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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

### Review Report of the Committee on the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**  
**Parliamentary Paper No. 8 of 2016**

*9<sup>th</sup> February, 2016*

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## Chairs' Foreword

I am pleased to present the review Report of the Social Affairs Standing Committee on the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs is a standing committee which was established under Section 109(2) (b) of the Standing Orders (SO) of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The Social Affairs Standing Committee is mandated to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture, media and their administration.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinize the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report specifically on the area of administration, legislation, budget, organization structure, functions, policies and programs of the year.

The Social Affairs Standing Committee has conducted its review on the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report. The findings of the review and the recommendations put forward by the Committee will be able to boost the Ministry's service delivery in the future and especially on its social responsibilities in all Fijian communities.

The review exercise was possible after a round of consultation was conducted with the Ministry. The Committee had identified some areas of concern in the findings which was affecting the Ministry's achievement in the past and this has been further captured in the recommendation for consideration.

Finally, I wish to extend my thanks to the Honourable Members and the Secretariat team who involved in the production of this bipartisan report: my Committee colleagues Hon. Salote Radrodro MP (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Veena Bhatnagar MP (Member), Hon. Vijay Nath MP (Member) and Hon. Anare Vadei MP (Member).

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to the Parliament.



Hon. Viam Pillay  
Chairperson

## **List of Recommendations**

### **Recommendation One:**

That the budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation be increase to cater for the Ministry's mandated responsibilities in all Fijian communities. *(This recommendation has been accommodated by the 2016 Budget)*

### **Recommendation Two:**

That the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation to strengthening its Department of Poverty Alleviation's capacity and capability to effectively monitor and evaluate the whole government poverty alleviation programs/projects.

## Introduction

Using the legislative powers provided to the Committee, this report examines the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report which was tabled in Parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.

The Committee had gone through the Annual Report and identified key areas that need to be assessed and these included the Ministry's budgetary allocation, policies, programs and projects of 2013, staffing issues, community awareness program and the overall administration.

On 14 July 2015, the Committee resolved to summon the Ministry on 15 July 2015 to provide a brief to the Committee on the overall performance of the Ministry in 2013.

The review involved the collection and sighting of available information and documents from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation so that the Standing Committee fully understands its operations and performance.

In summary, the information for this report was obtained through:

1. Thorough assessment by the Social Affairs Standing Committee Members on the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report;
2. Powerpoint Presentation by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation executive management; and
3. Face to face interviews with the Permanent Secretary, Dr. Josefa V. Koroivueta, Director Social Welfare, Rupeni Fatialu and Principal Research Officer, Luse Qereqeretabua.

The mandated functions of the Ministry have been listed below in which the Committee used as the basis of the review:

- 1) Care and protection of children;
- 2) Provision of income support which is in the form of social protection programmes;
- 3) Provision of policy intervention for older persons;
- 4) Provision of policy intervention for persons with disabilities; and
- 5) Promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Report is divided into three:

- I. **Chapter One** covers the Committee recommendations to Parliament;
- II. **Chapter Two** focuses on the Findings of the report; and
- III. **Chapter Three** covers the Conclusion.

## Findings

The findings of the review were detected by the Committee after scrutinizing the Ministry's 2013 Annual Report and the outcome of the interview made with the Ministry's senior officials.

The objectives of the assessment were to:

- Scrutinize the Ministry's 2013 administration, budget, functions, organization structure and policies that were in place;
- Projects/programs of the Ministry in 2013; and
- Making recommendations to Parliament on the overall performance of the Ministry in 2013 with regards to its mandated functions.

The **key findings** of the report have been listed below which were found during the Committee's assessment and consultation process:

- The Ministry had limited capacity to coordinate and drive efforts towards achieving its objective to look after all its social determinants including all geographical settings in all Fijian communities.
- The Ministry's Community penetrations were very weak in terms of its social services responsibilities on the area of education and health sector.
- Lack of expertise on the area of anthropology to assist in social marketing.
- Budgetary allocation was an issue with the Ministry in trying to fulfill all its obligations, especially on the Department of Women and Poverty Alleviation.

## Gender Analysis

Under SO 110(2), where a committee conducts an activity listed in clause (1), the committee ensures full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure matters considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally. The Committee considered range of issues including programmes that were coordinated by the Ministry and how it affects both male and female in Fiji. In particular, the Ministry was very specific on all the programs that were implemented which are aligned with its mandated responsibilities and these programs had mechanisms that ensured that the benefits are equally distributed amongst the target groups including both men and women in our society. In fact, the Department of Women also had various programs in place specifically for women empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to examine the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation's 2013 Annual Report. The Committee had conducted its review and formulated the findings with regard to the Ministry's performance in 2013.

The Committee report is a bi-partisan one and contributions from both sides have provided the final report which is closely supported by the Secretariat.

The response and the input from the Ministry were overwhelming which contributed a lot in the compilation of this report. The Committee has assembled few recommendations to Parliament on the result of the review that was undertaken with regard to the Ministry's mandated responsibilities with its performance in 2013.

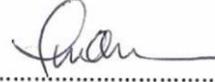
The recommendations highlighted two key areas of concern which included the Ministry's budgetary allocation, the capacity and the capability of the Ministry in carry out its social responsibilities.

Overall, the key areas highlighted by the Committee in its findings would boost the overall performance of the Ministry in the future.

**SIGNATURES OF MEMBERS OF THE**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS**



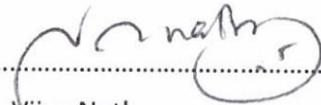
.....  
Hon. Viam Pillay  
(Chairperson)



.....  
Hon. Salote Radrodoro  
(Deputy Chairperson)



.....  
Hon. Veena Bhatnagar  
(Member)



.....  
Hon. Vijay Nath  
(Member)



.....  
Hon. Anare Vadei  
(Member)

03 / 02 / 16

.....  
(Date)

# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 1: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION BY THE MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL WELFARE, WOMEN AND POVERTY  
ALLEVIATION**

**Appendix 1: Powerpoint Presentation by the Ministry of Social Welfare,  
Women and Poverty Alleviation**



**THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN,  
CHILDREN AND POVERTY  
ALLEVIATION**

Presentation to Parliamentary Standing  
Committee on Social Affairs  
Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**PURPOSE OF THE  
MINISTRY**

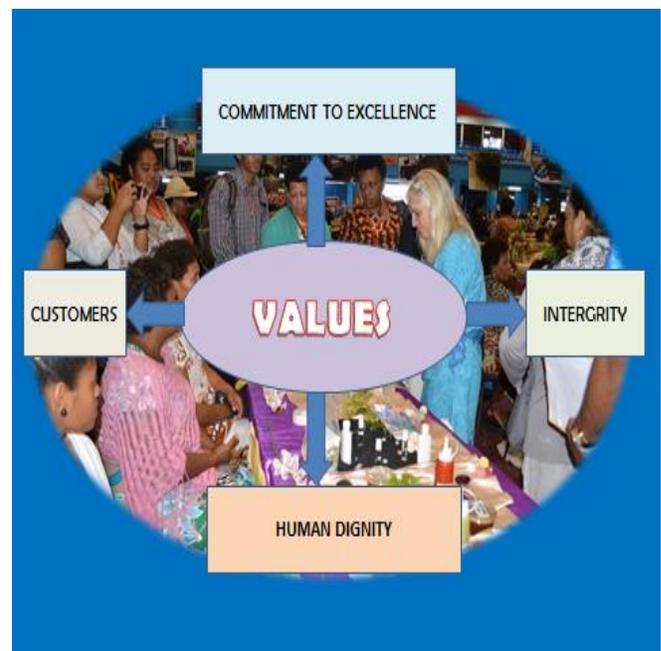


TO PROVIDE AN EFFICIENT AND  
EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY THAT  
ARE TARGETED TO THE  
DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES AND  
RURAL WOMEN GROUPS

**2015 MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND  
POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

**Vision:**  
Empowering the Women, Children and the  
Disadvantaged

**Mission:**  
Families and Communities supported  
through Social Welfare Initiatives and  
Gender mainstreaming programmes



## POPULATION COUNT OF THE MINISTRY

### ESTABLISHED STAFF

#### TECHNICAL FIELD

- ❖ SOCIAL WELFARE DEPT --72
- ❖ WOMEN – 36
- ❖ PMU – 10
- ❖ Juvenile - 10

**TOTAL ESTABLISHED STAFF : 179**

### UNESTABLISHED OFFICERS

**TOTAL UNESTABLISHED OFFICERS : 33**

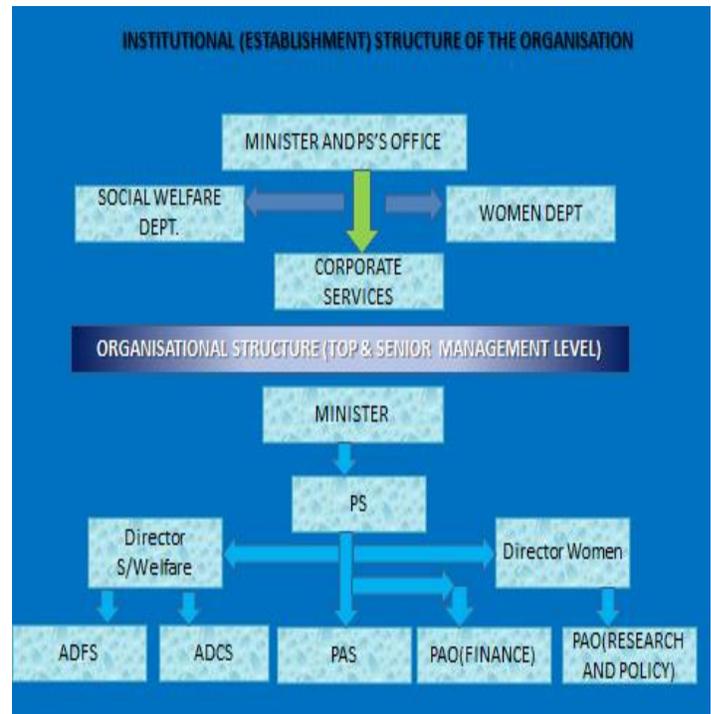
TOTAL PROJECT OFFICERS - 56 **NEC ATTACHEES – 14**

(6 Proj & 15 N/Attachees)

**TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT -- 249**

#### CORPORATE SECTION

(ADMIN/ACCOUNTS OFFICERS)-29  
Administrators Field : 22



## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MWCPA

- CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN;
- PROVISION OF INCOME SUPPORT;
- PROVISION OF POLICY INTERVENTION FOR OLDER PERSONS;
- PROVISION OF POLICY INTERVENTION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES;
- PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

## STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE MWCPA

1. Adoption of Infant Act Cap 58 1978
2. Community Work Act 1994
3. Family Act 2003
4. FNCDP Act 1994
5. Juveniles Act Cap 56 1973
6. Probation Act 1978
7. Domestic Violence Degree 2009
8. Child Welfare Decree 2010
9. Social Justice Act 1997

## INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child 1993
2. ILO (Trafficking, Child Labor)
3. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women 1995
4. Beijing Platform for Action 1995
5. Madrid – International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002
6. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## APPROPRIATION STATEMENT AS OF 31/12/2013

### BRIEF ON THE FINANCIAL REPORTS

1. Total Operating Expenditure for 2013 was \$29,837,483
2. Total Capital Expenditure for 2013 was \$778,847
3. Total Operating Expenditure was \$28,837,990
4. Vat incurred - \$220,646

### BUDGETING ALLOCATION



### FINANCIAL STANDARD POLICY OF THE MINISTRY

- ❖ THE MINISTRY'S FINANCIAL PROCESSES ARE ALIGNED TO THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS;
- ❖ PAYMENTS ARE DONE ON CUT OFF DATES;
- ❖ PURCHASE ORDERS – WHEN REQUESTED AND ACTIONED ASAP;
- ❖ PROGRAMS ARE PAID ON EVERY 5<sup>TH</sup> OF EVERY MONTH;
- ❖ ACQUITTALS ARE FACILITATED 7 DAYS UPON RETURN FROM THEIR OFFICIAL DUTIES.
- ❖ DUE TO SHORTAGE OF FUNDINGS, A REQUEST FOR VIREMENT IS PRESENTED TO MOF.

## DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN

### Programmes - Women's Plan of Action 2010 – 2019: 5 critical areas of concern:

- Formal Sector Employment and Livelihoods
- Equal Participation in Decision Making
- Elimination of Violence Against Women & Children (EVAW&C)
- Access to Basic Services including health, education, SRH&HIV&AIDS, roads, water, power, etc (Promotion of Equal Opportunities and)
- Women and the Law

## Department Of Social Welfare Responsibilities



Social Protection for Disadvantaged



Child Protection



Support for Disabled Persons



Support for Older Persons

### 2013 CARE AND PROTECTION

BUDGET ALLOCATION OF  
\$5.99m for this program

ALLOWANCES PROVIDED,  
RANGING FROM \$30 TO  
\$110.00

### OTHER SOCIAL BENEFIT PROGRAMS Allowances

Food voucher	=	\$30.00 per month
Social Pension Scheme	=	\$30.00 per month
Bus fare Assistance Program for the elderly;		
Fire Victims	=	\$1,000.00 to eligible applicant

## BRIEF ON THE SOCIAL PROGRAMS

### 2013 PBS RECIPIENTS

NO OF PBS RECIPIENTS 17,143

PROVIDED WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF \$60-100 PER MONTH TOGETHER WITH A \$30.00 FOOD VOUCHER

### BRIEF NOTE CHILD WELFARE CASES

- ❑ 312 CASES REPORTED TO THE MINISTRY;
- ❑ 348 REPORTS WERE SUBMITTED RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE CASES

## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF OLDER PERSONS BRIEF

## OBJECTIVE OF THE COUNCIL:



- (i) strengthen the partnership and collaboration between the Government, families, community based organizations, traditional village communities, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector, in creating an inclusive, protective, healthy and supportive environment for older persons; and
- (ii) represent the rights and interests of older persons in Fiji at all levels.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL



1. **ADVISER** - Government adviser on all aspects of ageing and the welfare of older persons;
2. **STRATEGIST** - Assist Government in the development and implementation of national policies and strategies designed to produce health and social gain for older persons;
3. **ADVOCATE** - Assist Government in the promotion of international instruments on the rights of older persons, the understanding of ageing and social security of older persons; and
4. **REGULATOR** - Regulate and monitor activities of organizations providing services to older persons for transparency and alignment to existing policies and frameworks.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL:



Achievements	Details
3. NCOP Registration of 10 Affiliates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Mother Aubert Home of Compassion Trust (Suva);</li> <li>2. Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (Nasinu);</li> <li>3. The Suva Relief Fund Trust Board (Pearce Home, Suva);</li> <li>4. Society of Saint Vincent De Paul (Suva);</li> <li>5. The Golden Age Home (Lautoka);</li> <li>6. Samabula Senior Citizens Home (Suva);</li> <li>7. Father Law Home (Lami, Suva);</li> <li>8. Senior Citizens Association of Nadi;</li> <li>9. Senior Citizens Foundation of Lautoka;</li> <li>10. Sisters of our Lady of Nazareth Retirement Home (Waikoku, Suva)</li> </ol>

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL:



Achievements	Details
4. Projects with Residential Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Father Law Home</li> <li>- Vincent House</li> <li>- Home of Compassion</li> <li>- Pearce Home</li> <li>- Ba Senior Citizens Centre</li> <li>- Housing Assistance Relief Trust</li> <li>- Fiji Council of Social Services</li> </ul>

## 2015 NCOP PURSUED PROJECTS:



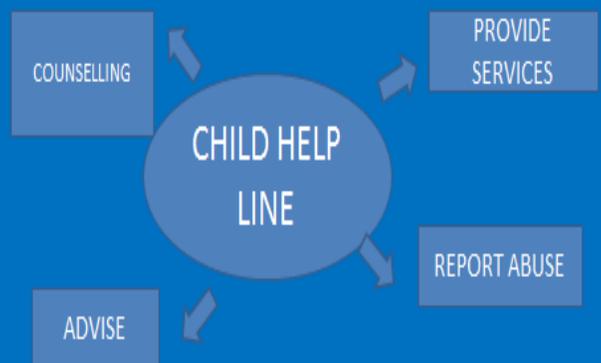
- Baseline Survey on the Older persons in Fiji;
- Facilities for Older persons in existing and potential parks;
- Day Centres for Older persons (similar to Ba Senior Citizens Centre);
- NCOP Membership drive as per the NCOP Decree;
- Acquiring Land for NCOP Headquarters;
- Expanding NCOP structure progressively as per Council administration;
- Liaison with Education Commission on the accreditation of Care Giving Courses;
- National Minimum Standards for Residential Homes for Older Persons;
- Strengthen partnership with the Private Sector.

## 2015 NCOP PURSUED PROJECTS:

- Greater awareness in partnership
- NCOP Structure not established.
- Interim measures – under the Director for Social Welfare.
- Budget is limited, 2016 capacity to be expanded by NCOP based on its priorities for 2016.
- Lacks a supportive mechanism to drive macro the activities aligned to the 4 goals in the Strategic Plan.

## NEW INITIATIVES

### NEW INITIATIVE



### ESTABLISHING OF SOCIAL PENSIONS SCHEME FOR THE ELDERLY

## NEW INITIATIVES

1. ESTABLISHING OF SOCIAL PENSIONS SCHEME FOR THE ELDERLY WHO ARE 70 YEARS OLD;
2. EXPANSION OF THE ZERO TOLERANCE ON VIOLENCE FREE COMMUNITY
3. OPERATION LOLOMA FOR SOCIAL ILLS (BEGGARS OPERATION)

## NEW INITIATIVES

1. WOMEN SHELTERS FRO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE;
2. RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED, HOMELESS AND DISABLED
3. SHOW YOU CARE INITIATIVE

## Conclusion

In regards to Social Work it has always been in the Department's core responsibilities not only to promote economic equality for the disadvantage but also to promote social well being and empowerment for the under privilege in the community

## **APPENDIX 2: VERBATIM**

## **Appendix 2: Verbatim**

### **VERBATIM REPORT OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS ON WEDNESDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2015 IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, EAST WING, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS AT 9.30 A.M.**

#### **Present:**

1. Hon. Viam Pillay - Chairperson
2. Hon. Salote V. Radrodro - Deputy Chairperson
3. Hon. Vijay Nath - Member
4. Hon. Veena Bhatnagar - Member
5. Hon. Anare T. Vadei - Member

**Presenter:** **Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation**

#### **In Attendance:**

- Dr. Josef Koroivueta - Permanent Secretary  
Mr. Rupeni Fatiaki - Director, Social Welfare  
Ms. Luse Qereqeretabua - Principal Research Officer

#### **Secretariat**

Mr. Savenaca Koro - Secretariat

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*(Welcome and Introduction by Mr. Chairman)*

We request that you take us along with the Report that you have presented to us and which was also tabled in Parliament. At the end of your presentation, honourable Members might like to ask questions or seek clarifications from you and we request that you respond accordingly. You now give you the floor.

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members of this Committee, on behalf of my team, I would like to thank you for this privilege to be here to present on the business of the Ministry and looking back at 2013, a report of which has been tabled in Parliament.

We have a powerpoint presentation which we thought would be an easier way to communicate to this Committee.

(Ministry's submission on powerpoint shown to Members)

Mr. Chairman, in 2013, the Ministry was branded as the Ministry of Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation but following the 2014 Elections and with the new portfolio that has been we were given a new name to be the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Purpose of the Ministry in the social sector is to provide an efficient and effective service delivery that are targeted to the disadvantaged communities and rural women groups.

The 2015 Vision is empowering the women, children and the disadvantaged and certainly, the Mission is that families and communities are supported through Social Welfare Initiatives and Gender mainstreaming programmes

When you look at the core values that are key to the business or the deliverables of the Ministry, we divide it into four and they are:

- 1) Commitment to excellence at all levels – central, divisional and also at the ground level;
- 2) Integrity;
- 3) Customers, which are very key to our business delivery; and
- 4) Human dignity.

As I had initially articulated, we are very small in numbers, very thin on the ground but we are expected to be looking after the social determinants in all aspects and in all geographical settings in our communities.

The total count as of today is 249; 179 established and 33 unestablished. In terms of our community penetration, we are very disadvantaged in that sense compared to the other social sectors, for example, in Health and Education where the community penetration is very, very good. We are 'one down' with the side of things but that should not be the excuse to deliver as per the Government mandate.

When you look at the establishment of the Ministry, in 2015 now, we have three main Departments which is Poverty Monitoring which used to be with the Prime Minister's Office and has moved to our Office but traditionally, there has always been two Departments – the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Women. That is the organisation structure (referring to the powerpoint) and when you look at it, I think with sympathetic eyes, we quite know the weaknesses in there. There is no Deputy Secretary and only this year, we have set up an Executive Support Unit for the Minister and Permanent Secretary. So, that is the key change that we have established. We have basically beefed up some of the weak areas that we had, and that is in expertise in gender, expertise in monitoring and evaluation, in policy and also in legal. There are key areas that were lacking in the Ministry, so that is the change from 2013 uptil now.

When you look at the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry, you can basically categorise them into five areas, as follows:

- 6) Care and protection of children;
- 7) Provision of income support which is in the form of social protection programmes;
- 8) Provision of policy intervention for older persons;
- 9) Provision of policy intervention for persons with disabilities ;
- 10) Promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

We have certain statutory obligations and these are the Acts for which we are the lead agency, the custodians of, as follows:

1. Adoption of Infant Act Cap 58 1978;
2. Community Work Act 1994;
3. Family Act 2003;
4. FNCDP Act 1994;
5. Juveniles Act Cap 56 1973;
6. Probation Act 1978;
7. Domestic Violence Decree 2009;
8. Child Welfare Decree 2010; and
9. Social Justice Act 1997.

For the information of the Committee, all these Acts are under review at the moment because as you know, they are pretty archaic and really needs to be modernized to measure up to the international standing that we have right now.

Our commitments internationally, are as follows:

- 1) Convention on the Rights of the Child 1993;
- 2) ILO (Trafficking, Child Labor);
- 3) Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women 1995;
- 4) Beijing Platform for Action 1995;
- 5) Madrid – International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002; and
- 6) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I have given you the brief and this is based on the audited financial statement in 2013, I think the notes are fairly explanatory. If you look at the budget allocations, a major chunk of the budget of the Ministry is spent on the Social Welfare. The Department of Women are very disappointed but I felt when we look back, there has been a significant increase in the budgetary allocation to the Department of Women in the last five years, something like a 300 per cent increase. Social Welfare takes \$27,924,587 and the Department of Women is \$1,912,896.

If you look at the financial standard of the policy, yesterday we had the opportunity to respond to the Public Accounts Committee and basically those (referring to powerpoint) were the issues that we dealt with. Looking at the processes in the Corporate, both administrative and financial; looking at systems and processes and policies within the programmes on social protection and also in the programmes in the Department of Women.

When you look at the Department of Women, Mr. Chairman, we have five critical areas, and honourable Radrodro knows that very well since she was the former Director for Women, and they are as follows:

- 1) Formal Sector Employment and Livelihoods.
- 2) Equal Participation in Decision Making.
- 3) Elimination of Violence against Women & Children (EVAW&C).
- 4) Access to Basic Services including health, education, Sexual Reproductive Health & HIV&AIDS, roads, water, electricity, etc (Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Equal Livelihoods).
- 5) Women and the Law which is an area of priority to us.

When we macroscopically look at Social Welfare's responsibilities, we can basically understand it in four ways, the:

- 1) Social Protection Programmes for the Disadvantages;
- 2) Support for the Disabled Persons;
- 3) Child Protection Programme; and
- 4) Support for Older Persons.

In 2013, the first Programme that I will inform the Committee is on the Poverty Benefit Scheme. This Scheme was initially the Family Assistance Scheme where the beneficiaries were individually targeted. Under the World Bank study, there was recommendation that we need to exit from that Scheme and move to the new scheme which is the Poverty Benefit Scheme which targets households. The data in Fiji shows that we have about 200,000 households. Our beneficiaries now stands at 22,000 and times four, you are looking at about ...because the mean household number is about four to five, so it is about 88,000. So, 88,000 of the 22,000 are the ones that are within the beneficiary list for the Social Protection Programmes.

In 2013, the amount given to households vary, depending on the eligibility and the numbers that would qualify within the households. So, if it is only for one person - \$60 which is a cash allowance and there is a \$30 food voucher.

In 2015, we have shifted. Now, they have a \$50 food voucher and it now varies from \$30 up to \$120 but whatever the range, the food voucher of \$50 stands uniform.

In 2013, the Care and Protection, stands at \$5.9 million and the allowances given to children who are eligible for this, and these are orphans, children of single mothers, children of prisoners, children in Homes and institutions under the Ministry, and also in faith-based organisations, and the allowances range from \$30 to \$110, depending on whether they are in the primary school or in the secondary school but under the law (Child Welfare Decree), any person under the age of 18 is considered as a child so the cut-off age for this support is 18 years old.

When you look at the Social Benefits Programme and this is the Government Pension Scheme for the older person over the age of 70 and this Scheme is \$30 per month, which was increased to \$50 from this year.

The Food Voucher Programme which is called the Expanded Food Voucher Programme was the initiative undertaken with the Ministry of Health to promote early booking of women who are pregnant because there was an issue about late booking, so this was introduced as an incentive for mothers to book early, especially with those in the rural areas. That is given all throughout pregnancy until after one month after birth.

If you look at Child Welfare cases, there were 312 reported cases to the Ministry and these are cases that are reported of varying in nature from health professionals, teachers and Police as well but we do that there is disparity in the numbers – the ones that go to the Sexual Offences Unit of the Police, the ones in the Ministry of Health, the ones in the Ministry of Education and the ones in our Ministry so the key issue is to have a reliable information system on the National Child Welfare cases throughout Fiji.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, 348 cases reports were submitted relating to Child Welfare cases and the Ministry undertakes a response to all the cases that are reported. These are communicated to higher authorities and even when it is required in court.

Under the Decree for older persons, there is a governance structure called the National Council of Older Persons which has been mandated to look after macroscopic issues relating to the welfare of senior citizens. This National Council is given an annual grant of \$200,000 per year and has a membership of nine and is chaired by the PS of the Ministry. The objectives are basically in two-folds, to:

- 1) strengthen the partnership and collaboration between the Government, families, community based organizations, traditional village communities, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector, in creating an inclusive, protective, healthy and supportive environment for older persons. I think the key area here, is that we are living in a society where family values are being affected or an erosion in family values and the outcome of that is that, the older persons are left to fend for themselves, being left to live on the streets now; or even to crowd up the senior citizens facilities that we have around. Basically, out of the comfort of the homes that they have sweated for in their lives.
- 2) representing the rights and interests of older persons in Fiji at all levels and this is proposing to Government what the Council feels is the right platform to address the key challenges facing older persons in Fiji, that may lead on to policy issues and the other thing is, putting matters across to international forums on the rights of older persons.

There is a very warming move now upon having the Convention on the Rights of the Older Persons at United Nations level and I think that Convention is going on in New York right now to look at that.

The functions of the Council are basically to:

- 1) Be the Adviser to Government on all aspects of ageing and the welfare of older persons;

- 2) Be Strategist; they look at development and implementation of national policies and strategies designed to produce health and social gain for older persons;
- 3) Advocate; promotion of international instruments on the rights of older persons, which is fairly enshrined within the Constitution, understanding of ageing and social security of older persons; and
- 4) Regulator - Regulates and monitors activities of organizations providing services to older persons and there is a move right now to have a standard for residential facilities caring for the older citizens in Fiji. Basically, we want to up the game on the quality of institutions whether it is State-based or is run by faith-based organisations because we do not want to compromise the standards that are being provided to them. I think that should be addressed because we feel that we need to address them inclusively and also in equality. So, whether they are in faith-based institutions or government institutions, the standard applies to both of them.

Mr. Chairman, those are the achievements of the Council and the list is fairly comprehensive. The number one key issue is the Council is mandated to register all the facilities that care for senior citizens in this country. So, we now have 10 that are registered and are listed there.

These are the achievements, projects that the Ministry funded for improvements to these facilities from the grant of \$200,000 that has been given every year by the Government to these institutions:

- Father Law Home
- Vincent House
- Home of Compassion
- Pearce Home
- Ba Senior Citizens Centre
- Housing Assistance Relief Trust
- Fiji Council of Social Services

It is not much, but it is something that does help. It is something that contributes to the other support that has been given from the other agencies, and also from the philanthropic organisations and corporate organisations.

Those are the projects for 2015. At the moment, it is the interim period, the Council is basically within the Ministry. The vision is that, it has to be independent, they have to find a home, have to find an office with a proper secretariat to maintain this independent role and pursue the role of the Council as justified in the Decree itself.

These are the pursued projects for this year:

- Greater awareness in partnership.

- NCOP Structure not established.
- Interim measures – under the Director for Social Welfare.
- Looking at budget increase in 2016.
- Looking at activities based on the Strategic Plan.

There is a now a sense that we are now having a close look at senior citizens now in the Government in discussion with the Ministry of Health to move these facilities from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services into the Ministry in 2016. So, we have to prepare ourselves and look at the smarter way to ensure that these facilities are actually taken on board in a more friendly, sustainable and continued manageable because there are many big issues there, they are not just homes but they are basically caring for the mentally challenged and people with all sorts of illnesses. So, it is not really the home for the person. It is like a mini hospital within a home.

We just thought that we just brief the Committee today on some of the initiatives that we are pursuing now:

Child Help Line Initiative which was established with a cost of \$200,000. It is a first facility for Fiji. It is a line internationally with existing facilities abroad but it is only the facility within the South Pacific. Basically, it is for counselling, providing information and it is an avenue where a child could report, professionals can report or even parents can seek counselling. So it is not just for children but for parents as well.

With regard to hits from January this year, there were some prank callers and some genuine cases, but the prank callers, once we identify the prank callers, those are pursued with the vendor, MSP, in co-operation with the Ministry. So, this is the existing mechanism whereby we respond to callers who do utilise this line. It is a free call line, it is available right throughout Fiji and it is a collaboration between the three telecommunication companies - Telecom, Digicel and Vodafone. So, as long as the child is near a phone, he/she are able to access this facility and it is a free call whether it is from a mobile, easytel or from your landline.

Those are some of the other new projects. We are now looking at women shelters for victims of domestic violence. We do not have that facility right now and there is a need because of the rising cases of domestic violence and we need to take care of them in the immediate phase before we could find a proper home or they return back to their family in that area.

We are now looking at facilities which are areas that we do not have at the moment, and we need to take care of them because otherwise, they will crowd our streets as it is happening now. These are based on the profiling work that we did with the beggars where we found that most of them are mentally challenged, some of them are homeless and also disabled. So, we need to take care of them and the solution would be a residential facility for them.

The other thing is mainstreaming; we care for senior citizens in public services, and one of them is mainstreaming them into bus facilities, which has been launched last week. So, now, the Fiji Bus Operations has allocated the first five rows have actually reserved as priority seating for the elderly, the disabled and even the expectant mothers. We just wanted to bring back the value of respecting our older people, the women, the disabled and those who are expectants.

The other area we are looking at now is mainstreaming this into banks, that they have a priority queue there in the bank and also within hospitals when they come in for outpatient visitations, if they could be given a priority lane in there for them to be attended earlier too, likewise for school children in that regard. I think that will be a big breakthrough, to show the rest of the world, that we are very serious when we talk about the welfare and the numerous support that we do give.

It is quite well known, based on the international evidence, that here is a growing number of older people right throughout the world and that includes Fiji, and we know that as years go by, more people are ageing and I think people are living longer, and that we should brace ourselves to look after for the care and support for people who are senior citizens of the land.

One of the programmes that we have taken to address high risk communities with violence against women and children was to take them on, on a programme called the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community and we have a set targets. We are looking at 32 in 2015. It is a very community-based, community-owned, community-managed and community-sustained programme.

It is a ten-phase programme and costs the Government about \$6,000 from Phase 1 to Phase 10. It basically has certified phases all throughout but in the end, there is a phase of declaration where they are given the status that they eliminate violence from the community. We know that when this programme was initiated, there was a lack of monitoring and evaluation for declared communities. So, this year, we are now taking a scope of work to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and success of the communities that have been declared, just to ascertain the gaps, the strengths and areas of improvement in the programme that has been there all the years. We do not want to run a “business as usual” approach, but we always keep a very eagle eye that there are areas that we need to improve.

The other initiative is the Social Pension Scheme for the elderly who are 70 years old, has been reduced to 68 years.

The other thing is the Operation Loloma which basically started off with the beggar, but it was actually intended for the social ills within the municipalities. So, we are looking at glue sniffing, prostitution, child trafficking and child labour, child pornography and all the various ills that operate like the methylated spirit but the beggar was the initial start. We have actually developed a model for Suva, and we have declared to adopt that model to be used in other facilities whilst they are up and running. We call it “Operation Loloma” because that was the initial name for it.

In regards to Social Work, it has always been in the Department’s core responsibilities not only to promote economic equality for the disadvantage but also to promote social wellbeing and empowerment and one of the key areas that we are looking at right now, Mr. Chairman, Sir, is actually to graduate people out of the Social Welfare Scheme. It is a key challenge because we are dealing with people who have been here for generations, people who are so dependent on the free handouts, and people who do not have the self-reliance mindsets, and that is quite a challenge right now to us.

We now have moved on from what it was and our new initiative now is that, they come in and they will be given a three-year mandate. No one is given a lifetime support for social welfare, and we are now looking at all those who are able-bodied, except for those who are disabled and those who are really in poverty and should remain in the scheme. We basically want to promote people helping themselves, finding opportunities for better lives to saturate the SME market because I think it is a good avenue to contribute to the national economy. When you look at the SME market in Fiji compared to other countries, we are still in a big deficit compared to these big countries.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, that is a very brief presentation on our work and we stand ready to answer questions from the Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- On behalf of the Committee Members, I would like to thank you PS and your team for a well presented presentation. I will now invite honourable Members if they have any questions, they may do so.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Mr. Chairman, can we firstly turn to page 17 of the Report. PS, can you clarify the tables to us in more simple terms?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Chairman, these are the shortfalls during those particular periods based on the allocation given to us.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, first of all, I would like to say to the team; “thank you” for your presentation and as mentioned, it is a ministry that I have a lot of interest in because of their areas of responsibilities. If we are to look at the children, is it now called the Department of Children, Rupeni?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, Madam, it is now called the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Unfortunately, we still maintain the name “social welfare” because our legislation has not changed. So, in the Juveniles Act, which is with the SG’s Office, it still refers to the Director of Social Welfare and that is why we have still maintained it.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Then hopefully, you will be able to synchronise it at a later time, but my point of interest is; are there any programmes or how are we looking at addressing our children we come into our Homes, and they have to leave because they have reached the age of 18 years?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Yes, that is one of the challenges that we face. At the moment, we are trying to encourage foster caring, especially for those children who come in at a very young age so we encourage foster parenting and then adoption. However, for those who are already in the

system that most probably will not be adopted because of their age because most applicants normally prefer those who are very young. So, for these children, we try and work with NGOs. Some still have their parents but unfortunately, some of the parents have reneged their responsibility and they do not come in or not even visiting them. So, we work with NGOs and we are pleased to see that some of the NGOs – faith based organisations that are willing to take these children and not only to work with them in the Homes, but also for aftercare planning. As you have mentioned, yes, this is one of the challenges that we face, especially in placing these children when they reach the age of 18.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Just further to that, this morning we heard the presentation from the Ministry of Education on Technical College and I understand that they have free programmes. I just want to highlight that issue that there is this programme available with the Ministry of Education in their upcoming institutions whereby you could link up those children from the Homes.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Yes, Madam, we do. We currently have some of our boys at the Juveniles Centre, who are schooling in schools that offer technical training because of their academic inability. We have started with the Boys Centre and now we are looking at putting some of our children in the Homes.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Just on the Department of Women, I know that budget had always been an issue and it is still our issue. Government has not always been looking at the Department of Women through a generous eye lenses but I note that you have mentioned women shelter, so I am just wondering how you are going to fund this?

Secondly, I note the expansion of the ZTVFC, and I am just wondering if a report will be tabled in Parliament on this in terms of its evaluation, particularly because there is still a continuous rise in violence against women and children and may be requesting if the FWCC Report could be tabled in Parliament, which I believe may be good to look at those recommendations. I think this report was in 2013. I had earlier requested the Minister in one of her sessions in Parliament if this report could be tabled, so that this Committee could look at the recommendations.

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Chairman, the issue about violence against women, children and girls is a very hot issue and to us, it is like a priority – day in, day out, every hour and we are now looking at the urgency when you are looking at the responses because from our own experience, we feel that the response given to victims of domestic violence are not regarded as being urgent. I think we need to promote that this be given a state of urgency so that women are basically not disadvantaged right from the word go in that setting. We have been bombarded to come and assist in that regard, and whether it is a crime of a different nature, the priority given by the law enforcement is very different. To us, it is something we felt is not right, and we would certainly see that women are given the immediate response in the very immediate phase.

With regard to women shelter, we have worked within basically to convert one of our existing institutions into one before the end of the year, and the way forward would be to

outsource it to faith based organisations in terms of daily supervision and also in terms of management. However, the Ministry will come into oversight the running of the facility, to ensure that it meets up to the expectation, that it will provide immediate shelter to the women in times of their needs and there are effective mechanisms put in place for the exits of the victims of domestic violence.

We are working very closely with one of our key agency – Homes of Hope in this regard, to look at the shelter for women and also for an upcoming issue is CSAC (Commercial Sex Against Children) which we feel is brewing, and is something that we need to take it by the horn.

MR. A.T. VADEI.- Mr. Chairman, sexual abuses as reflected in your Report is on the rise. Considering those information, what are your proposals in order to arrest those problems because just lately, a nine year old student was a victim of that. So, maybe the holistic approach to this need to be addressed or what are you planning to undertake?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Mr. Chairman, the increase in child sexual abuse, at the moment, we have five officers who are doing awareness ...There is this programme which we are working together with UNICEF which is called “Children are Gift from God” and this programme has been done nationwide. In fact, there is awareness conducted in communities and this has been going on for the last couple of years.

Yes, there is a need for a holistic approach from this social ill because it is an issue that affects all of us, so we are trying our best to work together, especially with the churches and religious organisations because of the influence that they have, especially in awareness programmes.

Likewise, in the schools, our hotline is one of the initiatives that we come up with so that children will be able to raise issues with us. One of the reasons, I believe, in the increase of the figures is that, there is awareness and people are now reporting those cases. The sad part is that, as we come across in our experiences that a good number of those cases are coming from within the family and the perpetrators are significant adults within those families, and that is the greatest challenge that we have.

So, we are going back to strengthening family institutions and one of the things that we are doing now is to take a paper to Parliament for Cabinet to endorse that there should be recognition of family institution – programmes are put up to highlight the importance and the need to strengthen our family institutions. So, those are some of the things that we are working on and as you have mentioned, that we will need not just the work of the Ministry but a holistic approach from all members of the community.

DR. J. KOROIVUETI. – Just to add on that, Mr. Chairman, we had looked at the social landscape in Fiji which has changed over the last years, and the pressure on our children and pressure on families are very different. Different sets of pressures are operating right now, and the key areas that we need to holistically approach is through marital life, family life, family values and also parenting. Often, we feel that children are often blamed and even the parents need to be assisted on how to bring up their children. These are key areas that need to be addressed.

The issue about discipline which is basically a national issue, we really need to look at some programmes to instil discipline into this generation because we feel that indiscipline is somewhat very well remarked in different sectors. This is the approach, as we have said, we cannot be just responding to the epidemic that we have right now but we need to take more preventative measures and we think the holistic is the way to go, knowing how functional the faith-based organisations operate within the society and we have very well institutionalised faith-based organisations who, we feel are willing to come on board and address these other bigger national problems.

HON. A.T. VADEL.- Mr. Chairman, what I am worried about is the urbanisation and globalisation we are faced with right now. That is my main worry because children will be leaving their parents, for example, those from the rural and maritime zones and are staying with family members in urban centres. Most of the targeted victims are mostly the ones from the rural and maritime areas. So, what sort of preventative measures to address such problems?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, on social media, the effects are so vast and none of us can arrest it. The only thing we can do is to build up a resilient population to cushion its effects. Sometimes we feel for parents because they are not computer-literate and they are not into social media, and they lack that knowledge/skills to actually advise their children or to properly mentor their children on this. They just lack it, and I think that is why we are coming in about parenting in these changing social times.

Now, the issue about children being left to the mercy of distant relatives in the urban areas is a real issue. In fact, quite a number of these cases do arise from there and this is why we said; the family life. The other thing I did not mention here, Mr. Chairman, and I think is the big battle that Fiji will go through is on gender and gender issue is a battle that we have today because it has been very archaic. The bailing system that has been there over the years and managers and leaders now will really need to go through that. In fact, we now say that violence against women and children is a symptom of gender inequality. That is what it is, so unless we address gender, then we should be able to take care of that. So, gender with holistic partnerships and approach towards pre-marital family life and all those, I think should be able to tackle that.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on the awareness officers provided by the Ministry. Actually, I always have a feeling that there is not enough awareness on the services provided by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation because quite a number of times when we visit communities, what I found is that, they do not know about the pension scheme, they do not know about the food voucher. So, I am wondering what are you doing in regards to these programmes?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you very much for your question. That is why I said at the beginning that we are very pretty thin on the ground. So, if we rely on that mechanism, then obviously the awareness would not be more effective. But we now have a great opportunity this year where there is a platform whereby we can enhance information sharing to the community at large.

We have partnered with UNDP through the Government of Japan through a project called REACH. REACH basically is to enhance our service delivery to communities that are disadvantaged, going into the rural communities. The platform to do this is a very hi-tech mobile bus, not the ordinary bus and we have actually had partnership with the Legal Aid Commission. So, we will be taking the services of the social sector and also with the Justice, also with the Government agencies, and even Department of Women and Children, right into the communities.

Also, the issue about mobile messaging on public transportation, it is a very big one that we will come out very strongly because I think this is a more efficient way to reach people because people are always travelling and people access some form of travelling one way or the other. So, these buses will be in a platform whereby we will communicate the services that are available to us, apart from the roadshows that have been done by the Government, even at the Government centres sharing information but I do understand that we need to work in a bigger way, to ensure that information about the service done by the Ministry is effectively communicated to people.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- Does the Department of Social Welfare have ever think of having thought of putting out these awareness messages or email messages on mobile phones so that it does flicks up any time whenever a person is using a mobile, he/she may receive this kind of messages?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, Madam, we know that the communication probably ever changes and in a ministry like this, it is essential and it is the expertise that we do not have. So, we have actually expressed our interest. We need a person with the background in anthropology to be obviously in social marketing. We need it not only for that, but we are dealing with change behaviour towards women, children, older persons, so it is a big scale and we want to do it in a more progressive way.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Perhaps, I would like to add to the discussion and always, I take my hat off on the staff of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and as the Permanent Secretary had allude that they are only thin on the ground, and I hope the Government will adequately resource the Ministry.

Having said that, I am interested to know whether the review on the FNCDP Act has been completed and if it has, whether Fiji has ratified the Convention on Disabled Persons?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Chairman, yes, Fiji has actually completed the review, we have actually went on to develop the new Decree and has gone through several rounds of revisions. The status quo right now is, it is with the Solicitor General's Office and the next phase would be to present it to Cabinet, it is a Discussion Paper for endorsement, before it proceeds to Parliament. We have ratified the Convention.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- PS, if you could elaborate more on the graduation programme. How many people have graduated?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- The graduation programme includes the funding for recipients. At the moment, we have graduated about 140 recipients. A budget of \$500,000 was given to us, part of that budget is the funding of the ICP projects. These are recipients who are abled bodied persons and projects include agricultural projects, canteens, and small business projects.

At the moment, we have partnership with NCSMED who conducts training for us. Previously, the Ministry implemented those projects and in 2010, there was an audit report that highlighted the discrepancies because of the amount of work that was required. Again, when recipients were not trained, like when the funds were given it was misused and there were no projects when they came to audit it. So, with that, we had an agreement with NCSMED to conduct training on how to run a business, training on banking and proposal development. So, they went through the phase of training and once they are trained, they are given these funds and they are monitored by NCSMED and also officers.

It is quite a slow process because the fact that they are not given the total amount, they are given in phases so once they acquit the first part of the money given to them, then they are given the second phase. So, that is the process now but we are looking at how we could try and work out other avenues where we could try and hasten the pace. Maybe, looking at other partners because that is one of our concerns because you will understand that now, a lot of the cases are coming in and there is unnecessary budget and skills for us to work with them in there. So unless we remove them, those who are not ready to be removed will continue to clog the system and then will deprive all those people who are genuinely supposed to be in the system. That is one of the things that we are looking at and we are planning on how we are going to do and improve that in the coming years.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- So, when you say 140 have graduated, that means they are taken off the system?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Yes, they are taken off the system. Once we give them the assistance, we give them a grace period of about three to six months, to ensure that they are able to sustain themselves and then we remove them from our books.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- I just heard about the new initiatives and residential facilities for the mentally challenged and physically disabled. I was talking to honourable Radrodro this morning that I had visited yesterday, the Board of Visitors Senior Citizens Home and St. Giles Hospital. They face this challenge that once the patients are treated, the family members they do not want to take ownership. They do not want to take them back home. So, what happens is, from St. Giles, they are transferred to Senior Citizens Home and there is a risk there. I mean, both the institutes are actually full with people. We are talking about residential facilities, how far have you progressed with that?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- We now have good offers on the land and we are now working together with colleagues from the mental health hospital on the design scope for the mental health facility. In fact, we have two good land offers right now that we are pursuing legally, to get clearance so that they could be leased for humanitarian purposes.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- I also heard the National Council for Older Persons (NCOP). They do regulate these institutes, inclusive of Senior Citizens Home. So, where does the Senior Citizens Home actually come under right now?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- They are under the Ministry of Health right now.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- Yes, but the NCOP, are they the regulating body?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, they are the regulating body, at the moment, they are housed within our Ministry but their functions are very different, but they are given the mandate to look after all the facilities which include the State facilities, plus the ones that are being run by the other faith-based organisations.

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you so much, Sir.

Another question is on the pregnant mothers, they get this pregnancy allowance. Can you elaborate on that? How many children do they get before this is stopped?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- This is for their first three. This is done in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, that is where they are identified and we take over the bit to actually process it and actually provide for them. We find that the list is actually provided from the Ministry of Health and even the awareness is also done by all the facilities. It is only given to rural pregnant women and there is a set listing approved by Cabinet for which we look at. We have modified it because we do know that some women from rural areas prefer to come to urban centres. That one obviously will still be within the ...

HON. V. BHATNAGAR.- Is check in place to see that this is not misused in between, I mean, they are rightfully given to the people who should get it or how is that managed?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Madam, the process is that, they will have to register with the health centre or nursing stations where they are from. Once they are registered, there is a form that they fill and it is filled by the health workers in stations and that is the form that is sent to us. We work on the forms that are provided to us and the information that are provided in the forms.

Our role in this programme is to create the vouchers and distribute them to health centres, and they do the distribution to their recipients.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I have another question to the PS, Mr. Chairman. So, what is that project for, population incentive boost?

DR. J. KOROIVUETA.- No, the programme is to actually promote early booking of pregnant women from rural areas in alliance to the MDGs 4 and 5, and also for promotion of nutrition for the lactating/pregnant women. It is a form of poverty alleviation as well.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Through you Mr. Chairman, this is not in regards to the Report but this was done last year, the Women's Expo. The traditional artefacts and also products that are produced during the Expo, what I am worried about is the benchmarking. I believe there are a lot of non-genuine products around like some of the virgin oil. For the next Expo, are you

prepared for the benchmarking so that you have confidence in their products and also, they can sustain the market rather than flooding the market with non-genuine products and we might lose the art of doing things in a cultural and traditional way?

DR. J. KOROI VUETI.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Member has already stated correctly, in fact, the theme this year is; “Connecting Women to the Market and Making it Happen”. We have changed our stance from last year.

Last year, the platform was like learning to us. We got in 2,000 women for the first time in a huge expo, to basically display what they could produce – handicrafts, food crafts and other crafts for that matter. This year, we have changed to be quality focussed, looking at creativity, innovative designs and benchmarking with the Fiji Arts Council which are the only professional evaluators on the programme, and promoting Fiji Made designs, as well as promoting things for the tourism market because last year, it was not tailor-made to the tourism market.

We are putting the competition setting for this year so for women groups, they have to pass the test before we could fund them to come to the Show. The very last one will be next week; we have done it now to all the Divisions where all the women are basically coming to display their products and they are judged in there through a high competitive rating by the Fiji Arts Council, then they are given the pass to come over. So, not all women’s groups in Fiji will come but only those who have been rated as being of quality and value or value adding products that will now come to this year’s Expo.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, we had to do that because the return from last year’s investment was low, and we had to ensure that the Government investment this year, that we have a good return on investment. Also, we are actually promoting women business entrepreneurs, and actually promoting them to market so this is sustainability of the business for that matter because we do know that women are the best agents of change. When there is an entrepreneur in the family, they are looking after about four or five; certainly it can make a big difference on the family welfare.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, I would like to take this time to thank the PS and his Team for coming this afternoon. I must commend you and thank you for your well-presented submission and we had the opportunity to better understand the role and activities of your Ministry. Once again, on behalf of the Committee, thank you very much.

The Committee meeting adjourned at 1.05 p.m.