Gender Aware Beneficiary Assessment of the Public Assistance Programme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

In partnership with Canada

BUILD BACK EQUAL 5 GENDER EQUALITY

UN WOMEN

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Funded in part by the Government of Canada, **Build Back Equal Project** focuses on ensuring that barriers to women's economic empowerment are reduced. The Project takes a comprehensive approach to addressing these barriers by (i) strengthening capacity and access to financing to women and youth-owned businesses; (ii) fit for purpose social protection programmes, including childcare services to reduce women's care responsibilities and to ensure no one is left behind; (iii) sexual and reproductive health services that are more effective and that survivors of gender-based violence can have easier access to the services they need including through the establishment of multi-stakeholder GBV Referral pathways. UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean is the lead implementing Agency, in conjunction with UNFPA Caribbean Office in four Eastern Caribbean Countries: Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

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Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Multi-Country Office (MCO) – Caribbean team for its unwavering support and insightful guidance throughout the project. We are particularly grateful to Ms. Isiuwa Iyahen, Deputy Representative, for her invaluable contributions and dedicated support. Gratitude is also extended to Ms. Rhema Lewis, Project Coordination Analyst of the Build Back Equal Programme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; her contributions were essential to the success of the project.

Our sincere thanks to the following government officials for their invaluable support: Mrs. Merissa Finch-Burke, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Mobilization (MONM); Ms. Odelia Thomas, Deputy Director of Social Protection; Mr. Anton Cesar, Deputy Director of the Beneficiary Unit; Ms. Jemma Alexander, Director of Child and Youth Affairs Division; and Mrs. Jemima George-Richardson, Director of the Gender Affairs Division. Their willingness to collaborate and share their expertise significantly enhanced the value of the project.

We are profoundly grateful to the case workers, intake officers, data officers and other staff from MONM who generously agreed to be interviewed. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives regarding the Public Assistance Programme (PAP) was invaluable to our research. We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to PAP beneficiaries, who generously shared their time, personal stories and experiences within their communities and the programme. Their invaluable insights enriched this assessment and will undoubtedly contribute to ongoing improvements of PAP.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to the research team led by Dr. Kimberly-Ann Gittens-Baynes and including Dr. Roxanne Brizan-St. Martin, Ms. Kimoy Worrell and Ms. Rani Bhajan. Their invaluable contributions were instrumental to the success of this research.

List of Acronyms

EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSG	Family Support Grant
HDSD	Human Development Service Delivery
GABA	Gender Aware Beneficiary Assessment
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GoSVG	Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MIS	Management Information System
MOENR	Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation
MOHW	Ministry of Health and Wellness
MONM	Ministry of National Mobilization
MoRES	Ministry of Results for Equity Systems
NESDP	National Economic and Social Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIS	National Insurance Services

PAP	Public Assistance Programme
SAMIS	Social Assistance Management Information System
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSN	Social Safety Net
SSNA	Social Safety Net Assessment
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USD	United States Dollar
XCD	Eastern Caribbean Dollar
YES	Youth Empowerment Service

Executive Summary

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a multi-hazard country vulnerable to natural disasters and economic fragility, and faces significant challenges which underscores the critical role of a robust social protection system. Amidst these vulnerabilities, enhancing social protection programmes is paramount to fostering resilience, as is ensuring equitable resource distribution and safeguarding the well-being of all citizens. The Public Assistance Programme (PAP), managed by the Ministry of National Mobilization (MONM), is the main social programme in the country, which offers three primary grant categories:

- **Vulnerability or Poor Relief Grant** – This grant provides long-term assistance to older persons (elderly), persons with disabilities, and persons unfit to work due to chronic illness, including persons living with HIV.
- **Family Support Grant (FSG)** – This grant provides short-term financial assistance, coupled with human development education. Beneficiaries must complete the 'WE CAN' capacity building programme to receive financial support.
- **Emergency Grant** – This grant provides one-off payment for emergency situations and needs.

The Gender Aware Beneficiary Assessment (GABA)

PAP serves a vital purpose, which is to offer a safety net for persons facing hardship; however, without a strong focus on gender, the programme may struggle to reach its full potential, as it fails to recognize the distinct challenges faced by women and men in terms of poverty and vulnerability. In response to these challenges, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean (UN Women MCO – Caribbean) has initiated a project supporting gender-responsive analysis and research on institutional, policy and service-delivery frameworks for social protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A cornerstone of this analysis is the Gender Aware Beneficiary Assessment (GABA), which is a comprehensive tool that scrutinizes the effectiveness of development programmes and focuses on accessibility and benefits received by intended beneficiaries. The GABA examines the entire beneficiary journey of PAP and identifies systematic barriers and bottlenecks faced by both women and men.

Methodology

The project employed four different data collection methods, including:

- Desk review of reports and documents related to social protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with MONM staff
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with PAP beneficiaries
- In-depth interviews with selected PAP beneficiaries

Analytical Approach

The Determinant Analysis Model, adapted from the Monitoring of Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) framework, provided the foundation for the analytical approach. This model focuses on the enabling environment, demand, supply and quality determinants of PAP, as well as how these variables correlate to address the specific needs, risks and vulnerabilities of children, women, men and other marginalized groups. The traffic light system was used to determine the extent and presence of bottlenecks related to each determinant, which entails categorizing them as significant, moderate or non-existent.

Enabling Environment in SVG

Social norms in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, such as the perception of men as breadwinners and not eligible candidates for social assistance creates barriers. Beneficiaries who were men reported facing stigma and complicated application processes; whereas older persons, who are often caregivers for extended families, reported facing financial difficulties and ostracism when seeking social assistance.

The legislative and policy framework for social protection presents significant bottlenecks. In particular, an outdated Public Assistance Act and the absence of cohesive social and gender policies has led to fragmented service delivery, duplication of efforts and inefficient resource use. Limited procedural oversight and impaired coordination mechanisms further hinder effective service delivery. The absence of an integrated data management information system (MIS) is also a major shortcoming. Recently, however, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (GoSVG) received World Bank funding to implement the Human Development Service Delivery (HDSD) Project, which includes the development and implementation of a new Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS) to centralize and integrate data from each of the different social welfare programmes. The introduction of SAMIS presents an opportunity to modernize and streamline data management and enhance coordination and accountability.

Supply of PAP

This component examines whether PAP effectively provides essential resources to all eligible beneficiaries. Beneficiary feedback indicated that PAP payments are insufficient to meet basic needs, such as food, utilities and medical care. Budgetary constraints result in extensive wait lists for poor relief and quotas for short-term grants, which affects primarily women beneficiaries. Another challenge is that MONM

human resources and technical capacities are underdeveloped, leading to unstandardized service delivery and inadequate targeting of vulnerable women and men. Communication issues and low programme awareness among beneficiaries, particularly women with limited access, further hinders effective service delivery.

Demand

Beneficiaries face specific challenges that affect the effectiveness and utilization of PAP. Although the application process is theoretically decentralized, it often requires visits to the main office in Kingstown, which disproportionately affects women with mobility constraints. Beneficiaries report long wait times without follow-up or communication. Gendered labour roles and lack of childcare options impact women's participation in human development programmes and job-seeking opportunities. Beneficiaries endorse expanding training programmes to include technical courses for entrepreneurial opportunities. Coping mechanisms range from seeking assistance from other agencies to more extreme measures, which highlights the deficiencies of PAP.

Quality

The current PAP structure is not informed by a comprehensive gender analysis or recognition of specific gender-based needs, such as unpaid childcare, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services or employment opportunities. Referral pathways to access key services, particularly health services, are not leveraged enough to ensure comprehensive support. Beneficiaries express a need for enhanced financial support and additional services, such as psychosocial support. Despite having a feedback mechanism, most people refrain from voicing complaints about PAP, due to a lack of faith in resolution; however, there is general satisfaction with PAP as a lifeline during difficult periods and for persons facing long-term challenges.

Recommendations

Based on findings of the GABA, a set of strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity and equity of PAP in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. While some recommendations may align with ongoing initiatives within MONM, they remain crucial for addressing gender and child-related disparities identified through the GABA.

1. **PAP legal and policy reform** – Revise the Public Assistance Act to reflect current socio-economic realities and incorporate gender-responsive provisions. Revisions should ensure that the Act promotes equitable access to social protection for all, regardless of gender, age and other demographics. Legislation should also make accommodations for new institutional arrangements, expanded benefit structures, financial systems, staffing and SAMIS implementation.
2. **Develop cohesive social and gender policies** – Establish comprehensive social protection and gender policies that align with international best practices. These policies should aim to reduce fragmentation, avoid duplication of effort and ensure efficient resource allocation.

3. **Develop a comprehensive PAP Operation Manual** – Develop a comprehensive operation manual detailing standardized procedures for all aspects of PAP, and ensure clarity and consistency in implementation across all levels of the programme.
4. **SAMIS implementation** – Prepare for SAMIS deployment to streamline data management and prioritize gender-sensitive data collection, and analysis of sex-disaggregated data.
5. **Develop a capacity building plan** – Develop a capacity building plan that defines human resource needs and enhances staff skills and establishes clear job specifications.
6. **Develop an information sharing strategy for MONM** – An internal communication strategy should establish clear guidelines, procedures and protocols for communication between and among ministry units, and ensure that information is shared promptly and effectively.
7. **Enhance the benefit structure** – Expand human development components, conduct needs assessments to identify skills gaps, and integrate psychosocial support and childcare services to address gender-specific risks and improve overall programme effectiveness.
8. **Enhance mechanisms for multi-sectoral collaboration** – Establish mechanisms for inter-sectoral collaboration and information sharing to foster a unified social protection system. Include the Gender Affairs Division (GAD) as part of the operational team to ensure gender considerations are integrated into sectoral strategies.
9. **Conduct comprehensive information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns** – Conduct IEC campaigns to inform stakeholders about programme features and address gender stereotypes. Ensure IEC campaigns are supported by a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. Educate different categories of beneficiaries on the updated polices and payment mechanisms, and the SAMIS platform. Develop customized education materials to appeal to each targeted segment of the population.
10. **Promote access to daycare and preschool services, and explore the need for a subsidized childcare programme** – MONM will expand its collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to promote access to affordable and quality daycare and preschool services. Simultaneously, MONM should conduct an assessment to ensure that sufficient daycare and preschool services are readily available to meet the needs of beneficiaries. This will include the exploration of the need for a subsidized childcare programme for vulnerable populations to empower women and facilitate women's economic participation.

The GABA provided valuable insights into the experiences of PAP beneficiaries, which highlighted both high points and challenges. There is a prevailing sentiment that while PAP fulfils its basic function, key areas need improvement, especially in institutional and service aspects. The GABA, alongside other major studies, offers extensive evidence to support the GoSVG. Combined with expected support from international and regional partners, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is on a path to develop a robust, gender-sensitive, and shock-responsive social protection system. Although the approach will be phased, considering environmental crises and fiscal constraints, a feasible path forward is set.

Introduction

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is an island nation located in the Lesser Antilles in the Eastern Caribbean Sea. The World Bank classifies St. Vincent and the Grenadines as an upper middle income economy,[1] with an economy that has been traditionally focused on agriculture, particularly banana production and tourism.[2]

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the country is vulnerable to external financial shocks. The country's economic fragility is further exacerbated by its environmental vulnerability. Situated within the Atlantic hurricane belt, the country is susceptible to devastating storms, which can cause extensive damage to infrastructure, displace communities and disrupt agricultural production.

1 Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: World Bank country classifications by income level for 2024-2025.

2 Grenadines TG of SV and the. Economy – Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Retrieved on 2 October 2023 from: Economy.

Over the past decade, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has faced numerous natural disasters, including devastating floods and landslides, and the 2021 eruption of the La Soufrière volcano.[3] In 2024, Hurricane Beryl caused extensive damage, resulting in an estimated USD 230.6 million in direct economic damage, with the Southern Grenadines accounting for 81 per cent of the direct economic losses.[4] These recurrent threats underscore the necessity for substantial investment in disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies.[5]

High unemployment rates and persistent poverty significantly hinder the ability of households in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to navigate and thrive within the socioeconomic landscape. According to the 2008 Country Poverty Assessment, 30.2 per cent of the population lived in poverty, with 2.9 per cent classified as indigent.[6] Adolescents from female-headed households were particularly affected, with a poverty rate of 41.0 per cent, compared to 31.0 per cent of male-headed households.[7] Women raising children without a spouse experienced the highest unemployment rate at 23.1 per cent, making them the most economically vulnerable group.[8] These unique challenges necessitate targeted social interventions to promote gender equality and empower vulnerable populations, thereby contributing to broader economic stability and growth.[9]

Social Protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

The social protection system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a multifaceted network of programmes and services designed to mitigate the adverse effects of economic instability and natural disasters on its population, particularly among the most vulnerable groups. Social protection encompasses both financial and in-kind support delivered through a combination of contributory and non-contributory mechanisms.

3 United Nations Human Rights Council (2021). Saint Vincent and Grenadines: Climate change a risk multiplier for impacts on human rights – UN expert. ReliefWeb, 2 December, 2021. Retrieved on 6 November 2023 from: Saint Vincent and Grenadines: Climate change a risk multiplier for impacts on human rights – UN expert – Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | ReliefWeb.

4 Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) (2024). *Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report: Hurricane Beryl 2024 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.* International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ World Bank: Washington, DC, USA. Retrieved on 14 August 2024 from: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report: Hurricane Beryl 2024 – Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | GFDRR.

5 Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2019). *National Adaptation Plan for St. Vincent and the Grenadines.* Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Kingston, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: FINAL NAP_SVG_Approved.pdf

6 Adult Equivalent Household Size, Consumption Estimates and Poverty Indicators, SLC 2007 to 2008. Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Information Technology. Retrieved on 3 October 2023 from: Adult Equivalent Household Size, Consumption Estimates and Poverty Indicators, SLC 2007 to 2008 — Statistical Office, Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

7 UNICEF (2021). Generation Unlimited – the well-being of young people in St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Fact Sheet. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: Generation Unlimited – the well-being of young people in St. Vincent and the Grenadines | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean.

8 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2015). *Overview of the Labour Market of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: A Gender Perspective.* Statistical Office: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Retrieved on 15 August 2024 from: Overview of the Labour Market of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

9 UNDP, UNICEF & UN Women Eastern Caribbean (2020). *Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: COVID-19 Heat Report Human and Economic Assessment of Impact.* UNDP, UNICEF & UN Women Eastern Caribbean: Christ Church, Barbados. Retrieved on 14 August 2024 from: Human and Economic Assessment of Impact (HEAT) Report – Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | United Nations Development Programme.

Contributory Social Protection. The National Insurance Services (NIS), formerly the National Insurance Scheme, is a comprehensive social insurance system that covers a wide range of benefits.[10] These include old-age pensions, survivors' benefits, sickness and maternity benefits, and employment injury benefits. The legislative framework for NIS is established under the NIS Act of 1986. Social Security benefits are offered under three categories:

- **Long-term benefits:**
  - Invalidity benefit – For those under pensionable age who are permanently incapable of employment due to physical or mental conditions.
  - Age benefit – Financial support (pension) upon retirement for insured individuals.
  - Survivors' benefit – Payments to dependents of a deceased insured person in the form of a pension (widow/widower) or a grant (dependent child).
- **Short-Term Benefits:**
  - Maternity benefit – Financial assistance for insured women during maternity leave.
  - Sickness benefit – Support for insured individuals who lose income due to illness.
  - Funeral grant – Assistance with burial expenses for the deceased insured person (related to age, invalidity and survivorship).
- **Employment Injury Benefit:**
  - Injury benefit – Provides 70 per cent of weekly earnings for up to 26 weeks for work-related injuries or diseases (after a three-day waiting period).
  - Disablement benefit – Pension or lump sum for permanently disabled persons, based upon severity of the disability.
  - Constant-attendance allowance – Provides 50 per cent of the disablement pension for individuals needing continuous care (up to 260 weeks).
  - Medical expenses – Reimbursement for treatment and related costs.
  - Funeral grant – Provides a lump sum in the amount of XCD 4,525 for burial expenses.
  - Death benefit – Payments to dependents of those who die from employment injuries or diseases.

According to coverage indicators presented in the NIS 2021 Annual Report, a majority of persons in the formal sector (80-85 per cent) had access to social benefits through NIS. Nationally, working-age women experience lower social protection coverage across various benefit categories, compared to their male counterparts; this highlights the impact of labour gaps on women's participation in social security.[11] For instance, only 45.3 per cent of women are entitled to old-age and disability benefits, compared to 61.3 per cent of men. In addition, only 45.3 per cent of women were covered by maternity benefits, citing significant coverage gaps.[12]

Non-Contributory Social Programmes. Social programmes play a vital role in reducing societal vulnerability. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Ministry of National Mobilization, Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Youth, Housing, and Informal Settlement (MONM) is the primary custodian of social programmes. PAP is managed by MONM, and is the largest in terms of coverage and expenditures. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation (MOENR), contribute through

10 Retrieved on 1 October 2023 from: Benefits – National Insurance Services.

11 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2015). *Overview of the Labour Market of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: A Gender Perspective.* Statistical Office: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

12 Ibid, 2015.

initiatives, such as the School Feeding Programme.[13] In addition, the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) provides food rations to vulnerable mothers during the antenatal and postnatal periods.[14]

Evolution of the Public Assistance Programme. Initially, welfare services and poor relief were delivered through a fragmented system across multiple ministries and divisions, which proved ineffective in reaching all vulnerable populations.[15] Following a Social Safety Net Assessment (SSNA), supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the predecessor agency of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), MONM embarked on a reform process from 2011-2022, in an effort to centralize service delivery and enhance effectiveness. This multi-phased reform focused on three pillars – social protection, child and youth development, and human development.[16] Proposed changes included: a centralized service delivery system under the Social Protection Unit; a data-driven approach with standardized assessments; digital data collection and performance indicators; and household profiling for targeted interventions.

Additional impetus for restructuring came from the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 2013-2025 and Social Action Research conducted in 2020. Both documents advocated for modernizing the social safety net into a social protection system that optimized resource allocation and clearly defines the interconnectedness of interventions for improved efficiency and effectiveness.[17]

Current PAP

The restructured PAP offers a cash transfer component, alongside human development measure, as a condition for accessing grants. This approach addresses vulnerability through its core functions, including:[18]

- **Poverty alleviation** – Through quality social welfare services, PAP strives to provide a financial safety net for those in need.
- **Promotion of family stability** – The programme goes beyond financial assistance and offers treatment services to strengthen families.
- **Empowerment of marginalized groups** – PAP prioritizes support and rehabilitation services for the poor and indigent, and others vulnerable to poverty, such as persons with disabilities and elderly.

13 Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS).

14 Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment. Supplementary Feeding Programme. Retrieved on 12 July 2024 from: https://health.gov.vc/health/index.php/nutrition-support-programme/general-information.

15 Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (2019). *Country Experience on Social Protection Reform in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.* Organisation of Eastern Caribbean State: Morne Fortune, Castries, Saint Lucia.

16 Ibid, 2019.

17 Ibid, 2019.

18 Email correspondence with the Ministry of National Mobilization, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2023.

PAP targets the poor, indigent and vulnerable using three grant categories – Vulnerability Grant, FSG and Emergency Grant. These grants aim to be "curative and restorative", and fill gaps in support across various ministries.[19]

The flexible approach of PAP to assistance duration is noteworthy. It ranges from one-time grants for specific needs to long-term support for the most vulnerable. This multifaceted approach is designed to empower individuals and families by building their resilience and equipping them to overcome challenges and improve their overall well-being.

Vulnerability Grant. The Vulnerability Grant, also known as the National Assistance Fund or Poor Relief, is designated to assist the elderly, persons with disabilities, and individuals unfit to work due to chronic illness, including persons living with HIV. The Vulnerability Grant is administrated by the Beneficiary Unit and provides long-term support. Socio-economic criteria include: an average household income at maximum XCD 500; and at least one family member who is disabled, elderly, chronically ill or medically unfit to work.

Family Support Grant (FSG). FSG is a short-term programme that offers financial and educational empowerment, through monthly assistance for essentials. It targets single parents, unemployed heads of households and households with disabled or elderly member. Eligibility requires participation in a capacity building programme, such as the 'WE CAN' Programme.

FSG offers initial assistance for one to six months, with the possibility of renewal. Support includes cash or in-kind aid, such as school supplies and transportation referrals. Guardians of foster children also receive an allowance for daily care.

Emergency Assistance Grant. The Emergency Assistance Grant offers a variety of financial support, including one-time assistance for medical expenses, transportation, school expenses and essentials (e.g., food, clothing). The grant also covers funeral costs and disaster-related assistance, which has become a core component of PAP.

Table 1 provides a summary of PAP grants, including criteria and benefits.

19 Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (2019). *Country Experience on Social Protection Reform in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.* Organisation of Eastern Caribbean State: Morne Fortune, Castries, Saint Lucia.

Table 1. Current PAP benefits by grant category

PAP Grant	Criteria	SEED Transfer Amount (XCD)
Vulnerability Grant	65 years and older for the Elderly Grant	National Assistance Fund XCD 250 – 300 per month
	Under 64 years of age for the Disability Grant & Medically Unfit for Work Grant	
FSG (monthly grant)	Foster care	**Cash:** Level 1: XCD 300 per month (households with one person) Level 2: XCD 400 per month (household with 2-3 persons) Level 3: XCD 600 per month (household with 4 or more persons) **In-kind:** Back to school supplies Transport referral for students School feeding referral Book loan scheme referral Internet access referral Short-term rental assistance **Skills-based training:** 'WE CAN' Programme
	Single parents	
	Teen mothers	
	Average household income at maximum XCD 500 per month	
Emergency Assistance Grant (immediate support)	Death with/without death benefits	Funeral expenses (maximum XCD 2000)
	Medical emergency	Air travel, consultations, diagnostic services, prescriptions (minimum XCD 100, maximum XCD 2,100)
	School expenses	Fees, supplies, exam fees
	Utilities	Partial coverage for water and electricity
	Disaster	Grant for building materials, rent, basic needs and immediate assistance

Sources: Email correspondence with the Ministry of National Mobilization, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2023; Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (2019). *Country Experience on Social Protection Reform in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.* Organisation of Eastern Caribbean State: Morne Fortune, Castries, Saint Lucia.

Addressing Gender Inequality in PAP

PAP serves a vital purpose in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as it offers a social safety net for persons facing hardship. Without a strong focus on gender, PAP struggles to reach its full potential, given the distinct challenges faced by women and men when it comes to poverty and vulnerability. By failing to consider these gender differences, PAP risks leaving some beneficiaries behind, which hinders the overall effectiveness of PAP and perpetuates cycles of vulnerability. Gender-aware approaches empower vulnerable groups by addressing the specific barriers they face, including economic dependence, unequal resource distribution and potential exposure to gender-based violence (GBV).[20] There is a real need for gender-specific support in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to address gender inequalities.

Unequal Labor Force Participation. In 2015, women (57.8 per cent) were less likely to participate in the workforce than men (72.6 per cent), and faced higher unemployment rates (26.4 per cent and 19.4 per cent respectively).[21] When we consider that women (25.4 per cent) were more likely than men (18.4 per cent) to be engaged in part-time employment, it further highlights women's economic vulnerability in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.[22]

Economic Vulnerability of Single Mothers. In 2021, 84.7 per cent of births occurred among single mothers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, of which 55.0 per cent were to mothers without an occupation; this further exacerbated the spectre of poverty and vulnerability for single mothers.[23] Targeted and gender-sensitive social protection measures are essential to empowering single mothers and improving their well-being, as well as that of their household.[24]

GBV and Teen Pregnancy. In 2020, there were 108 reported cases of domestic violence.[25] It is highly likely that this number underestimates the true prevalence of GBV, as many cases go unreported.[26] In 2021, girls aged 15-19 years accounted for approximately 10 per cent of all live births in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (down from 15 percent in 2019 and 2020).[27] Despite a notable decline, teenage pregnancy continues to be a significant concern. To create a safer environment for women and adolescents, it is essential to address GBV and promote access to SRH education and services.

20 Camilletti, E., T.P. Cookson, Z. Nesbitt-Ahmed, R. Sandoval, S. Staab & C. Tabbush (2021). Mainstreaming gender into social protection strategies and programmes: Evidence from 74 low- and middle-income countries. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocent: Florence, Italy. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: UNICEF-Mainstreaming-Gender-Social-Protection-Strategies-Programmes-2021.pdf

21 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2015). *Overview of the Labour Market of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: A Gender Perspective.* Statistical Office: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

22 Ibid, 2015.

23 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2021). *2021 Population & Vital Statistics Report. Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.* Retrieved on 3 November 2023 from: Population-and-Vital-Statistics-Report-2021.pdf

24 Ibid, 2021.

25 Ibid, 2021.

26 Reported Crimes by Type of Crime, 2011 to 2020. Statistical Office. Retrieved on 15 August 2024 from: Reported Crimes by Type of Crime, 2011 to 2020 — Statistical Office, Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

27 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2021). *2021 Population & Vital Statistics Report.* Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Overlooking gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities can inadvertently marginalize women and girls. A gender-sensitive approach is imperative to mitigate the impact of gender-specific risk and vulnerabilities on women and girls, and to ensure their active participation in economic recovery. Crises disproportionately affects women and girls; thus, neglecting their unique challenges can hinder their ability to recover and contribute to rebuilding efforts. Recent experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 Soufrière volcano eruption and Hurricane Beryl provides invaluable insights to inform a more gender-responsive approach and offer valuable opportunities to re-evaluate PAP. By integrating lessons learned from these events, PAP can be strengthened to promote a more equitable future where women and girls are integral to the economic recovery and long-term development of the nation.[28]

Table 2. Select social and economic indicators (data for the most recent years available)

Indicator	Male	Female	Year
Population[29]	56,177	54,241	2022
Labour force participation rate (%)[30]	72.6	57.8	2015
Unemployment rate (%)[31]	19.4	26.4	2015
Part-time employment[32]	18.4	25.4	2015
Incidence of GBV (cases)	n/a	108	2020

n/a = not available

The Gender Aware Beneficiary Assessment (GABA)

In response to these challenges, the UN Women Multi-County Office (MCO) – Caribbean initiated a project supporting gender-responsive analysis and research on institutional, policy and service-delivery frameworks for social protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A cornerstone of this analysis is the GABA, a tool that scrutinizes the effectiveness of development programmes and focuses on the accessibility of and benefits received by intended beneficiaries. The GABA delves into the delivery

28 Camilletti et al. (2021). Mainstreaming gender into social protection strategies and programmes: Evidence from 74 low- and middle-income countries. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocent: Florence, Italy.

29 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision. Retrieved on 10 September 2023 from: https://population.un.org/wpp/

30 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2015). *Overview of the Labour Market of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: A Gender Perspective.* Statistical Office: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

31 Ibid, 2015.

32 International Labour Organization (2018). *Gender at Work in the Caribbean – Country Report: Dominica.* ILO: Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: Gender at Work in the Caribbean: Country Report for Dominica | International Labour Organization.

mechanisms of MONM and dissects existing guidelines and procedures, and provides actionable recommendations for improvement.[33]

Through a gender lens, the GABA meticulously examines the entire beneficiary journey with PAP, and identifies current and potential bottlenecks faced by women and men. It accomplishes this by examining four thematic areas and research questions, including:

- **Programme access** – How are programmes accessed and by whom?
- **Programme design** – Who are the targeted beneficiaries?
- **Benefits received** – What are the experiences of programme participants?
- **Sustainability and improvement** – How can programmes be made more effective and sustainable?

Gender disparities are also examined with the aim of strengthening programme responsiveness to the needs of both women and men. The GABA examines:

- **Gender-based barriers** – Are there any barriers to programme qualification based on sex?
- **Location accessibility** – Are programme locations accessible to both women and men?
- **Beneficiary success** – Do women and men experience different levels of success in the programme?

Based on the findings, the GABA proposes techniques to improve PAP reach, and to identify and strengthen gendered needs, and ensure successful applicability to beneficiaries. Beneficiary feedback from focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies will assist MONM in evaluating the effectiveness of current support levels and identify areas for improvement to create a more gender-responsive and robust PAP.

33 Xavier, J.V. (2016). *Gender Aware Beneficiary Analysis of Saint Lucia's Public Assistance Programme.* UN Women MCO – Caribbean: Christ Church, Barbados. Retrieved on 16 May 2024 from: Gender Aware Beneficiary Analysis Of Saint Lucia's Public Assistance Programme | UN Women – Multi-Country Office – Caribbean.

Methodology

The GABA assesses how gender impacts PAP service access for beneficiaries. It explores potential barriers women and men face when interacting with the programme, and identifies areas for improvement. Recommendations focus on strengthening the capacity of PAP to deliver gender-responsive services and inform policy and programme adjustments for greater equity. A multi-pronged approach was implemented to explore different sources of information, but primarily qualitative research methods were utilized.

Research Objectives

This study explores the following research questions (**Table 3**), each are aligned with the four domains of the analytical framework (determinant analysis).

Table 3. GABA research objectives

Domain	Research Question
Enabling Environment	Is an enabling environment in place that supports the supply of and demand for quality interventions/services?
Supply	Are the necessary interventions/services adequately staffed and accessible to the most deprived populations?
Demand	If the interventions/services are accessible to the most deprived populations, is there demand for them? Are they acceptable, affordable and being used?
Quality	Are the interventions/services of adequate quality to achieve the desired results?

Source: UNICEF (2014). *The Determinant Analysis for Equity Programming.* UNICEF: New York City, NY, USA. Retrieved on 5 November 2024 from: determinant-analysis-for-equity-programming-final-draft-august-2014.doc

Data Collection Methods

Mixed research methods were used in the GABA as outlined below.

Desk Review. To gain a comprehensive understanding of PAP operations, the desk review meticulously examined relevant reports, documents, databases and past reviews. Some of these documents included:

- Gender Gap Analysis of the Social Protection Framework of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2023)
- Project and Appraisal Document for the Human Development Service Delivery Project (2022)
- Final Report of the Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS)
- Country Experience on Social Protection Reform in St. Vincent And the Grenadines (2017)
- Report on Human Resource and Institutional Capacity Assessment of the MONM (2023)

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). KIIs were conducted with MONM leadership and staff to gain a deeper understanding of the institutional architecture, procedures and day-to-day operations related to PAP. KIIs provided valuable insights from different perspectives within MONM.

- **Senior leadership** – Interviews with the Permanent Secretary, Directors and Deputy Directors of relevant departments yielded crucial information on the structure (taxonomy) of PAP, past PAP assessments, and the vision and direction of MONM for social protection. Discussions also touched on the upcoming digital integrated platform and its potential to transform beneficiary interactions with PAP.
- **Data and Communication Officer** – The Data and Communication Officer shed light on data collection, reporting and communication strategies of MONM, and highlighted existing gaps in these areas.
- **Frontline staff** – Caseworkers and intake officers provided firsthand knowledge of the daily operations of PAP, particularly related to client interactions. This information was vital for understanding the practical implementation of PAP.

KIIs were conducted using a hybrid approach to maximize convenience and access to stakeholders. This included online interviews via Zoom conferencing, in-person interviews and email correspondence using the structured guide for KIIs. Despite the variability in these approaches, the interview guide facilitated quality control and focused data collection.

Table 4. KIIs conducted in the GABA for St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Description of Interviewee	Number of Interviewees
Permanent Secretary, MONM	1
Director, Social Protection Division	1
Deputy Director, Beneficiary Management Unit, Social Protection Division	1
Coordinator (Ag.), Gender Affairs Division	1
Director, Child Development Division	1
Data and Communications Officer	1
Case Workers	4
Intake Officer	1
Total interviewees	11

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). FGDs with current PAP beneficiaries (i.e., working-age women and men, single parents, elderly receiving the elderly grant) served as the cornerstone of the GABA. These discussions provided a platform for in-depth exploration of beneficiary experiences, with a focus on gender dimensions. By directly engaging with women and men participating in PAP, the research team gained valuable insight into:

- **Beneficiary experiences and perspectives** – Lived experiences with PAP, including perceptions and associations, access to benefits, challenges faced and perceived effectiveness.
- **Decision-making processes** – Understanding of how beneficiaries navigate PAP requirements and utilize programme resources in their daily lives.

Seven FGDs were held throughout the island. To ensure comprehensive coverage, all of the main districts were included (i.e., South Leeward, North Leeward, North Windward, South Central Windward, Marriaqua, West and Central Kingstown, and Northern Grenadines). **Table 5** offers a detailed breakdown of participants and the communities in each district.

Table 5. Breakdown of FGD participants by location and profile

District	Community	Male		Female		Total
		Elderly	Working-Age	Elderly	Working-Age	
South Leeward	Vermont	1	3	1	5	9
North Leeward	Rose Bank	0	0	1	6	7
North Windward	Sandy Bay	0	1	3	8	12
South Central Windward	Greiggs	3	0	3	5	11
Marriaqua	Marriaqua	1	2	3	5	11
West and Central Kingstown	Camden Park	2	3	1	5	11
Northern Grenadines	Bequia	1	0	0	5	6
Total participants						**67**

FGDs proved to be a successful method for gathering insights, with generally favourable attendance, ranging from 6 to 12 participants. Recruitment efforts were coordinated by MONM. To ensure a smooth start for each FGD, caseworkers managed participant attendance, including last-minute confirmations and participant hand-off. Caseworkers also oversaw logistical arrangements at each location. A structured FGD guide was used to facilitate each FGD (see Annex B).

In-depth Interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with select PAP beneficiaries to gain a nuanced understanding of their experiences within the programme and decision-making processes in their unique social contexts. These interviews also incorporated personal details, such as employment status, household composition and family dynamics.

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten PAP beneficiaries, who were conveniently sampled based upon their availability and willingness to participate. Interviewees were recruited from all three PAP programmes and included individuals with different enrolment statuses (i.e., current, past, waiting and rejected). **Table 6** provides details about PAP beneficiates who participate in the in-depth interviews.

Table 6. Individual in-depth interviews conducted in the GABA for St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Beneficiary Category	PAP Programme	Status
Single father of a child with disabilities	FSG	Current
Single mother of a child with disabilities	FSG (awaiting transfer to Vulnerability Grant)	Current
Working-age man with disabilities	Vulnerability Grant	Current
Working-age woman with disabilities	FSG	Past
Single mother	Emergency Grant	Past
Single father	Rejected – FSG	Rejected
Indigenous woman	FSG	Past
Elderly man	Vulnerability Grant	Current
Elderly woman	Waiting – Vulnerability Grant	Waiting
Chronically ill working-age woman	Vulnerability Grant	Current

Analytical Approach

The GABA employed the Determinant Analysis Model, adapted from the Monitoring of Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) framework. This approach aligns with principles of equity-focused programming and is well-suited to assess programme effectiveness and identify shortcomings across various demographics. It also allows for a systematic analysis of factors impacting gender equity and children's rights within PAP. The Determinant Analysis Model offered several advantages for the GABA, including:

- **Equity focus** – The model was specifically designed for equity-focused programming and to ensure a gender and child rights-centred analysis.
- **Multidimensional analysis** – The model allows for examining programme effectiveness across various factors (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status/class and location).
- **Bottleneck identification** – The model facilitates the systematic identification of key barriers hindering gender equity and children's rights within PAP.
- **Programme reorientation** – The analysis can inform strategies to reorient PAP towards a more gender and child-sensitive approach.

The Determinant Analysis Model provides a robust framework that can comprehensively assess the impact of PAP on various beneficiary groups (see Annex C for this study's Determinant Analysis Matrix).

The Determinant Analysis Matrix outlines the thematic areas and corresponding research questions, which are aligned with the key domains of this research.

The 'traffic light' system was used to determine the presence and extent of bottlenecks related to each determinant.[34]

- **Significant bottleneck** – A major constraint to progressing towards the result.
- **Moderate bottleneck** – Moderately limiting or slowing progress towards the result.
- **No Bottleneck** – No longer represents a bottleneck for progressing towards the result.

A causal analysis of these bottlenecks identified effective and context-specific solutions. The results of the GABA informed by the determinant analysis will feed into the national strategic plan for promoting gender equality in PAP.

Limitations of the Study

Implementation of the GABA encountered several challenges that necessitated adaptations.

- **Data limitations** – A spreadsheet of PAP beneficiaries (by sex and location) and budgetary expenditures was not accessible during the development of this report.
- **Time constraints** – Fieldwork was impacted by national events, including International Women's Day, as well as country meetings and national holidays, which required the attention of MONM personnel and key stakeholders. This potentially affected participant recruitment and briefing processes.
- **Limited access to past beneficiaries** – A comprehensive list of past PAP beneficiaries, originally intended for inclusion in FGDs, could not be obtained.
- **Challenges with maximizing insights** – Recruiting participants from all three PAP grants ensured a diversity of viewpoints. Gaining a deeply nuanced perspective for each individual programme proved challenging at times. Probing questions strategically placed throughout FGDs and in-depth interviews effectively addressed this issue.

Despite challenges encountered, the GABA successfully gleaned valuable insights. Still, however, recognizing these limitations is essential for a nuanced interpretation of the findings and to inform future research endeavours.

Structure of the Report

This report is structured to present a clear and cumulative picture of the impact of PAP on gender equality. The findings are presented in a logical sequence and builds upon each other to progressively reveal the operational bottlenecks within PAP. This approach allows readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and how they are related to and impact the areas of focus. The report is arranged as follows:

34 UNICEF (2014). *The Determinant Analysis for Equity Programming.* UNICEF: New York City, NY, USA. Retrieved on 5 November 2024 from: determinant-analysis-for-equity-programming-final-draft-august-2014.doc

- **Enabling environment of PAP** – Reviews the enabling environment of MONM, specifically departmental arrangements, legal and operational frameworks, and data management.
- **Supply** – Explores supply-related variables that define PAP, such as budgetary allocations, benefits structure and targeting, evaluation criteria, payment arrangements, case management and information channels.
- **Demand** – Considers the broader context that shapes the utilization of PAP, such as ease of application, benefit usage and co-responsibilities.
- **Quality** – Examines quality-related variables that define PAP, such as feedback mechanisms, benefit coverage, linkages and referrals, and overall satisfaction levels.
- **Profile of select PAP beneficiaries** – Reports on findings from the in-depth interviews and provides a nuanced understanding of the specific challenges faced by beneficiaries in navigating and benefiting from PAP.
- **Conclusion and recommendations** – Outlines key conclusions and evidence-based recommendations for addressing systemic barriers to achieve a more gender-responsive PAP.

Enabling Environment of PAP

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the enabling environment of PAP entails social, legal, human resources and operational determinants. PAP aims to address the specific needs, risks and vulnerabilities of children, women and men, as well as other marginalized groups. A focus on equity is crucial for PAP to achieve its goals of promoting social inclusion and empowering vulnerable populations.[35]

Social Norms

Social norms in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, particularly those related to gender roles and expectations of self-reliance, can significantly impact enrolment in PAP. Beneficiary feedback indicated that traditional beliefs that men are providers often makes them hesitant to enrol in PAP, and potentially stigmatizes men in social spaces. In addition, the elderly are often viewed as single units, sufficiently supported by elderly grants, yet this stereotype overlooks the reality that many elderly, especially women, may live in multi-generational households and be expected to contribute significantly to their family's welfare. This can result in inadequate financial support for elderly women who face higher rates of poverty and longer life expectancy, which amplifies their vulnerability.[36]

> *"As a man they [MONM] really make you feel so low; they did not understand. I had to swallow my pride and seek help. I was given some papers and told to wait and see what happens. It was the attitude with that statement that made me feel embarrassed. They are out of touch with what is going on in people's lives."*
>
> (Single father)
>
> *"I cannot have a life anymore since the grand kids came to live with me. My house needs repairs, sometimes food is low."*
>
> (Elderly woman)

Legal and Policy Framework of Social Protection

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has made notable strides in advancing women's rights through legal reforms. Revisions made to the Domestic Violence Summaries Act and Criminal Code Cap 124 of the 1990 Revised

35 UNICEF (2014). The Determinant Analysis for Equity Programming. UNICEF: New York City, NY, USA.

36 Statistical Office St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2015). *Overview of the Labour Market of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: A Gender Perspective.* Statistical Office: Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines now more comprehensively address sexual offenses, abduction and kidnapping.[37] This commitment to gender equality extends to the macro-level with the enactment of additional laws, such as the Childcare and Adoption Act and the Law of Minors Act, which further protect women and children. In addition, ratification of several international human rights conventions signifies a dedication to fostering a legal and policy landscape that advocates for gender equality and child protection.

Social Protection Legislation. There are legal gaps that need to be addressed, particularly with regard to social protection legislation. The NIS Act and Public Assistance Act of 2015 are the only laws governing social protection. The NIS Act, however, lacks provisions for paternity leave and voluntary contributions for unemployed and offers inadequate maternity leave, compared to sickness benefits, which disproportionately impacts women.[38] The Public Assistance Act is misaligned with the current and evolving PAP, including roles, benefit structures (FSG and Emergency Grant) and payment mechanisms. These legislative shortcomings highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive review and reforms to create a more inclusive and equitable social protection system that caters to the diverse needs of all citizens.

Social and Gender Policy. Despite offering a range of programmes and services to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable, St. Vincent and the Grenadines lacks comprehensive social protection and gender policies that guide programme delivery and ensure equitable outcomes. The absence of these overarching frameworks has resulted in fragmented service delivery across different ministries and agencies, and resulted in a duplication of efforts, gaps in coverage and inefficient use of resources.[39] Currently, implementation and oversight of PAP relies heavily on administrative decisions and general guidelines, which can be inconsistent and lack transparency. It is also challenging to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of PAP in achieving its goals related to gender equality and poverty reduction.

Management and Coordination Mechanisms

Robust management and coordination mechanisms are essential to ensure efficient and transparent implementation of PAP, and to foster collaboration among relevant stakeholders and promote accountability at all levels.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Discussions with social protection staff revealed that the lack of SOPs is another critical weakness of PAP. Cabinet directives currently provide annual procedural oversight, with limited evidence of internal management directives. Frontline staff, particularly intake clerks and case workers, refer to the 2015 Procedural Manual for the intake process, including vulnerability calculations to determine benefit eligibility.[40]

37 *National Report on Progress in the Application of the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030.* Fourteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, 4-8 November 2019. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: st_vincent_and_g_em_2019.pdf

38 Report on the Gender Gap Analysis of Social Protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2023 (unpublished).

39 World Bank (2017). *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit for a Saint Vincent and the Grenadines HD Service Delivery Project.* World Bank: Washington, DC, USA.

40 Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS); Ibid, 2017.

Inconsistent experiences reported by beneficiaries during the assessment process, including variations in home visits across districts and communication barriers, reinforce beneficiaries' perceptions related to a lack of SOPs, particularly for short-term grants. This perceived lack of standardized service delivery further contributes to beneficiaries' perceptions of disorganization and inconsistency in PAP.

Organizational Infrastructure. Organizational infrastructure, including the structure and allocation of human resources within the social protection division, significantly influences the success of the programme. These arrangements are critical for vertical coordination, accountability mechanisms, expertise and specialization, and multi-sectoral collaborations. The social protection team consists of the following roles:[41]

- **Deputy Director/Director** – Leads case conferences, holds final authority on programme interventions (FSG and Emergency Grants), allocates benefits within budget constraints, and prioritizes interventions based on available resources.
- **Public Assistance Board** – Reviews applications for the Vulnerability Grant and finalizes the list of approved recipients. This board is composed of politically-appointed individuals selected by constituency leadership.
- **Public Assistance Board Member** – Acts as the initial point of contact for Vulnerability Grant applications. Home visits are then conducted based on discretion to verify need. Board members approve applications for submission to the central constituency board, and are selected by constituency leadership, as outlined in the Public Assistance Act. This raises concerns about potential inconsistency in needs assessments due to optional home visits and the potential influence of constituency politics in member selection.
- **Intake Clerk** – Serves as the initial point of contact for programme referrals (FSG and Emergency Grants). Application forms are completed digitally in Google Sheets. This is an evolving role, given the upcoming implementation of SAMIS.
- **Case Worker** – Conducts client interviews, home assessments, verifies supporting documents (e.g., medical records, utilities, invoices) and recommends appropriate programme interventions. Cases are referred based on the location of the client to ensure accessibility and manage logistics.

Vertical Coordination and Multi-sectoral Collaboration. The Social Protection Division operates within a hierarchical and centralized structure, and relies on consolidated units for policy and development, human resources, administration and data communication, among others; yet this can be a double-edged sword for service delivery. Centralized authorities can streamline decision-making and ensure consistent directives across different programmes; however, this structure carries the risk of creating departmental silos that impede information sharing and collaboration.

> *"I had appendix surgery and needed to access my medical records for the application. It was a series of back-and-forth communications. They should have a liaison person to assist applicants with retrieving records more efficiently. The cross communications can delay things by as much as six months."*
>
> (Working-age man)

41 Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS); Gittens-Baynes, K.A. & K. Worrell (2024). Notes from Key Informant Interviews with Case Workers and Intake Officers from MONM St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Staff suggested that in the absence of SOPs and an integrated database, information sharing is hindered. This may inadvertently lead to an incomplete understanding of the situation of clients, particularly regarding gender-specific needs. Although case conferencing is utilized, these organizational limitations hinder its effectiveness in ensuring comprehensive services for beneficiaries.

Staff interviews did not yield precise information on mechanisms for multisectoral collaboration, which suggests a reliance on phone calls and general correspondence between staff members, rather than structured processes. Beneficiaries reported that the application process for medical cases is particularly challenging, due to difficulties in obtaining medical letters and records promptly. A potential solution could involve immediate enrolment based on case worker assessment until the official medical referral is received. In other cases, persons cited smoother enrolment into PAP through medical referrals directly from the Social Protection Division. Both scenarios highlight the need for enhanced multisectoral collaboration to streamline referral pathways and reduce the burden on applicants.

Information Management. MONM relies on its frontline staff, particularly intake clerks, board members and caseworkers, to collect information on PAP beneficiaries. This is accomplished through paper-based application forms and Google spreadsheets, yet both have significant drawbacks.

Historically, MONM has been a *"paper first"* organization. In other words, the intake and registration process relies on physical forms, namely the Public Assistance Client Profile Form, which captures household demographics and economic information, and the Application for Immediate Assistance. These two forms are accompanied by supporting documents, such as birth certificates, identification cards and national insurance cards, which make up the physical client file. The estimated 35 minutes required to complete the Public Assistance Client Profile Form, even with staff assistance, creates a significant bottleneck at the very onset of the social assistance process. Clients report long wait times and staff inefficiencies.[42]

Paper forms are manually transcribed into Google Sheets by the intake officer. Client eligibility is then determined by searching multiple files to verify the applicant is not currently receiving PAP benefits. This is a time-consuming and highly error-prone process, even for dedicated intake officers.[43] Without a central database and a unique identifier for each household (e.g., a primary key), errors can occur, which increases the risk of duplicate benefits being accidentally awarded. Staff indicated that interns from the Youth Empowerment Service (YES) Programme would assist with data entry, but frequent rotations disrupt workflow due to the need to train new interns each cycle.

Reporting. The reliance on Google Sheets for reporting on PAP introduces a significant bottleneck due to its manual data entry and analysis processes.[44] The GABA found that reporting schedules are flexible, driven primarily by ad-hoc ministry requests versus mandatory annual parliamentary reports. Data is mainly presented in an aggregate format, although some degree of sex disaggregation is incorporated.

42 Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS).

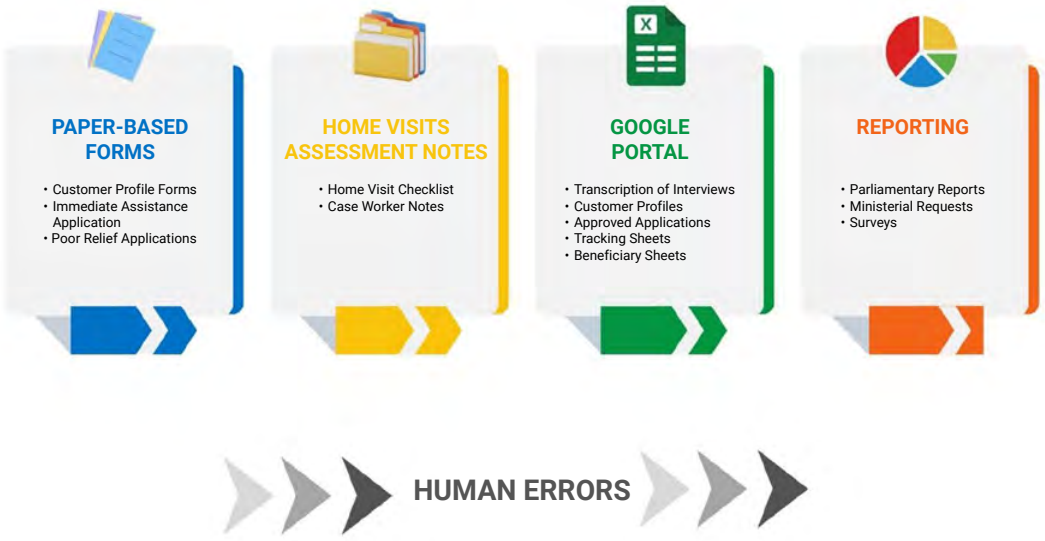
43 Ibid, 2022.

44 Gittens-Baynes, K.A. & K. Worrell (2024). Notes from Key Informant Interviews with Case Workers and Intake Officers from MONM St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Google Sheets simply lacks the functionality for complex data management and analysis, making it difficult to generate comprehensive reports or to analyse programme trends.

Figure 1 shows the current information architecture of MONM. Bear in mind, the risk of human error increases with each component.

Figure 1. Information Architecture of MONM



Source: Constructed by the author of this document.

Transforming the Enabling Environment through SAMIS

This report captures the realities of PAP as of 31 May 2024, and reflects identified shortcomings in the current processes of MONM. Many of the noted bottlenecks are linked to the absence of a comprehensive MIS to manage and leverage data for the programme and to optimize business functions.

During this study, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (GoSVG) received funding from the World Bank to support implementation of the Human Development Service Delivery (HDSD) Project.[45] A sub-component of the HDSD Project, which was under consideration, will finance the design, development and implementation of a new SAMIS and supporting workstreams. SAMIS aims to centralize and integrate data across various social welfare programmes, which will promote data-driven decision-making and improved service delivery.[46]

SAMIS will serve as a single data repository for all PAP benefits; this digital interface can be leveraged for management and administration of PAP. This central social registry will serve two key functions: to support intake,

45 Webster, G. (2023). Final Report: Review, Design And Development Of The Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS) Human Development Service Delivery Project.

46 Ibid, 2023; Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS).

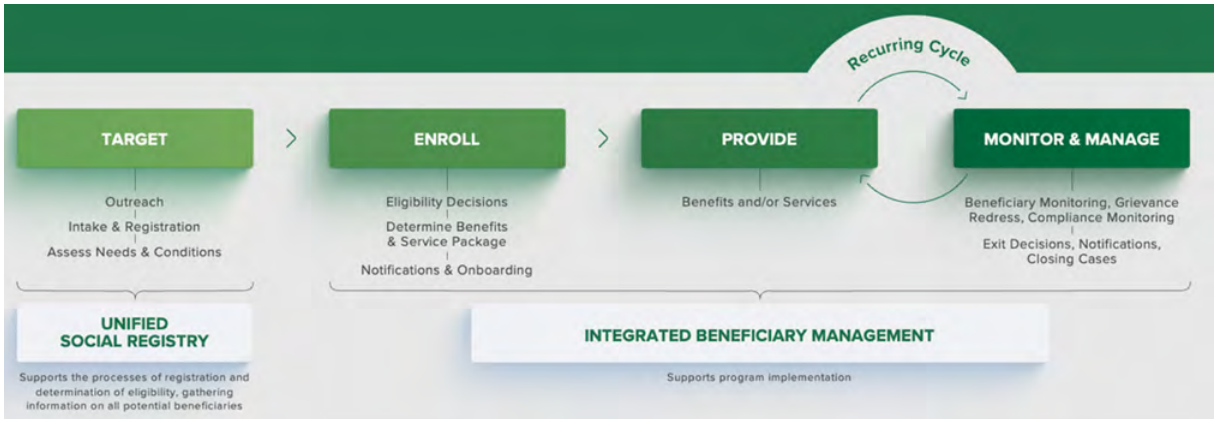
enrolment and referrals for social safety nets; and to function as an operational beneficiary registry for administering specific benefits. SAMIS is poised to revolutionize the delivery of social assistance in the following ways:[47]

- **Centralized data** – SAMIS will use a Beneficiary Registry as a central source of information for all social programmes. The registry will be linked to a larger Social Registry, but will have additional details specific to each benefit programme.
- **Automated processes** – The Beneficiary Registry will track the status of each benefit and allow for automating various tasks in the public assistance delivery process; this should improve efficiency.
- **Improved monitoring** – A centralized data repository will make it easier to monitor PAP benefit utilization and targeting.
- **Improved institutional mechanisms** – This Includes revised regulations, procedural manuals and organizational structures.
- **External data checks** – Enabled connectivity to other social protection databases to verify information provided by applicants.
- **Mobile access** – The project will provide hardware and software to allow authorized users to access the system remotely, and potentially from the field.

SAMIS will introduce user roles with varying permissions and information access to enhance quality control, which is a major limitation of Google Sheets. Currently, paper-based self-reported information will be digitized, which will allow clients continuous access to their data. In addition, specialized internal teams will utilize SAMIS for home visit verification, case management and benefit disbursement.

Based on its functionality and end-to-end controls, SAMIS will enable a more nuanced understanding of the different needs and challenges faced by women and men. This data can then be leveraged when designing and implementing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of women and men, and promote greater equity in the distribution of benefits and services. **Figure 2** is a screenshot of the SAMIS provider interface.

Figure 2. Screenshot of SAMIS Provider Interface



Source: Ministry of National Mobilization.

47 Webster, G. (2023). Final Report: Review, Design And Development Of The Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS) Human Development Service Delivery Project; Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS); World Bank (2017). *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit for a Saint Vincent and the Grenadines HD Service Delivery Project.* World Bank: Washington, DC, USA.

Systematic Barriers and Bottlenecks in the Enabling Environment

PAP has demonstrated its importance in providing vital support to vulnerable populations. The integration of other social protection initiatives under MONM has allowed for an expanded approach to addressing social vulnerabilities. The ability of the programme to become more gender-sensitive is hindered, however, by six systemic barriers and bottlenecks, and all are deemed **significant.**

- **Outdated legislation** – The Public Assistance Act is outdated and misaligned with the current and evolving design of PAP; thus, it perpetuates outdated eligibility criteria and benefit structures. In addition, the absence of comprehensive gendered considerations in existing social protection laws signals the need for a stronger commitment to gender equality at the policy level.
- **Lack of social protection and gender policies** – Policy gaps have led to fragmented service delivery across different ministries and agencies, and resulted in duplication of effort, gaps in coverage and inefficient use of resources. Without a guiding framework to ensure equitable outcomes, women and other vulnerable groups may not receive the consistent and holistic support needed.
- **Lack of SOPs within MONM** – Limited procedural oversight potentially contributed to inconsistencies in case management and service delivery. This can lead to arbitrary decision-making and potential biases, which disproportionately impacts women navigating a complex system.
- **Limited coordination across divisions and sectors** – Limited coordination across divisions and sectors for referral pathways and services hinders the effectiveness of PAP. This lack of coordination can result in beneficiaries, particularly women who require multiple types of support, to fall through the cracks. Improved coordination would ensure that beneficiaries receive comprehensive care and support, and reduce the risk of service gaps and duplication.
- **Archaic information system** – The current information system is largely paper-based and utilizes basic tools, such as Google Sheets, which severely limits the capacity of PAP to conduct detailed analysis and generate comprehensive reports. It is anticipated that SAMIS will resolve these issues and enable better tracking of programme outcomes and more effective allocation of resources.
- **Stereotypical social norms** – Traditional social norms, such as the expectation that men are sole breadwinners and the perception that elderly are financially independent through Elderly Grants, creates systemic barriers to equitable access and uptake of additional assistance.

Addressing these bottlenecks requires a multifaceted approach, which would include SAMIS and associated reforms. These improvements are expected to streamline operations, automate tracking of benefits across ministries, and enable beneficiaries to navigate the entire social protection system efficiently. Emphasizing that these reforms are gender-sensitive is essential to ensure that PAP can effectively meet the diverse needs of all its beneficiaries and promote equitable outcomes.

Supply

Supply examines whether PAP effectively provides essential resources to all eligible beneficiaries in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The focus is on access to essential commodities, services, guidance and information without discrimination or additional hidden costs. This analysis will determine if PAP ensures all eligible individuals receive the full spectrum of support intended by the programme.

Availability of Essential Inputs

Analysing the availability of essential inputs within PAP is critical to ensure its effectiveness in addressing vulnerabilities and promoting gender equality. This includes the range of benefits offered, beneficiary utilization patterns, and whether these benefits address unmet needs. An examination of the targeting criteria of PAP and waiting times will evaluate if the programme reaches the intended population, particularly women who might face unique challenges in accessing resources in a timely and equitable manner.[48]

PAP Benefit Utilization. Beneficiaries primarily direct their grants towards essential household needs, including food and clothing, and to a limited extent, prescription medication and school fees. These findings further emphasize that food is the main expenditure, particularly for households with young children. This aligns with data indicating that females, especially single mothers, form a significant portion of the PAP recipient pool.

Despite the assistance, covering basic needs is still a struggle, with food security remaining a significant concern. The limited coverage for high healthcare costs, medications and wellness supplements, feminine hygiene products and substantial utility bills imposes additional burdens. Older beneficiaries often struggle with household maintenance and live in homes that are in disrepair.

The diversity of unmet needs among beneficiaries suggests that the current benefit structure has been a one-size-fits-all method or, at the very least, not aligned with the specific needs of various target groups.

48 UNICEF (2014). *The Determinant Analysis for Equity Programming.* UNICEF: New York City, NY, USA.

Infrastructure upgrades are not allowed with Poor Relief as their only source of income, which serves as a constant reminder of their poverty.

Targeting and Eligibility Criteria. PAP utilizes a two-pronged approach for targeting beneficiaries. This approach takes into consideration average household income at or below XCD 500 per month, and specific characteristics (e.g., age, employment status, disability or chronic illness, household composition, and emergency, disasters and other hardships). **Table 7** demonstrates that the programme attempts to provide progressive coverage based on a three-tiered vulnerability priority level that categorizes households from a primary priority level (i.e., indigent/poor) to tertiary-priority level (i.e., prone to vulnerability). Using this vulnerability calculation, greater support is directed to those most in need.

Table 7. Vulnerability calculation from the Public Assistance Unit's Procedures Manual (2015)

Priority Level	Vulnerability Level	Average Monthly Household Income (XCD)
Primary	Indigence	0 to 208.83
	Poverty	208.84 to 460.25
Secondary	Vulnerability	460.26 to 575.33
Tertiary	Prone to vulnerability	575.34 to 800.00
	Above prone to vulnerability	800.00 and above
Average household income = total household income/total number of working household occupants		

Although PAP targeting and eligibility criteria appear to be comprehensive, many PAP beneficiaries report a lack of awareness regarding the criteria. Most beneficiaries received information from intake officers, which appears to be insufficient and inconsistent. The reliance on "discourse at the office" and individual interpretations creates confusion and uncertainty. Information deficits extend across all benefit categories, with beneficiaries being unclear about the purpose of required documentation and its impact on approval.

Staff have identified instances where individuals might access benefits from PAP and then seek similar assistance from another division in the Ministry. In addition, concerns exist about clients potentially approaching different caseworkers within PAP itself to obtain the same benefits. Fortunately, these issues are usually flagged in the accounts department when payments are being processed, which helps to reduce duplicate payouts.

> *"The officer informs you of the type of grant you are eligible for; however, it is only at the treasury do you receive complete details on the assistance you're receiving."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Implementation of SAMIS is anticipated to address the issue of benefit duplication. By developing unique identifiers for all applicants across the entire social protection system, SAMIS will provide a comprehensive 360-degree view of all benefits accessed, even outside of the Ministry. This improved data sharing will significantly reduce the risk of duplicate benefits and ensure a more efficient allocation of resources.

Budgetary Constraints and Waiting Lists. Staff highlighted the challenges of meeting growing demand with limited resources. It was mentioned that 4,500 individuals rely on Poor Relief, which costs roughly XCD 1.31 million per month. This significant expenditure, coupled with an extensive waiting list, underscores the need for increased budgetary allocations to facilitate programme expansion and support more vulnerable individuals.

The Poor Relief list is fixed, with openings only arising from deaths, emigration or institutionalization, or children reaching the age of 18 years. This creates a Poor Relief waiting list for those deemed eligible, but unable to be enrolled, spanning from months to over a year. A few Poor Relief beneficiaries, however, claimed to receive approval within a short period. Interim support measures are utilized to provide temporary relief for applicants awaiting placement on the Poor Relief list.

According to beneficiary feedback, the approval timeline for FSG and Emergency Grants varies significantly, ranging from 48 hours for urgent assistance to two weeks and onwards for the FSG. This variability is largely attributed to the urgency of the case and scheduling challenges associated with home assessments and case conferencing, as dictated by existing assessment and approval protocols. For beneficiaries who received on-the-spot approval, a tracking number was provided for cheque collection from the Treasury.

> *"The waiting period is not standardized . . . it comes down to luck. Some people get lucky, some people don't, it depends on who you meet at the office."*
>
> (Elderly woman)
>
> *"I have a card [PAP]. My brother-in-law went in [MONM] when I was hospitalized and was advised that I visit the office after my discharge. I did that and got through quickly with the PAP."*
>
> (Elderly man)

Beneficiaries expressed concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding the waiting period. Some beneficiaries receiving short-term aid were unclear about the reasons for the wait and noted a lack of follow-up communication from the programme, resulting in frustration and confusion. There were, however, individuals in the group who were enrolled in the Poor Relief programme quickly, which added to the uncertainty about the waiting period.

Rejection of Applications. There are clear grounds for rejecting an application beyond failing to meet income and needs criteria. Applicants may also be denied assistance if they are found to have provided falsified information, including discrepancies in documentation, during either the initial interview or a subsequent home assessment. Some rejected applicants were unaware of these criteria and attributed their rejection to bias or gender-based stigma from PAP staff; this sentiment was shared by both women and men applicants.

Payment Mechanisms. PAP utilizes two primary methods for benefit disbursement – prepaid debit cards for poor relief and cheques for short-term grants. The card programme with the Bank of St. Vincent and the Grenadines aims to enhance security, expedite payments and improve tracking of benefit usage. This initiative is intended to replace the previous in-person cash disbursement system, and offers a more convenient and efficient solution for beneficiaries in remote locations. The GABA found, however, that older beneficiaries are facing a learning curve with the new prepaid debit card system, particularly when using ATMs for balance inquiries.

Disbursements made by cheque for short-term grants are staggered across different districts to prevent bottlenecks at the Treasury. This approach aims to manage the flow of beneficiaries more efficiently and avoid overwhelming any district office when collecting cheques; however, this staggering results in longer wait times for some beneficiaries, as payments are not processed simultaneously across all districts. Beneficiaries report the need to frequently follow up on payment statuses, which incurs time and financial costs.

Availability of Adequately Staffed Services, and Information

Transparent communication and readily available staff are essential for ensuring smooth PAP operations and access for beneficiaries.

Staffing Qualifications. Staff generally had varied levels of experience in their roles, ranging from supportive positions within the divisions to selection by the Board. Technical qualifications appeared to be unstandardized among frontline personnel; some case workers possessed bachelor's degrees, while others were currently enrolled in educational programmes or possessed up to secondary level education. Overall, experience seemed to be the main criterion for fulfilling positions, rather than technical training. These variances suggest the absence of well-defined job descriptions and potential skills gaps.

On-the-Job Training. Most staff indicated that their only job-based training was focused on the operations of SAMIS. Training was differentiated based on the anticipated core roles of SAMIS users in the Ministry. Heads of departments received ongoing training in gender budgeting, which is crucial for ensuring a gender-sensitive approach in social programming; whereas frontline staff have not had similar opportunities.

> *"I went to the Kingstown office because my electricity got disconnected and several bills were overdue. I went twice to the Georgetown office and the experience was not nice. Was at the door standing for a bit and they [workers] did not approach or acknowledge me. It felt awful and I never returned."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

> *"I live in a shelter and never got help. I applied three times and was told to expect a call and never received one. The office requested [my] birth paper, ID card and information on children, and still was never advised whether the application was processed or rejected."*
>
> (Single mother)

The study found that frontline staff lacked access to ongoing training necessary to enhance their performance in their respective roles. At the present, assessments depend on limited quantitative assessments, rather than the principles of social work. The need for standardized training in case management was viewed as critical due to insufficient follow-up with beneficiaries and limited documentation of client experiences. As a result, the ability to comprehensively assess and address the complex needs of vulnerable individuals and families may be compromised.
Frontline staff at MONM believed that psychosocial support is critical and has been significantly underdelivered. Staff experience emotional strain due to demanding caseloads and the potential for verbal abuse or threats from clients. It was acknowledged that adequate support in managing stress and emotional well-being is essential for maintaining high performance.

Although there is an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), there is some distrust in the programme since it is a government initiative and includes MONM personnel among the counsellors. Instead, a subsidized arrangement was proposed for private therapy and wellness services to ensure confidentiality and effectiveness. Other staff challenges identified included:

- **Client factors** – Staff grapple with the limitations of self-reporting by clients, potential exclusion of vulnerable groups (i.e., LGBTQI community), and managing client expectations that may not align with programme realities.
- **Resource constraints** – Limited resources restrict the extent to which staff can assist clients. Grants are often quota-based, which hinders their ability to effectively meet clients' needs. Staff often have to use their personal mobile phones to field calls, without reimbursement, which raises financial concerns.
- **Data and technology** – Inconsistent reporting procedures and reliance on manual, paper-based systems, which are prone to time lags and potential data loss, creates inefficiencies. Also, limited access to technology in the field further hinders service delivery.
- **Work environment** – Confidentiality concerns arise due to physical space limitations.

These challenges paint a picture of a system under pressure, which demands significant effort from staff, and potentially limits their ability to deliver optimal assistance.

Communication Strategy of the Ministry

The community outreach strategy of MONM is managed by the Data and Communications Officer. This role shoulders both data management and reporting responsibilities, alongside crafting the community engagement plan. Combining these roles can be seen as an efficient strategy, but it is an uncommon approach given the specialized nature of both areas.

GABA findings indicate that while public awareness of PAP might be increasing on a subconscious level, outreach efforts have not yet translated into significant improvements in beneficiary knowledge. This highlights the need for a more nuanced communication strategy that balances outreach with careful targeting.

MONM prioritizes mass media channels, such as the radio and social media for outreach, with channel selection based on specific communication goals. Content development relies heavily on brainstorming sessions with staff and prioritizing video content for higher engagement on social media. While this might be collaborative, a structured content calendar with diverse content formats could ensure sustained public awareness and community engagement. Currently, metrics or indicators are not utilized for measuring the success of communication efforts, instead MONM relies primarily on anecdotal feedback from office visits and word-of-mouth.

It is notable that MONM adapts visuals based on specific programmes (e.g., male engagement programmes) to build resonance with a target audience; yet there is no dedicated communication plan specifically aimed at destigmatizing the use of PAP, nor is there public education that encourages participation among those in need.

Systematic Barriers and Bottlenecks in Supply

PAP faces several supply bottlenecks that hinder its effective delivery. **Significant** bottlenecks were connected to the design and delivery of the Programme itself, particularly in how benefits address essential needs. **Moderate** bottlenecks, on the other hand, relate to communications and awareness levels, which are circumvented by beneficiaries using informal information channels.

- **Limited coverage of PAP benefits** – PAP payments are insufficient to address some basic needs, such as household food requirements, utilities and medical care. Households with a higher proportion of female members often face greater non-food expenditures, particularly due to the cost of feminine hygiene products and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs. Consequently, the inadequacy of PAP payments would disproportionately impact these households, further exacerbating their financial strain.
- **Budgetary constraints for PAP** – Budgetary constraints within PAP has led to lengthy waitlists for Poor Relief and the allocation of quotas for short-term grants. These limitations have significant implications for the predominantly female beneficiary population.
- **Staggering of payments for short-term grants (i.e., FSG) across districts** – While this approach aims to prevent bottlenecks at the Treasury, it inadvertently results in longer wait times for certain communities. These extended wait times can disrupt financial planning and exacerbate stress and uncertainty. In addition, intermittent checks into payment statuses can place an additional burden on women who are already managing multiple responsibilities, including childcare and household management.
- **Lack of ongoing staff development** – No protocols for ongoing staff development may lead to a reliance on subjective judgments and quantitative assessments, which reduces the focus on social work and the nuanced understanding of gender-specific issues.
- **Limited awareness of targeting and eligibility criteria** – Eligible persons may fail to apply or navigate the PAP system effectively, which leads to underserved populations and inefficient resource allocation. This, however, is still considered a moderate bottleneck since beneficiaries are likely to actively leverage their community networks to understand programme requirements and overcome these challenges.

- **Ineffective communication strategy** – This hinders programme awareness and understanding among potential beneficiaries, especially women who may have limited access to information channels. Inconsistent messaging from different stakeholders creates confusion and erodes trust, particularly among marginalized groups.

Demand

This section delves into the social, cultural and financial landscape that shapes beneficiaries' experiences with PAP. It identifies factors that enable and hinder access to services and facilities, and desired programme outcomes. Beneficiary feedback was utilized to map their entire journey with PAP and included a specific focus on how gender dynamics influence their experiences with PAP. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights into programme effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Ease of Application

The ease of application for PAP is crucial to ensure that vulnerable populations can access the support needed without undue barriers, which can enhance programme inclusivity and effectiveness.

Introduction to PAP. Awareness of PAP occurred through a variety of channels, which reflects the diverse needs and circumstances of beneficiaries. Most individuals first learned about PAP through word-of-mouth within their communities. Neighbours, friends and other local contacts played a crucial role in disseminating information about the programme.

The programme's visibility was heightened by specific needs and life situations. Parents with children requiring special interventions often sought help from MONM, which led to their awareness and subsequent application for PAP. Unemployment was another critical factor, prompting individuals to seek government assistance.

> *"A friend of mine told me about the PAP via phone call."*
>
> (Single mother)
>
> *"My first encounter with the FSG programme was during the Soufrière disaster. They had outreach workers going around communities, talking to families and even asking people for referrals for the grants."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Some beneficiaries were referred to PAP by their doctors who provided the necessary application forms. This indicates a collaborative effort between healthcare providers and social services to ensure vulnerable individuals receive comprehensive support.

Significant events, such as the Soufrière volcanic eruption, also played a pivotal role in increasing visibility of PAP across the country. During times of crisis, MONM actively reached out to communities and directly contacted individuals to inform them about available grants and aid, thereby boosting awareness and enrolment in PAP.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, were also helpful in spreading information about PAP. In addition, television announcements regarding Poor Relief payment dates served as a consistent reminder and source of information for the public.

This multifaceted approach to raising awareness of PAP highlights the importance of diverse communication strategies in ensuring that vulnerable populations are informed about available assistance. Given that awareness is mainly driven by word-of-mouth and episodic events, there is real need for a more structured and consistent outreach strategy to ensure ongoing and equitable access to social support programmes.

Initial Application. Despite decentralization efforts through district officers, most PAP applicants still opted to visit the main office in Kingstown to initiate the application process. Reasons for this preference remain unclear and may ascribe to personal choice or a lack of awareness about decentralized services. Nonetheless, this prioritization creates an unnecessary hurdle for some beneficiaries, in terms of both time and financial resources expended.

Beneficiaries from the Northen Grenadines seemed to be most prepared for their applications. They meticulously documented calls made to the office to secure a checklist of required documents before visiting the office for scheduled interviews.

Steps in Initial Application. If calls and other enquiries were not made in advance, applicants made multiple visits to the social protection office to complete the initial application. Based on feedback from both staff and beneficiaries, the application process includes the following steps:

- **Step 1: Initial consultation** – Upon arrival, applicants consult with an intake worker. The intake worker advises them on any required documentation, if their files are incomplete. In the case of Poor Relief, a Board Member initiates the application.
- **Step 2: Document submission and intake process** – Applicants return with completed documentation to finalize their application, if not available during the initial consultation. The customer profile is completed with demographic details, with the assistance of a case worker.
- **Step 3: Preliminary assessment** – The case worker reviews the form and supporting documentation and makes a preliminary assessment based upon the interview. Applicants are advised of their eligibility at this point and the next steps to finalize approval of recommended interventions. A home visit is scheduled at the discretion of the case worker or files are lodged for approval by the Director and Deputy Director.

- **Step 4: Pending approval** – Applicants are provided with a profile number and advised whether to expect a home visit or a confirmation call of approval. Many applicants noted that approvals were often granted based solely on their testimony during the consultation, suggesting that if home visits were consistently implemented, assistance might better align with their actual needs.

A gender disparity was observed in the application experience, with men (both working-age men and elderly men) indicating a less favourable process; this included perceptions of stigma and less helpful staff interactions. Typically, unfavourable experiences were linked to a perceived lack of urgency by case workers.

> *"My first experience was very disappointing. I was turned away without even asking a question. They never heard me out. I returned 5-6 months later and successfully applied. I didn't give up."*
>
> (Elderly man)
>
> *"Sometimes they leave your form on the table with no action."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Monitoring of Applications. PAP beneficiaries claim that it takes significant effort and costs (e.g., transportation costs) to check on the status of their applications. Many beneficiaries reported a lack of proactive communication from case workers, which necessitated multiple calls and visits to the office; this was described as time-consuming and frustrating. Although some applicants receive immediate feedback on their applications, it was unclear whether final approvals were consistently communicated, adding to the uncertainty.

House visits, which could provide reassurance and a thorough assessment are inconsistently conducted, leading to perceived unequal treatment and service delivery. Improved communication during national emergencies is often facilitated by the involvement of external agencies. These agencies provide temporary additional staff and volunteers to bolster existing communication efforts. Beneficiaries questioned why MONM did not adopt a similar level of engagement and responsiveness, even after experiencing the positive impact of external agency support during emergencies. There were also inquiries into the underutilization of email communication, despite providing contact details on application forms.

> *"They came twice to assess the home because my brother is disabled. Eventually he may receive the Poor Relief based on their feedback."*
>
> (Working-Age Man)
>
> *"They were supposed to visit and see where my brother now lives. He was previously homeless, so I made temporary accommodations for him in my home."*
>
> (Working-Age Woman)
>
> *"They should just tell you they can't help. Instead, they prefer to tell you to check back again and again."*
>
> (Elderly Woman)

Mapping Beneficiary Interface with PAP. **Tables 8** and **9** outline the beneficiary journey with short- and long-term grants, as identified by beneficiaries and documentation from MONM. The case's urgency often determines the speed of the process. For emergency grants, the review process is typically shorter and bypasses home assessments, which allows funds to be disbursed much quicker.

The main bottlenecks appear to be working through applications and scheduling home assessments. Many beneficiaries claimed that home visits were never performed and that approvals were often based on client forms and self-reported details, leaving little justification for the extended wait times. Many beneficiaries were unable to clearly explain the specific steps involved in the process; instead, they provided vague descriptions and highlighted an overall lack of clarity and user-friendliness. To expedite the approval process, video conferencing could be employed as an interim measure for conducting virtual assessments, at least until an in-person home visit can be scheduled. Subsequent home visits would then serve as a confirmatory measure, and would provide a deeper understanding of beneficiaries' living conditions and foster a stronger connection between the applicant and the caseworker.

Table 8. Mapping the client interface with FSG and Emergency Grants Programmes

Steps in the Beneficiary Interface	Activities in Interface	Estimated Timeframe
Step 1: Intake and verification	• Client visits the Family Affairs Division/District to make an in-person application. • Intake officer reviews Google Sheets to verify if the applicant is already in the PAP system. • Intake clerk and client complete a customer profile and application for immediate assistance.	35 minutes (district office) 35-50 minutes (Head Office)
Step 2: Scheduling of home visit assessment	• Forms and supporting documentation sent to a caseworker for review. • Case worker reviews and approves documents, and provides initial case treatment. • Home assessment is scheduled to verify self-reported details and if additional assistance is needed.	
Step 3: Home visit assessment (discretionary)	• Caseworker visits the home of the applicant and goes through a home visit assessment checklist. • Updates home assessment case notes and appends to case file. • Prepares for case conferencing with the Deputy Director.	30-60 days (to schedule, visit and document). Emergency cases are approved within 48 hours of application.
Step 4: Case conferencing and approval of recommended interventions	• Deputy Director and officers collaboratively decide on case approvals/rejections, support duration, immediate assistance and placement on the waitlist. • Signs off on approvals. • Intake officer updates tracking and assessment sheets to include benefits received by household.	Two to five days (from receipt of client form and assessment notes). Emergency cases are approved within 48 hours of application.
Step 5: Client notification and payment	• Client is notified of approval via a phone call. Final details on grant detail payments are provided.	Payment received two weeks after notification of approval.

Source: Ministry of National Mobilization, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. SAMIS In St. Vincent & The Grenadines, 2024.

Table 9. Mapping of client interface with the Poor Relief Programme

Steps in the Beneficiary Interface	Activities in Interface	Estimated Timeframe
Step 1: Intake and verification	• Applicant visits the local constituency Board Member to request Poor Relief. • Poor Relief form is completed based on supporting documentation with the aid of a Board Member.	35 Minutes (District Office)
Step 2: Scheduling of home visit assessment	• Application form is verified and approved by Board Member for submission to Board. • Optional home visit scheduled.	
Step 4: Case conferencing and approval of recommended interventions	• The Board collaboratively decided on Poor Relief applications. Prioritizes list based on needs. • Names added to Waiting List. • List of approved applicants submitted for payments. Vendor forms is created for Treasury.	Wait time between one month to over a year due to fixed list.
Step 5: Client notification and payment	• Client is notified of approval via phone call. Final details on grant details payment and more are provided.	Payment received two weeks after notification.

Source: Stennett, R. (2022). Final Report: Business Process Review. Terms of Reference No. SVG-HDSD-CS-INDV-7A. Consultancy for Business Process Review, Design and Requirements Definition of the Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS).

Information Networks

Beneficiaries rely primarily on informal and mass media channels to stay updated about the programme and its services. The two main approaches to communication include:

- **Direct communication** – Information dissemination among beneficiaries occurs primarily through informal community channels or direct visits to district offices. While this traditional approach maintains a sense of community engagement, it can result in inconsistencies and delays in the dissemination of vital information. Residents of the Northern Grenadines prefer phone calls to the district office.
- **Public announcements** – Poor Relief payment schedules are communicated through media channels, such as radio and television. Beneficiaries of short-term grants perceive a disparity in communication practices, noting that formal communication channels seem to prioritize long-term grants, which are perceived as more reliable and organized. Beneficiaries suggest adopting similar communication methods, such as SMS blitzes, to disseminate payment updates for all forms of assistance. This streamlined approach could alleviate the burden on both beneficiaries and district offices by reducing the need for in-person inquiries and frequent status checks.

In more rural communities, there is a prevalent mindset that individuals should proactively seek out information, rather than wait passively for updates.

> *"It's about being proactive. If I can't help or understand something, I will go and seek out that information. You can't expect them [MONM] to contact everyone."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Personal Beliefs

Personal beliefs, such as social stigma, pride and mistrust in government programmes can act as significant barriers to enrolment.

Beneficiary Perspectives of PAP. Beneficiaries largely viewed PAP as a "lifeline during difficult times" or "assistance for the older persons and those with disabilities." Positive sentiments, such as appreciation and praise for the grants, were also expressed. Beneficiaries perceptions of PAP appear to be influenced by the timeframe of enrolment and children being the primary recipients within the household. Newly enrolled beneficiaries have a more positive view, as they tend to believe that the programmes effectively addresses their needs. Similarly, mothers receiving grants for their children, whether it is long-term PAP (disability) or school assistance, expressed higher satisfaction with PAP.

Long-term PAP beneficiaries, particularly those receiving support for disabilities, held the most favourable views. The reasons, however, are unclear, but potentially relate to a reduced burden of ongoing eligibility assessment and/or long-term duration of support. This is particularly beneficial for persons with limited mobility who are among the key target groups.

Unfavourable Perceptions. A particularly disruptive personal belief is that PAP is subject to political bias and favouritism. This perception of inequity undermines the credibility of the programme and hampers its ability to reach and assist those most in need.

Coping with Childcare Responsibilities

Beneficiaries face significant challenges balancing childcare responsibilities with other aspects of their lives, primarily due to financial constraints and their reported limited access to affordable childcare services. Time poverty is a pervasive issue, as many beneficiaries cannot afford paid childcare; as a result, they are forced to simultaneously juggle multiple tasks. Mothers often rely on school hours to manage domestic duties.

Family and Community Support. Older siblings frequently play a crucial role in providing childcare support, particularly when parents are occupied with other responsibilities. Elderly beneficiaries with responsibilities for supervising grandchildren expressed frustration, due to restrictions on their personal freedom and ability to attend to their own needs. Neighbours and friends also contribute to the childcare safety net; this form of support is unpredictable and unreliable, which leaves families vulnerable to gaps in care.

> *"It is a great programme; it's really helping me out. No way I could have covered the transportation costs for my daughter to attend college on mainland [XCD 300 per month]."*
>
> (Single mother)

> *"My brother was homeless for years, and despite having to care for three kids, I decided to intervene. He needed medication, clothes and necessities. I went to the Ministry of National Mobilization [MONM] with his police record and medical documents, and received six months of assistance. You need to know what you're doing because you can't waste government money. I'm now waiting for Poor Relief for him because he can't support himself, and I don't have the capacity to help him long-term."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

> *"Some people getting grants, who are not in real need. It is because they have connections in the system."*
>
> (Single father)

Despite the availability of these support systems, women beneficiaries emphasized that spare time is devoted to childcare; as a result, they have limited opportunities for personal relaxation and professional development. This disproportionate share of childcare activities is undoubtedly stressful on women.

> *"I wanted to work more, but there is no one to care for my son [disabled], so I had to sacrifice job opportunities."*
>
> (Working-age woman)
>
> *"I have no support, can't work though, would like to. I must stay home with three children."*
>
> (Working-age woman)
>
> *"I must send my kids to the mainland because I work fulltime, and my mother has serious health issues."*
>
> (Single mother)
>
> *"I feel like I'm not doing enough. By the time work ends and I've picked up the kids and baby, I still need to prepare dinner and handle household chores. There's simply no time left to supervise homework or engage with their school activities."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Coping Mechanisms. Beneficiaries employ various coping mechanisms to manage financial and resource constraints, often resorting to extreme measures due to limited alternatives. These coping strategies highlight the severe challenges faced by some individuals, particularly women, in their struggle to provide for their families.

- **Survival strategy** – Financial constraints and societal pressures have led some women to engage in sex work as a means of supplementing their income. These women often feel coerced into providing sexual favours in exchange for financial assistance from men within their community. This experience generates significant feelings of guilt and a belief that they are negatively influencing their daughters, which underscores the perceived lack of viable alternatives to support their families.
- **Praedial larceny** – Some beneficiaries resort to praedial larceny (i.e. theft of agricultural produce, such as crops, livestock and fisheries) to put food on the table. This coping mechanism is more common among persons in rural areas. Praedial larceny poses legal risks and social stigmatization which further marginalizes individuals involved.
- **Non-governmental support** – Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Catholic Soup Kitchen, are sought out for meals when there is no access to funds. These organizations provide essential support which helps to alleviate food insecurity, at least temporarily.

It was noted that beneficiaries residing in rural agricultural communities, despite experiencing economic challenges, exhibit remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They resort to cultivating crops and sharing harvests within the community, and adjusting their diets to maximize available resources. While acknowledging the limitations of government assistance programmes and grants, grants are viewed as ancillary support mechanisms to alleviate financial burdens. In addition, a strong interest was expressed in training, employment programmes and entrepreneurial opportunities to foster self-sufficiency and economic independence.

Considering there are significant geographical differences in social structures, economic landscapes and access to services that impact beneficiaries, programmes need to be tailored to address these differences and reduce disparities, and to offer strategic and effective approaches to maximizing impact. The human empowerment component of PAP would be an ideal cost-effective starting point.

Continuity of Use

The 'WE CAN' Programme, introduced as the Conditional Livelihoods and Life Skills Component of the Family Support Grant, is comprised of two main modules – Farming/Skills Internship and Family Life Education.[49]

Farming/Skills Internship entails:
- Internship Phase I: Farming & Skills Training
- Internship Phase II: Micro-Enterprise & Cooperative Development
- Business Development Phase I: Farm Development & Management

Family Life Education entails:
- Coping skills development
- Parenting education
- Social inclusion education covers topics, such as gender role development, disability awareness, and awareness of GBV and child abuse
- Health education covers topics, such as SRH, dengue, hygiene and COVID-19

According to MONM staff, the 'WE CAN' Programme, introduced in 2021, was structured over a three-month period and was designed to be intuitive and participatory, with a focus on positive reinforcement. The programme aimed to adjust the mentality of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries must attend at least 85 per cent of all activities and modules to receive financial assistance. Non-compliance results in warnings, with continued non-compliance leading to termination from the programme. Beneficiaries must also abide by other social contracts, including submission of school reports to ensure continued academic engagement and performance, and letters confirming good standing and enrolment from community colleges.

In general, the training was well received and considered "uplifting," although it varied in duration and structure. Some reported that the programme lasted two months for five days a week, whereas others cited just one day per week. Participants reported that they were promised a XCD 300 stipend and meals, but only received XCD 150. Despite job opportunities being included in the agreement, no participants reported materialized post-training. Participants from Western and Central Kingstown were primarily FSG recipients, but did not report participating in the training programmes or adhering to social contracts. They were, however, receptive to the idea of trainings.

Female beneficiaries frequently attended these sessions and were sometimes accompanied by their children due to limited access to childcare. In some instances, fathers would visit the sites to assist with child supervision, which allowed mothers to fully engage in the sessions.

49 Email correspondence with the Ministry of National Mobilization, St Vincent and the Grenadines, 2023

Overall, beneficiaries had a favourable perception of these co-responsibilities and endorsed the expansion of the training modules. They proposed adding vocational training in culinary arts and tailoring, which can be leveraged for entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, there were calls to address notable discrepancies in the delivery and fulfilment of promised stipends.

Feedback pointed to a need to reassess co-responsibility requirements. A comprehensive needs assessment should be prioritized to identify knowledge and skills gaps; such an assessment would help to inform the development of tailored training programmes that could be better aligned with existing employment opportunities and vocational courses, and help to enhance job readiness of beneficiaries. Concurrent subsidized childcare during training would address time poverty constraints, particularly for women. In addition, personalized psychosocial support and parenting programmes should be offered, alongside childcare options during sessions, which would cater to individual beneficiary needs.

Systematic Barriers and Bottlenecks in the Demand of PAP

Beneficiary experiences revealed specific challenges that hinder the effectiveness and utilization of PAP. **Significant** bottlenecks impede access to PAP and exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities, such as limited childcare options and cumbersome application processes. **Moderate** bottlenecks relate to communication and perceptions, which are typically managed through informal community engagement.

- **Centralized application process** – Theoretically the application process is decentralized, but in practice often requires beneficiaries to visit the main office in Kingstown. This centralized approach disproportionately affects women, who may face mobility constraints due to childcare responsibilities or limited access to transportation. The resulting financial costs and frustration are particularly burdensome for individuals living in remote areas, which negatively impacts their ability to access assistance promptly.
- **Non-standardized waiting periods** – The waiting period is perceived as extended and non-standardized, with many beneficiaries reporting extended delays and a lack of follow-up. This uncertainty disproportionately affects women and single fathers, particularly those who are heads of household or primary caregivers, which makes it challenging to effectively plan and meet the needs of their families.
- **Gender-specific challenges** – Female beneficiaries face significant challenges due to the lack of childcare options, which exacerbates their gendered labour roles. Without childcare support, women struggle to find time for personal development and/or employment, which perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability. Thus, providing women with access to childcare services would enable them to participate in conditional programmes and enhance their opportunities for personal and economic growth.
- **Training programme accessibility** – The lack of standardization and limited awareness of training programmes further disadvantages beneficiaries, particularly women who could benefit from skills development and vocational training. Inadequate welfare-to-work components hinder the potential of PAP to empower individuals and promote long-term self-sufficiency.

- **Limited communication channels** – There are limited channels for receiving updates on PAP, which appears to focus more on Poor Relief than on short-term grants. Lack of clear and accessible information forces beneficiaries to rely on rumors or repeated trips to the office, which causes delays and increases frustration.
- **Unfavourable public perception** – The pervasive perception of bias, manipulation and discrimination with the social system undermines trust in PAP, and potentially deters eligible individuals from applying.

To address these bottlenecks effectively, a multi-faceted approach is required, and should include both communication enhancements and structural reforms to foster self-sufficiency and resilience among beneficiaries.

Quality

Ensuring the quality of services within PAP is crucial for meeting both national and international standards. This section delves into how PAP adheres to these standards and focuses on inclusivity and universality of services provided, as well as accuracy and accessibility of information shared with beneficiaries, and practices employed to maintain high quality services.[50]

Coverage, Quality and Feedback

Comprehensive coverage, high-quality services and effective feedback mechanisms are essential components of an effective programme.

Relevance of PAP Benefits. The current PAP structure does not recognize the unique needs of women based upon their gender. For instance, women face unique risks and vulnerabilities throughout their lives, which are amplified by systemic gender inequalities.[51] These risks and vulnerabilities include: limited access to resources; increased exposure to GBV; and a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. Currently, PAP is primarily focused on income-related aspects of vulnerability and some support for human empowerment initiatives.

While some of these interventions may exist within other divisions or ministries, a more comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach requires their integration into the design of the PAP.

As previously mentioned, childcare support is not integrated into the conditional training programme, which is crucial for enabling women, especially single mothers, to participate in trainings. In-kind transfers should also extend to pre-school services to lessen the time poverty of young mothers looking to re-enter the job market.[52]

50 UNICEF (2014). *The Determinant Analysis for Equity Programming.* UNICEF: New York City, NY, USA.

51 SPIAC-B. *Social Protection to Promote Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment: A joint statement to the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women.* Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: wcms_674612.pdf

52 UN Women (2021). *Putting gender equality at the centre of social protection strategies in sub-Saharan Africa: How far have we come?* Policy Brief No. 24. UN Women: Nairobi, Kenya. Retrieved on 19 December 2024 from: Policy-brief-Putting-gender-equality-at-the-centre-of-social-protection-strategies-in-sub-Saharan-Africa-en.pdf

PAP also lacks specific provisions for women's health and safety needs, such as SRH services. Even though SRH services exist in the public healthcare system, out-of-pocket costs may influence women not to utilize these services. In addition, teenage motherhood cannot be comprehensively addressed through short-term grants.

> *"I feel like I'm not doing enough. After work, picking up the kids, and managing the household, I'm exhausted. I wish there was an afterschool programme, even just for an hour, that could help with homework and keeping me in the loop about their school life."*
>
> (Single mother)

Skills-based training offered through the 'WE CAN' Programme is a positive step, but additional effort is needed to ensure women's access to and benefit from economic empowerment opportunities, particularly by the end the programme, through structured pathways to formal employment. Beneficiaries have asked for support in accessing income-generating activities, micro-credit and entrepreneurship training. The GABA revealed that beneficiaries aspire to achieve self-reliance and autonomy, rather than remain dependent on PAP.

Feedback Mechanisms. In response to the 2021 Soufrière volcano eruption, MONM established a grievance management process to address complaints concerning the Transition Grant and FSG. This system includes specific instructions for hotline operators on how to handle grievances. A grievance tracking form was also developed using Microsoft Excel; this form enables MONM to systematically record and track complaints.

Only a minority of beneficiaries reported ever filing a complaint; rather, most beneficiaries choose to suppress their concerns. This tendency is more prevalent among FSG recipients and connected to the lack of confidence in the redress system, rather than an absence of complaints.

Satisfaction with PAP. Beneficiaries were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with PAP on a five-point Likert scale in which 1 equals 'very satisfied' and 5 equals 'very dissatisfied'. In general, most PAP recipients gave a high satisfaction score, close to 2, indicating overall contentment. This was particularly evident among Poor Relief beneficiaries with medical conditions and no means of earning an income. Further probing revealed that this satisfaction was more closely linked to gratitude for receiving assistance, rather than actual performance of the programme. Beneficiaries from the Northern Grenadines gave the highest rating, with a score of 1. The lowest rating was a 3, indicating a neutral stance on the programme.

> *"The government did not place you in this position; you need to also help yourself. Still be grateful for the assistance you get."*
>
> (Working-age woman)

Systematic Barriers and Bottlenecks in the Quality of PAP

PAP faces two significant bottlenecks, both of which undermine the quality of PAP. These include a gender-neutral approach to benefit provision and limited feedback and accountability due to beneficiary hesitancy in lodging complaints.

- **Gender-neutral benefits** – The lack of a comprehensive gender analysis of PAP's structure hinders the programme's ability to effectively address the unique needs and challenges faced by women. This oversight perpetuates systemic gender inequalities and prevents the design of targeted interventions from effectively empowering women beneficiaries and promoting gender equality.
- **Limited feedback and accountability** – Beneficiaries are apprehensive about providing feedback due to a lack of confidence in MONM's ability to effectively address their concerns. This reluctance stems from previous experiences where complaints were not adequately resolved; this led to a perceived futility in voicing issues. As a result, critical feedback that could drive improvements in service delivery and programme design are often not communicated; this further perpetuates existing deficiencies in PAP.

Profile of Select PAP Beneficiaries

The following profiles or case studies illustrate how vulnerability manifests across different age groups, family structures and other demographics. These profiles are essential for capturing the various challenges faced by beneficiaries and provides a comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of different subgroups in the population. This insight is crucial for tailoring support services and enhancing the overall effectiveness of PAP categories.

Terrence, Single Father of Children with Disabilities, FSG Recipient

After Terrence's wife passed away, he became the sole caregiver for his child who has intellectual disabilities. He has another child with a disability who lives separately and receives public assistance. Initially, Terrence received the FSG to support his child living with him, but he reportedly lost access to the grant due to unmet co-responsibility requirements, specifically regular school attendance.

Terrence withdrew his child from school because his child was struggling, and the school lacked qualified special needs teachers. Terrence claims that he was later informed his child would not qualify for public assistance because his other child, who lives in a separate household, was already receiving support. This decision was allegedly based on the registered address of the child, which is the family home listed on official documentation.

> *"No family member wants to help and people in the area are fearful of his mental episodes. I am left alone to care for him and at my age, worried about what will happen to him when I'm not around."*
>
> (Single father of a child with disabilities)

MONM suggested placing the child in a children's home for care, but Terrence believes this option does not adequately address his child's special needs. He feels that social services fail to consider the complex challenges faced by parents raising children with disabilities and special needs; instead social services focuses solely on financial support, while neglecting the emotional and physical demands required of parents/caregivers.

Assessment: Terrence's situation is critical, as he is solely responsible for the care of a child with disabilities and special needs, and lacks adequate support. While he claims that the FSG was discontinued due to

his child's lack of school attendance, this condition only applies to grants for meals and transportation. It is possible that the father is unaware of this distinction or may not have applied for the appropriate grant, such as the short-term disability grant, which can be renewed every six months.

The issue of his child's difficulty in a conventional school setting could potentially be addressed by providing assistance to identify and enrol the child in a school with qualified special education teachers. This highlights a broader issue, which is he need for increased support and education for beneficiaries to effectively navigate available social protection services.

The absence of comprehensive social support is evident in Terrence's situation. In other words, providing financial assistance alone does not address the significant emotional and physical challenges faced by parents/caregivers of children with disabilities and special needs. This underscores the necessity for holistic support services, including respite care, counselling and tailored interventions that address both the immediate and long-term needs of families in similar circumstances.

Michael, Working-Age Father with Disabilities, FSG Recipient

Over the past five years, as a father, Michael intermittently received the FSG. Michael was referred to MONM due to long-term mental health issues which impacted his ability to work and care for his children. While he found the application process to be straightforward, Michael believes that MONM should offer more ongoing support, especially for beneficiaries with mental illnesses, who often face isolation and significant life challenges. Despite these difficulties, Michael expressed a strong desire to regain normalcy and employment, and to be a more present father in the lives of his children.

> *"While financial assistance is beneficial, human connection is sometimes more important to truly feel valued and supported."*
>
> (Work-age man with disabilities)

Assessment: Michael's case highlights the limitations of the FSG in providing sustained and comprehensive assistance, particularly for individuals with a mental illness. His situation underscores the need for improved case management that considers the complex, multifaceted needs of clients, beyond financial support. Effective case management should focus on understanding and addressing the unique barriers faced by beneficiaries with mental illnesses, including social isolation and difficulty maintaining employment.

Integrating pathways to continuous mental health care and support, including psychiatric and psychological services, would enable beneficiaries like Michael to better manage their immediate challenges, while working toward long-term stability, self-sufficiency and active engagement in family life. A more holistic approach would not only address income insecurity, but also empower beneficiaries to achieve lasting personal and economic resilience.

Merle, Working-Age Single Mother, Soufrière Transitionary Grant Recipient

Merle is a single mother of children that range in age from toddlers to teenagers and faces overwhelming daily struggles. The children's fathers are either absent or unable to provide support.. Merle works multiple jobs, including cooking at a family member's shop and engaging in sex work, but struggles to meet the basic needs of the household. Previously, Merle received a grant during the Soufrière volcano eruption, demonstrating her familiarity with the services of MONM.

Merle's reality is a constant scramble for survival. Income from each pay check ensures food for the family, but at times, school attendance is sacrificed due to a lack of food or transportation. An elderly relative occasionally provides childcare support during work hours. Despite having dropped out of school and facing literacy challenges, Merle remains committed to securing educational opportunities for her children.

> *"I don't want them [my children] to drop out [of school] and work like other poor families . . . I would rather drink saltwater than have them go hungry and make that choice."*
>
> (Working-age single mother)

To manage daily expenses, Merle carefully allocates earnings and prioritizes food, but her family's survival often depends on the generosity of friends for food, and in some cases, regrettably, she has to engage in transactional sexual relationships. Merle hopes to obtain further assistance from MONM to help with her household's basic needs, although it is unclear whether an application has been submitted.

Assessment: The challenges faced by Merle, a single mother, has the hallmark features of the 'feminization of poverty'. The lack of a stable income often forces single mothers to make difficult decisions, such as prioritizing immediate needs over their children's education, which is sometimes viewed as a discretionary expense in dire circumstances. This situation perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits future opportunities for both mothers and their children. This case underscores the need for supplemental services, including education grants and accessible childcare that can be tailored to the needs of eligible single parents. In addition, it highlights the importance of addressing broader issues, such as income vulnerability and gender inequality, to support long-term stability and opportunity for families in similar situations.

Ana, Indigenous Single Mother, FSG Recipient

Ana is a single mother who received the FSG following her displacement from a government-run child-friendly space programme. The six-month grant helped to cover some immediate household expenses; despite now being in full-time employment, her situation remains difficult. Ana manages household expenses on her own and struggles with limited time to supervise her child, which remains a significant challenge. As her child prepares for the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), additional school expenses for projects and lessons add to the pressure. Ana raised concerns about the PAP application process, noting inconsistencies in how assistance is allocated within the community. She believes some ineligible individuals may have received support, which was potentially influenced by political factors. In addition, she expressed frustration over clients bypassing district offices, which she feels places

unnecessary strain on the head office. Ana suggested increased community-based investigations by MONM, including potentially using testimonials from local figures and religious leaders to enhance transparency and fairness. Despite these concerns, Ana remains grateful for FSG and desires additional support to manage the educational and nutritional needs of her son.

Assessment: This case illustrates the importance of PAP in providing immediate support during a crisis and also highlights its limitations in addressing longer-term needs of beneficiaries, such as Ana. A more integrated approach could enhance the programme's effectiveness by combining short-term financial assistance with referrals for childcare and educational support.

Ana's case also points to gaps in referral pathways within MONM and the broader social protection system, which suggests that there is room for improvement in coordinating holistic support. Addressing concerns about fairness and transparency in the application process would help foster trust and confidence within the beneficiary community and ensure that the programme meets its intended goals.

Frederick, Elderly Man, PAP Beneficiary

Frederick receives the elderly grant from MONM, which was obtained through a referral from a medical doctor. He initially received XCD 200 per month during the Soufrière volcano eruption, but then transitioned to PAP. Fredrick has to pay a nominee XCD 20 per office visit to collect his payment or any documentation from the district office, on his behalf. Although Frederick has children, they are not active in his life; thus, he needs paid assistance for essential transactions. Fredrick explained that this is a reality for many older persons who face social isolation in their later years, and is a unique layer of vulnerability and financial strain faced by the elderly.

Medical appointments are challenging to maintain due to limited mobility. As a patient with chronic health conditions that require frequent tests, Frederick's pension is insufficient to cover both medical needs and basic living expenses. Despite this, Fredrick expressed gratitude for the partial support that PAP provides. Frederick's situation reflects his multi-faceted vulnerability, which includes financial, emotional and social dimensions.

Assessment: This case reveals the complex and multifaceted vulnerabilities faced by elderly PAP beneficiaries. While the pension offers a lifeline, it is insufficient to cover medical expenses and the costs of basic needs. Fredrick's reliance on paying persons to perform transactions on his behalf highlights his social isolation, which is a hidden vulnerability that compounds the financial strain experienced by the elderly. This situation aligns with observations from MONM staff who have noted a rise in vulnerability among older persons, especially men, due to strained family relationships. This reality emphasizes the importance of addressing not only the financial needs of the elderly, but also their emotional and social needs to promote holistic well-being and resilience.

Marla, Working-Age Mother with a Disability, FSG Beneficiary

Marla faces challenges raising her children with minimal financial support from the children's fathers. Her eldest child, currently enrolled in post-secondary studies, faces attendance challenges due to transportation and educational expenses. Living with her elderly mother allows them to share utility and food expenses, but her mother's pension is barely enough to meet her own needs. Although she cultivates a small plot of land, seasonal changes and the rising cost of fertilizer make it an unreliable source of income and sustenance.

Despite facing persistent financial hardship and struggling to provide for her family, Marla is determined to create a better future for her children. Having previously received the FSG, she actively seeks additional support through PAP and other programmes to "give them a chance at life." Like many single mothers, she prioritizes her children's well-being, even making budget-conscious trips to distant markets to meet their basic needs.

Assessment: This case highlights the intergenerational nature of poverty, especially within female-headed households. The Elderly Grant received by Marla's mother barely covers her basic needs and leaves little left over to support Marla and her grandchildren. This precarious financial situation limits the ability of Marla to invest in post-secondary education for her child, which perpetuates intergenerational vulnerabilities. This observation aligns with evidence indicating the disproportionate impact of poverty on adolescents in female-headed households.

Marla's prioritization of her children's well-being over her own needs reflects a common pattern among single mothers living in poverty. While various forms of assistance exist to mitigate educational expenses for children in poverty, there is a notable lack of awareness about these resources within the target population, highlighting the need for improved outreach and information dissemination..

George, Single, Working-Age Father, Rejected/Waiting FSG

As a single father of three children, including twin sons and a daughter, George faces a difficult situation after his wife left the relationship. Recently unemployed and struggling to find a job, George faces additional challenges due to his son's chronic lung illness, which necessitates constant supervision. As a single father, George relies on a neighbour for childcare, however, the neighbour is not always available; thus, George believes that dedicated support would significantly aid his job search. Desperate for assistance, George approached MONM, only to be met with perceived mistreatment and stigma for seeking assistance as a man. This experience highlights the narrow societal view of men as sole providers and neglects their emotional needs and challenges. While his goal is to regain financial independence through employment, his current circumstances have left him with limited options. The lack of a definitive response to his application further compounds his struggle, leaving him without much-needed support.

> *"I left this morning and counted 10 pampers at home. My rent and light are overdue. I don't know how to cover these bills. My pride and dignity are gone."*
>
> (Single, working-age father)

Assessment: This case demonstrates that societal expectations that men are self-sufficient and stoic often marginalizes single fathers. As a result, single fathers often struggle to balance childcare, job-seeking, employment and medical expenses. This situation is exacerbated by the stigma associated with seeking help and highlights the unsustainability of such gender expectations. This case also underscores the necessity for cultural shifts that can help to normalize the practice of men seeking assistance and expressing their vulnerabilities, and can foster a more equitable and supportive environment for all parents and caregivers, including both men and women. Furthermore, the emotional toll of George's experience with MONM emphasizes the importance of staff training to ensure that they are sensitive and responsive to the unique challenges faced by single fathers.

Rue, Single Mother of a Child with Disabilities, FSG Recipient, Waiting on PAP

Rue faces immense challenges raising her children who are all under the age of nine. Balancing care for her children (one child has complex medical needs) while navigating financial constraints and limited childcare options has taken a significant toll on Rue's well-being. Recently Rue qualified for the FSG for six months, with the option to reapply by the end of the period. Rue also has an application pending for Poor Relief.

Although Rue lives with her elderly parents, the financial burden on the family remains substantial. Rue's resilience and determination to provide for her children is evident in her vigilant care practices and relentless pursuit of available resources, despite her own emotional stressors and strains, and her uncertainty about the future. Although Rue was advised to seek child support through the Family Court, she hesitates to do so because of the potential repercussions from the fathers. Rue explained that she "takes each moment as they come but is unsure of the future of her family."

Assessment: Single mothers raising children with disabilities experience profound vulnerability. Their challenges extend beyond financial constraints and includes physical and emotional burdens that hinder their ability to engage in employment and maintain stable livelihoods. The psychosocial needs of these parents is crucial, as are the health needs of their children. It is imperative that single mothers are fully informed about and have access to resources and support provided by the Gender Affairs Division (GAD), and that empowers them to advocate for their rights and to effectively navigate legal systems; this would foster a more equitable and supportive environment for vulnerable families.

Pat, Chronically Ill Working-Age Woman, PAP Beneficiary

For the past year, Pat, a working-age woman with a chronic illness, has been enrolled in PAP. Pat found the application process straightforward, as it required only basic contact information, identification, and medical documentation. Pat's proximity to the district office further facilitated the process.

Previously, Pat missed cheque payments due to medical appointments, resulting in her forfeiting benefits that required in-person collection with identification. The recent transition to a card-based system has significantly improved Pat's access to funds and balance inquiries, and offered much-needed convenience.

Pat was forced to leave her job in the automotive industry following a cancer diagnosis, shifting her focus to cancer treatments and family life. While Poor Relief provides some financial assistance it does not fully cover her medical expenses, leaving her under considerable financial strain, which is coupled with the emotional toll of her illness. Despite these challenges, Pat expresses gratitude for the support she receives and finds purpose through volunteering to counsel other cancer patients. Pat's daughters have stepped in to provide financial support to the household.

Pat believes that PAP could be enhanced by incorporating psychosocial support, outreach programmes and food baskets for beneficiaries dealing with serious illnesses or other challenges. She also pointed out that a lack of communication and visibility from MONM in its outreach efforts..

Assessment: While the application process for PAP was straightforward and facilitated by her proximity to the office, her experience underscores systemic gaps in addressing the holistic needs of beneficiaries with severe health conditions. The shift from cheque payments to a card system has improved access to funds, yet missed payments during medical treatments abroad reflect a need for more flexible and accommodating disbursement methods. Her voluntary counselling work provides a sense of purpose and points to the importance of psychosocial support for beneficiaries facing serious illnesses; such support is currently offered by MOHW. The involvement of her daughters in financially supporting the household illustrates the gendered responsibility of caregiving; in other words, financial responsibility is often borne by women in families affected by chronic illness.

Navi, Elderly Man, Awaiting PAP

Navi lost everything during a natural disaster. Now, practically homeless, Navi relies on the kindness of neighbours and his children for basic needs. Navi applied for the Elderly Grant at his district office, but has not received any updates. Limited phone access and connections make it difficult to inquire about his application. Because of informational barriers, Navi is occasionally forced to walk to the Revenue Office, adding to the burden of his situation. The lack of communication and uncertainty about the application process leaves Navi feeling lost within the system.

Assessment: The vulnerabilities of older individuals facing poverty, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters, can be especially severe. Conventional communication channels often act as barriers for older individuals in similar circumstances. This underscores the need for more proactive and direct outreach by social protection agencies to ensure that vulnerable individuals are informed and supported throughout the application process. Improved communication strategies could alleviate the uncertainty and feelings of disconnection experienced by applicants like Navi..

Key Takeaways

The aforementioned profiles underline that it is imperative to enhance the value of PAP payments to reflect the escalating cost of living, particularly for the elderly and multigenerational households, if the aim is to ensure a minimum standard of living. In addition, the integration of psychosocial support is paramount, as beneficiaries grapple with diverse challenges, including loneliness in old age, chronic illness, caregiving responsibilities and the emotional intensity of single parenthood. This holistic approach to poverty alleviation requires addressing both material and psychological needs, which is crucial for fostering resilience and empowering beneficiaries to overcome adversity. It is also crucial that GAD play a central role in enhancing PAP to effectively address gender-related issues. This entails ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into every aspect of the design, implementation and evaluation of PAP.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section highlights key conclusions and offers evidence-based recommendations that stem from findings from the GABA of PAP in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. While some recommendations may align with ongoing initiatives within MONM, they remain crucial to addressing gender- and child-related disparities identified through independent research.

It is important to acknowledge that the GABA was conducted during a dynamic period of transformation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; consequently, certain aspects may have evolved and changes since the analysis. Nonetheless, the key takeaways highlight persistent gaps in PAP across four domains of the analytical framework, which sheds light on how these gaps intersect with gender vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, the recommendations that follow are achievable for MONM, particularly with continued technical support from the World Bank and other development partners.

Conclusions

Efforts to strengthen PAP requires a 'whole-of-government' approach, which includes a multi-sectoral approach that requires effective collaboration and cooperation across key ministries and agencies, and with international and regional development partners. Communication and engagement strategies should also be tailored to be relevant to stakeholders. By fostering such partnerships, MONM can lead the charge in ensuring that PAP and other social protection initiatives effectively address the complex and intersecting challenges faced by beneficiaries. This collaborative effort is essential for realizing the full potential of social protection in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

The recommendations that follow should be thought of as stepping stones toward transformative change, which requires a cultural shift among both service providers and beneficiaries to dismantle deeply ingrained patriarchal views and perceptions of gender. Fiscal prudence dictates a phased implementation approach for some recommendations. By addressing identified gaps and implementing the below recommendations, PAP can evolve into a more gender-sensitive, cohesive and effective system that empowers all beneficiaries in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Recommendations

Public Assistance Legislation and Policy Reform. The Public Assistance Act needs to be revised to incorporate current and future changes in PAP, including the three grant structures, expanded benefits, and clarified roles and responsibilities. Revisions should include the integration of SAMIS, including data protocols and organizational infrastructure. The focus should also be on engaging the government throughout the process, including the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Funding Agency. Public assistance legislation and policy reforms should be focused on the following key areas:

- **Objectives and goals** – Clearly articulate the overarching goals of PAP, including poverty reduction, social inclusion, shock-responsiveness and gender equality.
- **Institutional arrangements** – Clearly define roles and responsibilities of MONM, the Social Protection Division and other relevant stakeholders in administration and delivery of PAP. Outline the governance structure, including decision-making processes, oversight mechanisms and accountability frameworks. Financial management systems should also be highlighted, including mechanisms for tracking expenditures, monitoring programme performance, and preventing fraud and corruption.
- **Staffing** – Define clear job descriptions and qualifications for all staff positions within PAP, including caseworkers, intake clerks, technical advisors and administrative personnel. Expanded roles should be detailed following institutional reforms and implementation of SAMIS.
- **Technical support** – Collaborate with international and regional development partners for the sourcing of technical expertise to provide advisory support to develop public assistance legislation and policy reforms.
- **Inter-Ministerial Committee** – Engage state agencies responsible for social protection during the development processes to facilitate buy-in and sectoral input, and to mitigate benefit duplications across sectors and ministries/agencies.
- **Community support** – Beneficiary and community-based engagement are critical for understanding experiences, grievances and gender-related disparities.

Develop Cohesive Social and Gender Policies. Establishing comprehensive social protection and gender policies that adhere to international best practices is critical for ensuring that PAP addresses the unique needs of both women and men. These policies should reduce fragmentation, avoid duplication and promote efficient resource allocation across programmes. GAD will serve as the primary technical partner in developing and implementing the gender policy. The following key activities are recommended:

- **Stakeholder consultations** – Engage GAD, civil society and international partners to gather insights and ensure diverse perspectives.
- **Draft policies** – Integrate provisions on childcare, reproductive health and employment support which reflect gender-specific considerations.
- **Secure buy-in and support** – Collaborate with policymakers throughout development to foster consensus and endorsement of the final policy.
- **Staff sensitisation** – Train PAP staff on new policy requirements to encourage gender-sensitive service delivery and improve programme outcomes.

Comprehensive PAP Operation Manual for the PAP. Development of a comprehensive PAP Operation Manual is essential to minimize ambiguity and standardize procedures across all stages of the PAP operation cycle, including planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting. The Operation Manual will delineate clear guidelines and tools for each process, and ensure uniform execution by all actors. The Operation Manual should also explicitly assign responsibilities at various levels and ensure clarity and accountability throughout the implementation of PAP.[53] The Operation Manual should be as detailed as possible and outline:

- Targeting, eligibility and registration protocols
- Payment mechanisms
- Financial operations and budgets
- M&E procedures and reporting
- Communication channels
- Case management
- Feedback and redress mechanisms

SAMIS Implementation. It is imperative that MONM continue to prepare for implementation of the SAMIS, which will replace the current Google portal for data management. MONM should ensure that staff are well-acquainted with the system and ready for its deployment. This new system will address current bottlenecks in critical service areas in the ministry. MONM should also prioritize training for staff on gender-sensitive data collection and analysis within SAMIS to identify and address disparities in programme outcomes.

The recent experience with Hurricane Beryl, along with the ever-present threat of future natural disasters, stresses the urgent need for the implementation of an integrated platform. This would facilitate the rapid collection and analysis of real-time data on disaster impact, including the extent of damage, affected populations and their specific needs. SAMIS will support tracking the allocation and utilization of resources, including donor funds, and help to ensure transparency and accountability in the distribution of aid. SAMIS can also help identify potential gaps in coverage and/or duplication of efforts, and allow for better coordination and optimization of resources in the social system. Mobile registration, conducted by field officers utilizing tablets and cell phones, can also be implemented across affected areas to expedite the delivery of assistance delivery.

Capacity Building Plan for MONM. A capacity building plan is essential to strengthening human resource capacities in MONM and to ensuring effective delivery of PAP. The plan should address the following key areas:

Workforce assessment and planning:

- Conduct a thorough assessment of current staffing levels, skills and competencies within departments.
- Identify existing gaps and future needs in terms of human resources, with consideration for evolving demands of PAP and potential expansion of roles.
- Develop a workforce plan that outlines the required number and types of personnel for each level of operation to ensure adequate coverage and expertise.

53 Retrieved on 17 December 2024 from: Login | Slack.

Job descriptions and specifications:

- Develop clear and detailed job descriptions for all positions, including qualifications, responsibilities, experience levels and key performance indicators.
- Ensure that job specifications reflect the specific knowledge and skills required for effective programme implementation, such as expertise in gender-sensitive approaches, vulnerability assessments, case management and data analysis.

Training and development:

- Design and implement comprehensive training programmes to address identified knowledge and skills gaps needed to enhance staff competencies.
- Prioritize training on gender-sensitive approaches (i.e., able to identify the needs of women and men), effective communication strategies, needs assessments, case management techniques and data analysis.
- Offer ongoing professional development opportunities to keep staff updated on best practices and emerging trends in social work and poverty alleviation.
- Establish and formalize mentorship programmes where experienced staff guide newer employees, and ensure regular supervision of ongoing learning and skill development.
- Partner with universities and NGOs to provide workshops, seminars and guest lectures; this exposure should enhance staff knowledge and keep them updated on best practices.

Performance management and accountability:

- Establish a robust performance management system that sets clear expectations, provides regular feedback and rewards outstanding performance.
- Develop mechanisms for staff accountability, while ensuring responsibility for actions and decisions (e.g., client feedback surveys).
- Create a culture of continuous improvement where staff are encouraged to identify and address challenges, share best practices and contribute to the overall effectiveness of PAP.

Staff morale and well-being:

- Foster a supportive and inclusive work environment that encourages collaboration and promotes open communication.
- Provide opportunities for staff to share feedback, voice their concerns and participate in decision-making processes.
- Implement employee wellness programmes to address the emotional and psychological demands of social work and promote work-life balance.
- Introduce wellness programmes to support staff in managing the demands of their roles and promoting a healthier and more productive work environment.

Information Strategy for MONM. By developing a comprehensive internal information strategy, MONM can break down existing silos and enhance vertical coordination, and create a more cohesive and effective programme. This strategy should leverage the centralized SAMIS database to promote seamless service delivery. Key components of this recommendation include:

- **Establish regular cross-departmental meetings** – Implement regular meetings between staff from different units, including social protection and beneficiary units, to discuss challenges, share insights

and coordinate efforts. Video conferencing should be utilized to support convenient scheduling of cross-department meetings.

- **Create shared dashboards and reports** – Utilize the SAMIS database to create shared dashboards and reports that provide a holistic view of the programme's performance and beneficiary outcomes, and to identify areas for improvement. Consider leveraging online communication platforms, such as Slack, to connect work teams and facilitate real-time messaging within the ministry.
- **Develop standardized communication protocols** – Establish clear guidelines and protocols for communication between departments and ensure that information is shared promptly and effectively.
- **Promote knowledge sharing** – Encourage staff to share knowledge, expertise and best practices through training sessions, workshops and online platforms.
- **Leverage SAMIS for data-driven decision-making** – Utilize data collected and analysed through SAMIS to inform decision-making processes at all levels of the ministry, and ensure that policies and interventions are evidence-based and responsive to beneficiary needs.

Promote Access to Day Cares and Preschools for Vulnerable Populations. The apparent mismatch between beneficiaries' lack of access to childcare facilities and MONM's indication of underutilised spaces suggests the need to address potential barriers or perceptions influencing uptake. Regardless of the factors contributing to this gap, the limited availability or use of childcare services restricts women's ability to fully participate in the PAP and pursue personal development or employment.

To tackle these challenges, MONM needs to strengthen its collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to expand access to affordable, high-quality daycare and preschool services. Simultaneously, it will undertake an assessment to ensure that sufficient services are available to meet the needs of beneficiaries. By providing greater childcare support, the PAP can enable women to participate in the workforce, pursue further education and ultimately enhance their economic well-being. Some key actions would be:

- **Needs Assessment** – Examine barriers to childcare use (i.e., location, cost, cultural factors, service quality). Consult beneficiaries to understand perceptions, circumstances and preferences.
- **Joint Promotional Campaign** – Partner with the MOE to raise awareness of existing daycares and preschools. Emphasise the educational and economic benefits of enrolment.
- **Referral Pathways** – Develop clear processes within MONM to connect beneficiaries to childcare services.
- **Subsidised Childcare** – Explore the feasibility of providing subsidised childcare services to ensure affordability and greater access, particularly for low-income beneficiaries.

Enhanced Benefit Structure. The current one-size-fits-all approach to PAP benefits fails to address the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of beneficiaries, particularly gender disparities experienced by women. To ensure equitable and effective support, findings of the gender gap analysis should be considered to inform programme revisions in conjunction with findings from numerous other studies undertaken in the region. Some key considerations include:

- **Utilize updated data** – Incorporate up-to-date data on inflation rates, cost-of-living and projected poverty estimates to ensure that benefit amounts are adequate and reflective of the current economic reality.
- **Prioritize beneficiary needs assessments** – Beneficiary needs assessments would help to identify education and skills gaps among beneficiaries, and could be used to inform the development of targeted

training programmes that would align with existing employment opportunities and vocational courses, and would enhance job readiness.

- **Establish linkages to employment opportunities** – Linkages to employment opportunities can facilitate the transition from social assistance to sustainable livelihoods, particularly in sectors with high demand.
- **Psychosocial support services** – Establish formal referral pathways to psychosocial services offered by MOHW to support the mental health and emotional well-being of beneficiaries.
- **Provide educational grants and scholarships** – Education grants and scholarships can be used to support education of children of PAP beneficiaries.

Enhanced Multisectoral Coordination. Fragmentation of the social protection system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines necessitates the establishment of robust multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms. This, however, requires integrating collaborative practices into the operational framework of PAP and mandating referral pathways between relevant ministries and agencies. It also requires fostering a culture of information sharing that extends beyond mere service provision to include insights and best practices. The following actions are recommended:

- **Establish a technical working group** – This is a key recommendation of the World Bank, to ensure that all social protection providers can effectively leverage the centralized SAMIS registry. This technical working group will mitigate bottlenecks, such as benefit duplications and payment issues, and promote more seamless inter-agency coordination.
- **Gender Equality Task Force** – Advocate for a Gender Equality Task Force within the technical working group to ensure that gender considerations are prioritized in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection programmes. GAD should play an integral role in the Gender Equality Task Force to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into all initiatives.
- **Develop formal referral pathways** – Create clear and standardized referral pathways between PAP and the social services to ensure seamless access to healthcare, education, housing and other essential support services for beneficiaries.
- **Conduct joint training and capacity building** – Organize joint training programmes for staff across different sectors to enhance their understanding of roles, responsibilities and available resources; this would foster a shared vision for social protection and strengthen collaborative efforts.

Develop Comprehensive Information, Education and Communications (IEC) Strategy. A comprehensive IEC strategy is crucial for raising awareness and understanding of the PAP and its role in addressing vulnerability and building resilience in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The pillars of this IEC strategy should include:

- **Sensitize the government and public** – Educate key government stakeholders and the public about the importance of social protection, the value of PAP and the need for collective efforts to build resilience within the population.
- **Manage expectations and promote understanding** – Clearly communicate the eligibility criteria, benefit structure, application process and graduation requirements to potential beneficiaries and the wider community; this will help to manage expectations, reduce misinformation and ensure that those in need are aware of and can access the programme.

- **Utilize multiple channels** – Employ a diverse range of communication channels, including traditional media (i.e., radio, television, print), digital platforms (i.e., social media, websites), community outreach events, and partnerships with local organizations. This will ensure that information reaches a wide audience and is tailored to different demographics.
- **Targeted messaging** – Develop targeted messaging that resonates with specific groups (i.e., women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities) and addresses their unique needs and concerns. This could involve creating culturally relevant content using diverse formats (e.g., videos, infographics, testimonials) and partnering with trusted community leaders to deliver messages.
- **Specialized campaigns** – Develop education materials on print and digital mediums to educate groups of beneficiaries on upcoming PAP changes, including SAMIS and the use of utilization of electronic cards. Language and visuals should be customized to resonate with specific groups, particularly older persons who report challenges with using the electronic card for Poor Relief.
- **Collaborate with community-based organizations (CBOs)** – Partner with CBOs to leverage their local knowledge, networks and credibility in delivering educational campaigns and outreach initiatives. This will enhance the authenticity and reach of the message, particularly in marginalized communities.
- **Integrate a M&E framework** – Incorporate a robust M&E framework into the IEC strategy to track its effectiveness, measure changes in awareness and understanding, and identify areas for improvement. This could involve conducting surveys, FGDs, social media analytics and/or tracking website visits.

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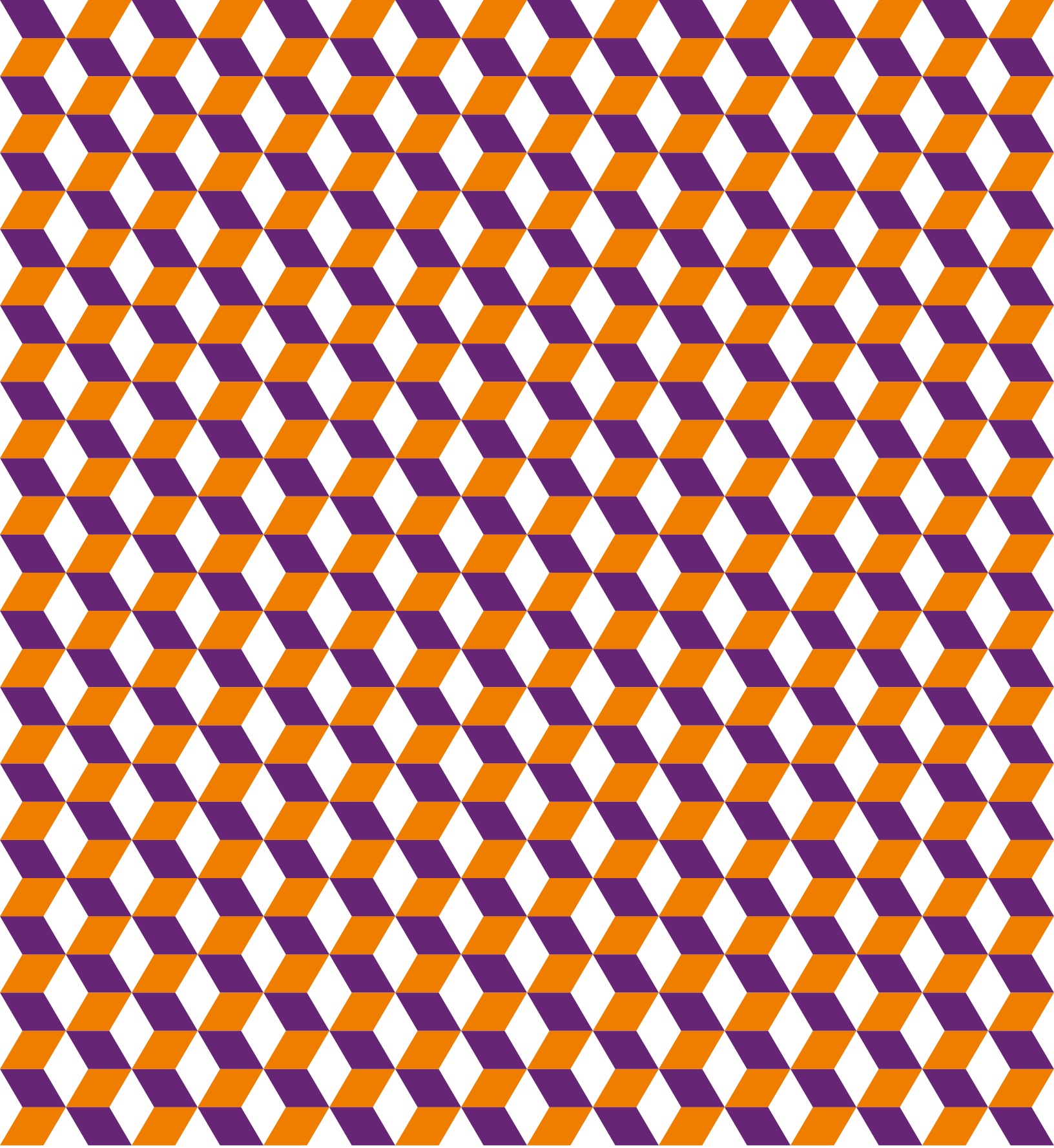
Annex B: Determinant Analysis Framework for GABA

Domain	Research Context	Determinants	Indicators/Research Areas	Data Sources
Enabling Environment	Does the enabling environment inclusive of social, legal, budgetary and operational determinants, address the specific needs, risks and vulnerabilities of children, women, men and other vulnerable groups in St. Vincent and the Grenadines?	Social norms	• Are there social norms or behaviours that act as barriers to the adoption and engagement with social protection services?	• Desk research- Technical Reports (inclusive of Gender Gap Analysis Report), Legislations, and Operational Documents • KIIs – Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Legislation and policy	• Does the social protection framework (programme, policy and laws) recognize and address gendered risks and vulnerabilities faced by children, women and men? • Are there any barriers within social protection that inhibit access to the different categories of services and benefits? • Are there laws and policies that protect children's rights, promote women's empowerment, gender equality and address gendered risks and vulnerabilities?	• Desk Research- Technical Reports (inclusive of Gender Gap Analysis Report), Legislations, and Operational Documents • KIIs – Programme Managers at the MONM; Case Workers and PS Ministry of Legal Affairs • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Budget and expenditure	• Does the budget allocated to the MONM adequately support operations (staffing, physical spaces etc.) and the fulfilment of their objectives and responsibilities towards beneficiaries?	• KIIs – Programme Managers at the MONM; PS of National Mobilization; and PS/Rep. Ministry of Finance

Domain	Research Context	Determinants	Indicators/Research Areas	Data Sources
		Management, Coordination, Information	• Is there an operational policy for the PAP? (i.e., operational manual/Policy). Does this policy differ by programme/ category of benefits? • Are there measures for addressing operational bottlenecks when it comes to sharing of data within the MONM (vertical coordination), data collection, reporting and M&E • Do mechanisms for multisectoral collaborations exist to enhance social protection services? With which agencies and sectors do you have established linkages and collaborations, and for which specific services?	• KIIs – Programme Managers at the MONM; PS of National Mobilization
Supply	Do all eligible beneficiaries have access to essential commodities/ inputs/ services, guidance, information and other resources without discrimination or additional costs?	Availability of essential materials and inputs	• Does a sufficient budget exist to meet the needs of all eligible beneficiaries of the PAP? • Are the PAP payments sufficient to cover the specific needs of the targeted beneficiaries? • What are the targeting criteria for PAP? How is this communicated to beneficiaries? Are applicants able to receive multiple benefits from the PAP, and how is the issue of benefit duplication managed? • How are financial resources allocated among the applicants? Do budgetary constraints impact the approval of applicants (i.e. number)? • Aside from not meeting the eligibility criteria, are there additional reasons (e.g., budget constraints) for denying services or placing beneficiaries on a waitlist? Are there interim measures in place awaiting approval? • What is the average waiting time for approval of social benefits/enrolment in PAP? Is there a fixed approval frame? What percentage of cases deviate from this timeframe? Are specific groups more likely to experience delays compared to others?	• Desk research- Technical Reports (inclusive of Gender Gap Analysis Report), Legislations, and Operational Documents • KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries

Domain	Research Context	Determinants	Indicators/Research Areas	Data Sources
		Availability of adequately staffed services and information	• Does the MONM have an adequate number of staff to handle inquiries, process applications, conduct reviews, and facilitate timely payments? What is the ratio of case workers/representatives to applicants? • What are the required qualifications for the role of case mangers/programme managers? • Does the MONM have gender, child and M&E specialists among its full-time staff? Detail the training policy at the MONM to ensure that staff acquires pertinent technical expertise. • Is there readily available and appropriate information on the PAP to aid beneficiaries in their application process? What is the communication strategy employed by the MONM to engage with its target audience and disseminate information effectively? • Is communication adapted to suit diverse target groups and geographical locations, encompassing appropriate communication mediums (print, radio, web) and messaging? How is the budget determined for this activity?	• KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Geographic location	• What is the ratio of payment centres/customer service centres to the population? Is it possible to submit, process, and update applications online rather than in person? Are electronic applications processed faster than in-person? • What is the average travel distance/time for case workers to visit the homes of PAP applicants? What are some of the challenges encountered when performing site visits?	• KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers, • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries

Domain	Research Context	Determinants	Indicators/Research Areas	Data Sources
Demand	Encompasses the financial, social, and cultural factors that either facilitate or impede the target population from accessing the services, facilities, systems, or desired practices. The entire beneficiary experience, inclusive of gender dimensions, is mapped based on the feedback provided in this section.	Ease of application (beneficiaries' perspectives)	• How did beneficiaries become aware of the PAP? How was contact initiated with the office, and were multiple visits or calls required to obtain sufficient information? • Based on personal experience, outline the steps in the initial application process for the PAP. Were any challenges encountered during this process, and if so, how were they resolved? • Were the applicants provided with information about the subsequent steps in the processing of their applications? Is there a procedure for checking the status of applications? (online, in-person or calls) • What was the average waiting period between application, approval, and receiving payments? Were there bottlenecks during this process, and how were they resolved?	• FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Financial access	• Are there any application costs involved e.g. postage, fees, significant transportation costs, time-off paid work, printing of forms. (separate from salaried contributions).	• KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers, • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Personal beliefs	• Are there social personal beliefs that act as barriers to the adoption and engagement with social protection services?	• KIIs –PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers, • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
		Continuity of use	• Are beneficiaries fulfilling their co-responsibilities for continuation in the programme? • What are the conditions for discontinuing participation in the programme?	• KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers, • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries
Quality	Services, information and practices adhere to national and international standards, inclusivity and universality.	Coverage, quality and feedback	• Are the PAP services and interventions of adequate quality to address the needs of different types of affected groups in an equitable manner? • Is the programme making a difference in the lives of the beneficiaries? • How is feedback on the programme gathered from the beneficiaries and used to improve the programme?	• KIIs – PS of MONM, Programme Managers at the MONM, Case Workers, • FGDs – PAP Beneficiaries



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