



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2017 - 2018 Annual Report



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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Chairperson

Hon. Viam Pillay MP

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Hon. George Vegnathan MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Alipate Nagata MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Salote Radrodro MP

Opposition Member



Member

Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu MP

Opposition Member

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 2017 – 2018.

This review was undertaken 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 committee first met to deliberate in April and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report.

In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the committee accepted a written response from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in lieu of a face-to-face hearing. Following our deliberations on its written response, we wrote to the Ministry requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, the committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in August.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Ms Jennifer Poole, and her staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues namely: Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Alipate Nagata, Hon. Salote Radrodro and Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions during the committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all members of this august House to take note of the Report.



Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for 2017 – 2018 and recommends that the House take note of its report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2017 - 2018 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation was tabled in Parliament during the February 2020 meeting and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its scrutiny.

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

Furthermore, 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.*”

1.1 Committee Procedure

We first met in April to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the 2017 - 2018 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation which was sent to the Ministry for its response.

Following our deliberations on its written response, we again wrote to the Ministry requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, we compiled our findings on the Annual Report and subsequently endorsed it in August.

We received written and supplementary responses from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for this annual review. They are available on the Parliament website, at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is the government agency that administers services and programs that is aligned to the care and protection of children, provision of income support to families to address poverty, provide policy intervention for older persons, provide policy intervention for persons with disabilities and address gender equality and empowerment of women.

3.0 COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS AND AREAS OF CONCERN

3.1 Implementation of the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community National Program

The Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community National Program is a widely successful program implemented by the Ministry. Through this program, communities that were in remote locations or difficult to reach were visited and made aware of the need to become actively involved in ending violence against women and girls and reporting incidents. Stakeholders were able to reach rural communities with the messages; and communities were able to access the health and social services and information provided by stakeholders due to the socio-economic nature of the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community implementation plan. This includes access to information on Gender Based Violence, access to justice, information to empower people to report cases of Gender Based Violence to relevant authority and share information.

We note that the communities were part of the decision making in committing to endeavor and undertake the plan program for the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community implementation.

Some of the challenges associated with the implementation of this programme is as follows:

- Competing community priorities which prolonged the programme implementation;
- Lack of commitment from communities especially in preventing violence. Often the Government programme was seen as providing awareness and responding to cases of gender based violence happening at community level rather than building systems to prevent violence against women and girls; and
- Full commitment of community members to the programme especially during training sessions.

Recommendations

1. That the Ministry continue to engage all stakeholders at the grassroots levels to provide awareness and trainings on gender based violence.
2. That the Ministry organise seminars and workshops with religious and community leaders.

3.2 Addressing Violence against Women and Children in Fiji

The Ministry informed us that a new approach to addressing violence against women and children is the development of the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls because the root cause of violence is gender inequality. The Ministry is taking a whole of government, whole of population, evidence based, measurable, inclusive and funded five year plan with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts. The National action Plan is envisioned to include key settings for prevention, an explanations on why violence against women happen in Fiji, key strategies to prevent violence against women, stakeholders roles and responsibilities, costed implementation plan, and the national communication strategy.

Recommendation

1. That the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls be developed and implemented urgently.

3.3 Need for Development of a Database of Sex Workers in Fiji

We note that the Ministry does not maintain a database of sex workers in Fiji. We were informed that this is an under-researched area for the National Women's Machinery and the Ministry is looking to work in partnership with stakeholders to develop this.

Recommendation

1. That the Ministry strengthen its partnership with various Non-Government Organisations and Civil Society Organisations and key Government agencies to provide baseline information.

3.4 Construction of the Barefoot College in Vanua Levu

We questioned the Ministry on the progress made in the construction of the Barefoot College. It informed us that in the 28/05/21 – 07/06/21 period report of the Sambhu Lal Construction Company, the Ministry's desk office had estimated a 75% completion of the whole project based on the analysis of the latest report and the April report. The report currently confirms a 90%

completion of joinery and framing work. This is taking into consideration the undertaking of major project work which includes the relocation of the Nadogo Women's Resource Centre.

Recommendation

1. That the Ministry closely monitor the progress of the project in consultation with the Construction and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Economy to ensure its timely completion.

4.0 GENDER ANALYSIS

Standing Order 110(2) provides that where a committee conducts an activity, the committee shall ensure that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.

We note that the various programmes of the Ministry through its Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women, and Poverty Monitoring Unit are administered equally to women and men. These programmes are available to all those who meet the necessary requirements and there is no discrimination based on the gender of recipients.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2017-2018 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. As part of its review process, the committee received written and supplementary responses from the Ministry.

In this review report, the committee has highlighted various areas that need to be strengthened by the Ministry and relevant recommendations have been made for the resolution of issues.

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 Vegnathan
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Alipate Nagata
(Member)



Hon. Salote Radrodoro
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)

APPENDIX

Published written evidence

Written evidence and supplementary information was received from the Ministry of Women, Children and 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/>