

Message of the Hon. Alain WONG, M.S.K,
Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment,
in the context of the commemoration of the
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2019

Today, on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we join people around the world to reflect on the progress made to alleviate poverty and acknowledge the work that is left to be done to improve the well-being of all. October the 17th represents an opportunity to acknowledge the effort and struggle of people living in poverty, and also an opportunity for them to make their concerns heard.

This year's theme "*Acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty*" reminds us that our efforts to overcome poverty must address the fulfillment of all the rights of children as spelt out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi, "*Poverty is the worst form of violence*". It causes lifelong damages to millions of children around the world, turning them into adults who perpetuate the cycle of poverty by transmitting it to their children.

Government has placed the rights of children high on its agenda. Based on principles of broad economic growth and inclusiveness, Mauritius has implemented a six pillar strategy to combat poverty, namely massive investment in education and training for all, the development of an inclusive economic growth model, the consolidation of a strong social security system, increased empowerment support to poor families, combatting social ills including drug addiction and trafficking, and last but not least, addressing the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

Government has already demonstrated its commitment towards poverty eradication through the adoption of the Marshall Plan Against Poverty, which specifically includes and addresses the needs, concerns and rights of children and their families. The enactment of the Social Integration and Empowerment Act 2016 provides for a series of empowerment programmes and projects that put the vulnerable families at the center of development. Since 2016 to date, funds to the tune of Rs 618 Million have been disbursed under the Subsistence Allowance Scheme for some 11,000 families registered under the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

As we all know, education is the key if a person wants to come out of the poverty trap. Around Rs 349 Million have been disbursed on Empowerment Schemes directly related to the field of education, namely the Child Allowance Scheme, the Creche Scheme, the School Materials Scheme, the School Premium Scheme and the Free Examinations Fees Scheme.

With a view to secure lifelong employability, some 1,182 SRM beneficiaries have completed training in various fields whereas 3,646 persons have attended job fairs organized across the island. Training in Life Skills has also been introduced and is helping towards changing and transforming the mindset of beneficiaries for a better future. Children of vulnerable families have been given the opportunity to take part in recreational and leisure activities so as to promote their emotional and social development. Furthermore, a “Boot Camp” programme has been initiated, in collaboration with the Mauritius Police Force, the Special Mobile Force and the Mauritius Scouts Association, with a view to instill a culture of discipline among these children.

Government is also providing housing support to improve the living conditions of vulnerable families. 10% of all social housing units constructed by Government are now allocated to beneficiaries under the Social Register of Mauritius. Moreover, to ensure the active collaboration of all partners in the fight against poverty, Community Working Groups have been set-up in all districts including Rodrigues, thus providing a platform for linking non-state actors, government institutions, NGO’s and civil society.

Since its inception in 2017, the National Social Inclusion Foundation, which ensures a better integration of social services and programmes provided by NGOs, has funded a total of 525 projects for 387 NGO’s for a total amount of Rs 514 Million. Out of this, a total amount of Rs431 M has been disbursed for 339 projects involving some 78,000 children.

In a bid to ensure inclusiveness of innovation and to bridge the digital divide, Government is providing free broadband internet access to some 11,000 SRM families. The implementation of this project has already started and as at date some 50% of these families are already connected.

As a caring Government, we are making every effort to address the needs, concerns and rights of children and their families for a healthy and productive population for future generations.

I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all partners and stakeholders who are actively engaged in the fight against poverty for their continued dedication, commitment and unflinching support.

Fighting poverty is a collective responsibility. I would therefore call upon each and everyone of us to join hands together to end poverty.

On this day, let us together ensure that no one is left behind and that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his/her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Honourable Marie Roland Alain WONG YEN CHEONG, M.S.K

Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment

October 17, 2019.