



---

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **Review Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report for the Period of 1st August 2018 – 31st July 2019**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI  
Parliamentary Paper No. 30 of 2023**

*April 2023*

---

*Published and printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, Government Buildings, SUVA*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP.....	3
CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD.....	4-5
RECOMMENDATION.....	6
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Committee Procedure.....	6
2.0 ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION.....	7
3.0 KEY FINDINGS.....	8-9
4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS.....	9
5.0 CONCLUSION.....	10
COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE.....	11
APPENDICES.....	12
Published Written Evidence.....	12

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



### **Chairperson**

Hon. Alitia Bainivalu MP  
Government Member

---



### **Deputy Chairperson**

Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure MP  
Government Member

---



### **Member**

Hon. Sashi Kiran MP  
Government Member

---



### **Member**

Hon. Viam Pillay MP  
Opposition Member

---



### **Member**

Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala MP  
Opposition Member

---

## **CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD**

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for 2018-2019.

This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last term of Parliament was referred the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report 2018-2019. The same report had been reintroduced in this new term of Parliament and have been referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs. As per the normal process for report scrutiny, the current Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

The Committee took note of and deliberated on the previous Committee's succinct work done on the mentioned report. This Report will reiterate the work done by the previous Committee in reviewing and highlighting the contents of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report 2018-2019 and make recommendations on the anomalies noted in the report. It will also highlight the discussions held by the Committee with the Ministry in relation to the issues noted from its report.

In this financial year, the Ministry received its highest budget till date enabling it to better provide for the welfare of the neediest Fijians, by sustaining all existing social protection programs administered by the Ministry. The Ministry continued to work in collaboration with its stakeholders and partners from Government and the Civil Society to ensure the best possible results were obtained from its work and reviewed areas that needed improvement for better service delivery.

Additionally, the Ministry continued the implementation of its plans in place for policy changes, projects, programs and better adherence to international governing instruments of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations that Fiji has ratified in relation to the benefits of its clientele.

Together with its partners, the Ministry continued to deliver on the National Development Plan goals for the disadvantaged Fijians based on the foundation of the 2030 Agenda and the vision of the Fijian Government, seeking equality for all.

At this juncture I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament for their efforts and input, which has greatly assisted our Committee in the completion of this report.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Members of the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the secretariat staff and all other support staff for their valuable input and support.

I also extend my gratitude to the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Ms Jennifer Poole, and her staff for their timely assistance in this review process.

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



.....  
**Hon. Alitia Bainivalu**  
**Chairperson**



## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for 201-2019 and recommends that Parliament take note of its report.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation was tabled in Parliament in the August 2022 meeting and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament. The same report was reinstated in this new term of Parliament in February 2023 and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its scrutiny and report back on its findings.

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

Furthermore, Standing Orders 110(1)(c) authorises the Standing Committee to “*scrutinise the government departments with responsibility within the Committee's subject area, including by investigating, inquiring into, and making recommendations relating to any aspect of such a department's administration, legislation or proposed legislative program, budget, rationalisation, restructuring, functioning, organisation, structure and policy formulation.*”

## **1.1 Committee Procedure**

To reiterate as major work of the report scrutiny was undertaken by the members of the Committee in the last term of Parliament. The Committee met to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Following this, the Committee held an audience with the Executive Management of the Ministry for their response to the Committee's questions and clarification of issues. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, we compiled our findings on the Annual Report where the current Committee further deliberated upon and subsequently endorsed it in March, 2023.

The previous Committee received written response from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for this annual review. It is available on the Parliament website, at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/Committees/standing-Committee-on-social-affairs/>

## **2.0 ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation oversees the three departments: Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and Poverty Monitoring Unit.

The Department of Social Welfare administers Fiji's social welfare programs, which include the Poverty Benefit Scheme, the Child Protection Allowance, the Food Voucher Program, and the Social Pension Scheme. In managing these programs, the Department is responsible for ensuring that assistance targets those most in need and eliminating corruption and fraud in the system.

The Department is equally committed to ensuring that these programs do not create a culture of dependency, focusing efforts and energy on graduating individuals and families from "welfare to workfare" through its Welfare Graduation Program and Executive Support Unit Projects.

The Department also has the statutory responsibility to ensure the protection and wellbeing of children, which includes managing juvenile centres.

The Ministry manages the three state owned homes for senior citizens and leads the National Council for Older Persons and the National Coordinating Committee for Children.

The Department of Women and Children is responsible for mainstreaming gender in the public service through the National Gender Policy, and does so by promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls through the implementation of the National Women's Plan of Action. The National Women's Plan of Action is aimed at boosting women's employment opportunities, increasing women's participation in decision making, eliminating violence against women and girls, improving women's access to basic services and addressing women's issues in new legislation.

The Department works with other Ministries to promote gender equality to ensure that gender perspectives are addressed in all Government policies and initiatives. The Poverty Monitoring Unit evaluates Government's poverty related programmes and makes policy recommendations to the Ministry and Cabinet. The Unit is committed to ensuring that all such programs deliver tangible outcomes that improve livelihoods and reduce poverty.

### 3.0 KEY FINDINGS

- 3.1 We enquired with the Ministry on its work to reduce the cases of children roaming in the streets. The Ministry informed us that, in order to address this issue, a holistic approach would be required, thus the Ministry is working through the Loloma project to provide at-point solution through collaboration with other Government agencies and NGOs.

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

- 3.2 The Ministry 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). The Ministry's 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). The Committee notes that while the Ministry conducts home placement for children found begging, it also counsels and raises 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. The Ministry removes children off the streets, identifies why and what their needs are whether it's emotional, spiritual and financial support, works with parents by providing social protection, counseling, and linking their children to counseling/education services.

- 3.3 Considering the large mandate of the Ministry and the many programmes and activities to be implemented, we asked the Ministry on whether it had sufficient staffing capacity to ensure smooth work flow. We were informed that currently, of 442 approved positions, there are 125 vacant positions of which:

1. 98 positions were advertised;
2. 43 appointments made;
3. 34 positions currently being processed;
4. 21 positions to be re-advertised;
5. 27 positions yet to be confirmed for advertisement; and
6. 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.

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 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 also 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.

## **4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee recommends:

- 4.1 That the Ministry expedite the process to fill all vacant positions.
- 4.2 That the Ministry work in collaboration with other relevant Government agencies and NGOs to address and reduce the number of street dwellers.
- 4.3 That the Ministry continue to work closely with all Ministries and stakeholders such as, *turaga ni koro* and advisory councillors to ensure that Poverty Alleviation Programmes are monitored and implemented.
- 4.4 That the Ministry review all cases in a timely manner to determine the genuine recipients of assistance provided.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The Committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. As part of its review process, the Committee heard evidence from the Executive Management of the Ministry and received a written response.

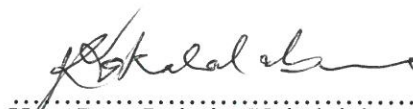
In this review report, the Committee has highlighted various areas that need to be strengthened by the Ministry and relevant recommendations have been made for the resolution of issues.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:



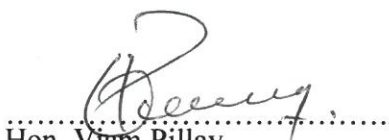
Hon. Alitia Bainivalu  
(Chairperson)



Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure  
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Sashi Kiran  
(Member)



Hon. Viam Pillay  
(Member)



Hon. Parveen Bala  
(Member)

29/3/23

(Date)

# APPENDICES

## **Published written evidence**

---

Written evidence was received from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/Committees/standing-Committee-on-social-affairs/>