ❑ To date the Government of Antigua and Barbuda COVID-19 Government Assistance Programme (GAP) – Food Packages/Vouchers distributions are still ongoing.
- ❑ Assisting poor and vulnerable households, especially for the elderly, unemployed persons, persons with disabilities, households with children.
- ❑ Food and care packages – inclusive of baby items such as diapers and formula.
- ❑ The Ministry of Social Transformation also received cash transfers through UNICEF and its international partners, and cash transfers and food packages through UNDP.

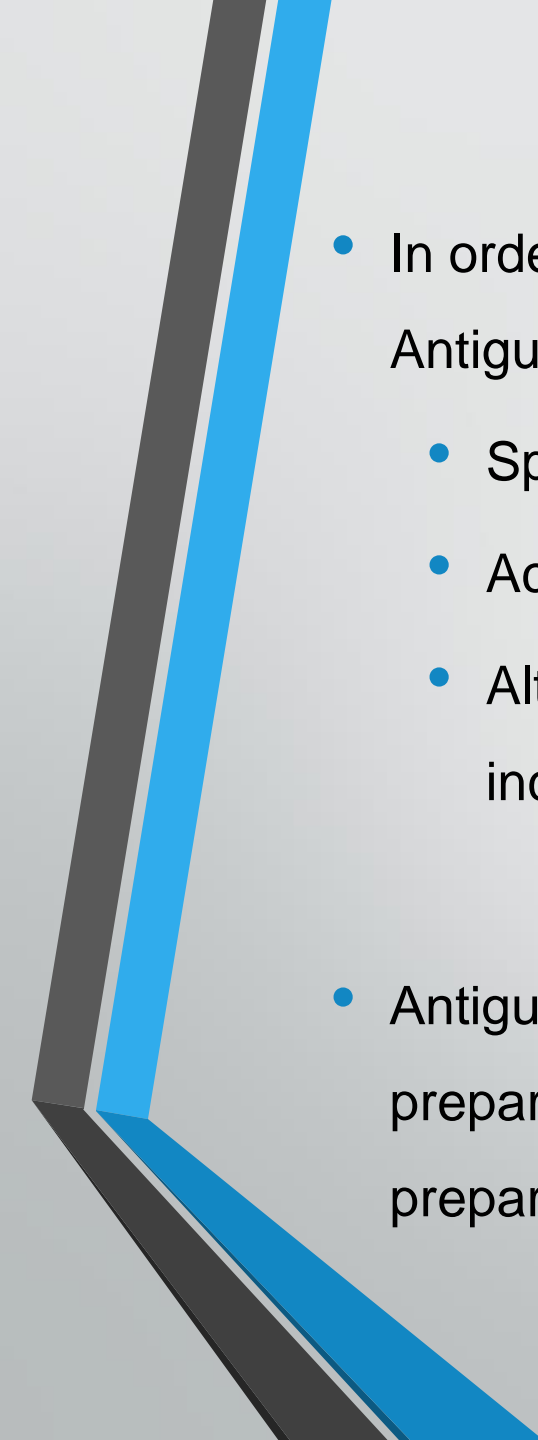
Natural Disasters/ Disaster Crisis and Social Protection

- A Contingency Disaster Emergency Fund was established to facilitate disaster management, emergency relief and humanitarian aid pre and post disasters/humanitarian crisis.
 - Housing/ shelters
 - Housing was provided for all residents of the sister island Barbuda in Antigua, following the devastation caused by Hurricanes Irma/Maria in 2017
 - Food/care packages
 - International and regional aid
 - Support from NGOs and wider civil society

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- CDEMA represents increase regional support as it relates to disaster risk management.

It promotes and fosters regional lessons learned, best practices sharing events and initiatives, which supports improved shock responsive social protection

- Antigua and Barbuda have made strong progress in ensuring that both its social protection and disaster risk management legislations are revised and current. These afford opportunities for strengthened collaboration, coordination, and shock responsive social protection tools, notably the Contingency Disaster Emergency Fund and Social Protection Fund.

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- In order to fully optimize the potential of shock responsive social protection, however, Antigua and Barbuda needs access to more resources and support.
 - Specific budgetary allocations and the establishment of reserve funds
 - Access to multilateral resources will remain important
 - Alternative risk financing instruments from multilateral development banks including the use of contingent loans based on agreed macro-economic targets
 - Antigua and Barbuda has made significant strides with regard to the country's preparedness and response strategies. However, there is still need to strengthen preparedness and response capacity in relation to health-related disasters.



- Natural hazards and climate change tend to impact the poor more, usually living in marginal conditions and have insufficient income to make the necessary adaptations. Disaster risk and climate change management strategies are also important tools for social protection and national cohesion.



Conclusion: Summary of Effective Social Protection Interventions

- ❑ A substantial increase in health-sector expenditure equivalent to 0.5% of GDP was directed toward the purchase of critical medical supplies, equipment and personnel.
- ❑ Implementation of up to 25% reduction in electricity rates to the public and fuel costs to fisher-folk for 90 days. The provision of public utilities waivers of fees/penalties afforded universal coverage to **ALL** households.
- ❑ The introduction of a one-year investment incentive framework for home renovation and construction designed to stimulate growth and employment in the labor-intensive sector.
- ❑ A suspension of the common external tariff on food imports to further reduce the cost of living and ensure food and nutrition security; a suspension of all new tax measures announced in the 2020 budget; and an expansion of social safety net programmes.

Summary of Effective Social Protection Interventions cont'd.

- ❑ The implementation of a COVID-19 Government Assistance Food Voucher Programme – an expansion of the GAP programme to provide cash assistance to those with children who have been made unemployed by the pandemic.
- ❑ Direct funding to support business model transformation and the digitization of small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs).
- ❑ School Meals Programme distribution continued throughout the series of lockdowns and remote learning.
- ❑ New Work Experience job programme (active labour policy) continued with no cessation of payments to beneficiaries.



THANK YOU!!!