

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Written Response by the
Ministry of Women, Children
and Poverty Alleviation

1. Provide more information on the Loloma Project.

The Loloma Project is still in continuity with regular monthly sweeps conducted on our streets with the Taskforce members including the Police, Department of Social Welfare, St Giles, Faith based organizations, NGOs and members of the public who volunteer in our projects.

The project since implementation has seen our collaboration with faith based organizations solidified with the establishment of shelters that provide short term accommodation to the homeless. This include the Hanisi Ministry shelter along Stuart Street and the St Vincent de Paul Shelter along Brown Street.

While we have assisted a total of 25 individuals and families who have been re-integrated back to their home from the streets, our efforts would not be possible without the collaboration and team work from our private sector counterparts like Extra Supermarket.

Our operations have seen us assist a total of 51 cases of beggars, psychosocial and children on the streets, suited their context and needs. Our assistance includes social protection, re-integration back to their homes and communities, counseling, shopping voucher assistance and placement into homes.

The Loloma Project is still active and operational. In addition there are helplines also available example the child helpline (1325) and the Domestic violence helpline (1560).

2. Through the extensive stakeholder collaboration under the REACH programme, inform us of whether this initiative has addressed policy gaps in the provision of Government social and economic services and promotion of greater access to Justice to Fijians living in remote maritime islands and interior parts of the country. What are the major challenges in rolling out the programme to these areas and how are these being addressed?

Yes, the Ministry through extensive stakeholder collaboration under the REACH programme has addressed critical policy gaps faced by Fijians living in outer islands and interior parts of Fiji. Many of these communities lack access to Government services and knowledge of social and economic rights in the Fiji Constitution. Likewise, updates from Government on reforms and programmes takes time to reach these communities due to the geographic location and limited access to information.

The REACH Programme have been successful in informing the people living in geographically marginalized communities of their rights through awareness raising and providing access to services by Government & NGO agencies.

For example, in July 2019, the REACH Team led a mission to the Lau group covering 9 districts and 40 communities. A total of 2,185 people were reached during the outreach programme and total of 6,948 services were delivered by Government & NGO's agencies. The mission was a highlight since Fijians living in the Lau group were made informed of changes in prices for the Births, Deaths & Marriages office for the new financial year and likewise the discovery of drugs by the CID Police Officers in the southern parts of Lau which villagers thought were random pipe floaters with GPS solar beacon.

There are also challenges involved in leading a REACH programme to geographically isolated communities in Fiji. These includes:

- ✓ High costs incurred –the cost of operation; allowances for the officers, catering, transportation, fuel, boat / hired vehicle, etc. E.g., 2019 REACH mission total cost incurred was more than \$100, 000 FJD
- ✓ Harsh physical and weather conditions – taking out services to remote communities also pose risks to officers when working under harsh physical and weather condition. E.g., June 2019 – 3 days stranded in Vanua-balavu, Lau due to cyclone warning.
- ✓ Prolong planning period – due to geographical location and limited network availability, planning for outreach mission in geographically remote areas in Fiji usually takes time and also affect other work plan for the year. E.g., 2019 REACH Lau mission took about 4 months in planning.

To address these challenges, the REACH team usually:

- ✓ Share cost between UNDP REACH & MWCPA REACH team to cover for operation during outreach mission. E.g., 2019 REACH Lau mission
- ✓ Prioritizing safety during mission – sleepover at remote communities to minimize travelling at night and regularly updated on weather conditions
- ✓ Small mission to cater for the prolong planning of main mission.

3. Page 15-16 of Annual Report (*Department of Social Welfare*) – On the number of Activities being handled by the Department, highlight major challenges and findings on each activity.

Major Social Protection programs namely the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Care and Protection Scheme, Social Pension Scheme and the Disability Scheme are administered across 19 district welfare offices. In 2018-19 the programs are administered to a volume of over 80,000 recipients, inclusive of families and individuals presenting their specific needs and vulnerabilities in need of financial support that range from families without basic needs, elderly persons, children in need of care and persons living with disabilities. In addition to these major programs, there is the bus fare subsidy, food voucher assistance to pregnant mothers and grants that are implemented in partnership with other stakeholders.

CHALLENGES

- The major challenges that are faced in the implementation of the programs is the limited resources in terms of staff to the extent that the major focus is on assessing the new demands for assistance. The ability to continue supporting the existing beneficiaries regularly through home visits is a challenge.
- Likewise, the volume of administrative work required in facilitating applications, processing is partially manual and automated. Therefore, the indulgence into manual input and processing is necessary across the programs.
- To date the volume of recipients have increased from 80,000 to 90,000. In terms of the schemes, the Poverty Benefit Scheme is slightly decreasing, other schemes have gradually increased throughout the years. To ensure its relevance and effectiveness the programs will need to be reviewed in terms of its targeting

priorities and its benefits are aligned to the present need and most importantly for the sustainability of the programs.

The Ministry in its efforts to address the challenges is engaging in a Reform Project over the period 2022-2025 with the assistance of the DFAT and World Bank. This Reform will review the targeting of the programs, operating procedures and provide capacity building for the workforce. It will most importantly enable the Ministry to build its own Management Information System (MIS) for its programs that will allow the full automation of its programs. It is anticipated to be completed by 2025 where by the programs will be effectively addressing the targeted population and automation to enable efficient and timely delivery.

4. Page 16 of Annual Report (Activity 8: Welfare Graduation Program) – How many have graduated under this program? Provide some successful stories.

1. The Welfare Graduation program was administered in partnership with the National Centre of Small and Microenterprise Development until the 2019-2020 upon its dissolution. The Welfare Graduation Program thereafter has been on review and is included in the Social Welfare Reform Project. From 2018 we have graduated 9 recipients of the program.
2. The following success stories were extracted from a Monitoring Report in 2018. Source: Success Stories-Monitoring Report 2018-Poverty Monitoring Unit

Success Story 1



Location: Lautoka

Project: Canteen/Flowering

Story

Ms. Suruj Kumari of Lovu Lautoka was assisted with a grant from the Ministry to start a canteen project however she later changed the project to flowering business.

She had attended SYOB training offered by NCSMED before starting her project.

Currently she faces no major competition in terms of her project and sales are made on order basis. She at times is able to make \$200.00 plus from the sale of her plants.

She has been successfully graduated from the Social Protection allowance. She is very thankful to the Ministry for the assistance provided.

Status: project Successful

Success Story 2



Location: Labasa

Project : Food Selling

Story

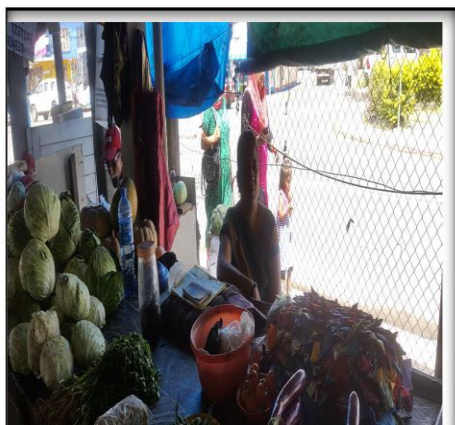
Ms. Sera Tiko of Labasa was assisted by the Ministry with a food selling business which is located in Labasa Market area.

She had been assisted with \$1,600 of which she used to buy pots, esky, gas stove and containers for her food selling business.

According to her, she makes \$100.00 profit per month from food selling which is used to support her children who are in tertiary institutions. Ms. Tiko has been successfully graduated from the Welfare assistance.

Project Status: Project Successful

Success Story 3



Location: Navua

Project: Market Vendor

Story

Ms. Sani Suman Lata of Navua had been assisted through the Welfare Graduation Programme with a grant of \$1600 which was used to purchase vegetables for her stall at

Navua Market.

She had attended training offered by NCSMED to assist with her business.

Her business has been in operation since the past 10 years. She has been successfully graduated from the Welfare assistance and is able to generate \$100-\$150 profits. She is grateful to the Ministry for the assistance provided.

Project Status: Successful

Success Story 4



Location: Ravita Settlement Vunivutu Macuata

Project: Market Vendor

Story

Ms. Bogilima of Ravita Settlement Vunivutu Macuata had been assisted by Ministry with a canteen business. She had

attended SYOB training before funds were provided in phases. Monthly, Ms. Bogilima is able to generate \$50 profit from the canteen and she is planning to save and start a poultry project.

She has been successful graduated from the social welfare assistance and is very thankful for the assistance. The market for canteen is the five houses in the settlement plus the neighboring village

Project Status: Successful

5. What is the Ministry doing to reduce the cases of children roaming in our streets? What initiatives have been implemented to reduce instances of the different types of child welfare cases reported, as provided on Page 17 of the Annual Report?

Reduction in children roaming in streets – this requires a holistic approach thus the ministry is working through the Loloma project to provide at-point solution through collaboration with other Government agencies and NGOs.

Publications and media awareness on the CHL, PCAN and Child Protection messages

The Department this year has taken advantage of using the social media platform such as the FBC TV, FBS radios, CFL radio stations, CFL Cinemas

and Fiji TV to expand its reach and coverage in educating, informing, create awareness and advocate on child protection issues. This financial year the Department released five (5) editions of the Child Services Unit Newsletter called the Mockingbird. Mockingbirds symbolizes the idea of innocence, beauty and goodness.

6. How has the Child Helpline, Training of Trainers (TOT) on Child Protection, and PCAN Campaign/Blue Ribbon Campaign assisted in protecting our children?

CHILD HELPLINE

The Child Helpline offers help and support services for children through referrals made to the Department of Children. A variety of communication methods can be used to ensure that children can always access help and find someone to talk to. These methods include telephone services, mobile phones, text messaging and direct referrals to the Department of Children, online via email, Facebook Chat, radio and mobile community/school outreach.

The helpline services are part of the national Child Protection system of the MWCPA and its purpose is to provide referrals and listening and information service for children. It also forms an accessible emergency contact for children in need of help, protection, assistance or guidance. There is always a trained counsellor on duty and they can provide information and referrals for a range of government services for children. While the helpline is for children, counselors also receive calls from adults reporting child abuse, or having concerns about neglected children or requesting information on a range of welfare options regarding their children.

The CHL also assists those who may not be able to access essential services, including street children, children living with disabilities and children in marginalized areas or communities. The CHL provides children with their fundamental right to amplify their voices and to be heard, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) , and plays a key role in shaping, strengthening and filling in the gaps of existing national child protection systems.

TRAINING OF TRAINERS IN CHILD PROTECTION

The Department has an Annual Work Plan with UNICEF and out of this was the development of a contextualized Facilitator's Manual called "Children are a precious Gift from God". This manual is a community based facilitation

manual designed to build community appreciation of children and draw attention to some of the issues that children face in their development. It assists community leaders, faith based leaders, youth leaders and parents and care-givers find solutions to these issues and help them identify ways to deal with issues that arise.

Community leaders are trained on this manual and to take the lead role and responsibilities in their communities to protect children. The outcome of the TOT is for community leaders to develop a community child protection measures for their own communities to ensure the safety and protection of their children in their communities. Apart from the TOT, there are child protection awareness carried out in the communities.

PCAN CAMPAIGN/BLUE RIBBON

Since 2002, Fiji has been commemorating the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect on the 19th November in synergy with the International Day for the Rights of the Child on the 20th November; which has its objective a rallying point around the issue of child abuse and the need for urgent prevention programs. This PCAN Activity is carried out at District, Divisional and National Levels. The Welfare Officers work together with their Inter-Agency Committee members in their Districts and Divisions to conduct awareness and workshops in the communities advocating on prevention of child abuse and neglect. It is also a timely reminder to stakeholders, families and communities to not only realize but re-vitalize their commitments and roles in the care and protection of our children from abuse, exploitation and violence.

7. What programmes are in place to assist persons living with disabilities in starting business ventures and finding employment?

Yes, there is an Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities. The programme in 2018/2019 was in pilot mode.

Please refer to question 10 for the details of assistance provided.

8. Page 20 of Annual Report (*Allowance for Persons with Disabilities*) – We note that the Disability Unit used the Functional Independence Measure as the guiding tool in assessing cases. Elaborate on this Measure and its accuracy in ensuring allowances are distributed to eligible individuals?

The Functional Independence measure is an 18 item guiding tool that assesses functions in 6 main areas namely: self- care, continence (the ability to control movements of the bowels and bladder), mobility, transfers, communication and cognition. The tool uses the level of assistance an individual needs to grade functional status from total independence to total assistance. In addition, the tool is used to assess a person's level of disability as well as a change in a person's Disability status in response to rehabilitation or medical intervention. This tool has been accepted worldwide as the most reliable in measuring ones disability.

Therefore, with the use of this measuring tool the Disability Unit is able to target only those with permanent disabilities and which is applicable to all age groups and gender across the nation and is not means tested.

9. We note in the media and from concerned welfare recipients of the delays experienced in receiving allowances. Explain why this is the case and how measures taken by the Ministry to ensure timely disbursement and processing of allowances?

The Ministry makes monthly allowance payment to recipients through the Banks, and the manual voucher mode. The voucher mode of assistance consists of 6-month voucher books that are sent bi-annually through the mail to various postal agencies across the maritime islands, where recipients do redeem monthly at their postal agency. The banking mode of payment is facilitated by the ministry with a timeline of 5th of the month to avoid large gathering of recipients. Where neither mode of payments is available, the Ministry takes the allowances to the recipients' and delivery of the cash to the recipient happens twice within a 6-month period (Pay-Master System).

Where there are exceptional delays, media messages are made to inform recipients. To improve the payment of allowances, the Ministry is currently expanding the Mode of Payments to include the Tele companies, the most recent being M-Paisa with Vodafone Ltd and is working with Digicel to be another mode of payment. These options for mode of payment are made available upon the recipient's choice.

10. Provide more information on the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities and how successful was the pilot program in the Central Division. How does the Ministry ensure that those living in

rural and maritime areas participate in this program and confirm whether this program has been extended to other divisions

The economic empowerment program is a initiative that has measurable and tangible outcomes to persons living with disabilities. For the current successful recipient of the SEED grant they now have an opportunity to improve their current financial situation that will positively translate into other areas of their everyday living.

There were 2 Business trainings conducted by organizations for persons with disabilities in the central Division in 2019 whereby 50 persons with disabilities were engaged. From the 50 persons with Disabilities 42 managed to successfully complete the training and were given SEED grants for their efforts. Managing their respective small businesses is a huge inspiration to the Persons with Disabilities and their Families.

Type of Business	PWDs
Grog and Chaser	14
Vegetable/Root Crops/Farming	4
Service-Boat/Grass/Money Lending	3
Decorations	5
Sewing	7
Canteen	6
Ice block Sweets	3

Currently 65% of the projects under the Economic Empowerment program are still operational and these are projects based around sewing, decorations, farmers, canteen and Ice Block and sweet sellers.

The Team has not yet touch base with the Maritime such as Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau Group but has incorporated a 3-month business plan that would accommodate the eastern maritime area and the Western Division. However, the team has managed to cover the Northern Division respectively

and this includes Bua, Macuata (Mali Island), Cakaudrove, Qamea, Taveuni, Rabi)

11. Provide more information on the process undertaken to profile beggars and what actions and/or arrangements are made by the Ministry with parents whose children are found to be begging?

The Department on a monthly basis conducts profiling exercises on our streets to identify beggars and children begging. This is done in collaboration with the police and St Giles staff (in instances where psychosocial beggars may need medical check-up etc). Our National Beggars Database has seen a total of more than 10 adult beggars and a growing number of children who are engaged in begging (total 20 since Jan this year). While we conduct home placement for children found begging, we also counsel and raise awareness with parents and families that allow their children to be unsupervised on the streets and what this means for them in terms of negligence and their responsibilities to their children. We remove children off the streets, identify why and what their needs are whether it’s emotional, spiritual and financial support, work with parents by providing social protection, counseling, linking their children to counseling/education services.

12. Page 21 of Annual Report (*State Homes*) – Inform us of the total number of applications received for each State Home in this period. What is the capacity of each Home?

Home	Number of Applications Received 2018-2019
Golden Age Home Suva	18
Golden Age Home Labasa	8
Golden Age Home Lautoka	9
Total	35

Home	Capacity in 2018-2019	Current Capacity in 2022
Golden Age Home Suva	58	49
Golden Age Home Labasa	30	29 (after Furnishing, capacity will be 40)
Golden Age Home Lautoka	53	42

Total	136	120
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The Ministry taking into consideration the limited resources at each home, had reduced the capacity in the homes to ensure quality care is provided to residents.

13. We note that the Poverty Monitoring Unit monitored 11 programmes and 8 Government agencies in this fiscal year including the ‘Upgrade of Cane Access Roads’. Inform us on why the Upgrading of Farm Access Roads programme wasn’t also identified for monitoring. What is the rationale for the Ministry undertaking the monitoring of these programmes and how are these programmes monitored?

The PMU identified the 11 programmes in consultation with Programme Implementers. Upon our consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, we identified Coconut Development Programme to be monitored. Programmes to be monitored from relevant Ministries in each fiscal year are determined from the four (4) sectors. This FY2022/2023 the PMU is monitoring Grant to Self Help Programme and some of the activities/projects implemented through this programme is the improvement of farm access road.

The PMU is mandated to monitor, evaluate and report on the impact of Governments Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). In each FY, the PMU in consultation with relevant Ministries identify PAP to be monitored. Focal point officers are also identified in each Ministry who then liaise with PMU Technical officers. Baseline information are gathered which include name of recipient/community/group assisted, type of assistance provided, year provided etc. are gathered from relevant Programme Implementers, this sets the platform of the monitoring exercise of the PMU. Programme Questionnaires are designed aligning to the objective of the Programme. The questionnaires are also shared to the Programme implementers for their input and confirmation.

The PMU used random sampling method to identify recipients to be interviewed. Face to face interview and focus group discussion are method used to interview beneficiaries and also visitation to project sites. The beneficiaries are approached and gave consent to be interviewed using paper questionnaires. Projects are usually individual, group, community and school based projects.

14. Considering the large mandate of the Ministry and the many programmes and activities to be implemented, does the Ministry have sufficient staffing capacity to ensure smooth work flow? What is the employee turnover and attrition within the Ministry?

Currently, of 442 approved positions, there are 125 vacant positions of which:

- 98 positions were advertised;
- 43 appointments made;
- 34 positions currently being processed;
- 21 positions to be re-advertised;
- 27 positions yet to be confirmed for advertisement; and
- In 2023 there will be 10 retirees thus the position will be advertised.

The Ministry has engaged temporary staff to fill in the vacant positions as well as volunteers.

From 2018 to 2021, the Ministry has experienced an average of 32 staff exits per financial year.

In August 2022, 7 staff have resigned due to job offers abroad.

The Ministry is in regular liaison with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Economy on the engagement of relieving Officers where there is an urgent need, for instance, for the Golden Age Homes in view of the nature of their duties.

For the current financial year, the Ministry has been allocated funding for the establishment of Department of Children including its Director and additional staff. To ensure that the legislations on the safeguarding of a child are properly implemented, monitored and evaluated, there is a need to strengthen the workforce within the Child Services Unit which will now become the Department of Children.

Corporate Services Division is in the process of including in the budget proposal for 2023-2024 on the need for additional support staff

Furthermore with the approved number of 442 staff in the Ministry Staff Establishment, there is a need to have additional staff to meet the demands of the Ministry considering the Ministry mandate and emerging issues.

Additional staff will be needed post reform to support the current services and intended MIS that will be developed.

There is a need to increase the Administrative/ Accounts cadre to enable Welfare Officers to concentrate on case management and be relieved of general administrative works.

The Ministry is reviewing its workforce needs and currently working on securing additional positions in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Economy.

Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2019

1. Pages 33 & 34 of Annual Report:

- a. Qualified audit opinion - We note that the auditor issued a qualified audit opinion on the 2018-2019 accounts of the Ministry on the 2 grounds provided. Confirm whether these issues have been resolved what mechanisms have been instituted by the Ministry to prevent their recurrence.**

Basis for Qualified Opinion

1. The statements of Receipts and Expenditure includes Operating Grants and Transfers amount of \$120,492,360. Included in this amount are the various Social Welfare Scheme payments totalling \$116,082,073. An unreconciled variance of \$365,360 exists between the General Ledger balance of \$116,082,073 and the actual payment amount made through the banks and other modes of payment totalling to \$115,716,723 for the year ended 31 July 2019. Consequently, I cannot establish the accuracy and completeness of Operating Grant and Transfers of \$120,492,360 reflected in the financial statements.
2. An unreconciled variance of \$453,794 exists between the FMIS general ledger and the Ministry's payroll report for Established Staff. Consequently, I was unable to establish the accuracy of the Established Staff expenditure recorded in the Statement of Receipts and Expenditure for the year ended 31 July 2019.

RESPONSE

1. Additional positions were provided by the Ministry of Economy enabling the Ministry to carry out monthly reconciliation and also maintaining the Ledger for monthly posting of the Social Protection Program expenditures. The Ministry has started doing this as of the last financial year (2021/2022).
2. The Ministry has reconciled the Ministry's P2P (Person to Post) against both the Government Wage Earner and Established payroll.

Furthermore, the Ministry is in the process of adjusting variances against the FMIS figure in consultation with the Ministry of Economy.

As a control measure to prevent recurrence, the Ministry has a monthly reconciliation system in place to reconcile the:

- Monthly Absence/Attendance Returns submitted by all the Offices;
- The approved Staff Establishment (P2P); and
- The Payroll.

b. Under Other Matters, confirm whether these 3 issues have been rectified and internal controls in place to ensure such issues do not emanate in future

Other Matters

1. Internal controls over procurement were generally found to be weak. In addition, the detailed listing of officers who have yet to retire accountable advances in the Revolving Fund Account was not maintained by the Ministry.

1) Internal Controls over Procurement

As an internal control measure, the Ministry is currently revising its Finance Manual and as per target in the MWCPA COP 2022-2023 it is expected to be finalised by 31/10/2022.

The Ministry also has in a place a system to thoroughly scrutinize all requests to ensure that it is in compliance with the procurement regulations.

For the period 2018-2019 the maintenance of Accountable Advance was not properly documented.

After the issuance of an internal circular on the Accountable Advance in September 2019 there has been marked improvement in the adherence to the processes.

Based on the provisions of the General orders and the MWCPA Finance Manual, the SOP will be developed by 15/10/2022 to guide the issuance and retirement of Accountable Advance.

In consultation with the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry will update the list of pending accountable Advance from August 2019 to date and provide a brief by 31/10/2022.

2. The administration and management over the Bus Fare Scheme were generally found to be weak as highlighted in the Performance Audit Report on the *Administration and Management of Bus Fare Assistance through E-ticketing for School Children, Elderly and Person with Disability* (Parliament Paper No.71 of 2020).
3. The National Council for Older Persons Act 2012 establishes the National Council for Older Persons (NCOP) to be a body corporate. However, the NCOP is still operating as part of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

2) Bus fare

The Ministry is only responsible for e-transport for Elderly and Person with Disability.

- The authority to verify records, upload, validate and approve has been handed over from Vodafone Fiji Limited to the Ministry w.e f Jan 2022 thus the ministry now has control over these processes
- Furthermore, Vodafone team has assured that recipients with only valid social welfare bus fare ID card are being issued with e-transport card. Cards extracted previously using other ID cards have been blocked. Additionally, card redemption is only permitted to the card holders
- Only one active card per recipient is updated once confirmation is received that other cards esp. lost ones are blocked.
- For better administration, tracking and utilization of funds, quarterly payments were rolled out w.e.f May 2022.
- With the centralized update of e-transport card top up using authorized privileges and roll out of improved processes will bring about efficiency and accuracy.

3) NCOP

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, in the budget submission for this financial year (2022 -2023) had provided its request for the official establishment of the National Council of Older Persons (NCOP) as a statutory body.

Thus, Government has allocated \$120,000, towards ensuring that the initial human resource aspect of the establishment is facilitated. This is inclusive of a Director position and a personal assistant.

In addition, funds will be dedicated to the purchase of required office equipment for establishment as well as Council meetings and consultations with relevant stakeholders


Government mechanism:

The National Council of Older Persons (NCCOP) Act of 2012 enables Government to establish a statutory and advisory arm which will function as a national mechanism with divisional and district committees. In 2013, a Council was appointed as per the NCOP Act. In 2014, Government had consistently resourced allocations towards the activities under the Council.

The Objective of the NCOP:


The main objective of the NCOP as a Council, is to:

- i. strengthen the partnership and the collaboration between Government, families, community-based organisations, traditional village communities, non-government organisations, civil society organisations 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.



Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation

PRESENTATION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS



Content of Presentation


- Vision & Mission
- Core Responsibilities of the Ministry
- Ministry Structure
- Unit Functions
- Questions & Answers

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



- **Vision Statement**
- Transformed Communities with Empowered Women, Children, Older Persons & the Disadvantaged
- **Mission Statement**
- Families and Communities supported through Social Welfare Initiatives and Gender Mainstreaming Programme

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation




CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY

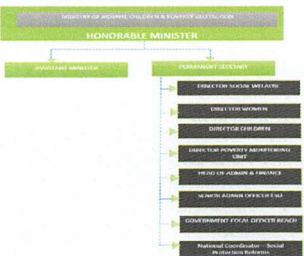
The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is the government agency that administers services and programs aligned to the:

- Care and protection of children;
- Community based correction;
- Provision of income support to families to address poverty;
- Provision of policy intervention for older persons;
- Provision of policy intervention for persons with disabilities;
- Promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women; and
- Monitor, evaluate and report on the progress and impact of Governments Poverty Alleviation Programme


Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



MINISTRY STRUCTURE



Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation




Poverty Monitoring Unit

The Poverty Monitoring Unit (established as Poverty Eradication Department in 2001 – approved by Cabinet) is mandated with the responsibility of ensuring government's poverty alleviation policies, projects and programmes are well coordinated through:

- Plan and formulate in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy (and all sectoral ministries) an Integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme (INPEP) in line with Government's target of reducing poverty by 5% annually as per Strategic Development Plan (which is now the National Development Plan (NDP))
- Monitoring and Evaluation of the Integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme (INPEP) across Government,
- Coordinate Impact Assessments and Research for the development of effective poverty alleviation policies, strategies, frameworks and;
- Identify remedial projects and investment packages on poverty alleviation to meet SDG 1 goal.

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation




Department of Women

The Department for Women (also known as the National Women's Machinery- NWM) is the policy advisor to Government and provides a national advocacy and coordination role in the area of Empowering Women to reach their full potential - Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

The strategic priority areas of the Department for Women include the following thematic areas:

- Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG)
- Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)
- Gender Resilience to Climate Change Disaster Risk Reduction (GCCDRR)


Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



Department of Women

- The thematic cross cutting strategic priority areas for the Department includes:
 - Access to Services
 - Women and Girls Leadership and participation at all levels
 - Women and the Law
 - Gender Statistics and Research
 - Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICTD)
- The Department also provides a coordination role through its thematic areas on program and policy matters at national and sub-national level

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation




REACH

The REACH project aims to promote peace building, social cohesion and inclusiveness. The project conducts awareness on social, economic and legal rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and provides access to the services associated with these rights, while strengthening institutional capacity to deliver these services. A mobile service delivery approach is used to reach communities throughout Fiji with the focus to reach the furthest behind first. The project supports the achievement of SDGs:

5 Gender Equality
Goal 5, which is commitment to achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls

16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Goal 16, which is commitment to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels


Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



Department of Social Welfare

- The core responsibility for the Department of Social Welfare is child protection and social protection programmes for the poor, the vulnerable and the Disadvantaged. The Department has four (4) Units:
- ✓ **Family Services Unit** - The Unit under the Department of Social Welfare administers the social transfer schemes for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families including the care & protection of children.
- ✓ **Child Services Unit** - The Child Services Unit handles the Department of Social Welfare's statutory responsibilities related to care and protection of children. The unit has 4 main areas of operation which includes
 - Child Protection Program
 - Residential Services
 - Probation and Juvenile Justice
 - Secretariat to the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC)

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



Department of Social Welfare

- ✓ **Disability Unit** - The Unit is responsible to the Minister in the administration of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018. When required the Unit provides support to the secretariat of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities in their duties, as well as link the disability provider organizations to the relevant service providers (Government and Non-Government).
- ✓ **Older Persons Unit** - the unit is responsible to promoting an inclusive, protective, healthy and an enabling environment for older persons.

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation



THANK YOU

Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation

Appendix II

Verbatim Report on the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Public Submission

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

ANNUAL REPORT

- 1. Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty
Alleviation 2018-2019 Annual Report**

SUBMISSION: (1) Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty
Alleviation

VENUE: Small Committee Room (West Wing)

DATE: Tuesday, 4th October, 2022

The Committee resumed at 1.41 p.m.

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

In Attendance:

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Ms. Jennifer Poole | - | Permanent Secretary |
| 2. | Ms. Emi Bainimarama | - | Director Corporate Services |
| 3. | Ms. Dilitiana Baleinabuli | - | Acting Director Social Welfare |
| 4. | Ms. Mereoni Tuimuru | - | Acting Director Poverty Monitoring Unit |
| 5. | Ms. Raijieli Mawa | - | Acting Director Women |
| 6. | Ms. Venina Duvuduvukula | - | Principal Accounts Officer |
| 7. | Ms. Lanieta Gonewai | - | REACH Unit |
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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, welcome to the second meeting of the day. We are now hearing submission from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation relating to its operational and financial performance from the period 2018-2019. I remind everyone in this room that all phones are to be switched off. Witnesses are reminded that the evidence given to the Committee is protected by the parliamentary privilege.

It is important for witnesses to be aware that the giving of false or misleading evidence to the Committee may constitute a contempt of Parliament. If, at any stage, a witness wishes to be part of the evidence in camera, he or she should make a request to me as Chairman, and the Committee will consider their request.

Today, we have with us the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Ms. Jennifer Poole, and her Team. Welcome, Madam. We have an hour with you, PS.

Before we proceed any further, please, let me introduce the Committee Members.

(Introduction of Committee Members by Mr. Chairman)

The normal procedure is that we invite witnesses to make an opening statement, then introduce themselves, after which we will hear their response to the Committee's queries which were sent earlier, and then you can make yourselves available for questions from the Committee Members.

So, welcome once again, PS, and the Team. After your presentation when you are going through the questions, PS, for the benefit of our viewers, please, read the question which was sent to you, followed by the Ministry's response. You may now proceed with your presentation. Thank you.

MS. J. POOLE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, and honourable Members, we are very pleased to be here today and thank you for reading our Annual Report for 2018-2019. I would like to just take a moment to introduce my delegation from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. So, I am going to handover for each of them to introduce themselves briefly.

(Introduction of Officials - Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation)

MS. J. POOLE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the presentation is just the vision, core responsibilities, the Ministry structure and Unit functions. Just to give you an understanding of the role of the Ministry in brief, our vision statement as in the Annual Report is transformed to communities with empowered women, children and older persons, and the disadvantaged. The mission is families and communities supported through Social Welfare initiatives and the Gender Mainstreaming Programme.

The Ministry is the Government agency that administers service and programmes which are aligned to:

- the care and protection of children;
- community-based corrections;
- provision of income support to families to address poverty;
- provision of policy interventions for older persons;
- policy interventions for persons with disabilities;
- the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women; and
- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the progress and impact of Government's poverty alleviation programmes.

We have a structure. I currently have three Units, including the Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and the Department of Poverty Monitoring. We also have the Department of Administration and Finance and we have recently been given funds to set up the Department of Children which is currently a Unit under the Department of Social Welfare and was for the purposes of the three reporting period.

The Poverty Monitoring Unit was established as a Poverty Eradication Department in 2001, approved by Cabinet, and it is mandated with the following responsibilities:

- Ensuring that Government's poverty alleviation policies, projects and programmes are well-coordinated;
- Plan and formulate, in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and other sectoral Ministries, an integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme in line with the Government's target of reducing poverty by 5 percent annually as per the Strategic Development Plan which is now the National Development Plan.
- Monitoring and Evaluation of the integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme across Government.
- Coordinating impact assessments and research for the development of effective poverty alleviation policies, strategies and frameworks.
- Identify remedial projects and investment packages on poverty alleviation to meet SDG 1.

The Department of Women, also known as the National Women's Machinery, which is the policy advisor to Government and provides a national advocacy and coordination role in the area of empowering women to reach their full potential on women's empowerment and gender equality. The strategic priority areas for the Department or our thematic tasks include; Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Gender Resilience to Climate Change Disaster Risk Reduction.

We also have thematic cross-cutting within the Department of Women including; access to services, women and girls leadership and participation at all levels, women and the law, gender statistics and research, and Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICD) which used to be known as Gender Mainstreaming and it is now more transformative.

The Department also provides a coordination role through its thematic areas on programmes and policy matters at national and sub-national levels. We also run the REACH programme which aims to promote peace building, social-cohesion and inclusiveness. This mobile project conducts awareness on social, economic and legal rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and provide access to services associated with these rights or strengthening institutional capacity to deliver these services.

The mobile service delivery approach is used to reach communities throughout Fiji with a focus on reaching the furthest behind first, and the project supports the achievements of SDG 5 which is the commitment to achieving gender quality and the empowerment of all women and girls and SDG16 which is commitment to peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

We also have the Department of Social Welfare. The core responsibility of this Department is Child Protection and Social Protection Programmes for the poor, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged. It has four Units as follows:

1. Family Services Unit which administers the social transfer schemes for low income and vulnerable individuals, and families including the care and protection for children.
2. Child Services Unit which handles the Department of Social Welfare statutory responsibilities related to the care and protection of children. The Unit has four main areas of operation which includes; Child Protection, Residential Services, Probation and Juvenile Justice and is the secretariat of the National Coordinating Committee on Children.
3. Disabilities Unit which is responsible for the administration of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, so it is responsible to the honourable Minister for this. When required, the Unit provides support through the secretariat of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities and supports them in their duties, as well as links with disability provider organisations, and it chairs the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.
4. Older Persons Unit which is responsible for promoting an inclusive, protective, healthy and an enabling environment for older persons.

So, that is the snapshot of our Ministry and now we can move on to the questions that you ask on our Report, unless there is any question on our overview.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- If you can provide the response to the questions which we have sent.

MS. J. POOLE.- I might read the question and allow my very capable delegation to respond on their technical areas.

Question No. 1

Provide more information on the Loloma Project.

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- The Loloma Project is a mechanism made up of a taskforce with members inclusive of the Fiji Police Force, the Department of Social Welfare, St. Giles, faith-based organisations, NGOs and members of the public who may wish to consider to volunteer their services in this project.

The project since implementation has been our collaboration with faith-based organisations solidified with the establishment of shelters that provide short term accommodation to the homeless. This includes; the Hanisi Ministry Shelter along Stewart Street and the St. Vincent de Paul Shelter along Brown Street.

Mr. Chairman, while we have assisted a total of 25 individuals and families who have been reintegrated back to their homes from the streets, our efforts would not be possible without the collaboration and teamwork from our private sector counterparts, like Extra Supermarket, who provide food vouchers as and when required.

Mr. Chairman, our operations have seen us assist a total of 51 cases of beggars, psychosocial cases and children on the streets. Our assistance includes; social protection programmes, re-integration back into homes and communities, counselling, shopping as per the food vouchers by Extra Supermarket and placement into institutional care homes.

The Loloma Project is still active and operational to-date and, of course, there are helpline mechanisms, such as the Helpline for Children and Domestic Violence Helpline which is also used as a responsive measure as and when required.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 2

Through the extensive stakeholder collaboration under the REACH Programme, inform us of whether this initiative has addressed policy gaps in the provision of Government social and economic services and promotion of greater access to Justice to Fijians living in remote maritime islands and interior parts of the country. What are the major challenges in rolling out the programme to these areas and how are these being addressed?

MS. L. GONEWAI.- Yes, the Ministry through extensive stakeholder collaboration under the REACH Programme has addressed critical policy gaps faced by Fijians living in outer islands and interior parts of Fiji. Many of these communities lack access to Government services and knowledge of social and economic rights in the Fijian Constitution. Likewise, updates from the Government on reforms and programmes takes time to reach these communities due to the geographic location and limited access to information.

The REACH Programme have been successful in informing the people living in geographically marginalized communities of their rights through awareness raising and providing access to services by Government and NGO agencies. For example, in July 2019, the REACH Team led a mission to the Lau group covering nine districts and a total of 40 communities.

A total of 2,185 people were reached during the outreach programme and total of 6,948 services were delivered by the Government and NGO agencies. The mission was a highlight since Fijians living in the Lau Group were made informed of changes in prices in terms of Births, Deaths & Marriages Office for the new financial year and likewise, the discovery of drugs by our CID

Officers in the Southern parts of Lau which villagers thought were random pipe floaters with GPS solar beacon.

There are also challenges involved in leading a REACH Programme to geographically isolated communities in Fiji. These include:

1. High costs incurred: The cost of operation - allowances for the officers, catering, transportation, fuel, boat/vehicle hired, for example, in 2019, the REACH Mission total cost incurred was more than FJ\$100,000.
2. Harsh physical and weather conditions: Taking out services to remote communities also pose risks to officers when working under harsh physical and weather conditions. For instance, in June 2019 – three days stranded in Vanua Balavu, Lau, due to cyclone warning.
3. Prolonged planning period: Due to geographical location and limited network availability, planning for outreach mission in geographically remote areas in Fiji usually takes time and also affect other work planned for the year. For example, in 2019, the REACH Lau Mission took about four months in planning.

Mr. Chairman, to address the challenges, the REACH team usually:

1. Share cost between UNDP REACH and MWCPA REACH Team to cover for operation during outreach mission. For example, the 2019 REACH Lau mission.
2. Prioritising safety during mission – sleepover at remote communities to minimise travelling at night and regularly updated on weather conditions.
3. Small mission to cater for the prolonged planning of the main mission.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 3

Page 15-16 of Annual Report (Department of Social Welfare) – On the number of Activities being handled by the Department, highlight major challenges and findings on each activity.

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.-The four major Social Protection Programmes are inclusive of the Poverty Benefit Scheme, the Care and Protection Scheme, the Social Pension Scheme and the Disability Assistance Scheme. These are administered across 19 District Welfare Offices.

As per the period 2018-2019, the Programmes were administered to a volume of over 80,000 recipients, inclusive of families and individuals with specific needs or vulnerabilities and in need of financial support. This can range from families without basic needs, older persons, children in need of care and persons living with disabilities. In addition to these major programmes, there is the bus fare subsidy, food voucher assistance to pregnant mothers and grants that are implemented in partnership with other stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, the major challenge that is faced in the implementation of the Programmes is centred around human resources, particularly with the capacity of 80,000 recipients. Part of our exercise is to validate their status - whether those beneficiaries are still liable to be assisted or not, so

home visitation is a challenge. Likewise, the volume of administrative work required in facilitating applications, processing is partially manual and automated. Therefore, there is a lot of manual input in processing the applications accordingly.

Todate, the volume of recipients have increased from 80,000 to 90,000. To ensure its relevance and effectiveness, the Programmes will need to be reviewed in terms of its targeting priorities and benefits outlined to the present need, and most importantly, for the sustainability of the Programmes.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry, in its effort to address the challenges, is engaging in a reform project over the period 2022-2025 with the assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the World Bank. This reform will review the targeting of the Programmes, operating procedures and proper capacity building for the workforce. It will, most importantly, enable the Ministry to build its own management information systems for its programmes, that will allow the full automation of its Programmes. It is anticipated to be completed by 2025, whereby the programmes will be effectively addressing the targeted population and, of course, the system.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 4

Page 15-16 of Annual Report (*Department of Social Welfare*) – On the number of Activities being handled by the Department, highlight major challenges and findings on each activity.

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, there are four success stories that I would like to briefly highlight. The Welfare Graduation Programme was administered in partnership with the National Centre of Small and Micro Enterprises Development (NCSMED) until the 2019-2020 upon its dissolution. The Welfare Graduation Programme, thereafter, has been on review and is included in the current Social Welfare Reform Project. From 2018, we have graduated nine recipients under this Programme.

The following success stories were extracted from a Monitoring Report in 2018. The first of which was located in Lautoka - a canteen and flowering business. Ms. Suruj Kumar of Lovu in Lautoka was assisted with this grant. She had attended the Start Your Own Business (SYOB) training offered by NCSMED before starting her project. Currently, she faces no major competition in terms of her project and sales, and she, at times, is able to make \$200 plus. She has successfully graduated from the Social Protection Allowance and is thankful to the Ministry for the assistance that was provided. The status of the project is successful.

The second success story, Mr. Chairman, is from Labasa - food selling business by Ms. Sera Tiko. She had been assisted with \$1,600 of which, she used to buy pots, esky, gas stove and the likes. According to her, she makes \$100 profit per month from selling food and is there to support her children in tertiary institutions.

Of course, success story three is about a market vendor in Navua. She was also given \$1,600 grant to purchase vegetables for her stall. She, of course, was trained before she was assisted and earns about \$100 to \$250 profits from this project.

The last one who is from Vunivutu in Macuata is also a market vendor. She also went through

the training but she gets to generate about \$50 profit from her canteen and also a successful business today.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 5

What is the Ministry doing to reduce the cases of children roaming in our streets? What initiatives have been implemented to reduce instances of the different types of child welfare cases reported, as provided on Page 17 of the Annual Report?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, on reduction in children roaming the streets, this requires a holistic approach and the Ministry is working through the Loloma Project to provide at-point solution through collaboration with other Government agencies and NGOs.

In terms of publication and media awareness, the Department, this year, has taken advantage of using the social media platform, inclusive of TV and radio stations, particularly to expand its reach and coverage in educating, informing and creating awareness and advocacy around child protection issues. In this financial year, the Department released five editions of the Child Services Unit Newsletter called the Mockingbird. It symbolises the idea of innocence, pity and goodness.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 6

How has the Child Helpline, Training of Trainers (TOT) on Child Protection, and PCAN Campaign/Blue Ribbon Campaign assisted in protecting our children?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, the Child Helpline offers help and support services for children through referrals made to the Department of Children. A variety of communication methods can be used to ensure that children can always access help and find someone to talk to. These methods include; telephone services, mobile phones, text messaging and direct referrals to the Department of Children online via email, *Facebook*, chat, radio and mobile, and community or school outreach.

The Helpline services are part of the National Child Protection System of the Ministry and its purpose is to provide referrals, listening and information services for children. It also forms an accessible emergency contact for children in need of help, protection, assistance and guidance. There is always a trained counsellor on duty and they can provide information and referrals for a range of Government services for children.

While the Helpline is for children, counsellors also receive calls from adults reporting child abuse, or having concerns about neglected children, or requesting information on a range of welfare options regarding their children.

The Child Helpline, Mr. Chairman, also assists those who may not be able to access essential services, including street children, children living with disabilities and children in marginalised areas or communities. The Child Helpline provides children with their fundamental right to amplify their voices and to be heard, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and plays a key role in shaping, strengthening and filling in the gaps of existing national child protection systems.

Mr. Chairman, on the Training of Trainers in Child Protection, the Department has an annual workplan with UNICEF and out of this was the development of a contextualised facilitator's manual called "Children are a precious gift from God". This manual is a community-based facilitation manual designed to build community appreciation of children and draw attention to some of the issues that children face in their development. It assists community leaders, faith-based leaders, youth leaders and parents and caregivers in finding a solution to these issues and help them identify ways to deal with the issues that arise.

Community leaders are trained on this manual and to take the lead role and responsibility in their communities to protect children. The outcome of the Training of Trainers package is for community leaders to develop community child protection measures for their own communities, to ensure the safety and protection of children in their communities. Apart from the TOT, Mr. Chairman, there are child protection awareness carried out in communities.

Of course, we have the PCAN Campaign/Blue Ribbon Campaign. Since 2002, Mr. Chairman, Fiji has been commemorating the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect on 19th November annually in synergy with the International Day of the Rights of the Child on 20th November, which has its objective - a rallying point around the issue of child abuse and the need for urgent prevention programmes. These PCAN activities are carried out at district, divisional and national levels.

The Welfare Officers work together with their inter-agency committee members in their districts and divisions to conduct awareness and workshops in communities, advocating on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. It is also a timely reminder to stakeholders, families and communities to not only realise but revitalise their commitments and roles in the care and protection of our children from abuse, exploitation and violence.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 7

What programmes are in place to assist persons living with disabilities in starting business ventures and finding employment?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, yes, there is an Economic Empowerment Programme for persons with disabilities. The Programme in the financial year 2018-2019 was in pilot mode and Mr. Chairman, I believe, later in Question 10, there is also a question on this as well.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 8

Page 20 of Annual Report (*Allowance for Persons with Disabilities*) – We note that the Disability Unit used the Functional Independence Measure as the guiding tool in assessing cases. Elaborate on this Measure and its accuracy in ensuring allowances are distributed to eligible individuals?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Functional Independence measure is an 18 item guiding tool that assesses functions in six main areas, namely; self-care, continence (the ability to control movements of the bowels and bladder), mobility, transfers, communication and cognition.

The tool uses the level of assistance an individual needs to grade functional status from total independence to total assistance. In addition, the tool is used to assess a person's level of disability, as well as a change in a person's disability status in response to rehabilitation or medical intervention. This tool has been accepted worldwide as the most reliable in measuring one's disability.

Mr. Chairman, with the use of this measuring tool, the Disability Unit under the Ministry is able to target only those with permanent disabilities and which is applicable to all age groups and gender across the nation and is not means tested.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 9

We note in the media and from concerned welfare recipients of the delays experienced in receiving allowances. Explain why this is the case and how measures taken by the Ministry to ensure timely disbursement and processing of allowances?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Ministry makes monthly allowance payment to recipients through the banks, and the manual voucher mode of payment. The voucher mode of assistance consists of six-month voucher books that are sent bi-annually through the mail to various postal agencies across the maritime islands, where recipients do redeem monthly at their postal agency.

The banking mode of payment is facilitated by the Ministry with a timeline of fifth of the month to avoid large gathering of recipients. Where neither mode of payment is available, the Ministry takes the allowances to the recipients' and delivery of the cash to the recipient happens twice within a six-month period which is referred to as Pay-Master System. Mr. Chairman, Sir, where there are exceptional delays, media messages are made to inform recipients.

To improve the payment of allowances, the Ministry is currently expanding the mode of payments to include Tele companies, the most recent being MPAlSA with Vodafone Ltd, and is working with Digicel to be another mode of payment. Mr. Chairman, Sir, These options for mode of payment are made available upon the recipient's choice.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 10

Provide more information on the Economic Empowerment Programme for Persons with Disabilities and how successful was the pilot programme in the Central Division. How does the Ministry ensure that those living in rural and maritime areas participate in this programme and confirm whether this programme has been extended to other divisions?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Economic Empowerment Programme is an initiative that has measurable and tangible outcomes to persons living with disabilities. For the current successful recipient of the SEED grant, they now have an opportunity to improve their current financial situation that will positively translate into other areas of their everyday living.

There were two business trainings conducted by organisations for persons with disabilities in the Central Division in 2019 whereby 50 persons with disabilities were engaged. From the 50 persons

with disabilities, 42 managed to successfully complete the training and were given SEED grants for their efforts.

Managing their respective small businesses is a huge inspiration to the persons with disabilities and their families and, of course, the breakdown are as such. Currently 65 percent of the projects under the Economic Empowerment Programme are still operational and these are projects based around sewing, decorations, farmers, canteen and ice block and sweet sellers.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Team has not yet touch base with the maritime islands, such as Kadavu, Lomaiviti and the Lau Group, but has incorporated a three-month business plan that would accommodate the Eastern maritime area and the Western Division. However, the team has managed to cover the Northern Division respectively and this includes; Bua, Macuata (Mali Island), Cakaudrove, Qamea, Taveuni and Rabi.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 11

Provide more information on the process undertaken to profile beggars and what actions and/or arrangements are made by the Ministry with parents whose children are found to be begging?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Department, on a monthly basis, conducts profiling exercises on our streets to identify beggars and children begging. This is done in collaboration with the Fiji Police Force and St. Giles staff (in instances where psychosocial beggars may need medical check-up). Our National Beggars Database has seen a total of more than 10 adult beggars and a growing number of children who are engaged in begging, that is, a total of 20 since January this year.

Mr. Chairman, while we conduct home placement for children found begging, we also counsel and raise awareness with parents and families, who allow their children to be unsupervised on the streets and what this means for them in terms of negligence and their responsibilities to their children.

Mr. Chairman, we removed children off the streets and identify why and what their needs are, whether it is emotional, spiritual, financial, and we work with parents by providing social protection programmes, counselling, linking their children to counselling and education services.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 12

Page 21 of Annual Report (*State Homes*) – Inform us of the total number of applications received for each State Home in this period. What is the capacity of each Home?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- We have a breakdown of the number of applications received. Actually, there are three State-administered Home facilities, as follows.

Home	Number of Applications Received 2018-2019
Golden Age Home Suva	18
Golden Age Home Labasa	8
Golden Age Home Lautoka	9
Total	35

Of course, in terms of capacity for the second question, they are broken down in those as well.

Home	Capacity (2018-2019)	Current Capacity (2022)
Golden Age Home Suva	58	49
Golden Age Home Labasa	30	29 (after furnishing, capacity will be 40)
Golden Age Home Lautoka	53	42
Total	136	120

The Ministry is taking into consideration the limited resources in each of these Homes and had reduced the capacity in the Homes to ensure quality care is provided to residents.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 13

We note that the Poverty Monitoring Unit monitored 11 programmes and 8 Government agencies in this fiscal year including the ‘Upgrade of Cane Access Roads’. Inform us on why the Upgrading of Farm Access Roads programme wasn’t also identified for monitoring.

MS. M. TUIMURI.- The Poverty Monitoring Unit (PMU) identified the 11 Programmes under the eight Government Agencies in consultation with Programme Implementers. Programmes to be monitored from relevant Ministries in each fiscal year are also determined from the four sectors.

In 2017/2018 fiscal year, while carrying our baseline collation with Ministry of Agriculture, we identified Coconut Development Programme to be monitored. In this financial year - 2022/2023, the PMU is monitoring Grant to Self Help Programme and Community Access Road, Footpath and Footbridges Programme under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management and Rural Outer Island Development (ROID) under the Ministry of Agriculture. Some of the activities or projects funded through the above Programmes are focused towards construction and upgrade of farm access roads.

Mr. Chairman, the PMU is mandated to monitor and evaluate on the impact of Government’s Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). In each financial year, the PMU, in consultation with relevant Ministries, identified Poverty Alleviation Programmes to be monitored. Focal point officers are also identified in each Ministry, who then liaises with PMU Technical Officers.

Baseline information are gathered which include; name of recipients/community/group

assisted, type of assistance provided, year provided, et cetera, are gathered from relevant Programme Implementers and this sets the platform of the monitoring exercise of the PMU.

Programme questionnaires are designed aligning to the objective of the Programmes. The questionnaires are also shared to the Programme Implementers for their input and confirmation.

The PMU used random sampling method to identify recipients to be interviewed. Face to face interview and focus group discussions are methods used to interview beneficiaries, and also visitations to project sites.

In addition, honourable Members, the surveys are conducted in the four Divisions and the beneficiaries are approached and gave their consent to be interviewed using paper questionnaires. The nature of projects monitored are usually individual, group, community and school-based projects.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Question No. 14

Considering the large mandate of the Ministry and the many programmes and activities to be implemented, does the Ministry have sufficient staffing capacity to ensure smooth work flow? What is the employee turnover and attrition within the Ministry?

MRS. E. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Chairman, currently, of the 442 approved positions, there are 125 vacant positions of which:

- 98 positions were advertised;
- 43 appointments made;
- 34 positions currently being processed;
- 21 positions need to be re-advertised;
- 27 positions yet to be confirmed for advertisement; and
- in 2023, there will be 10 retirees, thus the position will be advertised then.

The Ministry has engaged temporary staff to fill in the vacant positions, as well as volunteers.

From 2018 to 2021, the Ministry has experienced an average of 32 staff exit per financial year. For the current financial year, for August alone, we have seen seven staff who have resigned due to job offers abroad.

The Ministry is in regular liaison with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Economy on the engagement of relieving officers where there is an urgent need, for instance, for the Golden Age Home in view of the nature of their duties.

For the current financial year, the Ministry has been allocated funding for the establishment of the Department of Children, including its Director and additional staff. To ensure that the legislations on the safeguarding of a child are properly implemented, monitored and evaluated, there is a need to strengthen the workforce within the Child Services Unit, which will now become the Department of Children.

The Corporate Services Division is in the process of including in the Budget proposal for

2023-2024 the need for additional support staff. Furthermore with the approved number of 442 staff in the Ministry Staff Establishment, there is a need to have additional staff to meet the demands of the Ministry, considering the Ministry's mandate and emerging issues. Additional staff will be needed post-reform to support the current services and intended MIS that will be developed.

There is a need to increase the Administrative/Accounts cadre to enable Welfare Officers to concentrate on case management and be relieved of general administrative works. The Ministry is reviewing its workforce needs and currently working on securing additional positions in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Economy.

MS. J. POOLE.-

Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2019

Question No. 1

Pages 33 and 34 of Annual Report:

- (a) **Qualified audit opinion - We note that the auditor issued a qualified audit opinion on the 2018-2019 accounts of the Ministry on the 2 grounds provided. Confirm whether these issues have been resolved what mechanisms have been instituted by the Ministry to prevent their recurrence.**
- (b) **Under Other Matters, confirm whether these 3 issues have been rectified and internal controls in place to ensure such issues do not emanate in future.**

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Mr. Chairman, additional positions were provided by the Ministry of Economy, enabling the Ministry to carry out monthly reconciliation and also maintaining the Ledger for monthly posting of the Social Protection Programme expenditures. The Ministry has started doing this as of the last financial year, that is, 2021-2022.

With regards to the unreconciled variance of the FMIS General Ledger and the Ministry's Payroll Report, our response is that the Ministry has reconciled the Ministry's P2P (Person to Post) against both, the Government Wage Earner and Established Payroll. Furthermore, the Ministry is in the process of adjusting variances against the FMIS figure in consultation with the Ministry of Economy.

As a control measure, Mr. Chairman, to prevent the recurrence, the Ministry has a monthly reconciliation system in place to reconcile the:

- monthly Absence/Attendance Returns submitted by all the Offices in the Divisional and District Offices;
- approved Staff Establishment (P2P); and
- Payroll.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to part (b) of the question on internal controls over procurement, as an internal control measure, the Ministry is currently revising its Finance Manual and is targeting the Ministry's COP 2022-2023 and it is expected to be finalised by 31st October, 2022. The Ministry also has in place a system to thoroughly scrutinise all the requests to ensure that it is in compliance with the procurement regulations.

For the period 2018-2019, the maintenance of Accountable Advance was not properly

documented. After the issuance of an internal circular of the Ministry on the Accountable Advances in September 2019, there has been a marked improvement in adherence to the processes.

Based on the provisions of the General Orders and the Ministry's Finance Manual, the SOP will be developed by 15th October to guide the issuance and retirement of Accountable Advances. In consultation with the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry will update the list of pending Accountable Advances from August 2019 to date, and provide a brief by 31st October, 2022.

Mr. Chairman, the next section is on bus fare. The Ministry is only responsible for e-transport for the elderly and persons with disability. The authority to verify records, upload, validate and approve, has been handed over from Vodafone Fiji Limited to the Ministry with effect from January 2022. Thus, the Ministry now has control over the processes. Furthermore, the Vodafone team has assured that recipients with only valid social welfare bus fare ID card are being issued with e-transport card and cards extracted previously using other ID cards have been blocked.

Additionally, card redemption is only permitted to card holders. Only one active card per recipient is updated once confirmation is received that other cards, especially lost ones, are blocked. For better administration, tracking and utilisation of funds, quarterly payments were rolled out with effect from May 2022. With the centralised update of e-transport card top-up using authorised privileges, and roll out of improved processes will bring about efficiency and accuracy.

On the National Council of Older Persons (NCOP), the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in their budget submission for this financial year - 2022-2023, had provided its request for the official establishment of the NCOP as a statutory body. Thus, Government has allocated \$120,000, towards ensuring that the initial human resource aspect of the establishment is facilitated. This is inclusive of a Director position and a Personal Assistant. In addition, funds will be dedicated to the purchase of required office equipment for the establishment, as well as Council meetings and consultations with relevant stakeholders.

On Government mechanism, the National Council of Older Persons Act 2012 enables Government to establish a statutory and advisory arm, which will function as a national mechanism with divisional and district committees. In 2013, a Council was appointed as per the National Council of Older Persons Act.

In 2014, Government had consistently resourced allocations towards the activities under the Council. To date, the objective of the Council is to strengthen partnership and collaboration between Government families, community-based organisations, traditional village communities, NGOs, CSOs and the private sector, in creating an inclusive, protective and healthy and an enabling environment for older persons. It is also there to represent the interests of all the older persons in Fiji at all levels.

MS. J. POOLE.- Mr. Chairman, that is our response to your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, PS, and the Team for a very detailed response. I will now give opportunity to our honourable Members for questions.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the Ministry for bringing up a very powerful Team here this afternoon and have presented in depth the Loloma Report of this and perhaps, a little later, I will ask a question on that. I am still looking through this. Thank you.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Madam PS, and members of your Executive Team for that very informative presentation. My point of view is just with regards to your Ministry. It is viewed as a big Ministry in terms of the role and the number of programmes that the Ministry looks after. That is why we had asked the question with regard to your capacity in the Ministry.

You have rightly explained the challenges you faced but on that note, I just want to say that the challenges that you are facing with regards to your capacity and the role that you try and achieve, I believe, you are doing an efficient work with regards to that as is evidenced from the work of your staff in rural communities, especially in Taveuni. They are very efficient workers over there, so thank you very much.

My question after that is on the Loloma Project. It is a good initiative. You mentioned regular monthly sweeps. With those sweeps, do you also collate data, try and look at the data and interpret it and move on from there to see whether the timeframe for monthly sweeps is alright or it does not need to be in every two weeks or so. Just your view on that, please.

MS. J. POOLE.- Thank you very much. I am going to hand this over to our Manager of the Department of Social Welfare and who is coordinating the Loloma Project at the moment.

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, honourable Member, for the question. In terms of the data and interpretation, we do conduct sweeps on a monthly basis and at times, it is quarterly so for us, it is furnishing the baseline, analysing it and looking at strategic areas where we could probably work together in collaboration to address some of the critical issues, given the vulnerable cohorts that the Ministry looks after. Thank you.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, I must thank the honourable PS for their contribution this morning. My question is about the Ministry's responsibility of eradicating poverty. Can you enlighten us on the progress of achieving the five percent - the Government target of reducing poverty by five percent?

MS. M. TUIMURU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and honourable Member. Currently, the Poverty Monitoring Unit's mandated role is to monitor and evaluate Government's poverty alleviation programmes of Government. Given the recent HIES percentage level of poverty and we do all know that currently, it sits at 24.10 percent. However, the Poverty Monitoring Unit monitors poverty alleviation programmes of Government but we do not administer those programmes.

In 2018 to 2019, what the Unit did to measure poverty was access to services and access to income. Our way forward for now and what the Poverty Monitoring Unit is doing in this fiscal year, we have aligned our work to our national and international indicators in terms of measuring the impact level of our programmes on our beneficiaries. We are using the standards of living in terms of the types of houses they live in, access to water, access to electricity and access to food security, and when it comes to the programme itself in terms of access to services and food security. That is how we measure poverty and looking at the impact of the programme that has had all the beneficiaries in terms of improvement of their livelihood, improvement of the standard of living and basically access to services. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

HON. A. NAGATA.- I have a question in regards to the Disability Unit. First, I would like to commend the Ministry for the great achievements on the milestone for the Unit as at 31st July, 2019, and one of the milestones is the successful roll out of the Economic Empowerment Programme

for Persons with Disabilities. I believe it was piloted in the Central Division. My question is, how do people with disability qualify for the training or programme?

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, and honourable Member for the question. In terms of the criteria for qualification into the programme, the Unit is currently working on refining its criteria so that its district mechanism which is the District Committee on Persons with Disabilities, they get to be aware of the tool and, of course, the four Divisions can actually be profiled accordingly and assessed so that they can get assistance.

I think it is not far off from the current tool of assessment that we have in terms of the Disability Assistance Scheme, it is just looking at how the Economic Empowerment Programme could add greater value to the everyday living of a person with disability. So, we do have a tool, but it is currently being reviewed as well so that the District and the Divisional mechanisms are also aware of the tool.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, just a quick question with regards to your REACH Programme. You have mentioned here that it has been successful in informing the people who are living in geographically marginalized communities. How else would you measure the success of the Programme, is it through the number of individuals and communities reached, or how else would you measure the success of the Programme?

MS. L. GONEWAI.- Thank you, Sir. In terms of that, we normally carry out data gathering during every mission so we have statistics that are detailed in which age groups are also categorized. That is what we have with us in order to measure the success of our Programme.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Is knowledge gained also a measure of success?

MS. L. GONEWAI.- On that Sir, can I get back to you with the response.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Chairman, the initiative of Training of Trainers on Child Protection, can you enlighten us as to the number of trainings you have conducted and the areas covered? If there is any ongoing programme in the rural areas?

MS. J. POOLE.- I do not have the details so I will get those back to you, but I would be happy to note that we now have a mascot for the job protection and child awareness and his name is 'Charlie the Turtle'. We had an awareness programme that was on television on social media and we have now built the mascot and he is being launched which is still in the process of restructuring the Department of Children, and building their capacity to the programme in this awareness and utilise this.

I think one of the strengths we have in child protection at the moment and also through REACH is the use of our partners and working with our NGO partners that provide a lot of awareness on child protection. That has been very successful for us and we have also been able to work with communities but through schools and these areas. We had to continue to develop that Programme.

In terms of our training, I will get back to you with our report on that and send it in for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, thank you.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- The Economic Empowerment Programme for Persons with Disabilities, I believe, was a pilot programme in the Central Division. That is from Question No. 10.

Have you tapped into other Divisions, like Northern and Western Divisions, with regards to some cases that you have dealt with?

The reason is because one was brought to my attention and this person is computer literate, with the disability but he is very active and from the Northern Division. So, I referred him to the Social Welfare Department for assistance. I am sure he must have gone down that line. I am just interested to know how we are reaching out to the other Divisions with regard to people with this kind of disabilities and how we are helping them?

MS. J. POOLE.- I will just hand that over to the Acting Director.

MRS. D. BALEINABULI.- Just to give a very brief response to that question, the Economic Empowerment Programme is a programme that tries to reach the unreachable in the communities. So, we do have our district mechanism which is quite strong and through validation, they get to profile cases and refer. But here at the Ministry level, there is a budgetary allocation of \$18,000 this year and we get to look at our baseline from the last financial year - the pilot and, of course, it is looking like we need to spread our focus to the Western, Northern and the Eastern Divisions. So, it is actually distributed according to the portion of the budget and we are ensuring that we would also want to equally spread the assistance across the four Divisions as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, honourable Members. That concludes our meeting with Officials from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I would like to thank the Permanent Secretary and your Team. I appreciate the support provided to the Committee in its scrutiny process. Should we have any further queries, the Secretariat will get in touch with you.

Madam, do you have any closing remarks?

MS. J. POOLE.- I just want to thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, for this opportunity to showcase our Ministry and to talk about the programmes that we are doing and we hope to be here again soon when we submit our next two reports which are also finished. Sir, thank you very much for your time today.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now suspend proceedings.

The Committee adjourned at 2.44 p.m.