

Labasa Town Council

LABASA TOWN COUNCIL

CIVIC CENTRE BUILDING

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IN REPLY Please Quote:
OUR REF:11/1

30th March, 2022

The Chairperson

Standing Committee of Social Affairs
Parliament of The Republic of Fiji
PO Box 2352
Government Buildings
SUVA

Attention: Hon. Viam Pillay

Dear Sir,

**Re: Clarifications requested on Issues in Relation to Labasa Town Council 2004 – 2017
Annual Reports**

Reference is made to your letter dated 21st March 2022 on the above subject matter.

As requested, our responses are as follows:

1. Works undertaken by Council to address issues of widespread flooding in Labasa & Strategy to improve the town drainage and reduce flooding?

- To address the situation on hand, Council is carrying out cleaning and flushing of the underground culverts and open-storm water drainage system within the main CBD area.
- We have also summarily carried out and completed major upgrading to the existing storm-water drainage system at the following locations: along Sarosaro Lane, off-Ritova Street and adjoining Galaxy Hotel off- Prasad place leading to Nasekula Creek, behind Labasa College Girls Hostel off-Park Street and Damanu Street, behind Catholic Church & Holy Family School off- James Madhavan & Sarwan Singh Street, Nakoro Street at Delailabasa and within Covata, Tuatua & Naodamu Housing area. Council will continue with the upgrading works as per our budgetary allocations.
- Most of the underground storm water culvert laid by PWD within the main CBD area in the late 1970's to collect surface and storm water discharge have undersize culverts and is one of the contributing factors causing flash- flooding in town. Note back in the 1970's there were fewer concrete footpaths and sealed roads with less permanent structures, hence there were more natural ground surface area contact for water percolation.

- Climate change is also one of the contributing factors causing flooding of our Town due to the two major Rivers [Labasa & Qawa] flowing through the town. During spring tides, it has been observed that the river waters virtually impede any flow from the drains.
- The estuaries of Labasa, Qawa & Wailevu rivers are heavily silted and needs seabed dredging.
- Illegal logging activities and irresponsible tilling of land up Korotari, Qawa and Wailevu River is also one of the contributing factors causing heavy siltation of the rivers contributing to flooding of the Town especially during a cyclone. Note Labasa Town is located within a 'flood-prone area' etc.
- Labasa & Qawa Rivers including Nasekula Creek are heavily silted and needs to be dredged. Last dredging works were commissioned after TC Ami in 2003 but unfortunately was decommissioned in 2017 by the Ministry responsible. However, following TC Ana in January of 2021 Council has made several requests with Ministry of Waterways to re-commission dredging works for Labasa!
- Council is planning to compile a comprehensive Master Drainage Plans with assistance from the Director of Town & Country Planning and other stakeholders involved.
- Restoration of eroding riverbanks by planting more 'vativa grass' to reduce soil erosion.

2. Status of Subrail Park.

- Major upgrading works to the pavilions have been carried out. Routine repair and maintenance works are continuing. Subrail Park currently is fully utilized for sports after Covid restrictions were relaxed.

3. Plans to relocate or develop the Labasa market and Public Park?

- Council in-consultation with the Hon. Minister of Local Government had invited EOI in February of 2022 to engage Architects to compile concept design and hold consultations based on the TOR compiled for the new Market to be built at Naiyaca and also major upgrading of the Botanical Garden Park. Council in consultation with Ministry of Local Government has appointed a working committee to screen, shortlist and interview the Architects to proceed with the TOR involved. We are expecting to finalize the appointment of the Architect by no later than April of 2022.
- Council recently was able to secure proper leases over the open space and parks from I'TLTB at Nalovolailai, Delailabasa, Tuatua and Covata Subdivision. Council will proceed to upgrade these parks. Note, a Multi-purpose Court has been constructed by Council at Naodamu open space. Plans are in place in partnership with Ministry of Youth & Sports to construct a new Multi-purpose Court at Tuatua Open Space soon since we have proper leases now.

4. Plans to upgrade or do maintenance to the food selling area next to the library?

- Routine maintenance and upgrading works are carried out by our Works Section. Additional standpipes, bins with new seating benches and table have been

provided by Council behind the library next to the food shelter for customers and public to enjoy their meal and for leisure.

5. Major challenges encountered by the Council?

- Natural Disasters e.g., Cyclone and floodings
- Profiling, as some defaulting ratepayers are residing overseas
- Property transfer without notifying Council- no transfer notices given to Council
- Council to adopt to SME's according to the current IFRS

6. Breakdown information from 2004 to 2017:

- **Number of ratepayers**

2004	1018
2005	1018
2006	1018
2007	1018
2008	1018
2009	1018
2010	1379
2011	1379
2012	1379
2013	1379
2014	1379
2015	1379
2016	1408
2017	1408

- **Rates collected for each year (monetary value);**

Years	Rates Collected
2004	\$329,655.00
2005	\$273,375.00
2006	\$405,563.00
2007	\$405,703.00
2008	\$401,521.00
2009	\$392,244.00
2010	\$587,988.00
2011	\$548,177.00
2012	\$689,537.00
2013	\$699,924.00
2014	\$822,881.00
2015	\$527,674.0
2016	\$781,131.00
2017	\$876,008.00

- *On property rental arrears for each year from 2004 to 2017 (Provide the monetary value)*

Note, there were no major issues relating to property rents from 2004 to 2017.

- *Total rate arrears up until the present time.*
\$1,841,845.33 – note this also includes some of the informal settlements located within Vatia Ward at Batanikama.

a. What are the causes of the accumulation of rental arrears?

Note, we had no major issues relating to accumulation of rental arrears, however on accumulation of rates in arrears, the following contributing factors played a part:

- Major flooding had a devastating impact following TC Ami in 2003 and TC Winston in 2016 whereby business houses and ratepayers were reeling behind to get back to their normal lives/business.
- Also, there was another flooding in 2009 which also had an impact.
- Ratepayer's profiling- certain defaulting ratepayers are residing overseas and are not honoring their debts.
- Proper postal or mailing addresses sometimes are not disclosed when properties are transferred to a third party.

b. What are challenges faced in the collection of rental arrears and their method(s) of collection.

- It was noted, that some tenants only found difficulties in keeping up with their rent during the aftermath of any natural disasters
- They made arrangements with the Council to clear debts within a certain period of time.

c. Has the Council conducted a survey or research on the reasons for non-payment or delayed payment of town rates?

- Community meetings were conducted within the four wards to create awareness however no in-depth research were conducted on why ratepayers delayed in paying up their town rates though services were not compromised by Council. Council continued with its outreach programs and awareness. It seems to become a 'culture' for some defaulting ratepayers to delay with their payments and requires urgent review of the Local Government Act.

d. What is the Council's plan to address this issue and what punitive and non- punitive measures are taken against non- compliant rates payers?

Non – Punitive actions

- Rate payers to have payment arrangements done through agreement
- Friendly payment reminder
- Overdue payment reminder

- Final notice
- Direct contact

Punitive measures

- Formal letter of demand
- Winding up notices served to companies
- Attornment of lease
- Hiring of bailiffs to recover debts
- Small Claim Tribunal

c. How is the non-collection of full town rates impacting the service delivery of the Town Council?

- Stretches Council resources to continue with its normal day to day business in serving the ratepayers and providing the services.
- Limits Council budgetary allocations to carry our community projects such as upgrading & beautification of parks/open space, upgrading to drainage systems, installation of new street lights with street furniture's, etc.

f. Provide details of vacant lots in the municipality.

	Name	Assessment Number	Area	Lot
1	SATMA WATI KUMAR	04-00973-000-3	COVATA SUB	LOT 4 SO3336
2	NACANIELI ABELE	04-00952-000-2	COVATA SUB	LOT 19 SO 3339
3	TINFULAGI JIONE	04-00859-000-2	COVATA SUB	LOT 3 SO3341
4	PRANIAPPA REDDY F/N SUBRAMAIN	04-00947-000-7	COVATA SUB	LOT 14 SO 3339
5	NAPOLIONI NASEMIRA	04-00872-000-6	COVATA SUB	LOT 8 SO 3340
6	RISHI RAM	04-00885-000-8	COVATA SUB	LOT 21 SO 3340
7	SALEND KUMAR	04-00862-000-3	COVATA SUB	LOT 5 SO3341
8	TIRANI ULUINAKAUVADRA	04-00976-000-6	COVATA SUB	LOT 7 SO3336
9	LITIA MASILAGO & ALIPATE DAVELEVU	04-00955-000-5	COVATA SUB	LOT 16 SO 3338
10	BENJAMIN LEE & STEPHANIE CHANELLE DUNN	04-00548-000-9	DELILABASA SUB DIVISION	LOT 9 SO1864
11	KOLINIO SIGANISUCU MUSUDROKA & KOTOBALAVU R M	04-00543-000-4	DELILABASA SUB DIVISION	LOT 14 SO1864
12	SANJAY SINGH & ROMIKA NAND	04-00547-000-2	DELILABASA SUB DIVISION	LOT 10 SO1864
13	JONE WAINIDREKE	04-00538-000-6	DELILABASA SUB DIVISION	LOT 19 SO1864
14	VILISONI TAKAYAWA TAMANI	04-00545-000-8	DELILABASA SUB DIVISION	LOT 12 SO1864
15	UDHAN SINGH F/N GURBACHAN SINGH	04-00632-000-3	NASEKULA DRIVE	NL16103 LOT 12 M2868
16	HARAK NARAYAN F/N SHIU TAHAL	04-00633-000-0	NASEKULA DRIVE	NL16538 LOT 11 M2868

17	MOHAMMAD HUSSAIN F/N IMAM BUKSH(NLTB)	04-00637-000-8	NASEKULA DRIVE	NL16101 LOT 7 M2868
18	AMRIT PRASAD RAM F/N GANESH RAM(NLTB)	04-00638-000-5	NASEKULA DRIVE	NL16139 LOT 6 M2868
19	TIMOCI VUAKANISAKEA & LUSIANA SAGAVAKI.V.	04-00688-000-0	NASEKULA DRIVE	NL1612 LOT 4 M2869
20	ILAITIA DAUCAKAMANA	02-00105-017-6	SALUSALU STREET	LOT 1 T1515
21	PATRICK MICHAEL	01-00412-082-0	BHUJAWAN STREET	LOT 30 DP4883
22	SANJU REDDY	03-00427-003-9	NAIYACA SUB DIVISION	LOT 2 SO 3820

7. Appointment of the Labasa Special Administrator in 2019:

- a. What improvements have been brought about in the collection of arrears by the Town Labasa Council? Provide relevant statistics.
 - Notifying legal firms to obtain clearance on rates when transferring properties to a third party.
 - Updating ratepayers profiling- 1380 /1405
 - Issuing of winding up notices to business firms owing rates- 1
 - Ratepayers' meetings- minimum four meetings per annum
 - Appointing a new Manager Finance and Rates Officer
 - Entering into a MOU with I'TLTB to ensure lessees settle rates before consent to transfer is granted.
 - Withholding building permit until rate arrears is fully settled - 12
- b. What measures have been put in place to promptly address the grievances of the ratepayers? How many grievances were recorded from 2004 to date and what were the nature of these complaints?
 - Note, following the appointment of the Special Administrators in 2008, Council started recording grievances from ratepayers from the year 2017 and has recorded a total of 291 grievances. Here is a breakdown:
 - ❖ 2017 – 33
 - ❖ 2018 – 87
 - ❖ 2019 – 91
 - ❖ 2020 – 54
 - ❖ 2021 – 21
 - ❖ 2022 – 5

Majority of these complaints were related to faulty street lights, deteriorating footpaths, stray animals, littering, mosquitos nuisance, drainage issues from neighbours and state of existing access roads.

c. **How have the following services and facilities provided ratepayers in the Labasa municipality been enhanced:**

- **Maintenance of Public Amenities:** Labasa Bus Stand and Labasa Market has gone through major upgrading works that now allows the general public access to safer transportation services together with convenience to daily marketing of fresh goods and vegetables etc. Council maintains and upkeeps the public restrooms located next to the market in good condition and are also up keeping other facilities such as children's recreational facilities and parks, multi-purpose court, tennis court, squash court and fitness center so that the public can take full advantage of these facilities.
- **Rubbish Collection and Grass Cutting:** Council has placed adequate litter bins throughout Labasa Town CBD area including parks and open space, and has also started collecting of household refuse within the 'Extended Areas' of the Council boundaries.
- **Road Maintenance and Drainage:** Upgrading the existing drainage system off- Prasad Place adjoining Galaxy Hotel at Naodamu Housing that eventually discharging into Nasekula Creek. Realignment of Underground Culverts along Sarosaro Lane opposite Hotel Northpole to CDP and continued to Catholic Church Crossing. Upgrading and realignment of existing drainage system off- Nakoro Street at Delailabasa and off- James Madhavan Street & Sarwan Singh Street behind and along Holy Family School and the FSC tramline reserves, upgrading of the drainage system off- Park Street and Damanu Street adjoining Labasa College Girls Hostel and Government Quarters area.

d. **How has service delivery in the following arrears been enhanced?**

- **Health & Hygiene:** Council periodically carried out anti-mosquito spraying twice in a year and awareness is created on public health & hygiene within the communities. Council has an effective team that looks into this and through their frequent visitation and checks they are able to efficiently manage and promote public health & hygiene including sanitation.
- **Security and Safety:** CCTV Cameras have been installed within the Labasa Market premises and security officers are well placed in all the facilities of the Council to ensure security and safety for the general public. CCTV cameras are also installed within the CBD area by the Duavata Crime Committee in partnership with Police. Parking provisions and accessibility for the Disable provided along the pedestrian crossings within the CBD area, market area & Council Civic Centre car parks.
- **Impacts of Climate Change/Environment:** Council promotes compost within the communities i.e., a specific day has been set aside in a week to collect green refuse from residential areas and then it is used to make compost and is sold to communities at a very subsidized cost. Similar initiative is also promoted in Schools through the Clean School Programs. Solar power is slowly replacing EFL power supply for new street lights etc. Riverbank rehabilitation and protect works are peace-meal carried out by Council through its own initiative and includes placing boulders to prevent further

erosion of the river banks behind the Civic Centre Building, planting of mangrove seedlings along the river banks, planting of trees to allow its roots to hold back soil to further soil erosion.

- **Poverty:** Council has at all times considered the under privileged and the people who are living below the poverty line during its policy making. Special consideration is made for the under privileged when seeking assistance to sell their produce to the public. In addition, Council provides space in the market on Saturdays for farmers and vendors coming from the maritime and rural parts of the main Island.
- **Squatter Settlements within Town Boundaries:** Health inspector from both Council and Labasa Health Office carry out visitation of the squatter settlements to ensure compliance and strict measures are taken towards non-compliant residents. Ministry of Lands and District Officers are also involved.
- **Disaster Risk Analysis:** Council staff is present in NDMO North committee and are always engaged with risk management in times of disaster.
- **Gender Mainstreaming:** Council promotes gender equality at its workplace. The Council works closely with the Market Vendors Association that looks into the interest of female market vendors.

e. How has the accountability, transparency and good governance at the Council been strengthened seeing as the Committee is yet to receive outstanding Annual Reports of the Council from 2018 to 2020 with the annual audited financial statements?

- A standard operating procedure was introduced in 2017 and is still adhered to by strengthen its accountability, transparency and good governance when dealing with procurements, human resource and financial matters, i.e., relating to:
 - Purchases & payments
 - Receipts
 - Allowances
 - Employee entitlements
 - Workplace behavior

Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st December 2017.

8. Page 5 of the audited financial statements for year ended 31st December, 2017 issues rectified & internal controls instituted to prevent its reoccurrence:

- Debtors Accumulation – rate profiling was done to trace the ratepayers and issue updated statements and this exercise also assisted in updating the ratepayers' file.
- Council introduced Standing Operation Manual to strengthen its internal control and policies
- In January 2020 a new CEO was appointed for Labasa Town Council and in March 2021 the position was vacant by resignation. The position for CEO was advertised in July 2021 and the Ministry of Local Government is currently working on the recruitment of a new CEO for the Labasa Town Council.

- Monthly Vat payment and reconciliation is done by the Council to avoid arrears in Vat payments and lodgments.
- Monthly annual leaves tracking is emailed to the Council HOD's periodically and leave falling due for the employees are systematically taken without interrupting the Council operations.

9. Internal controls to strengthen market fees collection and reconciliation in order to promote better accountability and transparency?

- Introduction of Tally Sheet system and installation of cameras together with verification of income by the Manager Finance are few control measures put in place by Council. In addition, awareness was also created in the market to the vendors to demand for receipts from Council Market Attendants for any payments made towards stall fees etc.

10. Risk Management Policy, Asset Capitalization Policy & Disaster Recovery Plans/Business Continuity Plans.

- Council has an internal risk management policy and Council will be adapting to a financial manual provided by Ministry of Local government in terms of asset capitalization policy and internal controls.
- As for disaster recovery, Council does have its own data back-up system carried out on a weekly basis and hard-drive is stored in all-weather safe.
- Council has an internal risk management policy and Council is currently using impairment costing for asset management.


11. Current Staff Structure of the Accounts Section & positions substantively filled & qualifications of the Officers.

Position	Name	Qualification
Manager Finance	Karishma Devi	Bachelor of Accounting
Accounts and Payroll Officer	Swastika Seema Chand	Diploma in Business Accounting
Rates office	Nilesh Navin Chand	Diploma in Business Accounting
Cashier	Rozla Devi	Aptec (Certificate in computing)

It is anticipated that the response provided would suffice clarifications requested.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully

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M. F. Ali
Acting Chief Executive Officer

Cc. Special Administrators appointed

**Supplementary Response by the
Labasa Town Council**

LABASA TOWN COUNCIL

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14th April, 2022

The Chairperson

Standing Committee of Social Affairs
Parliament of The Republic of Fiji
PO Box 2352
Government Buildings
SUVA

Attention: Mr. Rupeni Mudunavuku III

Dear Sir,

Re: Supplementary Questions to Written Response - Labasa Town Council 2004 – 2017 Annual Reports

Reference is made to the email communications dated 13/4/22 on the above subject matter.

In responses to the supplementary questions, please be advised as follows:

1. Response to question 1

a) Third bullet point – One of the contributing factors causing flash flooding is the undersized culverts that was laid by PWD back in the 1970s. What action has the Municipal Council taken to address the issue?

- I. Following TC Ami in 2003, Council proceeded by carrying out flushing and cleansing of the underground culverts manually using whatever resources it had including engaging local waste management contractors to flush and bail out silt deposit etc.
- II. Following TC Ana in 2021, Council invited EOI to engage specialised local contractors to carry out jet-cleaning and flushing of the underground storm water culverts using high pressure pumps and vacuum plants. However, due to Covid-19 travel restriction in 2021, contractors who had shown interest could not travel from Viti Levu to Labasa to carry out the scope of works involved.

Since six [6] months had lapsed, Council under its SOP will be re-advertising the EOI before a suitable contractor is engaged to carry out jet-cleaning of the underground culverts using high pressure pumps and flushing of the hotspot

- areas within the main CBD area - Council currently is finalising on the revised scope of works involved after meeting one of the contractors. EOI is expected to be re-advertised in June 2022.

Meanwhile, Council will continue with its normal cleaning and maintenance works to the storm water drainage systems using whatever resources it has.

- III. Council on 25th of March 2019 had written to the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Local Government to secure funds under the 2019/2020 PSIP Budget Submissions that would have enabled the Council to invite and engage suitable Consultants to compile a Master Drainage Plan for the storm water drainage system for Labasa Town – we could not secure necessary allocations.
- IV. Council thereafter on 4th of March 2021 wrote to its Acting Permanent Secretary of Local Government to secure Budget allocations under its 2021/2022 PSIP Capital Expenditures submissions to compile a comprehensive Master Drainage Plan for Labasa Town- we could not secure necessary allocations.

- b) Fifth bullet point – The need for seabed dredging of Labasa, Qawa and Wailevu rivers which are heavily silted. Provide us with the current status of this project. Has this gone through to the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, and if so, enlighten us on the progress made?**

Following TC Ana in 2021, Council had several meetings with the stakeholders to address the flooding problems faced and need for re-commissioning dredging of both the Labasa and Qawa Rivers including the creeks by the Ministry of Waterways.

Council on several occasions had communicated both through emails and through formal letter of requests to the Ministry of Waterways to carry out de-silting and dredging works, Letters were written on the following dates:

- 16th January 2018,
- 21st of May 2018,
- 13th of February 2019,
- 7th February 2020 and thereafter on 26th February 2021

To date we have not received any positive response or feedback from Ministry of Waterways officials on dredging works.

We are anticipating that the Ministry of Waterways will consider re-commission dredging works asap.

2. **What action has been taken by the Council to address the issue of stray dogs wandering in public places and harming people?**

Council has been very closely working together with the Ministry of Agriculture- Animal Health & Production Division by carrying out Dog-Trapping Exercises within the town area.

All stray dogs caught are kept in a special pound before the animal are finally de-sexed by the Senior Veterinary Officer and released.

The exercise will continue followed by awareness to encourage pet owners to confine their animals.

We hope that the response provided above will suffice the supplementary questions raised by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully



M. F. Ali
Acting Chief Executive Officer

Cc. Special Administrators appointed

All correspondence to be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer