Social Workers' Perspectives on an Unconditional Cash Transfer in Trinidad and Tobago: Unraveling the Challenges and Heeding Lessons from the Public Assistance Grant

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Abstract

The Public Assistance Grant (PAG) is a 70-year-old unconditional cash transfer used for poverty alleviation in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). This paper aims to examine and understand selected efficiency domains in the administration of the PAG using in-depth interviews with one supervisor and one social welfare advisor from each of the 11 Local Boards nationwide. Content analysis was used to understand attributes of operational procedures, service delivery and legislative arrangements eliciting convergent and divergent perceptions having positive and negative implications in improving efficiency. Findings and recommendations would also be applicable to other developing countries that have cash transfer programmes.

Key Words: social workers, cash transfers, Trinidad and Tobago, content analysis, poverty, efficiency and effectiveness.

Introduction

Social Welfare Advisers (SWAs) and Supervisors are key players performing roles that are delivered globally in the daily administration of social welfare services. These officers execute the polces of the political directorate and are repositories of institutional and tacit knowledge. Ortiz (2007) posits that social workers should be immersed not only in the implementation of social policies, but also in the development of social policy, which facilitates a redistribution of resources, protection, and social justice. Fong and Uehara (2018, 71) emphasise that "the grand challenges for social work must generate both interest and enthusiasm among a broad public, and policymakers."

The Public Assistance Grant (PAG) is an unconditional cash transfer administered by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) since 1951. SWAs are key stakeholders who are guided by the laws pertaining to the PAG across eleven Local Boards in T&T. The Supervisors of each Local Board were once SWAs but are now in an administrative position and manage their respective Local Boards. In addition to their expertise as frontline workers, the value of their practical experiences in the field has reinforced the importance of SWAs (McDermott 2020).

Social work is defined as:

> a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels (IFSW 2014).

By virtue of their calling, Supervisors and SWAs engage in activities that bear the characteristics of social work although some may not be holders of a degree or other professional level training in Social Work or professional level training. Increasingly, the social worker-client relationship has been recognised as a useful reservoir for incisive interventions and serves as a management strategy for completing a feedback loop. Rollins (2020) postulates that the social worker-client relationship has been thought to be a useful mechanism to germinate interventions that may alter social work theory and practice.

According to Miller (2016), the main values of social work are characterised by service to humanity, social justice, human well-being, human dignity and worth, integrity, and competence. According to Sitepu (2017), the main aim of social workers is to promote human and community welfare, reduce inequity, reduce poverty through promoting social and economic justice, and the prevention of restrictions on human rights. McCartan *et al.* (2018, 3) stress that "social workers have a lot of power, they have access to highly sensitive and intimate knowledge about people." The COVID-19 pandemic showcased the role of social workers as essential workers in that they are regarded as "frontline workers whose job is central in holding together the seams of society in the COVID-19 pandemic" (Petruzzi *et al.* 2020 as quoted in Farr 2021, 1). Enacted into the laws of T&T in 1951, the Laws of the PAG have not been the subject of any comprehensive review since 1954. A review of the literature revealed a paucity of research on social workers' views on cash transfer grants despite the global prominence of such benefits since the early 1990s. This study aims to address this gap in literature.

Problem Statement

There is the perception that the PAG is not achieving its aims and objectives in alleviating poverty, promoting sustainable poverty reduction, and improving the quality of life for recipients and their families. There is also concern that the PAG has been plagued by tardy reviews of its laws, and inefficiencies with respect to operational procedures and service delivery. Modern management systems and practices, information technology, and feedback mechanisms for assessing the impact of interventions have also been an issue leading to wastage of scarce resources and dissatisfied customers. Supervisors and SWAs are the implementors of policies regarding the PAG in each of the 11 Local Boards responsible for delivery of welfare services in T&T. These officers are in the best position to assess implementation strategies including the operational procedures, service delivery and the relevance of legal prescriptions, all of which being criteria that render the PAG as an effective welfare mechanism with the capacity for redistributing state resources, facilitating social protection, and assuring social justice for clients.

The ultimate outcome should revolve around the achievement of standards tantamount to total quality service delivery and harmonisation within and across Local Boards with respect to different and similar elements that enable Supervisors and SWAs to redistribute state resources, facilitate social protection, and assure social justice for the clients. Regarding cash transfers (CTs), the perceptions of Supervisors and SWAs remain undocumented in the literature and warrant formal attention so thereby creating opportunities for enhancing prospects that positively impact the redistribution of resources, social protection, and social justice for beneficiaries.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine and understand the administration of the PAG from the standpoint of key administrators, namely Supervisors and SWAs associated with each of the eleven Local Boards in T&T, with the goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the PAG. Such an understanding is reflected in their perceptions about the triad – operational procedures, service delivery and legislative arrangements, and the extent to which convergent and divergent perceptions throw light upon pathways to greater efficiency regarding the administration of the PAG. Such insights would have utility with respect to providing policy recommendations for improving the management of the PAG and permitting greater equity and justice in the redistribution of society's wealth, opportunities, and privileges. This research explores the notion that Supervisors and SWAs can be the agents of change facilitating positive transformation for clients aspiring towards self-reliance.

Research Questions

1. What are the main categories and sub-categories of legislative arrangements identified by Supervisors and SWAs and to what extent is there concordance across the Local Boards?
2. What are the main categories and sub-categories of operational procedures identified by Supervisors and SWAs and to what extent is there concordance across the Local Boards?
3. What are the main categories and sub-categories of service delivery identified by Supervisors and SWAs and to what extent is there concordance across the Local Boards?
4. What are the general ratings reflecting strengths and weaknesses of key sub-categories pertaining to the triad of operational procedures, service delivery and legislative arrangements?
5. How do identified sub-categories and their general rating influence prescriptions to improve the administration of the PAG and its overall effectiveness and efficacy on clients' wellbeing?

Background and Literature Review

The administration and delivery of social welfare programmes are global pursuits and there have been attempts in many countries to promote greater legislative and service delivery arrangements to enhance efficiency and efficacy. Developing countries would have the dual challenge of large-scale poverty and limited resources to dispense satisfactory social safety net programmes. For example, Lee *et al.* (2019) stressed that social workers and recipients of social welfare are important contributors to the efficiency and efficacy in dispensing social welfare

in accordance with administrative agendas that are guided by a legislative framework.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSD&FS), Social Welfare Division (SWD) is responsible for the execution of the PAG which is contingent upon Chapter 32:03, Act # 18 of 1951 in the laws of T&T. The PAG is a social welfare intervention administered by the Government of T&T from its armamentarium of welfare grants directed towards mitigating poverty. Notwithstanding other interventions administered by the Ministry to deliver social protection, this study focuses on the PAG. For the year 2021, there were 18,506 PAG recipients costing TTD334,456,640.00[1] (MSD&FS 2022). For fiscal year 2020, the total budgetary allocations for key Social Sector Ministries in T&T were TTD 4.969 billion (Ministry of Finance 2020; Trinidad and Tobago Parliament 2022). For T&T, GDP per capita was USD 15,384.039 with a population of 1,399,491 as at 2020 (World Bank 2021). According to Central Statistical Office (CSO 2022), the overall unemployment rate was 4.9% as at 2018. Within the MSD&FS, its Vision Statement deems it to be "a dynamic, service-driven organisation that delivers premium social services towards the achievement of sustainable human and social development" (MSD&FS 2022). Its mission is geared towards "positively transforming the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago through the provision of quality social services" (MSD&FS 2022).

Supervisors and SWAs are aware of the main objectives of the PAG. The PAG provides financial assistance to the poor, needy, disabled, sick, orphans and the homeless in society once they meet the requisite criteria. The state also aims towards standardising operations across local boards in their efforts to implement policies in a uniform manner. A main objective associated with elevating service quality is the achievement of greater levels of efficiency in service-related processes. Anderson *et al.* (2004) identify four phenomena as underlying thrusts towards improving standards of service quality. These included productivity gains, staff reductions, managerial control of subordinates and processes, and timesaving. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and standards proposed by Anderson et al. (2004) for improving service quality, ground this study. Thus, six of the 17 SDGs are important to this study, and include the following: No Poverty (Goal #1), Zero Hunger (Goal #2), Good Health and Well-being (Goal #3), Quality Education (Goal #4), Gender Equality (Goal #5), and Reduced Inequality (Goal #10) (United Nations 2022).

In T&T, SWAs are affiliated with two major social work organisations in the world, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), conforming to international

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[1] USD 1.00 = 6.79 TTD as at (10 October 2022)

protocols, principles, and practices that are associated with the profession of social work. SWAs are mainly responsible for the administration of social programs, work directly with the recipients of social assistance, ensuring that recipients meet the requisite criteria for obtaining assistance, and do receive such assistance (MSD&FS 2022). In pronouncing on the roles of social workers, McCartan *et al.* (2018, 4) note that "it is important that social workers are supported in policy and practice to understand how poverty can affect or influence their decision-making, encourage them to be reflective, and feel equipped and empowered to respond to the challenges that deprivation creates for children and families."

Cash Transfers in Poverty Alleviation

In the quest to mitigate poverty, Cash Transfers (CTs) have become popular in developing countries since the 1990s (Molyneux *et al.* 2016). In accordance with legislative decrees, operational procedures, and service delivery, CTs have been known to improve the educational and health status of children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers (Bastagli *et al.* 2019). As of 2017, the number of countries offering CTs have increased to 149 (World Bank 2017). Moreover, empirical evidence has continued to offer support for CTs as interventions that prevent hunger and starvation among the poor, boost the local economy, and indirectly contribute to the stability of states (Devereux 2016). However, Martínez-Martínez, Coronado-Garcia and Orta-Alemán (2020) note that the paucity of evidence consistent with real prospects for households to escape poverty is among the disadvantages of CTs. In the Philippines, Filmer *et al.* (2021) note that CTs also increase the prices of perishable foods in some markets placing undue pressure upon non-beneficiaries.

Cash Transfers (CTs) can be Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) or Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs) hinging upon country-specific prescriptions regarding the administration of social welfare assistance for the poor. In some cases, UCTs may have been created for a specific purpose, and not considered a replacement for a state's social safety net programme. However, the views of social workers as key stakeholders in understanding the role of CTs have not been widely studied despite the importance of CTs in the management of poverty. Literature searches reveal limited studies addressing social workers' perspectives on CTs in the management of poverty.

More recently, social systems have been tested in responding to the socio-economic challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Recipients have had to cope with uncertainty, rising food prices and loss of supplementary income which some may have been getting from elsewhere as gifts (Power *et al.* 2020). A new class of poor who emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic could not access the PAG with the state having to intervene to disburse stimulus packages such as

cash transfers for immediate relief. Some of the poor did not have bank accounts and it was challenging to pay their stimulus (Buheji, *et al.* 2020). In a UN study, Sumner, Hoy and Ortiz-Juarez (2020) confirm that global poverty could increase for the first time since 1990 as the COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat to the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals of ending poverty by 2030. Kumar *et al.* (2021, 1) note that "unconditional cash transfers, whether they are in response to a societal or individual disaster, are not a replacement for a social safety net but can help support patients at key junctures in their lives." With respect to New York City's Safety-Net Health System, for example, the aim of the **COVID-19 Emergency Financial Hardship Grant Program** was to swiftly provide short-term income to medically and financially at-risk COVID-19 patients. This grant constituted a one-time unconditional cash transfer payment of US$1000 given to patients to help reduce financial crises associated with the pandemic in particular, COVID-19 testing that was instrumental in reducing threats to the overall health and well-being of the poor.

Nayaran *et al.* (2000) remark that:

> poverty cannot be viewed solely from a causal, unidirectional standpoint. Social workers should be aware that poverty is a multi-dimensional concept that goes beyond and includes structural factors that prevent people from accessing both external assets (credit, land, infrastructure, common property) and internal assets (health, nutrition, protection, and education). (quoted in Calvo 2011, 64)

Social work plays a pivotal role in developing a broader and more cohesive social system that could better facilitate orientations toward sharing resources and tackling the root causes of poverty from individual and administrative perspectives (Calvo, 2011). However, Bivort and Martinez (2009) note that:

> people are poor not just because of a lack of economic resources to satisfy their basic needs, but also because they live in a social, economic, and political system which does not provide equality of opportunities. Therefore, one obvious concern is the narrow approach to poverty of most social programs, including CCT programs. Within these programs, overcoming poverty depends on people or families, and not on historical, structural or inequity factors. (as quoted in Calvo 2011, 65)

In T&T, SWAs are key stakeholders in the management of poverty and must be involved in management and decision-making processes. Moreover, citizen participation is having a voice in the decision-making process at all levels. However, the interests of the poor are often not represented; they lack a "voice" in service delivery (Nayaran *et al.* 2000), and in policy design (Bivort and Martinez

2009 as cited in Calvo 2011, 65). Assisting the poor and vulnerable leads to benefits that permeate throughout the entire society leading to more economic activities and prosperity which in turn leads to a more stable and happy community and nation. Jones and Mohammed (2012, 5) note that because cash transfer programmes have benefits at the community level "it has strengthened knowledge of additional sources of support and facilitated the emergence of informal support networks among some programme beneficiaries." Consequently, the nation will be better poised for developing international linkages, collaborating in all facets of human endeavour, thereby facilitating greater cohesion and a better world. As a state intervention, Jones and Mohammed (2012, 5) felt that a cash transfer programme "is promoting a sense of rights-based entitlement to social support from the state." When the poor are assured financial assistance, they are more likely to participate in social events that yield benefits to positively impact their communities. Additionally, the poor are likely to develop confidence and a cohesive community spirit which could be a source for future virtues that bring greater dignity and pride to the nation.

Methodology

Philosophical Considerations

This study adopted a qualitative research design embracing content analysis to answer the research questions. Content analysis is a research technique used to determine and make inferences by interpreting and coding textual materials such as certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts emanating from written or verbal discourses, illustrations such as graphs and then quantifying the data in an objective manner (Krippendorff 1989). Elo *et al.* (2014) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005) indicate that there were two types of content analysis techniques, that is: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis establishes the existence and frequency of concepts in a text. Relational analysis develops the conceptual analysis further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text. This study used the conceptual analysis technique.

Content analysis permits qualitative data to be captured and converted to yield quantitative analyses. It draws on in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations to obtain rich, descriptive data and narratives. Content analysis looks at the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given set of qualitative data. With the use of content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships based upon certain coded words, themes, or concepts to make valid and replicable inferences from the interpretation and coding of the textual materials.

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010), Elo *et al.* (2014) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005), there are many advantages of content analysis. It directly examines communication using text; makes allowances for both qualitative and quantitative analysis; and provides valuable historical and cultural insights over time. Further, it allows a closeness to data; permits statistical analyses of coded forms of the text; provides unobtrusive means for analysing interactions; and uncover complex models of human thought and language. Content analysis is an inexpensive research technique and is more powerful when used with data obtained from interviews, observation, and archival records.

It should also be noted that content analysis can, however, be extremely time-consuming. It is subjected to increased error particularly when relational analyses are used to attain higher levels of interpretation. Moreover, in instances where theoretical frameworks may not be necessarily applicable, inferential statements come to the fore but may thwart relational patterns, negatively impacting the results of studies based on relational analysis (Elo *et al.* 2014; Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Krippendorff 2004). These threats have been minimised given that this paper draws on conceptual analysis.

Data Collection

The SWD[2] comprised of the following staff: 75 SWAs I[3], 27 SWAs II[4], 19 SWFOs[5], a total of 14 Supervisors across three levels (I, II, and III)[6], 1 Deputy Director, and 1 Director of Social Welfare. The staff are deployed within the Central Office and the 11 Local Public Assistance Boards throughout T&T. The 75 SWAs I, and 19 SWFOs are the first points of contact with clients and applicants. Purposeful Sampling, in particular critical case sampling, used to select sampled cases. It provided a basis for in-depth interviews with the Supervisors and SWAs from the 11 Local Public Assistance Boards throughout T&T. According to Patton (2002), the objective of purposeful sampling is to allow researchers to be deliberate when selecting individuals, choose the "best informants", and in the context of this study, deliberately select participants who have experienced and understand administration of the PAG. Data collection done using in-depth interviews during the period April 2020 to August 2020.

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[2] SWD - Social Welfare Division
[3] SWAs I – Social Welfare Advisers I - entry level is at SWA I
[4] SWAs II – Social Welfare Advisers II – Promoted to the higher level based on seniority
[5] SWFOs – Social Welfare Field Officers
[6] Social Welfare Supervisors I, II and III – higher ranking of an SWA II is followed by Social Welfare Supervisors I, II and III.

Using a sample consisting of 1 Supervisor and 1 SWA from each of the 11 Local Public Assistance Boards, in-depth interviews constituted a means for obtaining insights. The sample size consisted of 11 Supervisors and 11 senior SWAs, each of whom has over 10 years work experience and comprehensive knowledge about the PAG. Each Local Board comprised of two interviewees who were coded as Supervisors (1) and SWAs (2) respectively. Interviews are an important aspect of qualitative research in that they provide an opportunity for participants' voices to be heard. Ethics approval was obtained from Campus Research Ethics Committee, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago (CREC-SA.0048/10/2019) and data collection was conducted during April-November 2020. Otter.ai Transcription was used to transcribe the audio data into text data.

Method of Data Analysis

The results are based on an analysis of 22 officers attached to the 11 Local Boards nationwide. In each Local Board, the Supervisor and a SWA were interviewed, each providing responses reflecting their respective assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of three functional domains that mobilise the PAG as an instrument of welfare delivery in T&T. These three functional domains include operational procedures, service delivery and legislative arrangements. A careful review of transcriptions capturing the responses of the Supervisors and SWAs has revealed insights reflecting a range of categories and associated sub-categories of action areas. The latter are specifically gauged from messages implicit in responses that facilitate interpretations reflective of sub-categories worthy of being in need for improvement or commendation.

Within each of the three functional domains, frequency counts provide a basis for gauging the placement of importance on specific categories based on the responses of selected officers. Thus, the maximum frequency count is 22 and counts closer to 22 are indicative of greater placement of importance on specific categories. Within each category, frequency counts have also been provided for the respective sub-categories permitting similar classification for gauging the placement of importance. The data also permitted analyses of 11 pairs of responses, that is, one pair consisting of the Supervisor and a Social Welfare Advisor in each of the 11 Local Boards nationwide. For each pair, selected comments have been classified according to sub-category and whether interpreted as being positive or negative in terms of meanings indicative of a need for commendation (positive) or need for improvement (negative) with regard to mobilising the PAG.

In classifying the sub-categories, pairs were classified as concordant positive, concordant negative, or discordant.

- *Concordant positive* pairs emerged when the Supervisor and an SWA from the same Local Board expressed comments reflective of the same category to which positive meanings were assigned.
- *Concordant negative* pairs emerged when the Supervisor and an SWA from the same Local Board expressed comments reflective of the same category to which negative meanings were assigned.
- *Discordant* pairs emerged when the Supervisor and an SWA from the same Local Board expressed comments reflective of the same category and assigns contradictory meanings (one positive and the other negative).

For each sub-category, the percentage of pairs classified as concordant positive, concordant negative, or discordant provide a basis for interpreting assessments of the key actors (that is, Supervisors and SWAs) and meanings likely to be attached to promoting effectiveness and efficiency in mobilising the PAG.

Limitations

There were some limitations faced in conducting this study. First, face-to-face interviews were difficult to conduct due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; as such, that interviews were done via ZOOM or telephone, thus handicapping the interpretation of body language as data. Second, the interviewees were employees of the MSD&FS and therefore, Local Boards were assigned pseudo-names to preserve confidentiality of interviewees. The assignment of pseudo-names also prevented disclosure of local offices by geographic location and as such, placed limits of the classification of strengths and weaknesses by geographic area. Third, a specific set of senior supervisors declined participation in scheduled interviews and were unable to add further value to the study by not capitalising on the opportunity presented to share their valuable knowledge, experiences, and insights. Finally, the researcher was employed as a social welfare adviser in the MSD&FS at the time when the study was undertaken.

A Reflexive Note

The professional experience of one of the authors has been closely allied with the dispensation of the PAG. Any threats reflective of that author's biases have consistently been detected and minimised due to critical engagements of the second author who has had no association with either the MSD&FS or the administration and dispensation of the PAG.

Results

Categories of Operational Procedures

With respect to interviews conducted with Supervisors and SWAs across the 11 Local Boards, a content analysis of responses indicated that substantial importance was placed on the process that facilitated the ***disbursement of the first payment of the grant*** to successful beneficiaries (see Figure 1). A similar outcome was also observed with respect to the distribution of ***monthly caseloads assigned to SWAs*** in the different Local Boards. Interviewees also recognised that monthly meetings and ensuing decisions played a critical role in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of welfare services administered to beneficiaries. These monthly meetings included Managerial Meetings, Local Board Meetings, Case Committee Meetings, and Supervisors' Meetings (see Appendix 1). Each of these meetings serves a different function and produces outcomes that are instrumental in improving effectiveness and efficiency. Figure 1 shows differences in the importance that interviewees assigned to the different categories of monthly meetings.
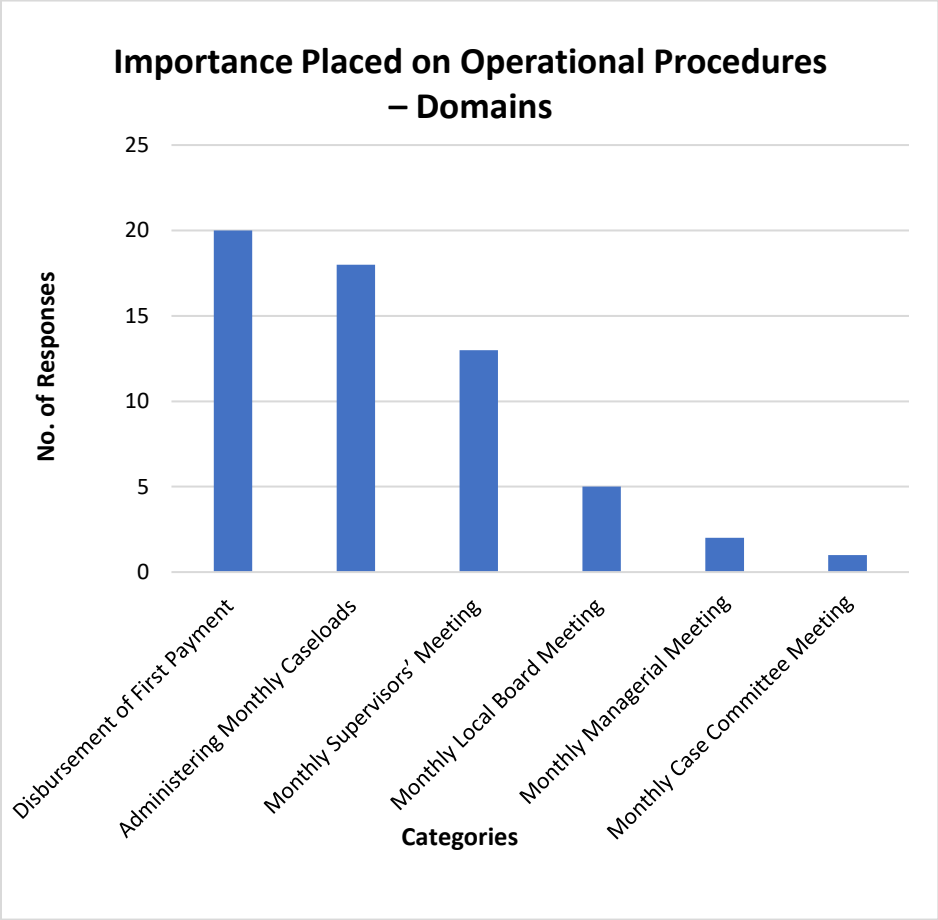
Importance Placed on Operational Procedures – Domains

No. of Responses (y-axis)

Category	No. of Responses
Disbursement of First Payment	20
Administering Monthly Caseloads	18
Monthly Supervisors' Meeting	13
Monthly Local Board Meeting	5
Monthly Managerial Meeting	2
Monthly Case Committee Meeting	1

Categories (x-axis)

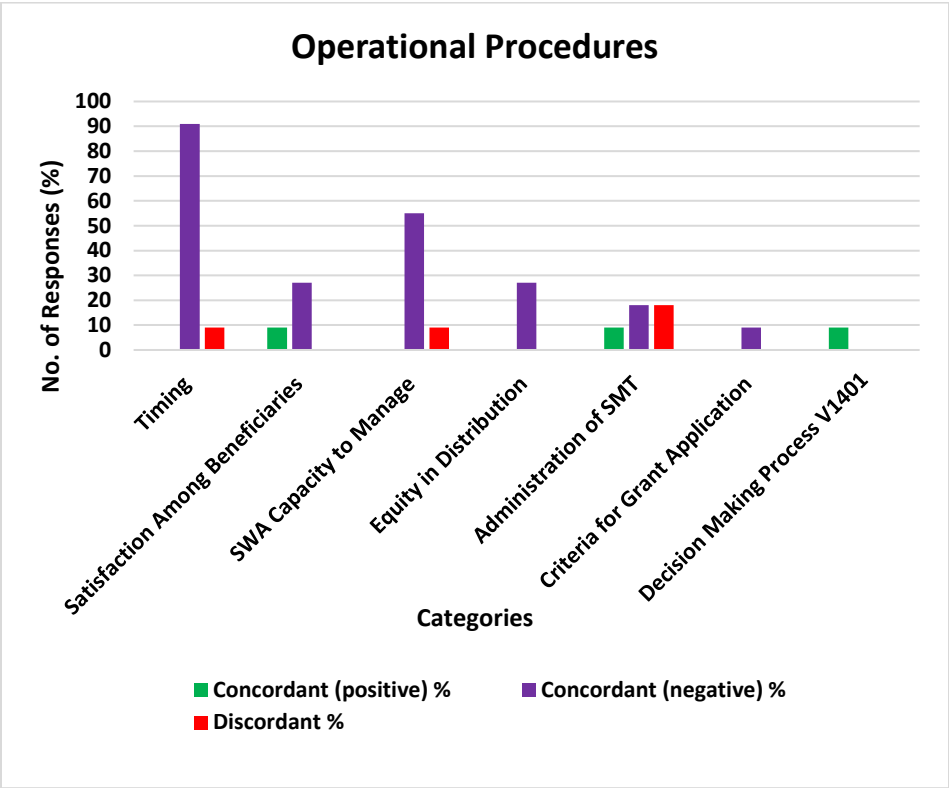Figure 1: **Importance Placed on Operational Procedures – Domains**

Figure 2: **Categories of Operational Procedures – Concordant Positive, Concordant Negative and Discordant**

With respect to operational procedures, Figure 2 and Figure 3 reinforce the preponderance of negative ratings over positive ratings. Specifically, 6 categories reflecting operational procedures were assigned negative ratings as opposed to 3 that were assigned positive ratings. Negative ratings were assigned to sub-categories of timing regarding disbursement of first cheque, SWA capacity to manage caseloads, equity in the distribution of caseloads, satisfaction among beneficiaries with respect to disbursement of first payment, the administration of the Standard Means Test, and criteria for grant application. Moreover, negative ratings were more pronounced than positive ratings with regard to beneficiaries' satisfaction regarding the disbursement of the first cheque and the administration of the Standards Means Test.

Pronounced negative ratings indicate that timing of the ***disbursement of first payments*** and ***SWA capacity to manage caseloads*** constitute the biggest threats to upholding effective and efficient practices in the administration of the PAG and become targets for ameliorative interventions. The remaining sub-categories with

negative ratings are also of concern, particularly in the context of delivering total quality service. Given its positive ratings, the ***PAG decision-making process*** is the only sub-category that seems to have some semblance of being a source of resilience while at the same time, being subject to sustained improvement in the near future. In terms of operational procedures, discordant ratings were most apparent, and thus of some concern with respect to the ***administration of the SMT.*** This has implications that amplify the incongruent perceptions that apparently prevail concerning the merit of the SMT.

Categories of Service Delivery

Service delivery is about the interaction between the client/public and the staff of the MSD&FS. The clients are the primary beneficiaries of the PAG, and good service delivery provides them with an increase in knowledge, value, and satisfaction. With respect to service delivery across the 11 Local Boards, the responses of the Supervisors and SWAs placed most importance on clients' experiences, principally the experiences of new applicants, existing beneficiaries, and the public. Environment/infrastructural elements such as the physical building and environmental ambience/spaces were also deemed to be of paramount importance based upon the responses of the Supervisors and SWAs, this being so especially with respect to adding value to the administration of the PAG. From the standpoint of infrastructure, having ***access to real-time information*** is essential in the delivery of premium quality service, and as a result, came to the fore as a main requirement. Interviewed Supervisors and SWAs assigned prominence and high priority to Human Resource Services emphasising the need to have the "right fit" or personnel who are specially trained, competent, and compassionate about social work. All of these observations are supported by Figure 3.
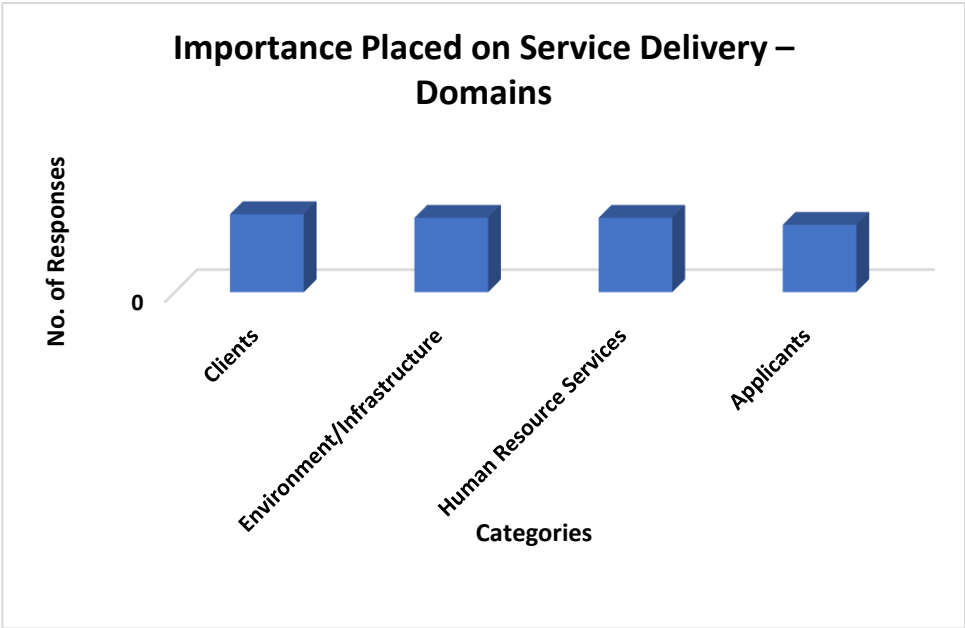
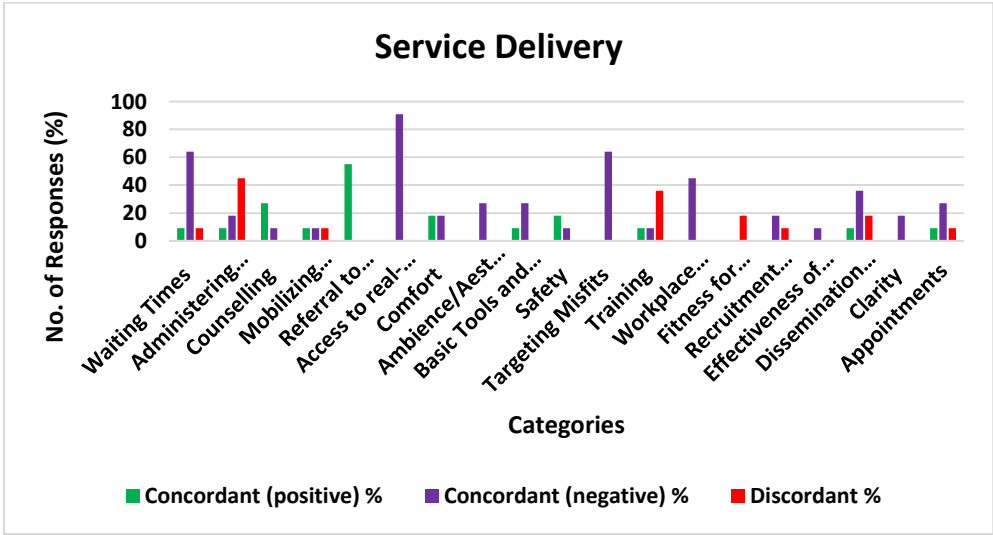**Figure 3: Importance Placed on Service Delivery – Domains**

Figure 4: **Categories of Service Delivery – Concordant Positive, Concordant Negative and Discordant**

In Local Boards where Supervisors and SWAs provided independent responses to express their sentiments about service delivery, Figure 4 shows sub-categories according to relative importance. Figure 4 shows sub-categories for which both Supervisors and SWAs assigned ratings whether concordant positive, concordant negative, or discordant. For service delivery, negative ratings were more predominant than positive ratings. Altogether, 17 sub-categories were assigned negative ratings whereas 11 were assigned positive ratings. With respect to negative ratings, the following sub-categories were most apparent – *waiting times for service delivery, access to real time information* (technology), targeting *misfits* (person not suitable for the job), *workplace morale* (staffs' enthusiasm in the workplace), *dissemination of information* to applicants, and *appointments* (introduction of an appointment system for persons visiting the welfare offices). In contrast, positive ratings were most apparent for the following sub-categories – *referrals to other agencies, counselling*, and to a somewhat lesser extent, **comfort** (office environment being comfortable), and **safety** (both staff and those who visit welfare offices seeking welfare services*)*.

In general, negative ratings were more pronounced than positive ratings. The negative ratings were more commonplace with respect to principally intangible sub-categories, these being attributes akin to clients and human resources services. In contrast, the positive ratings were more commonplace with respect to more tangible sub-categories reflecting attributes that were associated with environmental elements of Local Board premises. Pronounced negative ratings point to attributes or sub-categories that constitute threats to upholding effective and efficient practices in the *administration of the PAG*, and thus flag the targets for ameliorative intervention. The assignment of positive ratings points to attributes or sub-categories that constitute sources of resilience and ought to be sustained and improved with the passage of time.

Figure 4 also illustrates that Supervisors and SWAs assigned discordant (contradictory) ratings, this being the case for 8 sub-categories – waiting times for service delivery, administering the PAG, mobilising clients' needs, training, fitness for purpose, recruitment and selection, dissemination of information to applicants, and appointments. It should be noted that though belonging to the same Local Board, Supervisors and SWAs provided independent responses. Specifically, contradictory ratings were mostly predominant for *administering the PAG* and *training*. Nonetheless, sub-categories, specifically *fitness for purpose* and the *dissemination of information to applicants* were somewhat less dominant. In essence, contradictory ratings pose serious problems and are indicative of some measure of ambivalence that reinforces action signalling the need to err on the side of caution. The flagged sub-categories especially *administering the PAG* and *training* present transformative opportunities that could redress challenges

associated with the effectiveness and efficiency of welfare service delivery in the context of the PAG.

Categories of Legislative Decrees

Across the 11 Local Boards, a content analysis of the responses of the Supervisors and SWAs indicates that *amendments, aims, relevance, social justice, equity, interpretation, implementation,* and *compliance with the laws* were most frequently cited as important in addressing legislative decrees informing roles and relationships between service providers and recipients of the PAG (see Figure 5). Perceptions of Supervisors and SWAs resulted in thrusts towards each of the following sub-categories being classified as discordant – *Social Justice, Equity,* and the *Interpretation* of the relevant laws.
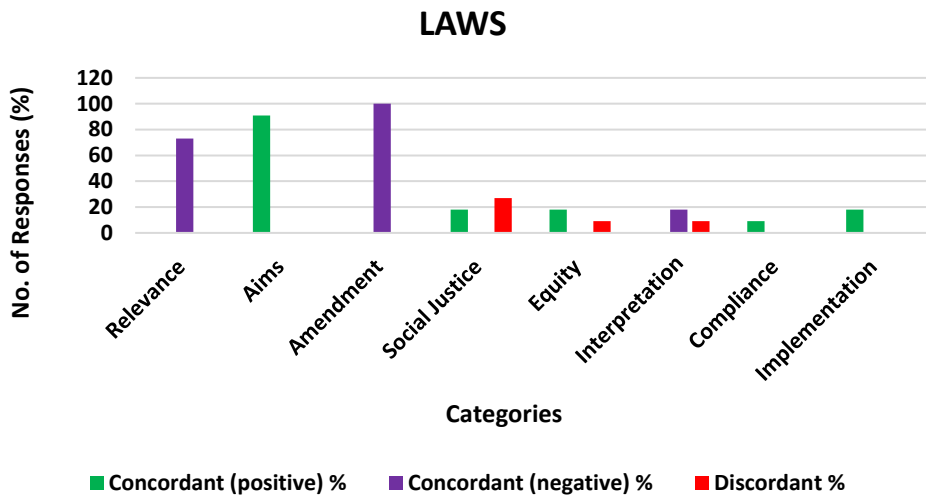
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Figure 5: **Categories of Legislative Arrangements – Concordant Positive, Concordant Negative and Discordant**

With respect to legislative decrees, Figure 5 reveals that a greater number of sub-categories was assigned positive ratings when compared to those assigned negative ratings. Referring to laws that were assigned positive ratings, Supervisors and SWAs from Local Boards cited laws enacting adherence to the *aims of the PAG, social justice, equity, compliance,* and *implementation,* such laws being very pronounced in the case of *aims* and substantially less pronounced for all other sub-categories. Fewer categories were assigned negative ratings by the Supervisors and SWAs of Local Boards, these being *relevance, amendments,* and *interpretation of the laws,* and most pronounced with respect to *amendments* and *relevance.* In

addition to being less pronounced, sub-categories of legislative decrees including *social justice* and **equity** *of the laws* were assigned contradictory ratings by specific pairs of Supervisors and SWAs; these nullifying positive ratings emerging out of other Local Boards. Except for the ***aims of the PAG,*** the remaining sub-categories of legislative decrees ought to be consistently addressed to attract ratings that are more favourable with regard to optimally serving the interests of policy implementers and clients.

Discordant Sub-Categories

A total of 15 discordant sub-categories emerged out of the responses of Supervisors and SWAs across 10 of the 11 Local Boards. Gamma was the only Local Board for which discordant sub-categories did not emerge from the responses of the Supervisor and the SWA. A total of 3 discordant sub-categories were associated with operational procedures; 8 were associated with service delivery; and 4 were associated with legislative decrees. Despite having a total of 15 discordant sub-categories, just 5 were deemed sufficiently impactful to influence the efficiency and effectiveness of processes akin to operational procedures (1 sub-category), service delivery (3 sub-categories), and legislative decrees (1 sub-category). Given earlier observations with respect to sub-categories classified as concordant positive and concordant negative, the remaining 10 discordant sub-categories are not likely to have noteworthy impact in framing the well-being of PAG administration. A summary of the characteristics of the 15 discordant sub-categories is provided in Table 1 with specific reference to the Local Boards associated with the discordance.

Table 1: **Discordant Sub-Categories: Operational Procedures, Service Delivery and Legislative Decrees**

Sub-Categories	Local Boards	Supervisors' Responses	SWAs' Responses
Operational Procedures			
Timing	Alpha	Negative	Positive
SWAs Capacity to Manage Caseloads – Operational Procedures	Alpha	Negative	Positive
Standard Means Test (SMT)	**Eta** **Theta**	**Negative** **Positive**	**Positive** **Negative**
Service Delivery			
Waiting Times for Service	Zeta Kappa	Positive Negative	Negative Positive
Administration of PAG	**Delta**	**Positive**	**Negative**

	Epsilon	Negative	Positive
	Zeta	Positive	Negative
	Theta	Positive	Negative
Mobilizing Clients Need	Iota	Negative	Positive
Training	Epsilon	Negative	Positive
	Eta	Positive	Negative
	Iota	Negative	Positive
	Lambda	Positive	Negative
Fitness for Purpose	Eta	Positive	Negative
	Kappa	Negative	Positive
Recruitment and Selection	Lambda	Negative	Positive
Dissemination of Information	Beta	Positive	Negative
	Iota	Positive	Negative
Appointment	Theta	Positive	Negative
Legislative Decrees			
Relevance of the Laws	Beta	Positive	Negative
Social Justice	Alpha	Positive	Negative
	Delta	Negative	Positive
	Iota	Negative	Positive
Equity	Zeta	Negative	Positive
Interpretation of the Laws	Lambda	Negative	Positive

Impact on Operational Procedures

The ***Administration of the SMT*** stands out as a sub-category that exudes some measure of ambivalence and thus may complement the negative ratings that are marginally more predominant when compared to positive ratings. Moreover, there does not appear to be any association between job category and ratings assigned to the **administration of the SMT**. Despite emphasis on improving coverage through screening that is a function of the SMT, emergent discordant insights appear to be inimical to the SMT as a mechanism for promoting coverage efficiency targeting the worthiest PAG recipients. In essence, thoughts abound indicating that the SMT could be associated with under-coverage. This is borne out by responses from Supervisors and SWAs in Local Boards Eta and Theta.

The Supervisor assigned to Eta expresses negative sentiments claiming that "with the SMT there would be cases where some may not pass the means test, but there is need… The SMT is not fair all the time and I think they should get rid of the means test." On a more positive note, however, the SWA assigned to Eta saw some merit in the SMT and claims that "it will determine whether they fall below the poverty line and determine their eligibility to the grant." In the Local Board Theta, the Supervisor assigned positive ratings, noting that "the Means Test sets an equal playing field for all." However, a negative rating is expressed by the SWA, claiming that "the means test is mandatory and is not fair in assessing the needs of the home. It only looks at the financial aspect." In essence, there are still concerns

about the efficiency of the SMT and its function as the preliminary screening test for the PAG.

Impact on Service Delivery

Premium quality service delivery and its efficiency as reflected in the administration of the PAG are predicated upon the nature of training interventions and human resource recruitment and selection practices that render workers as "fit for purpose." Not surprisingly, these three sub-categories stand out and from the standpoint of Supervisors and SWAs, are characterised by discordant ratings which are much more predominant when compared to concordant positive and concordant negative ratings. The Administration of the PAG is dependent on staff who must be knowledgeable, competent, and compassionate; properties that optimally reflect fitness for purpose and principally realised through formal training. Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate positive and negative comments respectively from paired Local Board Supervisors and SWAs who expressed discordant responses to the three sub-categories of ***administration of the PAG, training*** and ***fit for purpose***. Despite evidence of concordant positive and concordant negative ratings from some Local Boards interviewees, the predominance of discordant ratings points towards a clear need to systematically monitor and evaluate the full range of training initiatives and where necessary, troubleshoot and embrace maximal professional standards geared towards building knowledge, competence, and compassion among the service providers. The negative comments highlight incompetence, lack of knowledge, and lack of compassion as properties that must be consistently redressed through formal evaluation exercises. It is only through such mechanisms that the administration of the PAG will be deemed less problematic.

Table 2: **Positive Comments for Discordant Sub-Categories - Service Delivery**

Actor	Local Board	Comment	Property
Positive – Administering the PAG			
Supervisor	Zeta	*this is an opportunity for clients to reach the next level*	Competence
Supervisor	Delta	*the department tries its best to satisfy the client. We assist them in the best way possible and try to meet their financial needs*	Compassion
SWA	Epsilon	*the service at the SWA and CSR levels are basically great*	Competence
Supervisor	Theta	*the SWAs and CSR are the staff that interact with the public/clients. Some are experienced and some are junior staff*	Competence
Positive – Training			

SWA	Epsilon	*training for staff for better interviewing skills, screening to see who meet the criteria for the public assistance grant and reviewing the system to determine the continuance of the grant*	Competence
Supervisor	Eta	*they need to get training on a regular basis. No one could learn all that it takes to make a good SWA in one session. This job you learn as you go along every day*	Competence
SWA	Iota	*In-house training is important, keeping regular meetings, updating us on changes in policies, and even new programs that are introduced into the ministry*	Knowledge
Supervisor	Lambda	*The administrators train the new staff before sending to the local offices*	Knowledge
Positive – Fitness for Purpose			
Supervisor	Eta	*there are some that are very knowledgeable SWAs and they share their knowledge with others*	Knowledge
SWA	Kappa	*the weaker ones, we work more with them in training*	Competence

Table 3: **Negative Comments for Discordant Sub-Categories - Service Delivery**

Actor	Local Board	Comment	Property
Negative – Administering the PAG			
SWA	Zeta	*proper service is not meted out because of the size of the clientele. Also, most of the offices are understaffed.*	Incompetence
SWA	Delta	*clients will not receive quality service due to lack of training and poor attitude of staff*	Lack of Compassion
Supervisor	Epsilon	*information is given inaccurately sometimes and maybe piecemeal*	Incompetence
SWA	Theta	*we are overworked and understaffed and that affects the delivery of services*	Incompetence
Negative – Training			
Supervisor	Epsilon	*there are many inexperienced young SWAs and even some of the senior SWAs need continuous training in order to keep up with the changes in Laws*	Incompetence
SWA	Eta	*they are trained only for a short period. What we need to do is to make sure new and current staff are properly trained in order before they can actually come and perform the duties.*	Incompetence
Supervisor	Iota	*the first point of contact persons are not trained and that is why the welfare officer is also on duty at the time and can guide them and train them*	Lack of Knowledge
SWA	Lambda	*Insufficient training is being done for the new staff [Sufficient training is not being done for the new staff]*	Lack of Knowledge
Negative – Fitness for Purpose			

| SWA | Eta | *the CSR are the first point of contact, and they are not properly trained… they do not have the wealth of experience as the SWAs* | Lack of Knowledge |
| Supervisor | Kappa | *staff with bad attitudes that will have a very negative impact on the clients* | Incompetence |

Impact on Legislative Decrees

In achieving some measure of **Social Justice,** the "hands-on" nature of SWAs' duties provides them with a greater prospect for gauging fortunes accruing to PAG recipients based upon the application of Laws. As such, some weight must be given to the fact that SWAs were more likely to express positive ratings as opposed to negative ratings within Local Boards where discordant ratings were forthcoming. Regarding the SWAs, a negative response had its origins in Local Board Alpha while positive responses emerged out of Local Boards Delta and Iota. The SWA from Local Boards Delta and Iota made claims that were similar for example, the SWA from Local Board Delta notes that "the government has a duty and responsibility to look after their citizenry." Likewise, the SWA from Local Board Iota remarks "it gives the poor a chance to share in the country's wealth." Such ideals reflect outcomes that result from orientations consistent with a recognition of thrusts toward *social justice*.

However, negative ratings whether from Supervisors or SWAs, reflect a false sense of security that could be inimical to the attainment of sustainable poverty reduction and threaten thrusts toward social justice. In the context of negative ratings, the Supervisor from Local Board Iota opines that "it gives people a sense of comfort knowing that they are getting a monthly cheque." Intentionally, the laws espouse the principle of social justice though from a more pragmatic standpoint, such a principle is eroded based on the negative sentiments. The words of the Supervisor from Local Board Delta make specific reference to the SMT and the extent to which it could be inimical to orientations toward social justice. Such meanings are borne out in the following statement "with old-aged pensioners, parents in the home, value of the pension disqualifies him/her from qualifying for the public assistance. You know that impact negatively on individuals or incomes in the home."

Discussion

In facilitating and assuring social protection, the state has relied on the PAG, redistributed state resources, and provided a safety net for the very poor and vulnerable which include orphans, children, single mothers, the disabled, the mentally ill and those with chronic illness. As a CT mechanism, the PAG has been administered across 11 Local Boards nationwide. Each Local Board is characterised by its own unique culture which has the potential of militating

against the acceptance of standardised practices among staff and in particular, the administrative practices of Supervisors and SWAs with respect to interpreting operational procedures, service delivery, and legislative decrees.

Having collected data from Supervisors and a SWA in each of the 11 Local Boards, clear trends and patterns have emerged with respect to the predominance of attributes associated with the triad of operational procedures, service delivery and legislative decrees. Additionally, the relative importance of rated perceptions regarding the range of attributes within each of the three main domains of the PAG provides insightful nuances to guide efforts towards determining prescriptions to improve the administration of the PAG and its overall effectiveness and efficacy as it serves clients' well-being.

Redressing Operational Procedures

Operational procedures are alternatively referred to as business process management and permit the management of organisational processes in a manner that should accumulate maximum quality, customer satisfaction, financial performance, decreased duration-times for maximally favourable outcomes, and greater efficiency (Kohlbacher 2010). In the context of the PAG, standard operational procedures are the predetermined business processes that guide employees in executing the organisation's daily business, in accordance with industrial regulations and laws. According to Zelt *et al.* (2019) process management mechanisms such as process documentation, standardisation, or monitoring are important process mechanisms.

From the standpoint of operational procedures, negative ratings dominate with respect to the ***timing of first payment of benefits to beneficiaries***, ***SWAs' capacity to manage their caseload*** and ***administration of the SMT***. The first is in part a function of the tardy responses of lawmakers who ought to be more mindful of beneficiaries' needs notwithstanding the noble ideals that may be instrumental in the overall positive outlook associated with the aim of the PAG. The second is principally an internal matter indicative of administrative process and rest heavily upon the existence or non-existence of astute management skills in the distribution of workloads and appraising performance. In essence, Supervisors ought to become more skilled in embracing caseload management practices that would yield greater equity in the distribution of caseloads among welfare officers. Correcting such shortcomings is also likely to positively impact staff morale. Thirdly, the SMT excludes applicants who may deserve to receive the PAG but have failed the means test since household income rather than family income is used as the main criterion.

One of the major issues identified by Local Boards was the need to reduce the *timing - **waiting period for the first payment of benefits to new beneficiaries***. With the existing system, successful beneficiaries usually receive their first payment of benefits within three to five months from date of application. As a welfare programme, Canada's Ontario Works makes first payments to beneficiaries within four working-days from initial contact given that applicants have provided all the required information for staff to make informed decisions. The initial contact refers to the point at which the applicant makes first contact, either by telephone, in person, or by electronic means with the Ontario Works Office (MCSS 2022). In the USA, new applicants for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programme are processed within 30 days from the date of application (United States of America. SS dn-248-tanf.pdf n.d.). In Trinidad and Tobago, operational procedures prolong the waiting period for first payment of benefits to new beneficiaries and is the source of dissatisfaction that has resulted in negative sentiments regarding the length of waiting times.

Though not very predominant across Local Boards, some Supervisors and SWAs provided positive assessments of **Compliance with the laws**. Such responses reinforce the importance of conformity with the law in dealing with clients and reflect officers desire to avoid disciplinary action and termination of employment that could result from non-compliance. Given the reverence that has been assigned to conformity with the law, legal prescriptions consistent with the reduction of waiting times to no more than six weeks from the date of application are a necessary requirement in redressing this problem. From the standpoint of the **administering the PAG**, the customer should be centre-stage and his/her satisfaction should be paramount.

Despite some positive sentiments that characterised PAG staff as knowledgeable and conscientious, negative sentiments were still real and ought to be addressed, particularly with respect to facilitating staff empowerment, overcoming staff shortages, and arresting staff incompetence. Indeed, staff shortages presented difficulties with respect to meeting service demands, and as a result, can also contribute to the negative assessments that characterised waiting times. Anecdotally, reference has been made to beneficiaries' dissatisfaction with the lengthy waiting period that they have had to endure to obtain service. Based on observations, *waiting time for customer service* at most of the Local Boards varied between 30 to 90 minutes. At Alpha and Kappa, however, waiting times were approximately 15 to 20 minutes which is relatively lower than in the other Local Boards. The more favourable waiting times in Kappa are likely to be associated with its smaller client population when compared to other larger Local Boards. In the case of Local Board Alpha, an appointment system was instituted and that reduced the number of persons visiting the office to access services, the end-result

being reductions in waiting periods for service. Apart from Local Board Alpha, none of the other Local Boards has instituted an appointment system.

Basic tools and equipment are essential requirements for adequate service delivery. According to the Supervisor associated with Lambda "lack of resources is a major problem because you cannot perform effectively when you do not have the resources to do it." Similarly, a SWA associated with Lambda opines that *"lack of basic tools and resources is a continuous challenge."*

Negative perceptions prevailed with respect to ***SWAs' capacity to manage caseloads*** as well as their perceptions of equity in the distribution of such workloads. According to the SWA assigned to Eta "some areas' caseloads are just too heavy and the SWA in that area is unable to complete all the cases in one month's time." Perceived inequity in caseload distribution plays an integral part in demotivating SWAs, negatively impacting their execution of duties. Despite being employed in the same salary scale, ***equity in the distribution*** of SWAs' caseloads is compromised somewhat. This presents unacceptable levels of disquiet among SWAs and as such, is challenging due to the fact that some service delivery areas are more populated than others. Moreover, there are also instances when service delivery areas require longer travel-times to visit the homes of clients and applicants. To this end, the allocation of caseloads ought to be more objectively determined, relying on the collection of caseload data by service area with a view towards varying the assignment of caseloads in a manner that strives for greater equity on a quarterly or bi-annual basis. This is a worthy requirement as current operational procedures constitute a basis for continued dissatisfaction and ought to be improved to attain greater ***equity in the distribution of workloads*** for SWAs.

From the standpoint of legislative decrees, ***social justice*** has emerged as an outcome that is reflective of practices that have sought to attain greater equity often through social safety net programmes that enable the poor to share in a country's wealth. In the context of the PAG, thrusts towards promoting ***equity in the laws*** were assigned positive ratings despite fewer cases when Supervisors and SWAs from Local Boards assigned contradictory ratings. In fact, some Supervisors and SWAs reckoned that the promotion of equity and social justice was somewhat facilitated by the SMT as a mechanism that standardised the process for screening PAG applicants nationwide. Mixed feelings abound regarding perceptions surrounding mandates for the Standard Means Test (SMT), this being reflected through commentaries indicative of positive, negative, and conflicting sentiments, obviously across different Local Boards. According to a SWA assigned to Iota "the SMT has been working as it wean out those who do not qualify for the grant", while the Supervisor associated with Iota notes that "the means test is the preliminary yardstick used for deciding who qualifies for the grant." Opposite sentiments were forthcoming from a SWA assigned to Kappa "the SMT figures

are cold, they don't have feelings and is standard across the Boards… it's whether you passed or failed." For the Supervisor assigned to Kappa "if someone does not pass the means test, we cannot help the person."

Potential applicants may fail the SMT on the grounds that the total household income could actually disqualify access for him/her and deny needy individuals/family members from having access to the PAG. Some households may comprise of multiple family units. In such households, everyone who receives an income must declare such income for the purpose of computing total household income, a requirement of the SMT. In instances where total household income exceeds the adult equivalency score for the SMT, needy individuals/family will be denied access to the PAG having failed the SMT. This has been the case in several circumstances where an adult person with no source of income, is ill or disabled, and excluded from receiving the PAG and having opportunities towards welfare support. From the foregoing, it stands to reason that some from among the poor are left in a situation where there is no other legitimate means of getting assistance and are forced to endure further hardship. Notwithstanding claims associated with the SMT as permitting greater efficiency in addressing optimal targeting of potential recipients, some consideration must be placed on redressing the objective criteria that seem rational but may overlook needy individuals.

Redressing Service Delivery

In assessing the quality-of-service delivery, importance was placed on domains akin to clients, environmental and infrastructural features, human resource services, and applicants. From almost every Local Board, Supervisors and SWAs cited attributes associated with each of these four broad domains. With regard to service delivery, attributes that were assigned negative ratings outnumbered those that were assigned positive ratings. Moreover, attributes with negative ratings were more generally preponderant than those with positive ratings. Among the attributes with negative ratings, three prevailed across more than half of the Local Boards. They included *waiting times for* **service** (customer service), **access** *to real time information*, and targeting *misfits*. In this context, a *misfit* is a person who is not suited for the job and unable to fulfil such job requirements. Among the attributes with positive ratings, only one prevailed across more than half of the Local Boards nationwide. The latter related specifically to the provision of *referrals to other agencies*. Compared to negative and positive ratings, the number of attributes with mixed ratings were not as numerous and except for those that related specifically with *the administration of the PAG* and *training*, the remainder were not at all predominant.

A main feature of service delivery is the spatial context that provides a basis for the administration of any given service. Local Board offices are in buildings that are usually on lease rental. Some of these buildings are indeed comfortable and clean. All Local Board premises are outfitted with security personnel to present customers with a sense of safety while seeking services. **Safety** was cited as an attribute that was positively rated by respondents from some Local Boards. In T&T, many of the Local Boards premises were deemed to be well-appointed despite needs for some to be upgraded to attain modern standards. In some cases, **ambience/aesthetics** associated with Local Board sites were assigned negative ratings, this being less than acceptable and impacting negatively upon service quality. Beyond the physical premises, it is also critically important to assess service delivery from the standpoint of the staff attributes.

Good customer service is the key to effective social service delivery and customer satisfaction. Management conceptual models exist to address service quality in organisational structures. In conducting research on service delivery to customers, some researchers have been concerned with tangibles such as physical infrastructure, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance (Marshall and Murdoch 2001; Panda and Das 2014 and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). These markers of excellent service delivery should permeate throughout the hierarchical system in any organisational structure and in modern management systems (Naik *et al.* 2010). In this study, Supervisors and SWAs were targeted as respondents and their insights permitted categories to emerge and be processed as a means of determining their respective importance in the execution of service delivery functions associated with the administration of the PAG.

Staff attributes reflecting orientations and behaviour consistent with **counselling** and **referrals to other agencies** have been positively rated by Supervisors and SWAs in Local Boards. The Supervisor assigned to Zeta notes that *"all social welfare officers are counsellors in their own right, because the job requires that you counsel the clients."* Additionally, the SWA associated with Zeta opines that "counselling the poor is an integral part of our daily duties as welfare advisers." SWAs often go beyond their duties and function outside of their job specification, performing specialised functions of counselling, referring clients to other agencies, and mobilising clients' immediate short-term and holistic needs.

The majority of Supervisors and SWAs emphasised the need for **access to real time information** to improve decisions about benefits and provide answers regarding the status of queries for both beneficiaries and the staff. In accessing real time information, it seemed imperative that electronic hand-held devices such as tablets ought to be distributed among SWAs who are often required to share information within the Ministry and on field visits to clients and applicants' homes. Staff shortages may result in a greater prevalence of inexperienced workers

breeding greater suspicion of incompetence among staff, and mainly negative sentiments about the dissemination of information and in-house workloads due to poor scheduling of *appointments*. Greater access and exposure to appropriate training to maximise possibilities for the incorporation of devices to precipitate access to real time information becomes a mandatory requirement.

Clarity of information is a function of the ***dissemination of information***. Despite having a desire to disseminate clear information and recognising the importance of doing so, inexperienced, and untrained staff are inimical to such goals. Thus, innovative interventions such as the use of podcasts, you-tube videos, role-playing videos, and mass communication using social media, ought to become important means for disseminating information pertaining to the PAG. Technology and access to real-time information are key ingredients in the modern world for providing premium quality service. They constitute additional dimensions characterising the dissemination of information and have also been negatively rated given that a lack of real-time information often hinders quality service and results in unsatisfied customers. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been noted that technology has become increasingly recognised as a preferred service delivery medium.

Supervisors and SWAs recognised shortcomings associated with the ***human resource*** components shaping service delivery. The interviewees' accounts reveal that there were some under-performing staff and that a need existed for continuous education and training in the administration of welfare services. In essence, under-performing staff are to be red-flagged and remedial attention is recommended to improve the quality of services that they render to the PAG. The Human Resources function is key in providing competent staff, reducing the selection of *misfits* by selecting workers with the right attitude, and preventing the recruitment of workers with poor work ethics. Accordingly, proper ***recruitment and selection*** practices ought to be embraced in choosing the best person for the job. With respect to targeting *misfits*, recruitment and selection, and workplace morale, Supervisors and SWAs assigned negative ratings. To remedy such negative perceptions, the importance of continuous training is a key imperative. ***Training*** is a key component for educating staff to be "au courant" with current policies and practices and this can address *misfits*. For new and existing staff at all the Local Boards, routine training should be a priority as new knowledge emerges in dynamic environments where technological inputs continue to change over time.

Based on observations, mixed ratings were generally assigned to ***"fitness for purpose"*** which is key in recruitment and selection. Additionally, mixed feelings have been predominant regarding the value of training and further, the effectiveness of training has been rated negatively. Such observations raise alarming levels of scepticism about the value of training especially given that a

friendly, courteous staff answering promptly to customers' queries is a pre-requirement for attaining greater client satisfaction. Supervisors and SWAs have generally rated *workplace morale* negatively so that there is a need for interventions consistent with building team spirit. Although continuous training and measures to improve workplace morale are often considered essential to maximise efficiency and effectiveness in administering programmes such as the PAG, mixed perceptions about fitness for purpose and the value of training, and more importantly, negative perceptions about the *effectiveness of training,* all place limitations on the attainment of improved service quality.

Redressing Legislative Decrees

The *aims of the laws*, and in particular, the recognition given to the Vision and Mission of the PAG were preponderant and positively rated by officers who responded on behalf of each of the Local Boards across the nation. In contrast, assessments pertaining to *amendments to the laws and the relevance of the laws* were similarly preponderant though assigned negative ratings. These outcomes reinforce recognition of the overall intent of the PAG as a welfare intervention prescribed in accordance with the law of the land. At the same time, the overwhelmingly poor ratings with respect to *relevance* and *amendments of the laws* speak volumes about tardy responses among lawmakers and policymakers in embarking on action that is mindful of the changing temporal needs of those dependent on poor relief. This is especially potent coming from the lenses of Supervisors and SWAs, two main implementors of policies and charged with the responsibilities of delivering welfare services first-hand.

With respect to the need for *amendment to the laws* pertaining to the PAG, negative perceptions were forthcoming from Supervisors and SWAs from Local Boards. They felt that top priority should be directed towards reforming the laws enabling them to cope with contemporary poverty, inflation, and the rising cost of living, all of which negatively impact PAG recipients. Economic factors change temporally and influence the cost of living prompting considerations including temporal amendments of the law to counteract inflation. Legislative provision should make allowances for recipients to earn income while receiving the PAG. The maximum they can earn while receiving the PAG should be objectively determined and declared in accordance with the law. Any earnings beyond a pre-determined maximum would attract specific magnitudes of deductions from their benefits. This can facilitate weaning clients off the PAG and providing an exit strategy out of welfare and into the workforce as a primary pathway for promoting self-reliance. Furthermore, Supervisors and SWAs felt that a need existed for welfare services to be harnessed from stakeholders capable of providing complementary support, whether from the private or public sectors, to address the holistic development of the poor and provide the fastest route to sustainable

poverty reduction. This can be a mechanism for building human capital and poverty reduction.

Regarding *relevance of the laws*, the responses from Supervisors and SWAs of Local Boards were principally negative, claiming that the laws were restrictive in response to rapid change. The PAG laws were created to alleviate immediate needs among the poor and have done so for many beneficiaries. However, they do not make allowances for sustainable poverty reduction. Though some parts of the laws are relevant and in accordance with current circumstances, both Supervisors and SWAs felt that the laws generally must be updated to cope with modern day and future poverty manifestations. Supervisors and SWAs perceived the PAG laws to be creating a measure of dependency among recipients who were becoming comfortable and complacent receiving their monthly benefits.

Conclusion

There is a paucity of literature showcasing studies on social workers' perspectives on CTs. In T&T, Supervisors and SWAs have the capacity to make positive contributions to developing, advancing, and managing the PAG thereby rendering it more effective and efficient. This study drew upon the experiences of Supervisors and SWAs in their senior roles as implementors of the PAG in T&T. With reference to officers from each of the eleven Local Boards, their valuable insights have yielded robust cues targeting levers that are to be adjusted to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency in the administration of the PAG. Targeting the triad consisting of three domains – Operational Procedures, Service Delivery, and Legislative Decrees – cues impacting the administration of the PAG emerged in accordance with the preponderance and directional ratings of key attributes associated with each of the domains. Although this study drew upon the experiences of Supervisors and SWAs in improving the PAG in T&T, it has universal applicability in developing countries facing similar challenges. The use of content analysis as a methodological framework for obtaining cues will likely have universal applicability in developing countries seeking to evaluate process and upgrade the administration of their national welfare programmes.

Poverty is not only a function of economic deprivation but also a function of the failings of social and political systems that are often inimical to thrusts favouring greater levels of equity or fairness in the distribution of material resources. This study is predicated upon the value of CTs as providing avenues to redress innate imbalances in the distribution of material resources. Due to the small quantum of the PAG, it primarily facilitates poverty alleviation. Though some among the poor escape poverty while being recipients of CTs, such benefits principally occurred due to other complementary forms of assistance from families and Non-State Actors (NSAs). By being aligned to in-kind transfers and benefits such as

community programmes, skills training, nutrition, education, entrepreneurial capacity-building, and increased prospects for community empowerment, CT Programmes do go beyond poverty alleviation and may actually constitute a faster route to sustainable poverty reduction. Birchall (2020) suggests that a "cash plus" system will likely constitute the future of CTs.

In T&T, these benefits exist in the form of subsidised housing, and subsidised public utilities such as water, transportation, electricity, computers, education, pharmaceuticals, and gasoline. However, in integrating these benefits, legislative decrees and operational procedures must be mindful of processes that would reduce the dependency syndrome that could become a lifetime pre-occupation among recipients. In essence, mandatory conditionalities could be established for PAG recipients to participate in progressive human development interventions that have the potential for promoting lifelong self-reliance. However, non-compliance with such conditionalities could jeopardise their due to PAG benefits. In this regard, the establishment of conditions including compulsory training and development for recipients to enhance livelihood options, provision of evidence of active job-seeking behaviour, and at least a 90% school attendance among children, should be instrumental in medium to long-term thrusts targeting reductions in inter-generational poverty. Assisting the poor and vulnerable leads to benefits that permeate throughout the entire society leading to more economic activities and prosperity which in turn lead to a more stable and happy community and nation.

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Appendix I.

Table 4. **Description of Monthly Meetings**

Domain	Description
Monthly Managerial Meeting	Monthly Managerial Meetings are compulsory and permit the Director of Social Welfare to meet the Deputy Director of Social Welfare, the two Supervisors III, Supervisors from each of the Local Boards, the most senior SWA II from each Local Board and Secretary from each Local Board. These meetings permit discussions about policy and programme administration and are platforms that permit information sharing and feedback mechanisms, all of which are designed to raise levels of effectiveness and efficiency with regard to the administration of the PAG.
Monthly Local Board Meeting	Within each Local Board, Monthly Board Meetings are compulsory and facilitate decision-making with respect to first time applicants and renewals among prospective beneficiaries of the PAG.
Monthly Case Committee Meeting	On a monthly basis, Case Management Meetings are convened as a prelude to Local Board Meetings and permit cases to be discussed and finalised in-house, prior to being tabled in Local Board Meetings.
Monthly Supervisors' Meeting	Within each Local Board, Monthly Supervisors' Meetings succeed Local Board Meetings and provide a forum for Supervisors of the respective Boards to inform their staff of decisions taken and information exchanged within Monthly Managerial Meetings.

Source: created by the authors 2022.