



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 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 of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management 2018-2019 and 2019-2020*.

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

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management manage, coordinate and implements government development efforts in rural and maritime communities and support socio-economic development, improves living standards and quality of life and empower rural communities to achieve sustainable development livelihoods.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management successfully facilitated and coordinated the following Capital Projects and advisory services

- Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (**CARFF**)
- Self Help Projects that promote and assist rural dwellers in the construction of basic amenities and income generating projects
- Construction of new government stations and district services under the Public Sector Investment Programme (**PSIP**)
- Implementation of Community Capacity Building (**CCB**) Programmes
- Implementation of National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies
- Facilitation of Ancillary Services
- Provision of advisory support to the Divisional Development Forums (**DDF**)

I sincerely thank Mr Isoa Talemaibua, Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Rural & Maritime Development and Disaster Management and their officials for their invaluable contributions to this review process.

Finally, I thank the Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo, Hon. Viam Pillay, and Hon. Parveen Bala, for their invaluable input and support.

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



.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

MP	Member of Parliament
SO	Standing Order
CARFF	Community Access Road, Footpaths and Footbridges
SHP	Self Help Project
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
PSIP	Public Sector Investment Programme
CCA	Community Capacity Building
PPW	Project Preparatory Work
SPA	Strategic Priority Areas

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

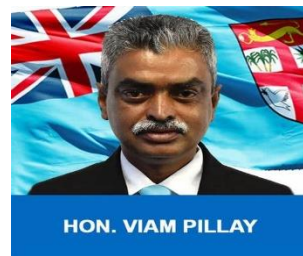
The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and Standing Order 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). Members of the Committee are:



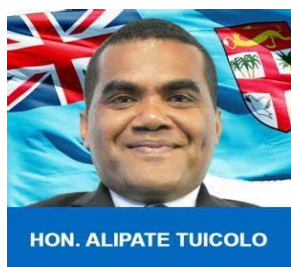
Chairperson
Government Member



Deputy Chairperson
Government Member



Member
Opposition Member



Member
Government Member



Member
Opposition Member

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management 2018 – 2019 and 2019 - 2022 Annual Reports was tabled in Parliament on 15th March 2024, and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs pursuant to Standing Committee 109(2) (b).

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 Consolidated Reports commenced in March 2025. The Committee read the reports, prepared questions and sought clarifications on key issues of interest, from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

The Committee held Public Submission with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management on 1st April 2025.

Upon receipt of all pertinent information pertaining to the Committee's queries, which was subsequently endorsed on 5th June 2025.

The Committee received responses from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, which can be viewed at the following link <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 COMMITTEE DELIBERATION AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Rural & Maritime Development and Disaster Management is mandated to manage, coordinate and implement government development efforts in rural and maritime communities and to support socio-economic development, improve living standards and quality of life, and empower rural communities to achieve sustainable development livelihoods.

The Ministry's role to raise resilience levels for all Fijians and apply Disaster Risk Reduction measures. These directions are aligned to the National Development Plan (20 Year) and support our global commitments. It also facilitates and conducts public awareness and education on government services to support national goals of growing the economy and improving the quality of life in rural and maritime communities.

Major Programmes and activities under the Ministry's portfolio included the Self-Help Programme (SHP), Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF), Emergency Water Supply (EWS), Community Capacity Building (CCB), facilitation of Government Road Shows, ancillary services and coordination and implementation of National Disaster Risk Management strategies.

From April 2020, the Ministry's role was reviewed following the return of the NDMO from the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Meteorological Services.

2.2 STATUTORY FUNCTIONS

The statutory functions of the Ministry are those of the National Disaster Management Strategy as in both the National Disaster Management Plan (1995) and Natural Disaster Management Act (1998), covering disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, emergency operations, relief and rehabilitation.

Ministry's ancillary Services include registration of births, deaths and marriages, issuance of licenses and collection of license and permit fees.

3.0 KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the Committee were -

- 3.1 Despite the effects of COVID-19 Pandemic, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management successfully completed 181 Self Help and 86 CARFF projects
- 3.2 Valid concerns were raised by the local community regarding the poor Government Service delivery, precipitated further by the relocation of Commissioner Eastern's Office from Levuka to Suva.
- 3.3 The formulation of the Ministry's 10-year strategic development plan will be realigned with National Development Plan.
- 3.4 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management had conducted road show programmes to inform the community about Government services, in few remote and rural areas only.
- 3.5 Routine maintenance were not carried out on rural and new roads after being commissioned.
- 3.6 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management collaborated with the international partners, donor agencies and Non-Government Organizations to complete various rural development projects.
- 3.7 The new National Disaster and Resilience Act (NDRA) requires all stakeholders to have their own Disaster Management Plan or Emergency Operation Plan in consultation with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends the following:

- 4.1 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management should be adequately funded to continue with Self Help and CARFF projects in areas not previously covered, considering its importance to the rural and maritime communities.
- 4.2 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management should carry out an assessment-on the need to relocate the Commissioner Eastern's Office from Suva back to Levuka, based on the concerns raised by the communities and key stakeholders.
- 4.3 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management must realign its strategic development plan with the National Development Plan 2024 to 2029.
- 4.4 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management should continue road show for government program in all maritime and remote rural areas around Fiji which benefits those communities.
- 4.5 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management should be fully funded for regular upgrading and maintenance of rural roads which has been commissioned, until such time the responsibility is handed over to Fiji Road Authority.
- 4.6 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management should continue to collaborate with its international partners, Donor Agencies and Non-Government Organizations to complete its rural development projects, risk and resilient support programs.
- 4.7 The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management to monitor and enforce new National Disaster Risk Act (NDRA) 2024, with the Municipal Council and Business Community.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS






The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management's Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs) are aligned with national government priorities and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These SPAs are further integrated into the Ministry's outcomes, outputs, and programmes, ensuring a cohesive approach to achieving its objectives.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Committee after having reviewed the Ministry of Regional and Maritime Development and Disaster Management Reports is of the opinion that the directions and plans set by the Ministry is on track to achieve its intended goals.

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. Alipate Tuicolo Member	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Parveen Bala Member	
Date: 5 th June, 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

(1) 2018-2019 Annual Report

(2) 2019-2020 Annual Report

SUBMISSION: Ministry of Rural and Maritime
Development and Disaster
Management

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government
Buildings, Suva

DATE: Tuesday, 1st April, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON TUESDAY, 1ST APRIL 2025, AT 12.56 P.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

In Attendance:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Mr. Isoa Talemaibua | - Permanent Secretary /Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management |
| 2. Ms. Losana Tarau | - Director Finance for Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development |
| 3. Ms. Arieta Dimuri | - Director Development Services |
| 4. Ms. Ana Tora | - Director Corporate Services Division |
| 5. Mr. Napolioni Boseiwaqa | - Acting Director for the National Disaster Management Office. |
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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members and the Secretariat, good afternoon to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this meeting.

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 also be aired live via the Parliament Channel on the *Walesi* platform and will be streamed live on the Parliament *Facebook* platform.

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

- (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. However, please, bear in mind that we do not condone slander or libel of any sort, so 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 also wish to remind honourable members and our guests that all questions asked are to be asked through the Chairman.

Now I will the floor to the members to introduce themselves.

(Introduction of Members of the Standing Committee)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Today the committee will be hearing submissions from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. This is in relation to the ministry's annual report 2018-2019 and 2020. And now I invite the PS and his team to introduce themselves and then begin with the presentation straightaway and after which there will be a question-and-answer session.

Please also note that if there are any questions from the members of the committee, they may interject, or we will wait until the end of your presentation.

Thank you very much. PS and the team, you may start now.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. I refer to the set of questions that was forwarded to the ministry in relation to the annual reports for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 financial years.

At the outset, the ministry, if we look at the budget book from the 2018-2019 budget, the allocations were reduced around \$2.9 million in the 2019-2020 budget. So, from \$21.6 million in the 2018-2019, in the 2019-2020 budget it was reduced to \$18.6 million.

However, having said that, the ministry then realises there was again a COVID-19 budget, a revised budget undertaken in the 2019-2020 financial year whereby the total budget was further reduced to \$14.9 million as a response to the COVID-19 in that financial year.

That is a bit of background information. 2018-2019 was an election year and then we move on to 2019-2020 where allocation was reduced by \$2.9 million and then immediately after that COVID-19 intervene globally and then there was another reduction in the ministry's allocation which is around \$14.9 million.

That is a bit of background information on the ministry's allocated budget for those two financial years.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS, I may intervene. When you talk about the reduction in budget, we already read the information about that, what could be the major reason the reduction was such, especially for 2018 before we came to COVID in 2019. Are there any explanations from the Ministry of Finance? I believe by that time you were there.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. You may recall that, when we run the COVID-19 response budget, all the ministries need to give up most of their allocations. Revenue was reduced, financial support was reduced, trade was not going, tax collection was not coming through and so all the ministries pitched in. If you look at the overall ministries budget, under the revised 2019-2020 budget, everybody takes a share of their cake by receiving a reduced amount from their initial allocated budget. So, for those ministries that start their financial year started with a bang. I mean, as soon as August comes in, they start their implementation. They were the fortunate ones. But for those that delay their implementation they suffer in the process because just after six months we reduced the budget. When they wake

up from their slumber, everything is gone. We needed to retune the process in accordance with what we were receiving. From our tax office, from other revenue sources and from the government support.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That was the decision from the government of the day during that time.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Mr. Chairman if you allow, we have forwarded the list of answers to all the questions that were sent to us on this 10-page lift-out. I believe if I read it, it may take time, but I maybe if there are concerns within the members, we can talk about specific questions. We will be happy to do that. Other than that, I have already discussed the background brief and in those years the only allocations coming out is the self-help projects. And the others are just constructions of new government offices. Inside, yes, we are doing almost everything inside, but outside in terms of rural infrastructures, rural growth, rural income generating support, those allocations were not supported then.

In those two years, we can see that the only main funding allocations for constructions, for grants it was coming out from the self-help projects allocation.

So that is very briefly what was allocated to the ministry in those years. We have a list of those projects that were funded, those programs and we do not like to select it Mr. Chairman, but as per your request we have realised that the team wishes to visit some of these projects. It will depend on the committee selections, and we will abide by it and organise whichever day the committee wishes to go and visit these projects.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS, I may intervene. Honourable members, we have heard what the PS already gave as the brief of their 11-pager, if I'm right. It will be wise if you give us a brief page by page as we move along so it will give us some leeway to intervene before we wrap it up. Most of the honourable members are trying to recap everything. After we finish with the presentation, then we sum it up. If you could just go brief by page as we move along. When we complete the cycle, we are all on the same level. You agree with that, honourable members?

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes, sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Okay. Just a brief on the pages and we will take the cue from there. Thank you, sir.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Vinaka Mr. Chairman.

Question 1. What are the challenges faced by the Ministry in fulfilling its vision of achieving sustainable, inclusive growth and resilient communities? How is the Ministry striving to address these challenges?

We have a few answers here. Number 1 is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought about a series of changes in the systems and processes of Government, as I have already highlighted earlier. Lack of personnel to ensure the efficient implementation of a few government initiatives. At that time, we have 291 staff members. Now we have almost 330

staff. Lack of interagency cooperation is something that happened then. There is a lack of, you know, the notion of integrated rural development where ministries work together at that time.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you. Mr. Chairman, through you, I have a question regarding point one. We all understand, as PS has also alluded, regarding why the budget was reduced. It is all because of COVID-19 and we had national priorities. You have also mentioned that most communities were left unassisted due to the budget reduction, and we all understand that. So, whether in the past years, those projects have been attended to, because the ministry must have planned for those projects. And due to COVID-19, the budget was reduced, and you were not able to attend to do, so whether those projects have been done?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you. Mr. Chairman, through you. Thank you for that question honourable Member, yes, we have a baseline data sets where we are checking. We have fulfilled most of those projects then, but we are encouraging communities if they still have projects that they think were not implemented or finalised during those years, they can always come back to us. We will regroup, rethink and re-implement if we have the resources. So, we are happy to redo these projects if communities come back. Based on our data sets, we do not have these outstanding projects now. So, what we are saying, we are fulfilling most of these project's request, but if there are any in the communities, they can always visit our district offices and resubmit these requests via our DOs, ADOs, provisional administrators so that we can go and reassess the request at the district level.

MR. CHAIRMAN. - To item number two, question number two, the lack of personnel to ensure the inefficient implementation of a few Governments initiative. We were in Levuka during our site visit for the municipality of Levuka. There was a lot of question raised to us about getting back the commissioners' office to Levuka. I'm just trying to relate this according to the question that is here in front of us, what they did mention was, that before, correct me if I'm wrong, they used to have the commissioner's office in Levuka, plus the executive team, looking after the Eastern Division. When you talk about the population wise of Levuka from 14,000 reduced to 9000. The issue here is how best to serve the Eastern Division. What they say, the locality at Levuka, they access all the divisional areas, rather than coming to Suva. I am not sure how you look at it from your angle. This was one of the issues that was raised, and it has been coming up during our sitting in Parliament. So, since you are here, you are the rightful owners of these commissioners' office around Fiji. What are you thinking moving forward in terms of capacity and how best to serve your conditions of Fiji when you talk about the Eastern Division, generally?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Vinaka Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that question. Yes, before the commissioner Eastern Division used to be based in Levuka. There was a decision made then, because the commissioner Eastern does not look after the Levuka population alone, or the Lomaiviti province alone. There are two other big provinces, the province of Kadavu and the province of Lau. Given the logistic inefficiencies for people, for example, from Lau, they come by boat, and they have to go directly to Levuka to visit the commissioner, it's logically not in their favour.

So, the administrator then, they made the decisions, the commissioner's office to be based in Suva, to serve the whole of Lomaiviti, Lau, Kadavu, and we reallocate a provincial administrator, which is now in Levuka to look after the interests of the Lomaiviti people. In Lomaiviti alone have the provincial administrator in Levuka sufficient to cover the whole island. And then we have a DO Gau to look after the Gau Island alone. And then we have a DO Koro to look after the island of Koro. A few islands of Moturiki, Makogai, they can always come to Levuka because they are close by. But it does not stop the fact that it has been raised in this committee. We will go back and rediscuss with the honourable Minister and the assistant ministers, and maybe we'll do a reassessment and see what steps we can take going forward in relation to the reallocations of the commissioner back to Levuka.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Through you Mr Chairman. Yes, I totally agree. The communities and the people of Levuka and other maritime island has already raised in regard to the services that is being provided by government teams. And they feel that, not enough is done. And they have asked for the commissioner's office to be taken back to Levuka. So now we have seen through your response that you are taking back the district offices in Vanuabalavu and the positioning in Lakeba and Moala. Is there a provisional administrator monitoring and working closely with them and how this is all linked to identify and assist to monitor the projects in the maritime islands.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you honourable member. Mr. Chairman, through you. We have the provincial administrator that supervise the work of the district officers. So, in Levuka, we have the provincial administrator for Lomaiviti and we have a district assistant district officer for Levuka. So, one is an implementer, and one is in overseer. So, we have an implementer in Gau, which is the DO Gau, so the overseer is the PA. Then we have an implementer in Koro, the district officer Koro. And also in Koro, we also have an assistant district officer. So, we have beef up staff in these two islands because of the populations, geographical locations, so that it can assist in the implementations of projects.

We understand they can work within the relevant government agencies in the islands to coordinate development efforts in those islands. And we believe going forward, will reassess and we might need to come back and discuss the results with the committee.

HON. A. TUICOLO.- Through you Mr. Chairman just a follow up question on number four. Is the proposal plan of moving the government services from Suva and establishing a district officer in Vanuabalavu, Lakeba and Moala cost effective?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- At the moment, the island of Vanuabalavu was part of the request in between the 2018-2019, for government to support the establishment, but the funding allocated was insufficient to construct a separate office in Vanuabalavu. We are doing that in this new financial year for government to consider it. For Lakeba, we are just using the relevant agencies which are in Lakeba right now. In the next few weeks, we will commission a new work boat for the Lau group. So, a work boat that will assist our office to visit this small islands. This boat will be this in Lakeba. So, to do that, we will assign a boat captain, maybe based in

Lakeba, and a sub-senior level officer to be based in Lakeba, just to make it easy for us to visit the other surrounding Lakeba. So that is the plan, because to build a total dedicated office for these islands, is very, very expensive and to manage. We are looking at some cost-effective measures just to help us in making these decisions.

Vinaka, through you Mr. Chairman on question Number Two

2. Performance and Achievements

- a.) What were the major achievements of the Ministry during these periods? How did these achievements impact rural and maritime communities?

The major achievements of the Ministry during the period were:

- b.) Completion of 181 Self Help Projects
- c.) Completion of 86 CARFF Projects
- d.) Facilitation of 48,185 ancillary services.
- e.) Launch of the NDRR Policy.
- f.) Facilitated 2 Government Roadshows in Keiyasi, Nadroga and Vaturova in Cakaudrove.
- g.) Establishment of the Office of the District Officer Kavala, to serve Northern Kadavu. This ensured that rural and maritime communities in Northern Kadavu are able to access Government services that they hitherto had to access these services all the way in Vunisea or Suva. In addition, there was also an increase in the number of Government assistance in Northern Kadavu due to the presence of a District Officer on the ground to advise the communities, stimulate economic activities and provide the strategic direction for socio-economic development.

We have completed 237 self help projects, our apology. On your note, it was 191 but it is 237. Completion of 124 CARFF projects. In your note it was 35. It is 124. Facilitation of 48,185 ancillary services. This is something that that we were doing then, for example, the liquor licensing. These are extra duties that are given. These are part and parcels of our duties. But it is not our core responsibilities. We are doing it on behalf of the Liquor Board and the court which are handling these services.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you. PS the salary services, what figure you have given, 14,000.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- 48,000

HON. V. PILLAY.- Okay.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, we continue on (e) we have facilitated two government road shows in Keiyasi, in Nadroga and Vaturova in Cakaudrove, with the establishment of the DO office in Kavala to serve the northern Kadavu, given the geographical difficulties of the government office in Vunisea.

Moving on to **Question 3. Policy implementation.**

- a. **What new policies were introduced, and how effective were they?**
- b. **Were there any significant changes in existing policies, and what prompted these changes?**

There are some key activities and achievement of the division during this period, number one is the partnership with the UNDP Gov4Res project. We partner with that program. The collaborations were formalised through the signing of a letter of agreement which laid the foundation for critical achievements in the ministry operations. Key outcome of the partnership includes the formulation of the ministry's 10-year strategic development plan, the adoptions of risk informed...

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, through you. This is the 10-year strategic development plan.

MINISTRY OFFICIALS. - Yes.

HON. V. PILLAY.- I think this was done before the National Development Plan. So how you are linking this to the national development plan?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you, honourable member for that question. Mr. Chairman, through you. Yes. Right now, we are reviewing the integrated development framework. We are doing it right now, currently, through the services of two consultants. So, on the same note, after the review, then then we will have a new, revised strategic plan which will be realigned to the new National Development Plan.

Moving on, the establishment of two new positions. Under those policy approaches, the one principal position and one senior GIS officer. In terms of Parliamentary ministerial support, formulations of ministerial speeches and responses and also media communications.

In terms of Digital Transformation: Introduction of Online Capital Programme Applications. This was introduced then, including the online application system, where division played a key role in managing and consolidating online applications before referring them to the relevant divisions. This just to improve customer services and feedback for our stakeholders. Also, there was a revision of standard operating procedures for capital programs. You may recall, because of COVID, we need to revise the SOP just to reflect the realities on the ground.

4. Infrastructure Development

- a. **What infrastructure projects were undertaken to improve rural and maritime areas? How did these projects benefit communities?**

In terms of Question four on infrastructure development for community access roads, food, private food bridges. There was a construction of the \$10.3 million Rotuma Hospital, initially fathered by the ministry, and then it was taken over by the Ministry of Health. Completion of the Yawe district and Nabukelevu-i-ra road, costing around \$5 million, completion of the 4.7-kilometre road along the Yawe district from Nakorovou to Naqalotu, construction of the Wainikoro District Office and the Kubulau District office.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS May I intervene. Just for this project. If you just can give us a table format, on what is completed, the ones that needs to be completed with timelines.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you, PS, for that information in regard to the access roads that has been done. So, after the completion of these roads, is it handed over to FRA for repair and maintenance, because the way we see, all these roads are in a very pathetic condition. Now leave aside the main roads. Already people finding difficulty with the potholes and the repair and maintenance program, maintenance is not happening. People are really facing difficulties in regard to the access roads. When it is done, it is done very nicely. So, who's doing the repair maintenance of these roads?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you, honourable member. Mr. Chairman through you. Yes, I agree with the honourable member regarding some of these roads. The maintenance part of it, but we've been told by the honourable Minister for Finance that FRA, going forward, will look after the FRA and the non-FRA roads, because of the current conditions. We've been making submissions to Ministry of Finance to give us allocations just to look after these small roads, because nobody wants to take care of repairs and maintenance. But then, that was something discussed at that level, but we are glad that the decision has come and that will solve a lot of problems surrounding the maintenance and upgrade of these access roads. We are also building farm roads through our rural programs in the last two financial years. And we are looking forward to active participation of both the PWD and FRA to maintain these roads once they are commissioned.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, because I strongly feel once you make that kilometre of road, it's nicely done, you cannot leave it to the community to repair, and they won't be able to do it. So, thank you. PS for that information. Going forward when that is done, then it's good for our communities. Thank you.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- We will resubmit again, because we want that reconfirmation to come out strongly from the Ministry of Finance that FRA will look after both the FRA and non-FRA roads. Mr. Chairman, through you, in terms of your question, yes for the Rotuma hospital that has been completed. The Yawe district and Nabuke-levu-ira, all these, all these projects that are highlighted on number four, those are all completed. And I guess no projects has been incomplete.

And we'll move on to number five, in terms of community development.

5. Community Development

- a. What program were implemented to support community development?
- b. How did these programs impact the rural and maritime communities

The Division implemented a series of projects funded under the Ministry development program, which includes the Self-Help Program, the CARFF projects and capacity building and other PSIP programs. These projects assisted the community in self-help initiatives, opened up inaccessible areas, built the capacity of individuals through financial literacy training and development planning for their villages.

The initial challenges faced during the implementation of SHP were the lack of capacity with our local communities in terms of financial literacy to enable them to sustain the project. The introduction of Community Capacity Building, in collaboration with line agencies and development partners, enabled the training of community members in the required business and literacy skills and knowledge to efficiently manage their projects.

We'll move on to question number six.

HON. A. TUICOLO.- Mr. Chairman, sorry, I'll go back to number four, the infrastructure development. With the projects undertaken to improve rural and maritime areas. Did any of these projects exhaust its budgetary allocation?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- For your information, honourable member, most of these projects were co-ordinated by other ministries. Because it is implemented in rural areas, that is why we recorded it. So, they will be in a better position to answer those questions.

We will move on to question number six.

6. Development Projects

How did Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF) program contribute to rural economic development?

Accessibility is one of the main contributing factors of rural development, especially in areas of education, health facilities, economic gain, et cetera. The easy access of rural communities to market is directly linked to income generations and raising of living standards. So, in this financial year, let me give an example, honourable Chairman and members of the committee, we constructed a 16-kilometre farm road in Vanua Levu. Just imagine, 16-kilometre. It is a really long farm road, benefiting close to more than 1000 farmers, yaqona farmers, semi subsistence farmers, and just imagine the impact it has on the lives of these farmers. So, through these projects, we are able to open up areas not only assisting in farming, but accessibility to health facilities, education, et cetera.

In terms of question number seven,

7. Stakeholder Engagement

How did the Ministry collaborate with local and international partners to achieve its goals in the 2018-2020 period?

The Division used the IRDF to foster collaboration with local and international partners to achieve its development goals. The Divisional Commissioner's Office, as the main coordinating agency, prioritizes the establishment of close partnership with its stakeholders. This collaboration resulted in funding assistance towards development needs such the JICA assisted project in Nawaikama, the Rotary Pacific assisted Water Projects in Koro and the AUSAID assistance towards the Vunisea hospital.

8. Financial Management

- a. How did the Ministry manage its budget and financial Resources?
- b. Were there any notable financial challenges or successes?

As I have already alluded to earlier, the ministry managed a total budget of \$21 million in the 2018-2019 financial year, of which \$14.4 million was expended. The Audited financial statements of the Ministry comprise the Statement of Receipts and Expenditure, Appropriation Statement, Statement of Losses and Trust Account statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ended 31 July 2019. Attention was drawn to three emphases of the matter, as per the following.

- i. Internal control over procurements was weak.
- ii. The presentation of trust receipts and expenditure provides limited information on the nature of receipts and expenditure incurred under the respective trust fund account.
- iii. Unreconciled variances of \$15,991 and \$38,696 exist respectively between the established staff and government wage earners payroll report balance and the General Ledger balance.

This was part of the report then, and the audit opinion was not modified in respect of these matters.

The Ministry's budget allocation was \$14,964,822 of which \$9,129,789 Operating and \$5,248,033 Capital. In that financial year a total of 91% was utilized with 94% Operating and 87% Capital.

The State revenue had a slight increase of \$3,883 or 3% in 2020 compared to 2019 due to an increase in collection of license fees.

The Established Staff Expenditure decreased by \$598,222 or 10% when compared to 2019. This is due to vacant, freezing of positions and reduced COVID-19 budget. So, this is one of the measures then, the Ministry of Finance had to take out vacant positions, freeze up positions and redirect those funds through the operating needs of government.

The Capital Grants and Transfers Expenditures decreased by 42% in 2020 comparison to 2019 due to the crisis caused by COVID-19 which resulted in a revised budget.

HON. V. PILLAY.- MR. Chairman, through you. PS, these vacant positions have been filled now.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- No, most of these positions are gone then. We need to resubmit or request the Ministry of Finance to consider these positions given the positions that were taken out. As I have said earlier that time, we had 291 positions and right now we have 330 supporting the ministry's projects and programs.

Let us continue question number nine.

9. Funding and Resource allocation

- a. What was the funding allocation for various programs and initiatives in the report?
- b. How did the Ministry ensure transparency and accountability in its financial management?

Yes, in the report.

- I. Programme 1-General Administration – 5.6m
- II. Programme 2-Rural Development Services-6.3m
- III. Programme 3-Rural Infrastructure-2.9m

For the very first time in the past fifteen years, the Office of the Auditor General had issued Unqualified Opinion on the Ministry's Agency Financial Statements (AFS) for three consecutive years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

I believe that time the honourable member was the assistant minister for the ministry. Thank you, Sir.

The historic achievement was a result of thorough scrutiny of the Ministry 'internal controls, historical data gathering, evaluation and analysis of documents and processes

Let us move on to question number 10.

10. Disaster Preparedness and Response

- a. What were the major disaster events the Ministry responded to during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 periods, and how did the Ministry manage disaster operations?

Major Disaster Events

- 2018 TC Keni
- 2019 COVID-19, TC Sarai
- 2020 TC Harold, TC Yasa

- b. What measures were taken to enhance disaster preparedness and response in rural and maritime areas?

The Division formulated its preparedness and response plan and facilitated the need for an interagency commitment. The preparedness plan ensured that the Division was well prepared to meet any need for the community during disasters. The Provincial Administrators also

informed the communities of the impending disaster and assisted communities to evacuate to a safer zone in anticipation for a disaster.

On question number 11

11. Impact of COVID-19

In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the Ministry's disaster response and rural development efforts?

The COVID-19 pandemic showed gaps in emergency operations as initially the Ministry of Health and Medical Services had coordinated operations without much cooperation from other line agencies. It showed the need for a whole of Government approach to such operations. In addition, the NDMO Act does not cover medical emergencies such as pandemics or other disease outbreak.

So, during the COVID 19, we still have the old Act that time, it only covers natural disasters.

Now we have a new Act. It covers all disasters, except political instability. If a pandemic, God forbid, but if that pandemic reemerges again, another ministry, through the National Disaster Risk and Resilience Office (NDRA) office, can coordinate, as per the Act.

12. Challenges and Solutions

a. What were the main challenges faced by the Ministry during these periods?

One is the reduction in our establishment budget, a PE budget meet which affected the ministry's operations. So, a total of 23 positions of the ministry's establishments were freeze or unbudgeted. This was equivalent to the 590,000 which I have highlighted earlier. The other challenged faced by the ministry was that the NDMO Act did not cover the pandemic. So, during the initial phase of the COVID-19 operations, the ministry was not sure how to facilitate its response.

Let us move on to question number 13, what percentage of leadership...

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, the NDMO Act has been reviewed and enacted. Now we also see, looking at the reports that come from the Municipal Council, they all are starting to have their own disaster risk plans. So here is how this is linked to the NDMO Act, or what guidance you are giving to the municipalities who are now preparing their own disaster plans?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you, honourable member. Mr. Chairman, through you, I will start the answer, then I will ask the Acting Director to help me with answering the questions. In the new Act, we've recognized Municipal Council's divisions, the divisions operations in terms of their emergency operations. Before, the Commissioner's Office, Municipal Council, and all the other stakeholders were not recognized. But through the new Act, they have been mandated to do this.

Mr. NAPOLIONI BOSEIWAQA.- *Vinaka vaka levu* Mr. Chairman, so part of the new requirements under the revised Act is for the establishment of the municipality emergency operations centres, and also for municipal disaster risk management plans as well. So that is something that we are currently working with Municipal Councils, particularly in those municipalities that have issues with natural hazards such as flooding. We are asking them to submit project proposals in which we can assist them with. And one of the new initiatives under the Act is the establishment of the Disaster Risk Management Fund, which now enables the NDRMO to assist in funding for DRR, Disaster Risk Reduction activities prior to an event.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, so is there any time frame for these municipalities to prepare their national disaster risk plan in line with the guidance from NDMO?

Mr. NAPOLIONI BOSEIWAQA.- *Vinaka vaka levu* Mr. Chairman, we just endorsed the Western Division Disaster Risk Reduction Plan through the assistance of JICA, and in that we also developed municipality-specific DRR plans that has been done for Nadi and Ba, so we are now moving to the rest of the municipalities as well.

HON. V. PILLAY.- I am asking Mr. Chairman, because we have really seen a lot of issues during disaster, and I personally have been part of the team on the ground, so it is very good that they have some plans to start off, because all these municipalities, the districts have been relying on NDMO to give guidance. Thank you.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- We will continue on question number 13.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, yes, is that percentage really true, which you have given, 2%?

MS. ANA TORA.- Mr Chairman, yes, that number is correct, 2% at that time.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Why I have asked, because I have seen the percentage different here today with the representation.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- *Vinaka*, honourable member. Mr. Chairman, through you on question number,

14. Future Plans

- a. What are the Ministry's strategic goals for the upcoming years?
- b. How does the Ministry plan to build on its past achievements?

The Ministry formulated its new 10-year strategic plan 2021 to 2031 in the financial year 2020-2021. The plan was formulated with the assistance of United Nations Development Programme and the Governance for Resilient Projects, Conquer Forest Projects. As I have alluded to earlier, we have a sitting consultant reviewing the integrated development framework, which will inform our rural development policy and at the same time embark on putting together a new strategic plan for the Ministry in line of the new National Development Plan.

On question number 15,

15. How is the Ministry incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into its policy framework and strategic planning?

The Ministry's Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs) are aligned with national government priorities and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These SPAs are further integrated into the Ministry's outcomes, outputs, and programmes, ensuring a cohesive approach to achieving its objectives. Attached for reference is the Ministry's 10 Year Strategic Development Plan 2021-2031.

And lastly, the last question, number 16,

16. When will the Ministry submit its outstanding annual reports?

We are tentatively looking at July 2025. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- *Vinaka*. Thank you very much, PS and your team, for a very comprehensive report to our understanding as a standing committee on these annual reports 2019-2020.

For us, when we go through the report, there was a lot that we needed to address. Apart from what we have heard from PS and the team today, now the understanding prospect part of the report is totally clear to us now. Nevertheless, if there are other supplementary questions which need to be addressed here when the team is still here. Thank you.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, first of all, PS, thank you very much for the response and the team. And just one question in regard to the repair and maintenance of roads once again. There was some arrangement from the Commissioner's Office before. They used to closely collaborate with the FRA and when some roads were identified, and then they were able to assist in the repair. Whether that is still going on?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you, honourable member, for that question. Mr. Chairman, through you, yes, that arrangement is still in place. But the problem now, we do not have funding to support this immediate response and approach during this time. But during a declared disaster, we have allocated funding that comes in.

But for that, as soon as the roads goes bad and we receive call or complaints from the public, we touch base with the FRA or PWD. So, I have told the Commissioners to make that a priority. But we understand there are a few problems here and there in relation to funding.

Because the FRA does not have that full maintenance budget to look after all the roads. But if we have identified a few funding within our ministry, we will go and attend to those complaints as and when required.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, PS, through you, Mr. Chairman. The recent floods, about four or five floods in the western division, especially in Ba, and the responses before, which I have seen myself, at the earliest, the access roads were cleared, the washed away site of the crossings were reinstated, and what I have observed in the recent floods, the response was very late.

I have seen communities cutting down big trees by themselves, clearing the crossings to get the access clear, community waiting for days for the access to be reinstated, especially along Balevuto Road, Coqe Crossing, Maranitawa Crossing. Why there is a delay in the response of reinstatement or clearing the roads after flooding disaster?

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you for that question, Honourable Member. I do not have an upfront answer to that. But what I can only say now, we are improving coordination's within our team because relevant stakeholders like FRA, they need to prop up their machines coming in on time after we receive complaints and document the request from the communities. Our commissioners and teams are trying very hard to improve on this coordinated approach, but that is one end of the equation. But on the other hand, the onus is on the implementers on the ground. Of course, we have machines, we have diggers and trucks that were given to the ministries, then, by the Japanese government. But unfortunately, the last administrator, they offloaded all this emergency equipment to the Ministry of Agriculture.

If we would have those excavators then, it could have helped on what the Honourable Member is saying. We could just have come in and, you know, help in accessibility, removal of trees, repairs of culverts, and all these necessary infrastructure improvements. But then, Honourable Member, daily we are communicating with our stakeholders on the approaches we are taking, and I believe we have learned a lot of lessons.

But we are hopeful that come the next flood, God forbid, we will be able to participate, effectively participate on time once we receive complaints from our stakeholders or the communities.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, honourable members. For me, it is only just two updates. It does not mean that I am from Vanua Levu, I want to ask everything about what is happening in Vanua Levu. I hope Mrs. Tora is okay about Koro.

Anyway, any update on Nabavatu and Ogea? Thank you, PS.

MR. TALEMAIBUA.- Thank you, honourable chair and the members for Nabavatu, when we come in, when I joined the Ministry in late 2023, the first thing that I had asked them, because they were concerned about Nabavatu, where was the approval to move these people? Because the only approval then was the decision by the last administrators to move the people to the new location.

Then we realised there was no Cabinet approval. So, we had to redo that from scratch, taking it to Cabinet to endorse the movement. And then from there, then we have to tabulate Cabinet people looking for money.

And we are so very fortunate that the last administrators have already come up with that community of trust account, which the New Zealand government has funded with over \$6 million, if I am correct. And then we targeted that funding and Cabinet approved for the Ministry of Environment through that community's trust fund to assist in funding the movement or the transfer, the construction of houses in Nabavatu. Altogether, 85 homes need to be reconstructed, but 37 homes are the priorities.

These are the people who are living in tents. And then after that approval, we then have to go for the administrative requirements, including the tender. So, there are a lot of bidders that come in.

Early this year, we received the approved bidders, one local company to do the constructions. But fortunately, I can highlight in this forum that this bidder not only will build wooden house, but he's going to build concrete houses for these 37 homes with steel frames, with the same cost as compared to the wooden homes that we were targeting at that time. So, it will be constructed with around \$5.2 million.

By June, works has already started the construction. So, by June to mid-July, he has told us if weather permits, the first 10 houses will be completed because he's targeting these 37 homes to be commissioned by December 2025, so in this financial year. So, if all goes out well, funding is available, weather is on our side, then we will be able to do that.

That is for the Nabavatu. And people are happy. They are helping in the projects.

And we have apologised to them of the series of delays, but we know that after December they can come into their new homes as promised by the last government and also the Coalition Government. That is one. For Cogea. The project for Cogea is being handled by the Fiji Council of Social Services.

There was a donor called Bread for Life, if I am correct. They are handling the projects, and we have told them we are with them. Whatever they need, they can come to us, but the problem is they do not want to offload this to the Government, they want to handle it themselves. So, we do not want to interfere because we have the Nabavatu with us at the moment. Now we have rolled out Nabavatu.

There are some lessons learned, which we want to discuss with the Fiji Council of Social Services, which we are hoping will be doing the same project tracking, management, development, according to what is required. We have realised doing relocation is not an easy job. It is very hard.

Different communities, different views. Even to acquire that piece of land, it takes a very long time. People complain we are losing that land, but luckily the Vunivalu of Dreketi gave that piece of land to support the relocated communities in that area.

We also thank the Assemblies of God Church for hosting the current 87 families, and also thank our partners, UNDP, UN World Food Program, and all this support given to us by the donors, the Australian government, and everyone who has participated for the safe relocations of the Nabavatu community to their new sites. We have provisions of water, I mean, new tents, blankets, non-food items, especially after the last cyclone, we visited the area last two months, giving them those non-food items just to support them for those living in tents. They are very thankful to the government for those assistance, but we are hopeful that come December we will be able to shift these families to their new homes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, PS and the team. At this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you for availing yourself, especially for this important consultation, for this

hearing, what has already been discussed during our annual reports. We thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourself for any further queries or clarification that the committee may have on these annual reports.

With those concluding remarks, I now close this public hearing session.

(Meeting ends)