



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Consolidated Review Report of the Nausori Town Council 2016- 2018 Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Consolidated Review Report of Nausori Town Council 2016-2018 Annual Reports*.

As mandated under Standing Orders 109(2) (b), the Committee looks into issues related to health, education, social services, labor, aviation, culture and media.

The Committee reviewed the Annual Reports and identified essential issues, which were then brought to the attention of the Nausori Town Council for necessary action.

The Committee, during its deliberations, and site visit noted that the Nausori Town Council's responsibilities was extended to the Korovou urban center in 2018. The discussion of Korovou developing to a Town has been put on hold. The Council has Plans in place for the development of a park, with amenities (public convenience facility), outdoor sitting areas, proper bus-bays and mini-bus bay. The Committee strongly recommends that this be a priority for the government.

Apart from its primary function of collecting rates and providing services to ratepayers, the Nausori Town Council now faces other challenges. These include the drug situation, flooding within the municipality and the additional services to the extended rural boundary.

The Committee believes that given the current situation, the municipal council must urgently review its functions and operational procedures to address the serious issues within the municipality.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Local Government must guide and oversee the Council’s operations, compliance, efficiency and effectiveness.

I would like to sincerely thank the Acting CEO, Special Administrators of Nausori Town Council and her team, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and her officials for their valuable contributions to this review process.

Finally, I would like to thank the current and former Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Sashi Kiran, Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Hon. Viam Pillay and Hon. Parveen Bala for their valuable input and support. I would also like to thank Hon. Taito Rokomatu, Hon. Joseph Nand, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo and Hon Shalen Kumar for their assistance on several occasions as alternate standing committee members.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.



.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

Acronym	
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
MP	Member of Parliament
SO	Standing Order

COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution and SO 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). The Committee consists of the following members:



Chairperson

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Government Member



Opposition Member



Alternative Member

Government Member



Opposition Member

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nausori Town Council Annual Reports 2016 to 2018 was tabled in Parliament on 24th May 2024 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

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

1.1. Committee Procedures

Deliberations on the Nausori Town Council began in late October 2024. The Committee read through the reports and prepared clarifications on key issues of interest, which were then sent to the Nausori Town Council.

The Committee held a Public Submission with the Nausori Town Council on 6th November 2024.

Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, it was subsequently endorsed on 10th March 2025.

The Committee received the responses from the Nausori Town Council which can be viewed at the following link. <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2. NAUSORI TOWN COUNCIL

2.1 Background

Nausori is a town that has evolved from what was once a thriving sugar industry in the 19th century for the colony of Fiji, to a rural backwater town on the banks of the Rewa River from 1937 onwards to the present. It is historic in the sense that it was the first sugar mill established by the Colonial Sugar Refining Co of Australia in 1881. It also hosted the first major influx of Indian laborers in Viti Levu in 1881 to come to work on the sugar plantations in the Rewa Delta.

The Population of Nausori in the last census had grown from 15,000 to 24,950 and approximately 30,000-32,000 in 2017. This major increase is attributed to the transfer of Naulu/Nakasi/Davuilevu Housing and Wainibuku from Nasinu and its inclusion in the Nausori Township in 2004.

The Nausori Town Council has limited assets confined mainly to the bus stand, the market, Ratu Cakobau Park, to the Council commercial complex hosting the library, restaurants, nightclubs and various other services. There are also small parcels of land in Vunivivi Hill and Manoca.

2.2 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

The committee noted and deliberated on the Nausori Town Council's undertaking to improve its operations and service delivery.

- The Committee noted that for the period under review, 2016-2018, the Auditor-General issued a disclaimer opinion for all the years. The Committee considers this a serious state of financial affairs, and it is evident that the Nausori Town Council has failed to comply with the relevant financial regulations.
- The Committee noted that there are cases pending investigation before the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) for the Council.
- The Committee is also of the view that the Ministry of Local Government has failed to provide an effective oversight for those years over the financial affairs of Nausori Town Council.
- The Committee noted that Nausori Town Council has 50 open spaces. Some of these spaces are classified as open space development, this can be better utilized for development and income generating for the council.
- It is also crucial to review the relevant legislations and regulations to empower Nausori Town Council.
- The Committee noted that Nausori Town Council is working in partnership with Shop n Save on the redevelopment of the old market site.
- The Committee noted that Nausori Town Council looks after Korovou urban center and is working on plans for future developments.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings that the committee compiled through its deliberations.

- 3.1 **Review of Legislations:** The Committee noted that the Local Government Act needs to be reviewed to better control the activities in all municipalities.
- 3.2 **Financial Management:** The Committee noted that the Nausori Town Council did not observe the proper accounting protocols for the period under review. The Nausori Town Council has implemented a Finance Manual and departmental SOPs for each of the accounting functions and has strict check and review measures in place.
- 3.3 **Collection of Rate Arrears:** The Committee noted the increase in rate arrears as of 31 July 2024, which stood at \$4 million for the Council. The Nausori Town Council has taken measures to address these issues with the small claims tribunal and other strategies for recovering rate arrears.
- 3.4 **Status of Open Spaces:** The Committee noted that the Nausori Town Council has 50 open spaces. The council is considering using these open spaces for parks and other recreational purposes.
- 3.5 **Natural and Man-Made Disaster Risk Plan:** The Committee noted that the Council does not have any Disaster Risk Management Plan. The Council, with other stakeholders, is in the process of formulating a draft Plan.
- 3.6 **The Old Market Site Development:** The Committee noted that Nausori Town Council has contributed to the removal of asbestos and is working in partnership with Shop n Save on the redevelopment of the old market site.
- 3.7 **Garbage Collection Extended Boundary:** The Committee noted that the council provides services to the rural boundary for garbage collection and the fund given doesn't suffice the services.

- 3.8 **Drainage and Road Maintenance Issue:** The Committee noted that the Nausori Town Council faces many issues with roads, streetlights, and drainage. The Council, in collaboration with the Fiji Roads Authority, has been addressing the issues faced by ratepayers.
- 3.9 **Korovou Urban Center:** The Committee noted that the Nausori Town Council is responsible for the development and upkeep of the Korovou Urban Center. The Committee was also informed that the process of Korovou becoming a town has been halted.
- 3.10 **Ratu Cakobau Park:** The Committee was informed of the poor state of Ratu Cakobau Park Pavilion and the expiring of lease in 2028.
- 3.11 **Collaboration and Networking:** The Committee noted that the Ministry of Local Government and the Councils need to improve their coordination and collaboration to improve service delivery. The Council must establish its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and strengthen its network with other key agencies.
- 3.12 **Fight against Drugs:** The Committee noted that the Nausori Town Council has an anti-drug group comprising key stakeholders. The Council engages the youths in sports and other community services to occupy themselves rather than engage in criminal activities.
- 3.13 **Monitoring and Oversight:** The Committee noted the lack of proper oversight and monitoring from the Ministry of Local Government resulting in financial mismanagement and inefficient service delivery from Nausori Town Council.

4. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends the following:

- 4.1 That Nausori Town Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government with urgency, expedites the review of Local Government legislations.
- 4.2 That Nausori Town Council must take measures to fully comply with the financial regulations and procedures to meet standards from the Auditor General's Office.
- 4.3 That Ministry of Local Government must strengthen its oversight and monitoring of all municipalities.
- 4.4 The Committee supports the Nausori Town Council's efforts to reduce its outstanding rate arrears through various legal means.
- 4.5 The Committee strongly recommends that the Nausori Town Council should have a Disaster Risk Management Plan in place pursuant to the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024, and a Business Continuity Plan for the sustainability of the council.
- 4.6 For a safer, secure, and clean town, the Committee strongly recommends that the Nausori Town Council must strengthen its collaborations and network with stakeholders and agencies to effectively confront social issues like drugs, loitering, littering and criminal activities.
- 4.7 The Nausori Town Council must prioritize improving the state of all recreational parks and public conveniences within the municipality.
- 4.8 The Nausori Town Council must work closely with the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and other stakeholders to address the issues of poor road conditions, blocked drains and malfunctioning street lights.
- 4.9 Government must assist municipal councils with more funding to have a regular collection in the extended boundaries.
- 4.10 The Committee recommends that Government prioritize the township of Korovou for the delivery of proper services to the people of Tailevu North, Maritime Islands who frequently travel through Korovou and its neighbouring communities.
- 4.11 Government to provide for the renewal of the lease and the construction of the pavilion at Ratu Cakobau Park.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS:

The Nausori Town Council's commitment to the SDGs are as follows:

1. SDG 1: No Poverty – The Council with the assistance of Government seeks to ensure the completion of Nausori Bus Terminal and Market. Market space is provided for income generation to farmers, fishermen and small-business owners who run kiosks, handicrafts, sweet-carts and food sellers. The project seeks to alleviate poverty.
2. SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities—The Council's actions and activities towards SDG11 are through operations and service, ensuring compliance with local government, health and building laws. The Council provides advisory and policy advice to the public, allowing developments to occur without negatively impacting communities or the town itself.

Gender Analysis

There is no specific action, activity or service by the Council to contribute to gender mainstreaming as everyone is considered equal in Nausori. There is the equal opportunity aspect, with women (say in the markets) are encouraged to have a voice. They are represented and considered as well as the male counterparts in the decision making at the market. The Council does not believe in segregation and social cohesion is encouraged.

The UN Women's Accommodation centre was constructed as a recognition of the high percentage of women vendors in the market from the rural areas. It may be considered as gender mainstreaming in one perspective. However, when looking at the statistics, most of the rural vendors who bring their produces to sell on Fridays and Saturdays are women.

6. CONCLUSION






In conclusion, the committee whilst deliberating through the Nausori Town Council Report is of the view that Nausori Town Council with oversight from the Ministry of Local Government must seriously look into the recommendations provided by the committee and work on that. There have been many plans outlined by Nausori Town Council, and the committee feels that while all this is talk, action is needed.

It is also recommended that the council should provide timelines for the developments and timely updates with relevant authorities.

The committee looks forward to the next Nausori Town Council Report and is hopeful that all recommendations highlighted will be carried out by the council.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

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

Committee Member	E-Signature
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu Chairperson	
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure Deputy Chairperson	
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Alternative Government Member	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Parveen Bala Member	
Date: 10 th March 2025	

ANNEXURE

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

ANNUAL REPORTS

2016-2017 and 2018 Annual Reports

SUBMISSION: Nausori Town Council

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government
Buildings, Suva

DATE: Wednesday, 6th November, 2024

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON WEDNESDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER, 2024, AT 10.48 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Nausori Town Council

In Attendance:

Nausori Town Council

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Mr. Paula B Navunisaravi | - | Special Administrator |
| 2. Ms. Talei Rokotuibau | - | Special Administrator |
| 3. Mr. Ravuama Vunivalu | - | Acting CEO |

Ministry of Local Government

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Ms. Saidu Nazrana | - | PACO |
| 2. Ms. Bindula Devi | - | Director Local Government |

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members and Secretariat, a very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this public hearing session.

At the outset, for information purpose, pursuant to Parliament Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are to be opened to the public. Therefore, please, note that this submission is open to the public and the media, and will not be aired live via the Parliament Channel at the Walesi platform and will not be streamed live on Parliament *Facebook* platform due to technical issues.

For any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this morning that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. However, be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111, there are only few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure and these includes:

1. National security matters;
2. Third party confidential information;
3. Personnel or human resources matters; and
4. Committee deliberation and development of the Committee recommendations and reports.

This is a parliamentary meeting and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. Please, bear in mind that we do not condone slander or liable of any sort and any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of the protocol of this Committee meeting, please, minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I wish to also remind honourable Members and our guests that all questions asked are to be addressed through the Chairman.

I would also like, at this time, to introduce our honourable Members of the Standing Committee.

[Introduction of Committee Members]

Today, the Committee will be hearing submission from the Special Administrator and their Team from Nausori Town Council. It is in relation to the Nausori Town Council Annual Reports 2016-2017 and 2018.

We also acknowledge the presence of the representative from the Ministry of Local Government. Thank you, Ma'am, for availing yourself and being present here today. We believe you are a very important part of this meeting.

I now invite our guests from the Nausori Town Council to, first, introduce themselves and begin with their presentation straightaway after which there will be question and answer session. Please, also note that if there are any questions from the honourable Members of the Committee, we may interject or will wait until the end of the presentation to ask our questions. Thank you, you may start now.

(Introduction of Nausori Town Council Officials and Ministry of Local Government)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, you may start with your presentation.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Mr. Chairman, our response is before and it is in response to the questions that were sent.

Question No. 1

Regarding the operations of the Municipality as outlined in the 2016-2018 Annual Reports, what was achieved during the years under review? What were the targeted outputs in terms of services provided?

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members of the Standing Committee, from 2016 to 2018, we found out that it was listed, and the major project was the relocation project where we see the old market, and the vendors move on to the new market which stands today. The transport relocation, the new Nausori Market and the bus station.

From 2015, it was opened. Following that, we all know it continues with consultancy phase and clearance of the project cost. The Nausori Market and Bus Station, after its opening, it still had to clear its fees whilst the market commenced its operations following its opening.

The second project achieved was the Drainage Project where the Council received a grant of \$70,000 (VIP) for the drainage project for informal settlement in Nausori. This project commenced in 2016 and was completed in 2017. This project is the drainage constructed behind Ratu Cakobau Park. Ratu Cakobau Park is always flooded, denying games, so it was important for that drainage to be addressed and the outflow to the informal settlement. So, there were actually two, one was the relieving of flood from the Ratu Cakobau Park and on to the informal settlement.

The construction of the Multi-purpose Court, where the council received \$252,650 from the Government for the construction of the multi-purpose court at Cargill in Davuilevu Housing. This is part of Davuilevu, Naulu and Nakasi Ward. This project was completed in 2018, and is heavily used, as we speak, by the residents nearby.

Mr. Chairman, in 2017, it was important for an additional sanitary facility for Ratu Cakobau Park. The Council received a grant of \$50,000 for the construction of the Ratu Cakobau Sanitary which was completed also in 2017.

There is also the development of old market site. The Council incurred expenditure of \$111,950 in relation to the development of the old market site. By this spirit, it was important for the Council to dismantle the old market due to the asbestos that was there. This was in partnership with Shop & Save, who also partnered with the Town Council on the redevelopment of the site. It shall be noted that there is very little, in its records, on the expenditure regarding the old market site, apart from information that it was used for the clearance of the asbestos when we received the \$111,950.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may, when you say that there is very little in the records on the expenditure relating to the old market, that is a very serious statement. Even to this point, you still have no records of this expenditure, or is it included in your report?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Yes, Sir, when we submitted this yesterday, I believe we were looking for the breakdown of the \$111,950. There was a relocation of the place where we store our records, in the office, I mean. We had to try and confirm what the \$111,950 was for, since it was not stated specifically in the Annual Report. We got it confirmed today that it was for the dismantle and the asbestos clearing.

Mr. Chairman, to continue, also the programme of festivals and festivity in the Nausori Town Council. The Council created a budget for festival expenses to cater for Sutlej Girmitiya Fiji, Fiji Business Excellence, Tebara Carnival and Fiji Pageant.

The construction of the Women's Accommodation Centre which the Council incurred cost construction through the assistance of the UN Women. The UN Women accommodation now stands today and is also heavily used by our women vendors at the market.

The Council, during the three-year period, also purchased new vehicles for its operations and also in recognition of service, that it had to create and open a Nakasi Market at the Nakasi Office in 2016.

Mr. Chairman, if you allow us, there are some figures that I have to give now which are the correct figures in regard to the Council's performance. In 2016, it shall be read 'the Council having a deficit of \$728,596'. For 2017, it shall be read as 'a deficit of \$385,583'. For the deficit for 2018, the number remains the same which is a deficit of \$1,646,875. We had to verify these figures again this morning, and we apologise for these changes. I will confirm the numbers that we have given, Mr. Chairman, this is from the Audit Report of the Office of the Auditor-General.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much for your answer to Question No. 1, I have a supplementary question on that. I believe that you will submit the correct figures which you have alluded to us, we will await that. You can send it over to us so that we can amend our reports, especially when we are talking about the Auditor-General's Report.

While looking at 2016 to 2018, the amount was always a deficit. Looking at it for the last three years, while moving forward, what are your plans in order to get this deficit out of your operational?

The second question I want to ask is, if I am correct, there are three grants that were actually given to you by the Government. When you talk about grants, to me, you are actually dependent on the Government. What is the status of your bank statement during those years until to-date?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Mr. Chairman, if you allow me, we will ask the Ministry Official as a former Acting CEO for Nausori Town Council, Ms Saidi Nazrana, to answer your question.

MS. S. NAZRANA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, as for deficit, Nausori Town Council actually managed to overcome that deficit situation in 2018 since 2019 to 2022-2023 financial year, they did not run into a deficit. Only for the last financial year, due to Opex and to meet a few of the capital projects, that is when ODA facility for the Council was utilized which, in a way, it would be financed this year to cover for that overdraft facility that has been utilised as well. So, from 2019 till 2023, the Council did not have a deficit budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am, you shall continue.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 2

Provide a list of all open spaces, grounds and recreational spaces within the Nausori boundary. What is the current state and what are the future plans?

Within the Municipality, there are about 50 open spaces and recreational spaces. The Council has submitted across a table listing all the open spaces and they are differentiated in terms of its colours. It also states the Council's future plans.

Nausori Town Council recognises that this is a priority for the Council. Going forward from 2016, if you will notice, there was the festivity. We have been working with Tebara Carnival Committee on its programme and the funds from the festival, part of it is used for beautification, as well as the upgrading of our parks. The theme for this year was, 'Healthy lifestyle, healthy spaces', and this is one of the reasons we are working with Tebara Carnival to upgrade our facilities.

The status of our parks are written on the table that you have. You will note that those that are shaded yellow are our parks that we are currently using, and they are being maintained periodically. The parks that are shaded blue, most of them are gulleys, and they are left as it is. One or two are occupied as settlements or as squatters, but very minimal. The ones shaded in orange, we have identified them for open space development. In saying 'open space development', it is a category that we have, either we upgrade it properly for playground or we put courts - a volleyball court, a netball court and a basketball court, as well as having soccer. Others which are smaller parks, we are intending to put play sets. There have been some playsets that the Council have installed across the Municipality from 2022 to 2023. Lastly, with our main parks for the Town, you will note they are shaded white, we will see them as it is.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, a question in relation to the parks and open spaces; we understand there are so many parks and open spaces and I can see the plans and the programmes. Some you have said that you will leave them as they are, some you are frequently maintaining them. Have you carried out an audit to find out actually which scenario you are focusing on?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, the table that we have is fairly recent. From here, we will be prioritising which ones to carry out for development. The Town Council, from the whole of this year, have been working with the Office of the Director of Lands. It is important for the Town Council to invest on the parks that have been returned to the Council. Most of them had not been transferred from the State, so we had to carry out inspections, had them verified and confirmed, now we have our table, then we can invest on the parks.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Ma'am, you shall continue to the next question.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 3

What is the progress of all capital projects initiated in the years under review?

You will notice the projects that are listed are similar to Question No. 1 and the status of these projects from 2016 are as follows:

- (1) Relocation project
It has been opened, it is fully operational and even now, the Council is working on further improvements and even some inclusions. To date, we are working on a solar project above the roof of the old market.
- (2) Drainage Project
This is a project that has been completed, as I have alluded to before.
- (3) Multi-Purpose Court in Cargill, Davuilevu Housing
It was constructed, completed and now heavily used.
- (4) Ratu Cakobau Park
Construction of the sanitary facility was completed in 2017, and it is also used when we have events at Ratu Cakobau Park.
- (5) Old Market Site Development
The contribution of the Council was on the clearance and because of asbestos, we have yet to see this project completed, so this project will be constructed by Shop & Save.
- (6) Women's Accommodation Centre
This project was completed in 2022 and is heavily used. If you will allow us to say that it is not only used for women's accommodation, but it is also used for training and also used for events during the early week from Thursdays to Saturdays when it is used for accommodation.
- (7) Manoca Works Depot
The Nausori Town Council used to have its depot in Ratu Cakobau Park. It had to relocate its depot to Manoca, the industrial area in Nausori. It is funded by a Government grant and completed in 2018. This is where the Council's depot is located now.
- (8) Children's Park Upgrade (Syria Park)
This was completed in 2018. It was funded through the Tebara Carnival Committee and is heavily used as well.
- (9) Drainage Upgrade for Residential Areas of Nausori
Through the assistance of the Ministry of Waterways, this project was also completed in 2018.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you Ma'am, you shall continue to Question No. 4.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 4

Does the Council have a risk management policy, asset capitalization policy and disaster recovery plan, business continuity plan to govern aspects of its operations and activities?

Contrary to this, we have received confirmation today that there is a Risk Management Policy of the Council, as well as an Asset Capitalisation Policy. On Disaster Recovery Plan and the Business Continuity Plan, the Council does not have these Plans yet, but we will take it as a priority to have it done, at least, a draft by the end of this month.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am. I believe Question No. 4 clearly states a very important area that needs to be addressed. The Report says that there was none, on the fourth list. Now, you have informed us that you have the Risk Management Policy as well as the Asset Capitalization Policy but the other two are still pending. What is your future plan, while moving forward, to have a Disaster Recovery Plan and the Business Continuity Plan?

I believe, when you run a business, these are key elements that need to be there in order for you to set the pace while moving forward. You talked about disaster, disaster is a natural cause, it is beyond our expectation. We have to prepare for it, that is important. If you can have a plan earmarked so that you can have these two Plans and likewise, adjust the other two Policies in the Reports. This is just a comment for you to look at it, while moving forward.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, do you have an investment portfolio? Do you have an investment out there beyond running of the daily operations of the Council?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Member, the Council has investments, it has properties that are within the Nausori CBD, its building has been rented out as investment, in addition to assets like the parks, the market and bus stand, so we are investing in our properties that are there within the CBD. There is very minimal in our books that we are investing as an investment portfolio *per se*.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- I am just asking this question as a way forward to prepare the Council much better, it is just part of the contingency planning, that you are able to sustain your own operations and run your own affairs instead of relying. I am bringing this up because I recall in one of our conversations with the Suva City Council, they have an investment out there with Fijian Holdings, I think. Maybe, the Team from Local Government can enlighten us.

MS. S. SHANDIL.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Nausori Town Council also has investment shares with Fijian Holding. The values can be provided by the Team at a later date.

MS. B. DEVI.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to add on to the policies that the Councils are required to have. In terms of the Disaster Recovery Plan, the Ministry has shared a template with all the Councils and after discussions with Nausori Town Council, we understand that they will be amending their Policy to suit the needs of the Municipal Council and have it implemented in due course.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Ministry of Local Government. We shall now go on to the next question.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 5

How is the Council ensuring the timely collection of annual rates and arrears whilst also minimizing expenses?

This has been an exercise and a programme that is very aggressive for this year with the Team at the Council. For timely collection of arrears, it is important for us to have the information of the ratepayers in terms of communication. So, we have embarked on ratepayers' profile with their contacts, allowing us to effectively issue notice via emails. There is also our team on the ground who delivers notices across the Municipality. Issuing notices both on the current and the rate arrears, the ratepayers are notified by those sources that I had mentioned and also it pops out on the website, just a reminder to the ratepayers that rates are now for the periodical payment.

An exercise that we had also carried out during the last few months is when we have our recent ratepayers consultation with the community where we share with them again on the rates, the importance of rates, the rate arrears and even our staff directly with those on the ground during the evening sessions, we informed them that this is the rate and we are expecting the rates to be paid. So, it is more a two-way conversation in both sessions.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question; with our earlier deliberation with Suva City Council, they are embarking on the 'name and shame' approach. So, would you take a similar approach to that of Suva City Council in regard to the ratepayers not paying their rates and outstanding rates?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- We have just discussed but we have not been keen to explore that option yet. We would like, as I had mentioned, to aggressively go out to the ratepayers or to the residents on the ground. We have noticed that in the past, there have been very little meeting with the residents. What we have experienced is that when we meet with them, some we do not even know, so the whole team, rather than just the Special Administrators, to actually have the session with our residents or pocket meetings with them. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just a question, what are your biggest challenges while collecting rate arrears in general?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- The biggest challenge was giving notices across to them. There is there is lots and lots of 'return to sender' notices, which prompted us, and to show the other Councils also across the country to embark on the rates profiling.

Yesterday, we met with agencies, landlord agencies, iTaukei Land Trust Board, Housing Authority and even the Methodist Church - major landlords within the Nausori Municipality, to simply sit with them and just mention the challenge that we have, and we are aware that they might have that information and to have, at least, a Memorandum of Understanding of sharing information between us.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- *Vinaka*, shall we commence to Question No. 6?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 6

Provide a breakdown of the following information for 2016, 2017 and 2018 in terms of ratepayers?

Ratepayers in 2016, as is listed in the table, were 4,372, as well as in 2017. In 2018, it just increased slightly to 4,375.

As to the rates that were collected for each year (monetary value), the table shows the breakdown of 2016 to 2018. In 2016, we had a total of \$1,128,815.54. For the year 2017, a total of \$1,374,317.90 and in 2018, a total of \$1,352,254.05.

The rate arrears for each year as per the table, at the end of the year on 31st December, 2016, we collected \$2,749,275.65, in 2017 was \$2,803,239.23 and in 2018, \$2,720,428.20.

Regarding the question on the rates, we were also to indicate the total arrears up to present time, it is, as you have in front of you in the table.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- *Vinaka*, shall we continue to part (a) of Question No. 6?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

(a) What are the causes of the accumulation of rate arrears?

On the causes of the accumulation of the rate arrears, we all know that the most common one is hardship - financial challenges. What we have noted as for rate arrears, not only in our discussions but also when we sit with our ratepayers who have rate arrears, is a substantial amount that they have in terms of rate arrears. For instance, the rate arrears is about \$4,000 and the current would be \$500. The ratepayer may be able to pay the current instead of the rate arrears. However, they will have to clear the rate arrears first. That is one of the big challenges that is also faced by the ratepayers themselves. They have to be cleared first before they can clear the current, so what we have is accumulating current rates.

Other common factors are financial hardships and challenges faced on clearing of these rates. Another factor is the Council's communication with ratepayers whereby, as I have mentioned, the ratepayer does not receive the notice at all. The notice is returned to the sender as the ratepayer is either not in the country (absentee ratepayer and landlord) or had been away somewhere else in Fiji or their address is outdated and needs to be changed. This is the reason that the rate profiling exercise is critical for the Council to carry out aggressively.

Whilst at a ratepayers, residents and committee consultation meeting this year, this is an example, the Council shared its challenges on services and rates collection. A ratepayer mentioned that the reason of non-payment of the rates is due to inadequate services, particularly on road upgrading and streetlights. These services are not carried out, leading to frustration by the ratepayers and have been a factor of non-payment. The Council does not upgrade the roads, that is the Fiji Roads Authority. Out of frustration of deteriorated roads and the absence of streetlights, the ratepayers feel it unnecessary for them to pay the rates. It is just an example, Mr. Chairman.

(b) What are the challenges faced in the collection of rate arrears and their methods of collection?

We have listed six that are on the response, as follows:

- (1) unknown owners.
- (2) vacant lots.
- (3) financial constraints.

- (4) I stand to correct on number four - increase in UCV value and increase in town rates. This is an error. There had been a valuation, but the Town Council has not increased the town rate. Mr. Chairman, we will correct this as well.
 - (5) No full details or legal description of the land.
 - (6) Owner is deceased and there was no probate or Will done.
- (c) Has the Council conducted a survey or research on the reasons for non-payment or delayed payment of town rates?**

Mr. Chairman, the Council has not conducted a survey yet.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- May I ask a question on that. Are there any plans for you to actually go into survey so that you can get a permanent result because as you have indicated, there was no plan moving forward?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- There have been some discussions to work, at least, for the top 100 that we have to meet with them. Our first priority is to finish our rate profiling exercise before we go to the next step on meeting with the ratepayers.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is great. Now, we can see that you have a plan moving forward to get the Councils, I may say, not parallel, at least, benchmark with best practice from other Councils. Remember, you are the third one for this week to be here with us and we were looking at the trend in moving forward, so what we are trying to say, to give you some information ahead so that you can utilise or benchmark from either Councils who are doing well in this area. Let us move forward.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

- (d) What is the Council's plan to address this issue and what punitive and non-punitive measures are taken against non-compliant ratepayers?**

The Council files it in the Small Claims Tribunal, default ratepayers are charged, The charge is based on the property. The Council is also planning to see default ratepayers having above \$5,000 to have filed in the Magistrates Court, and there is also plans to see if the Council can have the mortgagee sale on property but that will have to be carried out by a lawyer who is outsourced.

There has been very little investment on the Council in getting the ratepayers and residents. In the past, the Council has been carrying out ratepayers and residents' consultative meetings from June this year across the Municipality to enlighten them on the Council's services and rates. They are provided with statistics and awareness is created for them to understand what rate really is, which is the Local Government service fee, as defined in the Local Government Act.

The Council also intends to meet with those having the highest arrears, as I have mentioned, the top 100 rate defaulters, to discuss payment plans. The payment plan programme also assisted, however, it is slow, as payments are staggered for a certain period.

Following our ratepayers and residents' meetings in the evenings, we have started to receive ratepayers coming into our office, calling in for payment plans to be done. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am, you shall continue.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

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

If you allow me to go right to the second paragraph, the Council is struggling - struggling with rate arrears and non-collection of town rates is impacting upon the Council's performance. Residents across the Municipality, through the awareness programme, were shown statistics per area.

The current rates that are collected from that area stands between 70 percent to 80 percent and 25 percent to 30 percent on rate arrears. Subsequently, the services that the residents hope to receive is not 90 percent or 100 percent, and this is shared with them during the meetings.

The Council is struggling with rate arrears passing the \$4 million mark by end of financial year 31st July, 2024. This is something that the residents and ratepayers have been advised on during the meetings, as a strategy to influence commitment to pay rates. It is important for us to give the figures to residents or ratepayers during our consultative meetings.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am, you shall continue.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

(f) Provide details of vacant lots in the Municipality.

Nausori Town Council does not have any details of vacant lots in its Municipality. The vacant lots fall into three categories of leased land in which the respective landlord will have information, or absentee landlords where the property owner is away overseas, or open spaces that are mostly gully and for passive recreation, or even unsuitable to create playgrounds. This is most common in Nakasi.

Question No. 7 - Collection of Arrears

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

In terms of arrears, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, we have mentioned this earlier, all default ratepayers are filed in the Small Claims Tribunal. We charge over their property for the default ratepayers. The default ratepayers above \$5,000 will be filed in the Magistrates Court. We will do a mortgagee sale over properties that are subject to having great arrears, so that will be carried out by an outsourced lawyer and rates profiling which the Council is carrying out.

The programme for rate profiling exercise has now begun, following an analysis of the challenges that the Council had for the recovery of rate arrears. The absence of basic information to enable the Council to effectively communicate with its ratepayers is either outdated or has changed. The completion of this rate profiling will have an impact positively on our rate collection both, for current and rate arrears.

(b) What measures have been put in place to promptly address the grievances of ratepayers?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Although unwritten, Nausori Town Council has an unwritten response and action policy where the complaint or grievance is acknowledged, recorded or registered and an officer attends to that for needful action and is communicated back to the complainant. There

is a dedicated Complaints Officer who receives, registers and assigns that complaint to the appropriate section or division to attend to the grievances.

The complainants are in the loop on the actions that are required and, in some instances, allow me to digress that some goes through the Ministry, or it is referred to us from the Ministry, so the Ministry is also kept in the loop on those grievances that have arisen.

It is the responsibility of the external party, and I have mentioned an example, which is with roads where we have to engage other stakeholder agencies to address the complaint.

(c) How many grievances were recorded from 2016-2018 and what was the nature of these complaints?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- This is outlined in the table before you. The total number of complaints in 2016 was 700, the total number of complaints or grievances in 2017 was 775, and the total number of grievances in 2018 was 664. The nature of these complaints is categorized as per the table presented.

Complaint Category	No. Received in 2016	No. Received in 2017	No. Received in 2018
Health	249	117	35
Solid Waste - Kitchen Waste	0	12	1
Solid Waste - Green Waste	40	17	1
Drain	133	138	130
Grass Cutting	22	41	26
Streetlights - New	0	28	4
Streetlights - Repair & Maintenance	86	88	54
Traffic	26	47	117
Stray Dogs	20	31	17
Roads	29	39	27
Street Signs	4	7	8
Sewer	34	18	24
Market	13	5	2
Food	6	12	5
Poultry	0	7	1
Noise Nuisance	0	18	11
Landslide	0	5	5
Wastewater Discharge	6	17	12
Rubbish Disposal	0	52	46
Business-related Complaints	4	36	28
Mosquito Breeding	0	14	0
Contractors	0	22	68
Complaints against Council Staff	0	4	12
Development			30
Other	28	0	0
TOTAL	700	775	775

Mr. Chairman, that is our response with regards to grievances.

(d) How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the Nausori Municipality, been enhanced?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- On the maintenance of public amenities, the Council carried out regular cleaning and maintenance for all their public washrooms. This is for the market, the bus stand, even the playgrounds that we have. The upgrading of open spaces, with children's parks and regular drain cleaning, as well as playground drains are done.

In terms of rubbish collection and grass cutting, considering there are numerous complaints from ratepayers about rubbish not collected on certain days, all garbage collection services are in-house, properly scheduled, collected on a timely manner with three trucks, two compactors for kitchen waste and one open truck for green and white goods waste. We have a good team of garbage collectors with team leaders looking after each group.

Grass cutting and drain cleaning services are outsourced through a proper tender process, and they managed well by the Contractors for the four Wards that Nausori Town Council has and is listed in the Report as follows:

- (1) Nausori Ward – Zhao's Investment;
- (2) Davuilevu Ward – Atlantic Hire;
- (3) Naulu/Nakasi - Zhao's Investment; and
- (4) Davuilevu Housing- Zhao's Investment.

Grass cutting and drain cleaning services are regularly monitored by the Works Supervisor and Team, who provides a monthly report by Ward for reporting and payment purposes. There is another assessment of the work that has been carried out.

Mr. Chairman, and honourable members, with regards to road maintenance and drainage, there are certain roads that are not maintained, and it is evidenced by potholes in roads within the Municipality. We all know that all road maintenance is handled by FRA, so all complaints are forwarded to FRA for their needful action.

There has not been any drainage maintenance for a while due to cashflow issues. For the last several years, many of the requests have been submitted to the Ministry but have not been considered.

In terms of security and safety, the security of all the properties has been monitored by outsourced security services that the Council engages. The Council also has an insurance policy to safeguard properties. The OHS Policy is in place for the workers that attend to our drainage.

The issue of safety and security at municipal level was brought up by the residents and ratepayers during community meetings this year. The Council has been working with FRA on this matter, particularly on the densely populated area of Nakasi. They have factored streetlights into their programme.

At the CBD, it has also been raised by some business owners in town subsequently is this matter of streetlights to FRA, in the absence of streetlights. Streetlights have now been installed for areas that are fronted by the Nausori Plaza.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, a supplementary question; you have said that your request was not entertained by the Ministry of Local Government who are here with us. Is there any response from the Ministry?

MS. B. DEVI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I surely wanted to respond to that. Sir, as alluded to the Committee earlier during yesterday's public hearing, we have developed a Cabinet Paper for the transfer of assets from FRA to the Municipal Councils and this would include the streetlights, footpath and drain, with certainly some resources that could be provided to the Councils for the upkeep of those assets. The Cabinet paper have been circulated to the Municipal Councils - the Special Administrators for their comments. So, we will be tabling the Cabinet Paper as soon as we are able to receive the comments from all the Municipal Councils on the way forward. *Vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am, you can continue on poverty.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- On poverty, the Council is encouraging small businesses, the SMEs, within its boundary, giving opportunities to the less fortunate.

We recognise the need for space for these small businesses, so the Council allows selling outside the market premises to be used for selling produce as well as on Sundays. The issue is on space for them to have it properly sheltered. Some tents granted by the UN Women are used and the Council has it, in its plans, to extend the areas for such spaces. So, it is both on the space, as well as having tents similar to the one that have been donated to the Council by UN Women. That is part of the Nausori Council's plan.

The new Municipal Market have also been constructed through Government assistance, that is the one in Nakasi. This has much bigger and better facility and we know that there is a lot of space where we can also raise similar tents.

There are plans for ROC markets put in the Nausori Market, as well as in Nakasi, and night markets. These are the plans of the Council with regards to poverty.

On climate change and environment, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, as a low-lying area and near the main Rewa River, the Council's service and contribution to climate change and environment is on awareness and services at operational level. This is when it considers building and development applications, ensuring that developments adhere to setbacks or requirements that should provide when building near a watercourse.

At municipal level, there have been considerations to upgrade the riverbanks of the Rewa River. We have been discussing it with the Ministry of Waterways on this, particularly on the banks that are eroding. The Council, during the review period, was assisted by the Government on some drainage upgrading works on the informal settlement in Vuci. The Council, this year, has had conversations with the Ministry of Waterways. The priority areas at the moment are drainage systems and clearance of debris and rubbish on these watercourses. Works have been carried out from last month on Waicuku Creek. This is the main creek that borders the CBD in town and the ratepayers, on to Rewa River, and this is work in progress.

Other environmental services are those relating to garbage collection, solid waste management and services where the Council utilised, at least, 25 percent of its operational budget on carting of rubbish to Naboro Landfill. There are also clean-up programmes with communities and stakeholders.

The Council also has its plan to have a composting site. Now, our green waste goes all the way to Naboro. The Council is working on its composting site on a land in Manoca that has been given to the Council by the Ministry of Lands to develop its composting site for our green waste.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, on disaster risk analysis, what transpired in the review period of 2016-2018 on disaster risk analysis is not known. The flooding of March 2024 in Nausori, on the Rewa Bridge, declaring a national disaster, has prompted the Council to look at its records properly again - records in drainage and subdivisional records. Historical records that assisted in the identification of culverts, hence blockages which were attended to and addressed the flooding at the new Rewa Bridge. These records are being used now by the Council, as it maps out its drainage clearing programme.

On gender mainstreaming, there is no specific action, activity or service by the Council to contribute to gender mainstreaming, as everyone is considered as equal in Nausori. There is an equal opportunities aspect with women, say in the markets, and are encouraged to have a voice. They are represented and considered as well as the male counterparts in the decision-making at the produce market. The Council does not believe in segregation but more on social cohesion is encouraged.

The UN Women's Accommodation Centre was constructed as a recognition of the percentage of women vendors in the market, a significant one being from the rural areas. It may be considered as gender mainstreaming in one perspective. However, when looking at the statistics, most of the rural vendors who bring their produce to sell on Fridays and Saturdays are women. The project was to address a need for it than it did for gender mainstreaming.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much. Honourable Members, I believe we have to move on to the next question.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 8

We note that the Auditor-General issued a disclaimer of opinion on pages 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the audited financial statements for 2016, 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports. What measures has the Council undertaken to address all the issues and what internal controls are in place to prevent their re-occurrence?

The measures and internal controls are listed in the Annex 2 table.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the opinion of the Auditor-General is quite serious. He has not offered an opinion because of state of the affairs of the Council financially. We have noted your responses. The issues, what has been highlighted by the Auditor-General and the actions that you are intending to undertake. We have read it, it is quite clear here. Mr. Chairman, if I may suggest asking the Council if they could put clear timelines on how they are going to carry out some of these actions?

Secondly, it is really for them to inform us, instead of us going through each of these in detail. Just inform us of the progress, because if you note some of these are progressing, some are 2022-2023 financial year, et cetera, just to help the Committee understand what you have really done because there are very serious issues that have been raised by the Auditor-General.

My second question, if I may, through you again, Mr. Chairman, may be directed to the Ministry, as a result of these issues that have been raised where there were people who were implicated who have misappropriated, end up to some corrupt practices, are there cases pending or have been referred to the appropriate authority?

MS. S. NAZRANA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question. I think for timeline, they have actually mentioned the timelines, given some have been resolving financially in 2022-2023, once audited, then it will be cleared out.

As per what happened if there were misappropriation of funds, in 2022 when the Team who are currently here joined, actually it was noted that there were source documents that were not in order, it was missing. So, a full investigation on the financial side was done whereby that matter had been lodged to FICAC on the Finance Team that were there for the prior year. Yes, Nausori Town Council has lodged this issue with FICAC. We have not got any written response from FICAC on the updates or on the investigation but, yes, the matter has been reported.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, again, as a Committee, we would like to have some understanding on that, the progress if the Ministry could advise us or could it be reported in our report back to Parliament on the status of all those.

MS. B. DEVI.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, yes, Sir, we take note of that, apparently we would be able to provide that sort of information in writing to the Committee.

Sir, just to add on, these are legacy issues, and we have been made aware of the serious matters at the Council, not just Nausori Town Council but the other Councils as well, so Teams have taken appropriate actions to address those issues and going forward, we will make sure that those issues are not repeated.

In terms of the audit issues, from the Ministry of Local Government and as mentioned earlier, Sir, we now have a Compliance Team that will be visiting the 13 Municipal Councils to understand the Audit qualification issues that are there, how those issues will be rectified with a definite timeline for the rectification. So, the Team will be working along the observations made by the Office of Auditor-General, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, honourable Members and the Team. We will continue with Question No. 9.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 9

How have internal controls been strengthened to prevent the loss of Council funds through fraud and misappropriation in the following areas:

- (a) Cash at Bank;**
- (b) Revenue;**
- (c) Payroll;**
- (d) Property;**
- (e) Plant and Equipment;**
- (f) Receivable; and**
- (g) Procurement?**

In terms of cash at bank, now we have daily reconciliations, updating by the Finance Officer and verification, so it is only done by one. He has a team that is going through the process.

In terms of revenue, processing of revenue received by the Council shall be carried out in accordance with the corresponding Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs), whether it is posting,

receipting, register, reconciliations and banking on the same day.

In terms of payroll, control on the payroll is a three-tier process of checks, from the main register, submission from the Supervisor onto the HR first and before clearance entered by the Finance or Payroll Officer. There is reconciliation done on weekly Payroll.

In terms of property, rather than leaving this aspect to the Finance Team, there is now a Property Officer, who will be responsible in registering all properties of the Council, be it land or building, so that it is factored appropriately in the Council's financial reports. Every commitment upon the Council's properties will be managed both as a financial and technical approach, whilst adhering to the procurement policies of the Council. In terms of properties there is a two-member team, trying to just do away with one officer being responsible so there is a check and balance on each other.

For Plant and Equipment, a Fixed Asset Register (FAR) has been created and the Board of Survey to be a standard practice. The absence of both since 2021, the Council has to effectively carry it out as part of 2023-2024 audit programme.

In terms of receivable, a Standard Operating Procedures on receivables, corresponding reconciliation.

On procurement, there is a Procurement Policy of the Council, and it is strictly adhered to. The Corporate Division, together with the HR Division, will be conducting an induction course for new staff. The induction always has a Procurement Policy and Procedures component to be shared with the new staff rather than just the Finance Team and HR, it is important for us to have all the staff be aware of the Procurement Policy and other policies of the Council.

Question No. 10

What budgetary support has the Council received from the Government during the periods under review and how was it utilised?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- The Council received support in 2016 of \$3,401,898.51 and this is to do with the market. In 2017, we received \$132,000 and 2018 - \$495,847. Those are for the projects that we have stated in the earlier questions and listed below in chronological overview of the budget support that has been given to Nausori Town Council. Mr. Chairman, would you want me to read them again?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am sure we are all aware of that. We will go straight to Question No. 11.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 11

Can the Council outline the challenges encountered by the Field Department during the implementation of its project?

You will notice that most of the projects carried out were delivered by contractors engaged by the funding agency, this being Government and UN Women for the Women's Accommodation. The projects that were actually carried out by the Council were the:

- (1) Depot relocation from Ratu Cakobau Park to its depot in Manoca; and

(2) Syria Park upgrade.

If there were to be challenges, it would be in terms of capacity, as a small team is carrying out normal operations of maintenance and, at the same, have to carry out the projects to be completed at the projected timeline. The projects have started with the same workers engaged in the projects and are assigned to other operational work, like services to the ratepayers.

Question 12

What are the Council's plans for clean-up and maintenance of the drains?

The Council has a calendar on garbage collection, green waste and white goods. This is distributed to ratepayers as handouts during meetings, it is placed on the Council website, and it is shared by our field staff when they go out to the ratepayers and to the properties across to the Municipality.

There are also scheduled Clean-Up Days that the Council's Health Team has programmed and planned for the new financial year (August 2024 – July 2025), outside of the normal Environment Day or Clean-Up Day as organized by the Ministry of Environment.

Other strategies of the Council is to aggressively carry out clean-up in the CBD and also to advise the public on litter and meetings with schools on this strategy before school resumes in 2025. On this, Mr. Chairman, it is important for us to be going on a proactive approach that our team can physically go out in the CBD, in town, and they advise them on littering rather than waiting for a specific programme itself. The programme is to meet with the Principals and Head Teachers in Nausori before school starts. We enlighten them on the litter issue within the CBD and ways that we can locate partnership with the schools and with the school children.

Question No. 13

(a) What is the current status of the recreational facilities and public spaces?

The main recreational facilities and public spaces are well maintained, be it Ratu Cakobau Park, Syria Park and others across the Municipality.

(b) Does the Council have plans to create new inclusive recreational facilities and public spaces to cater for gender needs?

The Council has created an inventory on playgrounds, open spaces and parks. It is important for the Council to provide active space that cater for all and in understanding that most, if not all, sports nowadays are played by both gender, thus, creating spaces for the enjoyment of all and not just a specific gender. For instance, the Tennis Court in Vunivivi Hill is used for netball, volleyball and sometimes soccer by the residents nearby. The Council has plans to install new playsets and also upgrade grounds that can be developed for courts or as a playground.

Question No. 14

What is the Council's policy on gender?

The Council is firm on equality and equity, ensuring that there is no discrimination against a gender, be internally, on its staff/workers, when it recruits or manages them, or for the people it serves.

Question No. 15

In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), how is it relevant and achieved during the years under review?

SDG 1: No Poverty – the Council has efforted itself with the assistance of the Government, to ensure the completion of the Nausori Bus Terminal and Market. The market is a space provided for income generation to farmers, fishermen, small-business owners who run the kiosks, handicrafts, sweet-carts and food sellers. The project may not result to no poverty; however, it contributes to reduction of poverty and create empowerment in the informal economic sector.

SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities - the actions and activities of the Council towards SDG11 is through operations and service, ensuring compliance to local government laws, health and building laws, et cetera and regulations.

The Council provides advisory and policy advice to the public, allowing developments to occur without negatively impacting communities or the town itself. The Council got its Town Centre Planning Scheme approved by the Director of Town and Country Planning in 2015. The years after, it is important to implement the Scheme where it possibly can, by guiding ratepayers and developers to the requirements of the planning scheme. A planning scheme that has been prepared through extensive consultation with the communities.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Ma'am, shall we go to Question No. 16?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.-

Question No. 16

When will the Council submit its outstanding Annual Reports?

The Council will make every effort to submit the outstanding Annual Reports before the end of the financial year, 31st July, 2025. *Vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much Nausori Town Council for the well-articulated presentation here this afternoon. We believe that we are both on the learning edge way moving forward, especially for the Council. That comes to the end of our question time.

I will now hand over to the honourable Members, if they have any further supplementary questions. The floor is yours, Sir.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, on the positive note, I commend the team from Nausori for the efforts they are now putting into place based on the presentation today, in addressing some of the issues that needs to be improved. Above all, I have noted there are proactive stance towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the operations. Additionally, their determination to engage the community much more effectively.

I personally feel and we have talked about within the community that the Municipal Councils are in a good position to play a pivotal role in building the community spirit, helping the community understand that they are there to serve them better and creating the right environment where the community feel at ease or safe, not only for the various communities but, above all, for the people.

Therefore, the point that I would like to emphasise as a Member of this Committee is the need to create those environment, especially those recreational environment that is inclusive to everyone,

not only for the young ones, but for the older generation, where our children could sit in the evening and perhaps, study. Perhaps, you just extend that further but in a different environment, study after school and then discuss the environment. We need to create those environment. You have a lot of space, what we have noted, and I think we just need to expand the mode and scope of our operations, to expand it further into a more community engaging Council, but I think Nausori will still need to do that.

On a very specific issue, I am asking, and I have raised this with the other Councils, is the emphasis on a more inclusive, focussed and a more directed effort towards the fight on drugs. This is a national effort. You have heard about the counter narcotics strategies, and I just wanted to hear more from your side on how the Councils can be not only a drug-free municipal, city or a town, but above all, directing your efforts to fight this war or battle against drugs. Therefore, I would ask that you consider looking into your drugs plan, your fight against drugs, and above all, working very closely with your key stakeholders on the ground. So, that is enclosing your drugs plan. I know you are doing it with the police, but I think there is more effort that is needed right now. Instead of playing a catching up game, we need to adopt what you have said, a proactive posture towards drugs.

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, since February and March this year, we have an anti-drugs group in Nausori Town. That is with the Council, the Commissioner Central and the Churches. At the end of April, we had a programme, as well in July, on anti-drugs. What we came down to was, having our youth to be actively involved in other things. What we noticed is that, when they are idle, that is when they venture into that space.

So, in July and August, we had reactivated Nausori Volleyball Association. That was one of our fight against drugs. It came out from there on having our youth to participate on things other than sports, as well as other community services that we will embark on in 2025. What is important is them getting occupied with things and not being idle.

One of the programmes of anti-drugs was we acknowledge that there is that fight where we have targets to reduce even the number of pocket areas within Nausori Town or CBD. We have 25 spots; it comes down to 10. Our target is, come 2025, we come down to 10 spots where they are frequent.

The Churches are heavily engaged in this exercise. The Christian Mission Fellowship and Faith Harvest in Vunivivi Hill have provided us space for those children, teens and even some adults right now, following our anti-drugs campaign in July, as well in April. We have identified youths, a space for them to sleep, feed, clothing, for those who had been sleeping in towns. We have come now to the counselling bit. These are the things we did; we have not written anything but thank you for the suggestion on the draft plan. We will take that on board. *Vinaka*, Sir.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may just encourage the Nausori Council again, I thank them for the initiative that they have taken but I think what we would like to hear is a very clearly-stated intent that people can buy into and understand where you can declare or you plan to declare that Nausori Town as drug free by 2025. When you state that publicly, people will understand how serious and how committed you are for them.

There are similar activities that you have just mentioned that are happening all over Fiji, but the intent must be stated very clearly and made to be understood by the people and also above that, they need to be able to buy in, into that, and that is very important. Once you state that publicly, people know that you are committed and you are serious about Nausori Municipal Council, such as further suggestions. I involve myself in a lot of community work and in the absence of a very clearly

stated intent and without explaining the intend to others and helping them to buy in, then dwelling everyone together, then with that effort together you are able to get them. So, I am challenging Nausori Council to state publicly that you can, and you will make Nausori Town into a drug free place.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, thank you very much for a very lively presentation. This is in regard to the issue of stray dogs and cats in the Nausori Municipality. What sort of engagement you have to encounter the stray dogs and cats in Nausori Town?

MS. T. ROKOTUIBAU.- On stray dogs, honourable Member, the Council is working with the Ministry of Agriculture on how to tackle daily stray dogs. It is not aggressive here at the moment. We are fortunate too; we associate stray dogs with food and rubbish. If we manage our rubbish completely within the CBD, we will not have dogs in the CBD. This is also one of the things we have raised in our residents and ratepayers committee sessions, particularly when they have pets - dogs and cats, when they feed them well, they will not run away from your home and come right to Nausori Town. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- *Vinaka*, I believe we have come to the conclusion of our session. I may say it is a very participatory presentation with both teams, especially from us as your Parliament representatives on the Standing Committee. We thank the Ministry for their highly dedicated service to all the Municipalities.

(Vote of Thanks by Mr. Chairman)

The Committee meeting adjourned at 12.13 p.m.