

Sigatoka Town Council



SIGATOKA TOWN COUNCIL

small town, BIG 

TAUNI HEWA, YALO VINA

CHOTA SHAHAR, BADA DIL

File Ref: 1.2 | 7.4

31st March, 2022

Hon. Viam Pillay
The Chairperson
Standing Committee on Social Affairs
Parliament of Fiji.
SUVA.

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION ON ISSUES IN RELATION TO THE SIGATOKA TOWN COUNCIL 2005 – 2019 ANNUAL REPORTS

Reference is made to your letter dated 21st March, 2022 in regards to the above subject.

The responses for the query are as follows:

QUESTIONS

1. 2018 Annual Report - Provide a breakdown of how the \$968,826.00 loan from BSP life was utilised. What is the loan repayment term and has the Council been able to make repayments on time? What is the outstanding loan balance?
 - The loan was taken to repay the previous loan that was in Credit Corporation and for Capital projects. Yes, the council is able to make the repayment on time and has been \$7298.00 on a monthly basis; outstanding balance at present is \$789,743.80.
 - The Loan repayment term for Council is 12 years.
 - The previous loan was taken for these projects: the construction of Duabale Road, market extensions (New Wing), Nayawa Footpath, and Road Works around town.
2. What are some of the challenges faced by the Council in meeting its strategic objectives and how is it planning to address these challenges?
 - Due to not having enough revenue, the Council is not able to meet its objectives.
 - The council is now working on its plan to having properties that will boost economic return to the council. These projects includes; the construction of Office Spaces at its vacant property in Lawaqa, Riverside development for cafes, restaurants/bars and kiosks, and Amphitheatre, allocation of new parking spaces at the Tramline. And the construction of a NewMarket and Bus Stand at the Etuba land to accommodate the increase in market vendors and buses.

Sigatoka was proclaimed a town on the 1st of June, 1936.

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3. Inform us of the work the Council has undertaken to address the issue of widespread flooding in Sigatoka town during adverse weather and why despite such measures, flooding is a recurrent problem in Sigatoka town and surrounding areas. Can the Council provide us with a strategy to improve the town drainage and consequently reduce flooding?

- The council has upgraded most of its earth drains to concrete drains, these projects were carried out through the City wide Upgrading Project at Nayawa and the Ministry of Waterways funded projects around town.
- The main reason for the recurrent flooding in the main Town is due to the fact that there's a drainage basin from the rear lots back of St Joan School (*known as Nadjukuyarukia*) that is directly connected to the main drain. When there is a heavy downpour the water runoff from the creek overflows through the main drain causing the storm water backflows into town.

The Sigatoka Town Council, Fiji Roads Authority and the Ministry of Waterways are working on an alternative route to divert storm water drainage from the Market road to the Sigatoka River.

4. Provide more information on the female vendors' accommodation at the Sigatoka market and its capacity. Is the accommodation able to sufficiently cater for all female vendors in need of a lodge and are there plans to expand?

- Sigatoka Market Accommodation has total of 15 single bunk beds, with 20 mattresses and 28 pillows. The accommodation has a capacity to accommodate a total of 30 female market vendors. Hence, an average of 6 -15 female vendors stays in the market accommodation per day.
- The market accommodation can only cater 20 female vendors per day due to the number of mattresses available in the accommodation. However, there are 138 registered and 125 casual female market vendors at Sigatoka Municipal market. As result the market accommodation cannot cater all the female vendors in the accommodation. A contributing factor is that most vendors reside nearby.

5. How is the Council working together with the Land Transport Authority and other relevant agencies to address the issue of traffic congestion within the Sigatoka town boundary?

The Council is working very closely with LTA and Police Department for the control of traffic flow within the Sigatoka Town. This includes the control of illegal operation, illegal or abreast parking, failure to obey traffic signs/ directions and or obstruction of Public Streets.

The council has now allocated more car parking space at the Mission Road tramline so as to minimize traffic flow and abreast parking within the main Central Business District.

Further to these the council is also having discussion with the Land Owning Unit (Mataqali) for the allocation of Bypass roads.

6. Does the Council have a Master Plan in place for Sigatoka town?

The only plan the Council have is based on the councils Strategic Development Plan and Annual Corporate Plan.

For Development (Capital projects)

The council previously does not have a Master Plan in place but is currently working to have one for Sigatoka town with the assistance of the Special administrator Board.

Further, Council working with block rezoning since these residential ratepayers are showing interest for commercial activities, which is part of the approved scheme plan.

7. Provide a breakdown of the following information for each year from 2005 to 2019:

- ✓ Number of ratepayers;
- ✓ Rates collected for each year (monetary value);
- ✓ Rental arrears for each year from 2005 to 2019 (provide the monetary value);
and
- ✓ Total arrears up until the present time.

Year	Number of Ratepayers	Rates Collected each year	Rental Arrears	Total Arrears Present time 2022
2005	248	\$202,511.00	\$3,858.00	97242.19
2006	248	\$201,302.00	\$3,413.00	97242.19
2007	248	\$202,517.00	\$4,105.00	97242.19
2008	248	\$202,429.00	\$2,775.00	97242.19
2009	248	\$274,144.93	\$1,525.00	97242.19
2010	248	\$280,834.37	\$0.00	97242.19
2011	248	\$347,500.00	\$4,470.00	97242.19
2012	248	\$296,257.38	\$308.66	97242.19
2013	248	\$345,329.37	\$2,143.36	97242.19
2014	248	\$345,329.37	\$1,715.12	97242.19
2015	248	\$368,244.77	\$5.90	97242.19
2016	248	\$345,570.10	\$2,215.20	97242.19
2017	248	\$295,693.50	\$4,311.00	97242.19
2018	248	\$305,405.14	\$5,776.10	97242.19
2019	248	\$285,288.64	\$1,751.10	97242.19

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

Flooding and Cyclone had been the major reason for the rental arrears.

When the people are unable to come to town due to natural disasters, the business are affected therefore less economic return.

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

Challenges

- The late payments of rent from tenants,
- The slow business operation.

Methods of collection

- The council is giving verbal reminders/ face-to-face discussions on the terms of payment to tenants.
- Gives seven days notice before the debtor is taken to Small Claim tribunal.

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

Yes, the council has a Debt collector who does daily follow ups and reminders for the payment of rates and arrears.

The same is reported to the Council meeting.

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

- i. Verbal reminders/ face-to-face discussions – terms of payment
- ii. The Council then gives seven days notice before the debtor is taken to Small Claim.

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

The council is unable to do operational activities since Suppliers payments are not paid as revenue is affected.

- f. Provide details of vacant lots in the municipality.

No:	Zone	Number of Vacant Land
1	Commercial	8
2	Residential	15
3	Parks/Recreational Area	3
4	Civic	2

8. Since the appointment of the Sigatoka Special Administrator in 2019:

- a. What improvements have been brought about in the collection of arrears by the Sigatoka Town Council? Provide relevant statistics.

The council debt collector is doing house to house visit to rate payers on payments of the rates arrears. Hence, since 2019 till date the council is able to do a collection of \$174,580.74 of the total rates arrears.

- b. What measures have been put in place to promptly address the grievances of ratepayers? How many grievances were recorded from 2005 to date and what were the natures of these complaints?

The Council have implemented the complain form to record the grievance received by the council. After the recording the grievance it is forwarded to respective departments to follow up and respond to the complains received to the complainant within 3 working days. In 2019 Council implemented digital recording of all grievances that is received since year 2019 till date.

Year	Nature of Complaints	Total Number
2019	Service delivery, grass cutting/ drain cleaning & sweeping, Infrastructure-drains, law enforcement, inter-agency-roads and shoulders and beautification	549

- c. How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the Sigatoka municipality been enhanced:

- Maintenance of public amenities;

Upgrade of the Public Convenience with wheelchair accessible toilet facility in 2014, reclamation of the Riverbank area to allow for more public sitting and hangouts, construction of the Nayawa, Kedrakulu and Mission Road children's park toilets.

- Rubbish collection and grass cutting;
- Road maintenance and drainage

In past practice the Sigatoka Town Council hired the private contractor namely Sudesh Transport who was at that time responsible for the above garbage collection, drain cleaning and grassing cutting. In the year 2021, 8th October the Council through the generous donation from the Japanese Embassy was able to carry out in-house collection including in-house contractual works.

- d. How has service delivery in the following areas been enhanced:

- Health and Hygiene;

The Council took in new Health Inspectors in the year 2019 to oversee the health and hygiene safety for the rate payers and the commercial houses including the residential houses with the town boundary.

The consistent inspection of public health related issues or general related issues were attended by the Health Inspectors. The Council working in collaboration with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency to minimize solid waste management with the assistance from the Ministry of Local Government pertaining to the Solid Waste Grant Subsidy. Providing garbage collection services in the few settlements has enhanced hygiene for the people in the settlement and also eradicated the issue of garbage disposal.

Inspection was also carried out in restaurants and other food retails to ensure the safety of the consumers.

- Security and Safety;
The Council has installed CCTV cameras in the Sigatoka Municipal Market to reduce the theft in market. The council has also have staff security at the Sigatoka Town Council office and council depot. The Council is working closely with the Police to do monitoring in Sigatoka Town to ensure the safety of the people of Sigatoka.

For the safety of the staffs, Sigatoka Town Council has following policies put into operation such as OHS policy, Disaster Management policy, Risk Management policy and the standard operating procedures for the safe operations of the council.

- Impacts of Climate Change/Environment;
The Council upgraded the drainage system in Sigatoka Town and at Lawaqa area to reduce the impact of flooding. Sigatoka Town Council does have in-house disaster representative team consist of the heads of departments who represents council in the Nadroga DISMAC team during disasters.

The mangrove planting is done in the Lawaqa creek beside the main Council Office to lower the risk of flooding. Council have a disaster recovery plan that is designed to assist council to establish recovery arrangements.

The Council is practicing 3R activities in partnership with OISCA in doing composting of market green waste. The Council is also providing the solid waste management services to seven settlements in the Extended Town Boundary through the subsidy from Ministry of Local Government as this reduce the illegal dumping in the areas. In year 2020 Sigatoka Town Council organized cleanup campaign and tree planting with relevant government stakeholders and villages to keep the environment clean.

- Poverty;
To help eradicate poverty level the Sigatoka Town Council take into consideration individuals who request to operate Mobile or Temporary Small Scale Catering licenses to help these individuals meet ends meet pertaining to the terms and condition of the Council.

Due to the current pandemic the Sigatoka Town Council allocated a spot beside the Council as a flea market whereby the occupants are also to adhere to Council term and conditions to cater for vendors who are unable to obtain a spot at the market complex due to the inability

- Squatter Settlements within town boundaries;

There are no squatter settlements within the town boundary however the squatter settlements are located in the peri-urban areas into the extended town boundary.

The Sigatoka Town Council is providing solid waste management service in the two (2) peri-urban informal settlements through the subsidy received by Ministry of Local Government for solid waste management.

- Disaster Risk Analysis; and

Sigatoka Town Council has a disaster recovery plan with detailed instruction on how to respond to the natural disasters such as flooding and cyclones. Sigatoka Town Council has formed a DISMAC committee which is lead by the Chief Executive Officer during the responds of natural disasters.

The Sigatoka Town Council in conjunction with Fiji Roads Authority upgrades the drainage system around town to mitigate the flooding issues. The council also had community engagement from nearby villages to assist the council in removal of debris from the old bridge to lower the flood risk in Sigatoka Town.

- Gender Mainstreaming.

12.5% - Female

87.5% - Male

There are more male compared to female staffs working at Council as result of more male staffs working at the ground and sanitary department.

The council is working towards bring gender quality at the Council.

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

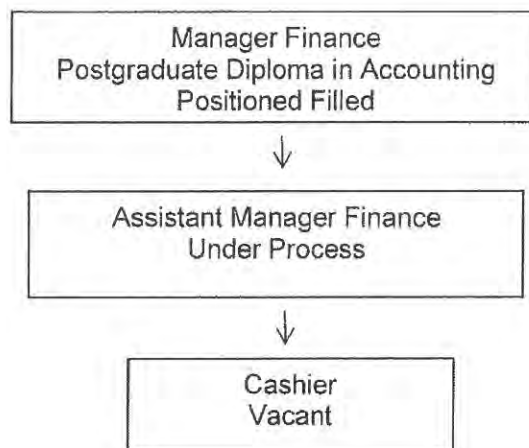
The council has engaged an external auditor to audit the council's accounts.

The 2020 Annual report narratives has been forwarded to Ministry of Local Government, hence the financial accounts is being currently finalized by Auditor General Office, a report has been sent to Council.

Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2019

9. We note that the auditor issued a qualified audit opinion on the 2019 accounts of the Council based on the five grounds provided on Pages 3 and 4 of the financial statements. Confirm how the Council has addressed these five issues and the actions taken to prevent the recurrence of such audit issues.
 - This matter is from 20 years back, the council has given the matter to Ministry and also working closely with the stakeholders so that this kind of issues does not appear again.
 - The council has noted this and is developing a system to have detailed documented policies and standard operating procedures of Accounts payables and Accruals Functions.

- The Council has noted this and with the Approval of SAs and Ministry formulating a system and process for carrying out impairment assessment of the property plant and equipment in a structured manner.
 - The Council has noted this and has given the accounts to an external accountant to minimize these types of errors.
 - The Council has noted this and has given the accounts to an external accountant to do Financials of 2020.
10. Page 4 of financial statements (Emphasis of Matter) – How has the Council addressed the five issues?
- The council has noted and took critical review of its system, policies and procedures of recording transaction, and preparing monthly reports and reconciliation to ensure proper recording is done.
11. Page 5 of financial statements (Other Matters) – How has the Council addressed the four issues?
- The council has noted all and ensuring that all internal controls and Risk Management is followed among the Finance staffs so that the issues noted does not repeat in future.
12. Provide the current staff structure of the Accounts Section. Indicate the positions, whether they have been substantively filled and the qualification of these Officers.



Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2018

13. Provide a breakdown of the \$105,144.90 total expenditure of the Traffic Department for 2018

PARTICULARS	AMOUNT
Salary	\$706.12
Salary	\$475.13
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Parking Meter Maintenance	\$17,189.54
Salary	\$556.99
Salary	\$712.76
Salary	\$50.00
Petty Cash	\$53.30
Salary	\$712.76
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$818.13
Government of Fiji	\$280.00
Salary	\$461.19
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Salary	\$873.35
Salary	\$712.76
Salary	\$50.00
LICI	\$198.92

FNPF	\$646.20
Department of National Trade	\$80.00
Salary	\$872.75
Salary	\$217.27
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$872.48
Salary	\$718.48
Salary	\$300.32
Salary	\$860.71
Salary	\$722.60
Salary	\$50.00
LICI	\$198.92
FNPF	\$758.23
Kasabias	\$55.04
Salary	\$871.32
Salary	\$684.65
Salary	\$50.00
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Salary	\$888.88
Salary	\$715.94
Salary	\$660.56
FNPF	\$1,220.01
LICI	\$278.58
P/MParts-FRCS	\$855.65
EFS	\$480.75

Salary	\$307.38
Salary	\$548.25
Salary	\$519.51
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$900.88
Salary	\$478.23
Salary	\$50.00
Parking Meter Maintenance	\$655.74
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Post Fiji Ltd- LICI	\$99.46
FNPF	\$473.99
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$900.88
Salary	\$436.94
Salary	\$573.41
Salary	\$560.80
Salary	\$50.00
FNPF	\$877.98
LICI	\$298.40
Salary	\$873.13
Salary	\$735.94
Land Transport Authority	\$156.52
Kasabias	\$163.30
Salary	\$901.48
Salary	\$725.94

Petty Cash	\$95.00
Salary	\$1,696.08
Salary	\$775.94
FNPF	\$484.76
LICI	\$198.92
All Freight Pacific	\$244.96
Salary	\$880.88
Salary	\$700.90
Salary	\$50.00
Land Transport Authority	\$162.43
LICI	\$198.92
FNPF	\$553.75
Salary	\$300.32
Salary	\$796.10
Salary	\$378.14
Salary	\$125.90
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$600.76
Salary	\$735.94
LICI	\$198.92
FNPF	\$674.27
Salary	\$778.64
Salary	\$735.94
Salary	\$136.00
Land Transport Authority	\$156.52

Salary	\$853.73
Salary	\$725.94
Salary	\$475.62
Salary	\$822.54
Salary	\$268.67
LICI	\$198.92
FNPF	\$635.09
Salary	\$906.78
Salary	\$759.29
Salary	\$573.42
Salary	\$735.94
FNPF	\$1,030.61
LICI	\$219.20
Salary	\$844.65
Salary	\$597.67
Salary	\$914.56
Salary	\$765.91
Salary	\$852.78
Salary	\$745.85
FNPF	\$685.26
LICI	\$198.91
Salary	\$483.93
Salary	\$442.92
Salary	\$50.00
Parking Meter Maintenance	\$137.62

Salary	\$744.20
Salary	\$771.33
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$614.70
Salary	\$899.88
Salary	\$379.58
Salary	\$938.84
Salary	\$863.34
Salary	\$50.00
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Salary	\$873.73
Salary	\$553.51
Salary	\$1,123.25
Salary	\$511.01
FNPF	\$754.75
LICI	\$198.91
Salary	\$511.01
Salary	\$924.71
Salary	\$250.32
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$873.13
Salary	\$761.33
Salary	\$50.00
FNPF	\$800.82
LICI	\$276.77

Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
Salary	\$863.14
Salary	\$761.33
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$890.88
Salary	\$741.13
Salary	\$50.00
FNPF	\$594.04
LICI	\$198.91
Salary	\$893.14
Salary	\$741.13
Salary	\$50.00
Salary	\$830.75
Salary	\$230.12
Salary	\$50.00
Land Transport Authority	\$156.50
LICI	\$272.10
FNPF	\$1,042.70
Salary	\$647.00
Salary	\$890.88
Salary	\$711.13
Salary	\$110.00
Salary	\$829.45
Salary	\$220.12
Salary	\$50.00

Salary	\$521.04
Salary	\$675.92
Salary	\$50.00
LICI	\$198.90
FNPF	\$691.57
FLGOA	\$15.00
Salary	₹831.64
Salary	\$488.01
	\$105,144.90

14. We note that a total of \$234,089 was reserved for the riverbank project. Confirm whether this project has been completed.

The above project has not been completed and is matter is with the court.

15. What are the Council's plans to generate more income?

The council is planning to and has implemented capital projects such as

- Allocation of additional parking spaces within the main CBD area
- Upgrade of multi-purpose courts to accommodate other functions
- Installing of electronic parking meters
- Construction of additional Office Space at the Lawaqa Open Space
- Construction of the Riverside Development (cafes, restaurants, kiosks and open air Amphitheatre)

16. Capital works:

- a. Why didn't the Council tender capital works carried out for Cuvu Market construction and landfill upgrade in accordance with the requirements of the Manual of Accounts for Municipal Councils in Fiji even though payments made to certain suppliers exceeded the limit of \$10,000?

These works were not tendered out but proper financial processes were followed. The Tender was not called out because the initial plan/ workdone were less than \$10,000.00. But as the need arise another process is done with separate LPO's.

The Cuvu market project commenced in year 2018 with a demand of roadside vendors having proper market stalls to sell their produce.

A portion of land was acquired from the Fiji police Force for the construction of the said project.

The project commenced with the initial plan of having a proper road side stall with shelter. This work was executed by the Council, while the civil works were out-sourced following proper Financial Processes. These civil works includes clearing, excavation, cut and fill, supply of soil and soap stones, leveling and compaction.

But as the demand increases, there was a need to increase the size of the road side market from 25 vendors to 74 vendors. Therefore, the council decided to construct a proper building to fully accommodate these market vendors from Nadroumai, Tagitagi, Cuvu, Cuvu Top, Ulusila and other nearby communities.

With the increase in the size of the market, there is also a need for extra civil work. So another Purchase Order was issued following its processes. Separate invoices and payment were done with separate invoices received in separate occasions.

Progress reports were submitted to the Ministry and they were monitoring the projects on a time to time basis.

- b. Explain who authorized these payments and why relevant guidelines were not followed.

The Council authorized these payments, following proper procedures.

- c. Who were the contractors engaged to complete the two projects and elaborate on the selection process used to contract them.

- Cuvu Market: Quick Earthwork- Civil Works, Sigatoka Town Council – Construction of the Market Building.
- Landfill: Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) initiated the project in 2014 from the start to the end of the project whereby they brought in Landmark surveyors to survey landfill area and then Shankar & Sons were brought in for landscaping works. [all the companies that were engaged in the project was all handed by JICA]

17. Why did the Council not maintain proper records of recruitment and why were variances noted between the number of staff listed as recruited in 2018 and the number of new additions in the pay report? Has this issue been rectified in the following years?
- The council has noted this and has taken various HR approaches in order to be in line with all Recruiting procedures and has put these approaches in practical by working very close with Ministry of Local Government.

- The Sigatoka Town Council is also sharing resources with Nadi Town Council in terms of recruitment procedures and human resources.

For your information please.

Yours faithfully



.....
Mr. Anand Sami Pillay
Acting Chief Executive Officer

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LH #: 096/22

**Supplementary Response by the
Sigatoka Town Council**

File Ref: 1.2 | 7.4

25th April, 2022

Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson –
Special Committee on Social Affairs
Parliament of Fiji.
SUVA.

Dear Sir

RE: Clarification of Supplementary Questions

Reference is made to your email dated 19th April, 2022 in regards to the above subject.

The responses for the query are as follows:

Supplementary Question

- Enlighten us on the practice of rate collection on rented properties; does the Council collect rates from the property owner or tenants? We note that there have been some incidents whereby tenants have been paying town rates, including garbage collection fees however, services are not been provided to them.

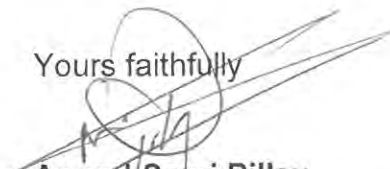
- **Answers:**

1. Rates are levied to those properties which fall within the Town Boundary as per Approved Sigatoka Town Council Scheme Plan.
2. Council collects the rates only from those Property owners has a land registered titles.
3. At some circumstance tenants were paid the town rates, where Property owner [Landlord] were failed to pay the rates to the Council on timely basis and matter was taken to the court by the Council and Court decided to execute a court order where tenants were instructed to pay the rent to the council to clear the rates in arrears on behalf of his/her landlord, such practices are done upon the request of the Council to the Court.
 - Sometimes Tenants are paying the rates to the council when landlord stays in aboard, so there is mutual understanding between tenant and property owner [landlord].

Sigatoka was proclaimed a town on the 1st of June, 1936.

4. As for the garbage fees -all tenants and business houses are required to pay the garbage fee to the Council.
- a. All green waste/ White Goods are collected on quarterly basis.
 - b. Residential kitchen wastes are collected on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays.
 - c. Wastes are daily collected at Commercial Areas, Hospital, and Market and at Public Bins.
 - d. Councils Health Dept team monitors the garbage collection services to ensure that all garbage is collected on timely basis.

Yours faithfully


Anand Sami Pillay
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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LH#: 120/22