



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of:

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2016/2017 Annual Report

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 1 January 2016 to 31 July 2016 Annual Report

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2015 Annual Report

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2014 Annual Report



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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for the period 2014 to 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2014 to July 2017, conducted into: The Ministry's administration; structure; budgetary allocation; programmes offered; policies; challenges; highlights; priorities for the coming years; and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Permanent Secretary for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Ms. Jennifer Poole, and her staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contributions and support.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend the *Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2016/2017 Annual Report*; *Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 1 January 2016 to 31 July 2016 Annual Report*; *Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2015 Annual Report*; and the *Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2014 Annual Report* to Parliament and request all members to consider its content.



Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ITC	-	Information Technology and Computing
MWCPA	-	Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
OMRS	-	Open Merit Recruitment and Selection
REACH project	-	Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion for Rural and Urban Fijians Project
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted a review of the following Annual Reports:

- Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2016/2017 Annual Report
- Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 1 January 2016 to 31 July 2016 Annual Report
- Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2015 Annual Report
- Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2014 Annual Report

The committee recommends that Parliament take note of its report.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has had a lapse of four years in reporting on its functions and work done from 2014 to 2017. Therefore, the Ministry has endeavoured to submit its Annual Reports on these lapsed years in 2018.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last Parliament term was referred the 2014 - 2017 Annual Reports of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation which were subsequently reintroduced in this new Parliament term and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs, for its scrutiny.

Standing Orders 109(2)(b) allows the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

Standing Orders 110(1)(c) authorises the Standing Committee to *scrutinise the government departments with responsibility within the committee's subject area, including by investigating, inquiring into, and making recommendations relating to any aspect of such a department's administration, legislation or proposed legislative program, budget, rationalisation, restructuring, functioning, organisation, structure and policy formulation.*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The substantive members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs are:

- Hon. Viam Pillay (Chairperson)
- Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson)
- Hon. Alipate Nagata (Member)
- Hon. Salote Radrodoro (Member)
- Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu (Member)

During the Standing Committee's meetings, the following alternate membership arose pursuant to Standing Order 115(5):

- Hon. Simone Rasova
- Hon. Mikaele Leawere

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation oversees the three Departments: Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and Children, and the Poverty Monitoring Unit.

Government is committed to reducing poverty to a negligible level and these Departments further that cause by breaking down barriers erected by gender, age, disability and economic standing.

The Department of Social Welfare administers Fiji's social welfare programs, which include the Poverty Benefit Scheme, the Child Protection Allowance, the Food Voucher Program, the Social Pension Scheme and the Bus Fare Subsidy. In managing these programs, the Department is responsible for ensuring that aid flows to those who need it the most, while stamping out corruption and fraud in the system.

The Department is equally committed to ensuring that these programs do not create a culture of dependency, focusing efforts and energy on graduating individuals and families from "welfare to workfare".

The Department also has the statutory responsibility to ensure the protection and wellbeing of children, which includes managing juvenile centers.

The Department of Women is responsible for providing Fijian women and girls, particularly those in rural communities, with the skills and education they need to participate as equal members in society. It works to provide the necessary support to enable them to bring about positive changes for themselves, for their families and for their communities.

This mission is underscored in the National Women's Plan of Action, which is aimed at boosting women's employment opportunities, increasing women's participation in decision making, eliminating violence against women, improving women's access to basic services, and addressing women's issues in new legislation. The Department works with other Ministries to ensure that gender perspectives are addressed in all Government policies and initiatives and to promote gender equality.

The Poverty Monitoring Unit evaluates Government's poverty related programs and makes policy recommendations to the Ministry and Cabinet.

ISSUES RAISED

LACK OF RESOURCES AND FUNDING FOR HUMAN CAPITAL AND OFFICE SPACE

The committee notes that the geographic dispersion of the Ministry's Executive Unit Offices and Departments around the City is challenging for human resource management. All teams lack space not only for staff but also for storage and archiving of documents.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Ministry liaise closely with the Ministry of Economy to ensure that adequate resources are provided for any new programmes.

TECHNOLOGY

Currently, the Ministry is seeking options for technological assistance to review and consolidate its data. The Ministry currently does not have such support internally for high level ITC as such, discussions are underway with the Ministry of Economy, ITC Unit, and the Civil Service Reform Unit to progress one of its reforms which was to review and consolidate the Ministry's data.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Ministry work closely with the Ministry of Economy, Civil Service Reform Unit, and other stakeholders for appropriate resources to upgrade its ITC Unit and to strengthen its network for the successful establishment of the Ministry's database.

UNEXPECTED PROGRAM REQUESTS

Each year, the Ministry is requested to take on new programs. Such programs include the Help for Home Initiative (2016-2017), Home Care Program (2018), Bundle Insurance (2018), and Bus Fare Top Up (2018). Such unplanned programs require the rapid deployment of resources and funds and the Ministry must adjust internal budgets and internal resources. This can disrupt normal activities and place additional stress on Human Resources and impact certain Department outputs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That there be a review of the challenges faced by the Ministry during Cyclone Winston and other natural disasters in the implementation of the subsequent programs of the Help for Home Initiative (2016-2017) and Home Care (2018) to ensure that cyclone victims are fully and properly assisted.
2. That relevant training be undertaken by the Ministry according to its Ministerial responsibilities to fully equip staff to respond to disasters efficiently and effectively.
3. That new programs such as, the Help for Home Initiative and Home Care Program which result from natural disasters must be channelled to appropriate Ministries.

INCREASING NUMBER OF BEGGARS

Currently, the Ministry has profiled 266 cases on the streets of our cities and towns. However, not all of them are permanent beggars.

Working with such individuals is challenging and the success rate is very low. However, there are success stories where some individuals have been given bean carts and are still selling while others have been issued with Hawker's license and some have been assisted in finding work.

The Ministry has established a Unit within the Department of Social Welfare to look at the challenges faced by beggars. The Unit works with other stakeholders to assist these beggars to find meaningful work (which suits their abilities). This also includes finding their families and placing them back, finding accommodation and linking them to other service providers that can assist and mentor them.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Ministry identify new programs and work with Faith Based groups and other community groups to address the issue of increasing beggars.

RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT AND COHESION (REACH) FOR RURAL AND URBAN FIJIANS PROJECT

The REACH project was funded by the Government of Japan from 2015 – 2018 with total funding support of USD\$2.65 million. The funding was administered by UNDP and the core partners in this Project are the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the Legal Aid Commission and the Ministry of Justice.

The REACH project aims to promote peace building, social cohesion and inclusiveness. The project conducts awareness raising of the social, economic and legal rights enshrined in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. It provides access to the services associated with these rights, and also strengthens institutional capacity to these services. A mobile services delivery approach is undertaken to reach communities throughout all of Fiji with the focus to reach the furthest behind first.

The committee notes that the REACH project funding comes to an end in June 2019 and it is of the view that these critical activities should continue. Given the success of the REACH project in reaching Fijians in remote and rural locations, it is essential for the Fijian Government to ensure the continuity of the REACH project beyond the donor-funded period of 3 years which is set to expire on 30 June 2019.

As the way forward with respect to the expansion and strengthening of the REACH project, the Ministry will be undertaking the following initiatives:

- Establishment of a REACH Unit in the Ministry of Women (MWCPA) with approved Human Resource.

- Decentralization of the governance structure for REACH, placing the Outreach Divisional Officers in the 4 Divisions. These officers will solely manage their Divisional Outreach Programmes and provide cohesive trainings such as legal literacy, governance and rights to the communities and the Ministry.
- Memorandum of Understanding with core agencies to be pursued with the Legal Aid Commission, Birth Death and Marriages Office to continue the work for REACH.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Ministry seek an extension of the REACH project with the donors.

GOLDEN AGE HOMES

The committee noted that there is a high demand for the three Golden Age Homes in Labasa, Lautoka and Samabula. The Ministry is now seeing a trend where old people have now been abandoned by their relatives and there is a growing waiting list of applicants who have been referred or applied to be accommodated in one of these Homes. More challenging is the fact that some of these cases do not fall under the category of old persons but also include those with some form of disability whether physical or mental. Currently, there are no dedicated Homes for disabled persons.

Thus, in trying to address this issue, the Ministry is working with the other Homes for older persons for referrals if possible, at the same time encouraging the communities through its awareness programs for families to fulfil their duty to look after their elderly family members, and to access the Government Social Pension Scheme or the Disability Allowance. In order to achieve this, the Ministry is also conducting care giving trainings with the communities in trying to build their capacity to care for their old people.

Further research is also required to understand the trend and to provide a baseline on the need for respite care and training and resources for carers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Ministry raise awareness on caring for elderly through family and faith based groups and other existing networks.
2. That the Ministry pursue the option of expanding existing Homes.
3. That the Ministry pursue the user pay option with partners for the construction and operation of Homes.

COMMITTEE SITE VISITS

BABASIGA ASHRAM, LABASA



BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, through the Babasiga Ashram, ensures that older persons are not left behind in the development agenda (community/institutional) thereby promoting the inclusion, protection, healthy ageing and the provision of enabling environments for older persons. The Babasiga Ashram currently accommodates 31 residents of which 18 are males and 13 are females. 26 staff are tasked to take care of these residents.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SITE VISIT

1. **Construction of a new older persons Home** – The Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation is awaiting the completion of the tender process for the construction of a new Home for older persons which is expected to house 45 residents.
2. **Family placements unsuccessful** – The committee noted that family placements of residents were largely unsuccessful due to the residents being returned to the Home.
3. **Awareness** – The Ministry is conducting awareness on the need for families to care for the elderly through the *Bose ni Tikina* and *Bose ni Yasana* that is held in various areas.

4. **Need for qualified caregivers for disabled persons** – The Home has no qualified caregivers to look after disabled persons however, it is working in partnership with the Empower Pacific to conduct trainings with internal staff of the Home. The committee observed that the Home is well equipped and resourced to cater for the needs of persons living with disability.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That ongoing caregiving trainings are provided to staff to look after the elderly and the disabled.
2. That staff recruited are qualified caregivers.

LOMANI AU CHILDREN'S HOME



BACKGROUND

The Lomani Au Children's Home is situated on a 3.5 acre property beside the sea in Savusavu on the island of Vanua Levu, Fiji. Lomani Au Children's Home was officially opened on 16th March 2013 to serve as a refuge for victims of abusive relationships and orphans. Children in the Home are taught to become role models and contribute positively to society. Currently, there are 29 children residing in the Home who are under the care of the Department of Social Welfare.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SITE VISIT

1. The committee noted that the Home is well equipped and resourced to care for the children and commends it for the important role it plays in providing education to children who have access to local schools in nearby communities as well as to tertiary institutes.
2. Volunteers at the Home are trained in caregiving and this is done through partnerships with the Empower Pacific and other relevant stakeholders.

3. The committee is pleased to note the good working relationship that the Home has with the Department of Social Welfare and other stakeholders in terms of provision of assistance for the benefit of the Home and its children.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Home should strengthen its working relationship and dialogue with the Department of Social Welfare through regular visits to the Home by Welfare Officers.
2. That more awareness is carried out in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare to allow locals to provide financial assistance to the Home.

PEARLY GATES HOME, NASESE, SUVA

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SITE VISIT

1. The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation manages the only Girls Home “Pearly Gates Home” that caters for young girls who are victims of abuse.
2. The rehabilitation in this facility provides a safe and secure environment for them to be educated and also seek psychosocial support.
3. The Home accommodates girls aged between 14 and 18 years who are orphans or have been victims of child abuse and neglect.
4. An annual allocation of \$150,000 has allowed the Ministry to outsource the holistic care and management of the Home.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

1. That there should be regular visitations by the staff of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation so that they are aware of the issues and challenges faced by the Home.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The committee notes that the Ministry's work is closely aligned to progress the SDGs. The Ministry's programs support a number of key goals:

Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

A lot of the Ministry's work also is cross-cutting and links to a number of SDGs, including:

Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

GENDER ANALYSIS

Gender is a critical dimension to parliamentary scrutiny. Standing Order 110 (2) requires committees to consider gender equality and ensure that the impact on both men and women is explored in all matters.

The Ministry ensures that both male and female employees are treated equally in recruitment, through the introduction of Open Merit Recruitment Selection (OMRS) where everyone is given an equal opportunity to apply for positions advertised. The Ministry's Job Advertisements are open and do not discriminate by gender. Furthermore, the Ministry complies with the OMRS Guidelines with respect to hiring, promotions and training opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to examine and review the following Annual Reports of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

The committee's findings from the review showed that there were certain issues faced by the Ministry but this is gradually being addressed by the Ministry as mentioned in the Report. The committee acknowledges the improvements made in the Ministry's operations but recommends that the Annual Reports of the Ministry be compiled and submitted in a timely manner to Parliament.

The review was conducted in a very tactful and comprehensive manner. This has enabled the committee for Social Affairs to submit to Parliament a more reliable and a cohesive report.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:



Hon. Viam Pillay
(Chairperson)



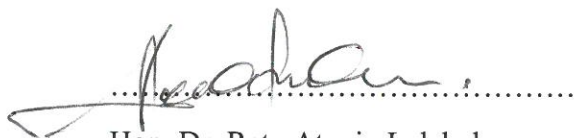
Hon. George Vignathan
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Alipate Nagata
(Member)



Hon. Salote Radrodoro
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)

APPENDICES

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

Thursday 28 March 2019

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation

Jennifer Poole, Permanent Secretary, **Rupeni Fatiaki**, Director Social Welfare, **Saleshni Naidu**, Director Poverty Monitoring Unit, **Venina Duvuduvukula**, Manager Finance, and **Semisi Siga**, Senior Administration Officer (Department of Women).

Published written evidence

Written evidence and supplementary information was received from the Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>