**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY QUESTION NUMBER: 3966**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 28 OCTOBER 2022 INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NUMBER: 42 - 2022**

**3966. Dr D T George (DA) to ask the Minister of Social Development:**

Whether her department and the National Treasury have agreed on a comprehensive social relief package to address the growing levels of food insecurity in the Republic; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

NW4934E

**REPLY:**

The pandemic and the consequent lock-down exacerbated the loss of household income and increased hunger, which heightened the demand for the Department to provide food relief and Social Relief of Distress (SRD). As a result, the Department, in consultation with the Presidency, National Treasury and other relevant stakeholders, developed and implemented a social relief package for a period of six (6) months which was inclusive of the COVID-19 SRD (cSRD) and social grant top-ups.

However, most of the relief packages came to an end in October 2020 with an exception of the cSRD. It should be noted that the cSRD was initially extended by 3 months to January 2021, then by a further 3 months to April 2021. In July 2022, it was further extended to March 2022, after which it was extended for a full financial year from April 2022 to March 2023 under the Social Assistance Regulations. At its peak, the SRD grant was able to support 10.9 million beneficiaries in March 2022, but this has declined to 8.1 million people as at mid-November, due to stricter qualification criteria. The majority of beneficiaries have confirmed that they used the money primarily for food, followed by electricity and masks for personal protection during the pandemic.

The Minister of Finance in his Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement has announced a further extension of the cSRD until the end of the 2023/24 financial year, which is welcomed by the Department.

The extension of the provision until 2023/24 financial year will provide some assistance to cushion the effects of poverty, food insecurity and the high inflation rate amongst the poor, particularly the working-age population, who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, whilst a sustainable permanent intervention is being explored. Further engagement is ongoing with the National Treasury regarding longer term interventions, including other complementary measures linked to labour activation measures.

The Department also implements the Household Food and Nutrition security programme throughout nine Provinces. Vulnerable and poor individuals aged 19 -59 years are provided with cooked meals served at 282 Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs) that are spread in the most remote areas of the country.