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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

- (1) 2019-2020 Annual Report (2)**
- 2020-2021 Annual Report (3)**
- 2021-2022 Annual Report**
- (4) 2022-2023 Annual Report**

ENTITY: Office of the Prime Minister
VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)
DATE: Monday, 8th June, 2026

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON MONDAY, 8TH JUNE, 2026, AT 8.32 A.M.

Present

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|--|
| (1) | Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua | - Chairperson |
| (2) | Hon. R.R. Sharma | - Deputy Chairperson |
| (3) | Hon. P.K. Ravunawa | - Member (4) Hon. I. Tuiwailevu - Member |
| (5) | Hon. V. Lal | - Member |
| (6) | Hon. T.R. Matasawalevu | - Member |

Apology

Interviewee/Submittee: Office of the Prime Minister

In Attendance:

- | | | |
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| (1) | Dr. Lesikimacuata Korovavala | - Permanent Secretary |
| (2) | Mr. Moape Rokosuka | - Head of Operations and Development |
| (3) | Ms. Shreiya Kumar | - Principal Administrative Officer at Cabinet |
| (4) | Ms. Catherine Guivalu | - Manager Human Resources |
| (5) | Mr. Jemesa Davetanivalu | - Principal Research and Policy Officer |
| (6) | Mr. George Katonivualiku | - Principal Public Relations Officer |
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MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, and representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), members of the media and the public, and dear viewers, ladies and gentlemen; a very good morning to you all. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone present in the room, as well as those joining us via live broadcast.

I wish to advise that pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Orders 111, all Committee meetings are open to the public and the media so, accordingly, this submission is open to the public and members of the media. Should there be any sensitive information relating to this submission that cannot be disclosed publicly, that information may be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a closed session. However, that will only be permitted in limited circumstances, including matters relating to national security, third-party confidential information, personnel or human resource matters, and also during Committee deliberations when we finalise and develop our report back to Parliament.

I remind honourable Members and witnesses that all comments and questions should be directed through me, the Chairperson. For viewers following this meeting live on *Facebook*, you may submit your questions via the comments section. Please, note that only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee from the public. Members of the Committee may interject during

the submission, or alternatively, if the OPM so wishes, questions can be raised at the conclusion of their presentation.

I remind all present that this is a parliamentary proceeding and all information provided is protected under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act 2016 and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Slander or libel of any kind will not be condoned, and all information presented to the Committee should be factual.

In terms of meeting protocols, movement within the meeting room should be kept to a minimum. The use of mobile phones is discouraged, and we ask everyone to, please, turn your mobiles to silent.

I now introduce the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to our submittees today.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

Today, the Committee will receive an in-person submission from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in relation to the Office of the Prime Minister and Fiji Immigration Department's 2019-2023 Annual Reports. Therefore, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports.

I now invite the witnesses from the OPM to introduce themselves before proceeding with their submission. You have 20 minutes to do your presentation, and we will interject with the questions during your submission. I invite you to, please, turn your microphones on when you speak and to turn them off afterwards.

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Committee, it is an honour to present ourselves to this Committee this morning to respond to the questions from the Committee, as required of us, on behalf of the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. With all fairness, the presentation will be made by the Director of Corporate Services and Project Planning.

(Introduction of OPM Officials by PS)

Without further ado, Madam Chairperson, I ask that the Director proceed now to answering the questions.

MR. M. ROKOSUKA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, we have submitted our written responses to the 16 questions that

were raised, and I believe the Committee must have gone through those questions. Briefly, before we go straight into the questions proper, the 2019-2023 period, as we all know, was a challenging period not only for the OPM, but for whole of Government in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic that reached Fiji during that period. During that period, the OPM faced a lot of challenges in terms of its operations.

One of the challenges is in terms of how we managed the COVID-19 pandemic. Another one is about public demand in terms of requests that came through the OPM. Another challenge was on resources in terms of staff constraints within the OPM, and the growing challenge of digitalisation. As we know, during that period, we were required to move into digital transformation. Lastly, is in terms of logistical hurdles for our remote areas in terms of accessing the assistance that is available within the OPM. Those are some of the big challenges that we faced during that period.

We were fortunate that we had leadership at that time, who managed to guide the team at the OPM in order to go through those challenges during that period.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, that is our brief introductory remarks to you on our presentation this morning. We are ready to discuss and present in detail, if you wish, in terms of the questions that you have raised and we have provided very thorough responses to, as we have

June, 2026

submitted last week.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I welcome honourable Penioni Ravunawa. I think he was stuck in traffic this morning.

I have a question, and this is a question based on the Prime Minister's Fund. During *TC Winston*, there was a lot of fundraising through the Prime Minister's Fund, and this is really just a general question because how are we preparing, for example, the *El Nino* that is going to hit the Pacific?

When the OPM is inviting, as it did in 2016-2017, for donations to assist with members of the public, how has OPM now prepared itself for further say, a bad cyclone comes cyclone season? My line of questioning is around the acquittals of the money that came into the Prime Minister's

Fund during that time. I know that many of you were not there or may be all of you were not in the OPM, but if those questions were to arise when there is a new disaster, can you explain how these funds are going to be acquitted should the OPM ask for donors because donors were private donors, overseas donors, funding the Prime Minister's Fund at that time?

MR. M. ROKOSUKA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, just recapping on the previous pandemic that we went through and in terms of the donor funding that comes through to the OPM, that funding is disaster funding, as you may have been aware that we had the Prime Minister's Disaster Fund. For the information of the Committee, that Fund was coordinated and controlled by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. Although the account name is under the OPM, the Prime Minister is just a trustee to that account, but the controlling of that Fund in terms of payment and disbursement is coordinated by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. They receive donations and also acquit the funds that have been submitted. The account is kept with them and not with the OPM. I hope that clears that question.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, that clarifies, Mr. Rokosuka.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, my question is in regard to grants from the OPM. I noticed the distribution of grants by Division and one Division is receiving about 112 projects, whereas another Division is only receiving 21 projects. How do you justify one Division receiving 112 and the other receiving only 21, can you explain that, please?

MR. M. ROKOSUKA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the Small Grants Scheme provided by Parliament for the OPM is to fund community-based projects. In terms of requests that we receive, we do not have a control on that in terms of divisional requests received. However, on the usage of this Fund, it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister himself. The Prime Minister has the prerogative to approve the funded projects.

In terms of the assistance that we give out, it is based on three modes. One is that when the Prime Minister makes a commitment. When he goes out to rural communities, requests come from those communities. We have to attend to those requests and fund those projects because the honourable Prime Minister has made the commitment on the spot that his Office will provide and fund the assistance. So, if the Prime Minister commits to a project, that project is 100 percent funded from OPM. That is one way - through the honourable PM's commitment.

Another way whereby projects are funded is through written requests that we receive from the general public. The figures vary because of the commitment that is done by the honourable Prime Minister in the various Divisions, plus those that the Permanent Secretary thinks that we need to fund through written requests that we receive.

HON. V. LAL.- Perhaps, the honourable Prime Minister is concentrating on one Division only. By Province I can see here that one Province is getting 78 projects with a value of more than \$1.2 million and three Provinces are getting only one project each. The Province that is getting only

one project is \$16,450. I am still going back to this disparity – one Division is getting 78 projects. Is it that we are concentrating on certain Divisions only, or what is it?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- When a request is received, there is a verification process that is applied. The Project Team at the OPM visits the village or community or the author of the request. That is done in coordination with the Provincial Administrators, the Divisional Commissioners, as well as the *Turaga ni Koro* and *Liuliu ni Yavusa*.

When those are verified, then we go through the process in the SOP - we assess the costs, and then we verify with other Ministries. If the same project is being handled by another Ministry, we hand over that particular project to that Ministry, or at times, as we have received, a request is applied to three different Ministries at the same time, so we have to consult, and that is in the SOP. We are required to do that.

In the past, this was named as a small grant, focussing on the amount that is there at the OPM. That is one of the things that we have changed in this current period that we are in - we have changed the approach to development grant, which means that we are using this as a catalyst to development, which is sustainable in the communities from which they apply. Therefore, we work together with them to understand the follow-on activity from the project that they are applying for. As you would see that the number on the graph represents the number of requests we received - not all Provinces that apply for this Fund has the same intensity or numbers as other Provinces.

Additionally, some of the requests that were received were already catered for under other Ministries, so we coordinated with them and they provided for it. In some, this becomes a catalyst, and the other Ministries take over the follow-on work.

The other criteria that we use in development grant is the contribution of the community to the actual project itself. We would like to move away from the dependency culture where the communities can stand on their own two feet and then make some commitment to this. At times, we have a conversation with the communities that submit their request - what can they do? At times, they offer to provide gravel, they provide labour or they provide timber. At times, they say that they cannot provide all those, so the only thing that they can provide is the community contribution in labour. So, we work with the Ministry of Transport, or with the Ministry of Public Works, or with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development to see where we can capitalise and maximise the resources that are applied in there so that they can achieve better outcomes from the same resources.

You also would have probably read in the Report that we are applying minimum optimum organisation which, for us, is a small grant. For example, in the allocation in this financial year, it is

only \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million. The total requests we have received so far is worth \$12 million. That shows the number of requests that are coming and the amount that we can entertain or support through this project.

Again, it is a necessity for us to coordinate with other Ministries to make sure that Government resources, wherever they are being used, are used to the maximum benefit. So, those

are the kinds of considerations that we use here to be able to support the projects. The numbers, again, go back to what I have just explained. Some of these, we offload to other Ministries so that they do not get reflected here.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Sir, for your explanation. When policies are done, these policies need to be implemented, and I am talking about the Look North Policy which is not reflected here.

The other thing is, you are saying that some Provinces do not apply. Is there any sort of awareness done to the Provinces that this grant is available and that they can apply and receive it? If you look at the graph, there are very few applications and I agree with you, but why is it so? Are there not enough awareness programmes done to the Provinces?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, the Public Relations Unit of the OPM accompanies the Prime Minister wherever he goes to visit, whether he participates in the events of Provincial Council meetings or other events of openings or other events in other Provinces. They are there, and they are the mouthpiece to advocate for the work that this particular grant is doing for the Government and for everyone. Whether they want to apply, that is, their absolute choice but whatever they do, there is a process for us that we follow, and we give them feedback.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Sir, for the insights because I understand when someone feels that they need to reach the Prime Minister for an issue, that is when these grants are highlighted to them, “Alright, yes, the Prime Minister’s Office can fund these small projects.” One question is; how have you improved the tender and procurement processes to ensure that there is no corruption and favouritism?

There are always allegations or rumours that anything below \$50,000 under a Government grant can be taken in by three invoices, from whom you know. That sort of allegations needs to be cleared up. So, how has the procurement and tender process been improved constantly because corruption is very complex and we are not free from it? What is the Ministry doing in this aspect?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, the standard Financial Regulation applies. For every commitment in the project, there is a three-quote system, which is totally outside. If it is to deal with energy, we do that in coordination with the authority that deals with energy; if it is to do with roads, we do it in coordination with the Fiji Roads Authority; if it is to do with

schools, we do it in coordination with the Ministry of Education. So, the three quotes come, and we are totally independent of it. That is verified.

The verification process is a key element of this. Every step of the way is verified. We have the verification of the Provincial Administrator, we also have the verification of the *Liuliu Ni Yavusa* or *Liuliu Ni Mataqali*, to ensure that the work done has the proper clearance of those who should make that decision.

Then it comes to Financial Regulation. We do the verification, and most of the work that we do are verified by the Office of Solicitor-General. We do a background check on the vendors that apply to be considered in this particular case. In some cases, some of the villages and communities suggest who they want to implement the project; that goes through a verification process as well. In other words, we try at every step of the way, to verify that this is above board. What we are doing is according to the Financial Regulations and is transparent in all these processes.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- As you have said, you want to reduce dependencies by giving grants. When you look at the national budget of Fiji, we give away billions of dollars in grants just to keep the country and households alive. That is something we need to work on as a nation.

How do you measure the return on investments from these small projects? Is there any framework being developed to say, “Alright, this was the gap, it has been addressed, this is how this community has been uplifted financially and physically, in any aspect.” Is there any framework around this on the return on investments that we make into the communities and households of Fijians?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, when a particular community complains about the crossing in a creek for their school children and they say that their children have been doing this for decades, when you provide an outboard vessel with an engine or a pontoon to cross over, there is no formula to measure the satisfaction and relief that the community finally receives when we do that - the idea that the parent is satisfied or at peace, knowing that his or her child is able to cross safely to the other side, go to school and come back home at the end of the day.

At the end of the project, there is a verification team that goes out again. We do that immediately after, probably, about three to six months after the project. They go back and try to get feedback on whether the project has met their needs, their expectations, or if there is something else. Almost more than 95 percent of the time, we have recorded positive

responses. Sometimes they come back themselves and write, or call to say, “Thank you very much for this. This is what we have been asking for. This is what we have been dreaming of and crying for over the years.”

I think on page 16 of the response we have provided to you, it summarises in dollar terms what has been delivered and what the outcome is. However, what I am explaining is how the people feel — to be heard, to be valued, and to be remembered. That is something that comes from the heart of the people themselves. When they write or call to express that satisfaction, we are pleased that this small grant has been able to lift their standard of living, give them safety and comfort, and allow members of their family to go about their lives and realise their potential as they had dreamt over the years.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Chairperson, I have a question regarding the projects. How many projects are still not completed from the time of reporting until now, for all Provinces?

MR. M. ROKOSUKA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, as already alluded to by the PS, in the budget submission this year, we requested for a capital budget of \$10 million. That shows the number of projects that have been pending for quite some time until today. So, \$10 million worth of projects are sitting there with us awaiting funding, and we hope maybe the Committee can help us in securing this budget of \$10 million for 2026–2027 in order to fund these pending projects worth around \$10 million as of today.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I thank the Officials from the OPM for reporting well on their Annual Report from 2019-2023. I also want to acknowledge and thank the leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were so many lessons learned from it, and they are important, not only for Fiji but for the region, as well as for other parts of the world. So, my sincere thanks to the OPM Officials who are here with us today, but there are some recommendations during COVID-19 that are yet to be implemented and to be made sustainable in case we have another pandemic around the corner. Do you have a dedicated focus team to look into the framework around any pandemic that might come around? Right now, we have *Ebola* that is happening in the other side of the world. That is just my general question to the Committee.

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, on the 28th of last month, we had a conversation with the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, and we had the Taskforce on HIV/AIDS’ presentation at the OPM. One of the lessons we picked out from your Committee was exactly the points that you raised, which is looking beyond what is before us, and looking and picking up from the lessons from those events that had already affected us.

We have heard about *Ebola*, and we have heard the projection about other pandemics that might hit our country. We are working with your team to be able to sequence in a way the current work that we are doing to be able to prepare better for the next pandemic, whatever that might be. That work is ongoing. We are likely to go to Cabinet on the 16th of this month for the first paper on the HIV Taskforce, but that is the start of the work that we are doing. There are lessons from this current crisis on HIV and drugs that we also are piggybacking on the lessons from the COVID pandemic, which we want to replicate in the work ahead of us. That is as far as we are working right now.

I recognise the mandated boundaries between the Ministries, and we are working sensitively not to encroach into all those work but we are working in coordination, and this is one of the roles of the OPM - the oversight role, which means that we coordinate with other Ministries to be able to facilitate their work, to remove bottlenecks, as well as to coordinate on line Agencies and Ministries on either side, and working with our development partners before we let them do their work but we facilitate. We do the coordination, and we are listening to what they are saying. There are certain revelations/information that the Taskforce is sharing with us now - it is concerning, but it is beyond what we are looking at right now. We were reminded that some of those lessons came from COVID.

I thank you for this question. It points to the future. We are trying to organise ourselves across the Ministries. This is a point that we have raised with the functional review of the Public Service last week also, in looking at the capabilities of the public service system that is able to cope and then get on top of the kind of challenges that are coming through, confronting our system.

Of course, it will require resources but, of course, it also requires that we improve our relationship with our donor partners. There are certain things that we need to look at and the expertise are not here yet. So, we believe it is about sorting out our thinking, it is about confronting the lessons and admit that some of these lessons have not been, probably, presented and sequenced in a way that enable us to go step by step to implement them.

We also, in this question, recognise that in the bilateral with some of the Prime Ministers around the Pacific region, they are looking to Fiji as their first referral. So, for us, we always take a regional approach to this, given that we have the hub status that comes with responsibilities. So, at the OPM at the DSC Meeting on 14th May and the DSC meeting last week on Thursday, we have included another compulsory consultation in the policy formulation process which is the regional impact. So, every policy decision that the Government takes has an impact across the region, as well as the region is looking to Fiji, so

these decisions have far reaching consequences and for us, the key is to work across systems, work across Ministries and also, listen to the political leadership that comes and that is required in these matters.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I thank the PS for his very comprehensive explanation and answer, which is really encouraging to note. He added that there are resources needed, so my supplementary question to the OPM; are you in a position and ready to also support the budget that will be required when this pandemic hits the nation?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, you would have probably aware that in the serious negotiations that we had with Australia, there were six sessions of negotiations led by the OPM and we looked to each sector. The Ministry of Health is high up there. We looked at the work for CWM Hospital, we looked at the work for the new hospital facilities, and we also looked specifically in responding to HIV crisis.

We did the same for critical infrastructure, and the same for education, as well as for aviation. That is part of the work of the OPM - the oversight role - to open the opportunities for each ministry and sector to be able to pursue and deliver on their mandate. So, absolutely! It was presented in Cabinet last month, about the commitments that our donor partners have, particularly, on health, so that is now official.

We look at this approach from building the economic structure. Health is critical to the economy, as well as all the other sectors. When health is not in the right place, probably nothing else matters, but this is the consideration that we give in consultation and coordination with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the security agencies as well. So, all these come together. This is the joint Government team that is approaching this particular work, and I am pleased to also advise that Cabinet has been informed of this, and they have taken their decision on it.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- The Prime Minister of a nation has a very key task, and he needs a very good set of advisors. I will give an example. If the Prime Minister says, “There is three months of fuel left”, and the next thing you know, you see a price hike, that puts the Prime Minister in a very difficult position in front of his people. I would like to know, is your office the final channel that vets the advice given to the Prime Minister before it goes out to the public? Do you facilitate speeches, engagements, et cetera? So, is your office the final channel that vets the correct information so that the Prime Minister can disseminate to the public?

DR. L. KOROVAVALA.- Madam Chairperson, the advice comes from the expert Ministries and agencies. All the OPM does is fact-check. So, in other words, we work with the ministry to ensure verification, that has been said there are factual.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I can see in the 2022-2023 period, it was reported that 426 cases remained unresolved due to absence of an applicable policy framework, insufficient budgetary provisions, or the personal nature of the complaints. My question is, what capacity building measures or institutional reforms has the OPM since implemented to address and rectify this?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Lal, could you clarify which Annual Report and from what page?

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, that is from Page 22 of the 2022-2023 Annual Report, in regard to the summary of complaints and the last issue there, “The Unit noted that 426 cases remain unresolved.” That is what I am talking about, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- If I could read that out for the benefit of viewers and everyone in the room, that point says, “The Unit noted that 426 cases remain unresolved due to its nature, and falling on categories of cases that are civil in nature, absence of budgetary provision, absence of policy to address the issues and complaints that are personal in nature.” Could you repeat your question based on that, honourable Lal?

HON. V. LAL.- My question, Madam, is what policies have been implemented to see that these deficiencies are rectified?

MR. G. KALONIVUALIKU.- Madam Chairperson, through you, thank you for the question.

These complaints that are unresolved are civil in nature. The strategy that we try and put forward is to discuss this with our Policy Unit and other Permanent Secretaries to put this into policy, to change the situations around the regulatory matters. We have seen some improvements to-date in the policy and whenever Parliament updates the laws of Fiji. By sharing the feedback on the work and update outdated policies on budget and adjustments, all these are discussed throughout with the Ministries. From there, lessons are learned and we try and resolve complaints.

We can see in our data that unresolved complaints have now decreased since 2022. In 2024, we had 425 and now, we have reduced it due to the improvement of policies. Now, we only have 52 unresolved complaints that are civil or personal in nature.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Speaking of complaints, when we have Parliament sittings, I often hear that we have people come in from very far - rural areas, and they all want to talk to the honourable Prime Minister. Can you take me through the steps that people can take?

These people have paid a lot of money to come here wanting to see the honourable Prime Minister. Can you take us through your public relations and the reporting back from the Ministries? I am sure you have sent people or ask questions from Ministries based on the complaints or issues brought forward by the members of the public. What is the turnaround time do you have for those kinds of policies in place, especially for those who are coming from rural areas?

MR. G. KALONIVUALIKU.- There is a Standard Operating Procedure in handling all types of complaints, either it is written or verbal. The honourable Prime Minister is busy and members of the public only wants to meet the honourable Prime Minister. However, we often step in, take down their issues, listen to them and we try and get what the real issues that they come up with. There may be more than three issues at one time, but there is only one genuine issue. So that genuine issue, we try to resolve through coordination and consultation with Ministries. Sometimes, we go right down to the village level, even to the household level. Whether it is in the interior or on the island, our team will go there, meet them, and see them on the ground.

That has been happening since 2017 until todate. I can say, Madam Chairperson, that there has been tremendous improvement. There is tremendous feedback and appreciation on how Government is reaching out to the grassroots, especially when complainants come right from the interior, leaving early in the morning.

You can read through your responses that we have there on the types of complainants that we receive, the types of mitigations, and the complaints resolutions process that we always undertake. In all that, we try to be personal when we meet them. We take away the barriers, meet them face to face, and then we try to resolve the issues. If we can resolve the complaint, it is good and are always honest with the public. We can always say 'no', or we can always say 'yes'.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, speaking of complaints, do you have statistics on the number of clients who have walked in directly wanting to meet the Prime Minister, or do you see more complaints coming through your website, which I have just opened - clientservices2@pmoffice.gov.fj? What is the turnaround time? Do you have a

specific turnaround time for attending to the complaints, especially the ones sent by email? I will then have a follow-up question after that.

MR. G. KATONIVUALIKU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, it is seven days. We will get back to the complainant.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do you also have a whistleblower policy? If one of the staff, for example, has a complaint against one of your Executives or the Permanent Secretary, what is the procedure? I hope he is not sent home, but if he or she is sent home, do you have any whistleblower policy?

MR. G. KATONIVUALIKU.- There is a whistleblower policy in the Civil Service, so that will be followed through.

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, when we talk about complaints, it goes right down to personal complaints. We have received numerous complaints about unfair dismissal from those years. We talk about the loss of property because of a domestic argument. We talk about land ownership. We talk about land that was acquired by someone 120 years ago. It requires a lot of processing and tracking on what were the historical facts to these cases, and that takes more than five days.

We work with the Ministries responsible. We sit with them, ask appointments with their respective Ministers if we can have their view, we talk about disagreements in the traditional title holding, the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB) queries, et cetera. Those are the number of complaints that are registered here. For some, we try to be polite, and there is a process for us to follow, but some of them have been waiting for three generations. So, when they come to us, patience is already out of the window, so they want answers right away. We have to manage expectations while managing emotions, in the way that this is also tried to be coordinated through.

We communicate with other Ministries – Ministry of Lands, or VKB, or Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, regional, health, infrastructure - these are the kinds of complaints that we want to deliver, and they are increasing. Some are about whether they are entitled to Board fees when they were Board Directors in certain entities some years ago, so we had to go back and track what the history was to that complaint. We just cannot dump those complaints.

Madam Chairperson, when we talk about numbers, these are the things that we receive in the OPM. For them, if they have a query or quarrel with a particular officer at the Ministry, they all

come to the OPM. We have to check back and try to get the story and the facts about it, then we can proceed to try and find solutions.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I totally agree with you. Why would someone come to the OPM? It is only because of the years that have taken to get justice, or simply to be heard, and I totally agree. However, I guess, when the proper channels that are in place are not followed by these Ministries, I see the amount of pressure coming to your Office. So, what framework are you developing so that Ministries function the way they should? Also, do you actually check up with these other Ministries on your own, or do you redirect people? What is the exact channel? As you have said, three generations — I can understand.

If staffing is an issue, because looking at the kind of issues that come to you, they are so complex. We, as Members of Parliament, receive over 20 to 30 issues per day. I think we do the same job, pretty much, so I can totally understand where you are coming from. How can we make this easier for your team at the OPM? What would be the ask?

DR. L. KOROVALA.- Madam Chairperson, we do respect the legal status and mandates of Permanent Secretaries and Ministers. Once we receive complaints of this sort, our first step is to reach out to the Permanent Secretary responsible. At the same time, we are careful not to be seen as stepping over their mandate.

We have conversations with them, we present them the documents, we explain to them different outlooks from where we are sitting and from where they are coming from, and we ask them to give us feedback. We do not handle a case automatically. We try to communicate with the author to reply to him, saying:

- we have received your complaint;
- this is what we are doing right now; and
- expect another follow-up in five to seven days afterwards.

We will coordinate and make sure that where we are handing over is where he can find a solution. The last thing we want to do is to dump them, because that aggravates the injury that has been carried on for years. Again, that does not take seven days.

We have received complaints also about interpretation of contracts that affect other Ministries. So, we work with the Permanent Secretary on the other side to make sure, because we do not know the circumstances of that. We ask them, and we sit together. We talk through the issues. They give us the understanding of the issues and who was involved, especially if the office holder is a newcomer to the post. So, he or she will need a bit of time to understand

before responding to the complainant. There is a lot of back-and-forth conversation before this is then handed over to the responsible Ministry. From our side, we try to be as humane as we can, both to the complainant and to the Ministry responsible.

As a Permanent Secretary, I reach out to my counterparts and have a conversation with them. These complainants have come to the OPM because for them, there is no other avenue. If they can devote some quality time and deep thinking about how else we can resolve that in a legitimate way, that has been the process.

Every issue is different, and we try to approach it in a sensitive way that does not step over the mandate of other Permanent Secretaries and Ministers, but it does take time. We ask for patience on the side of the complainant, even though they have been handling this complaint for an extended period, for them to understand that we are trying to make a connection to where a solution can be found.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Sir. To add on, I think, in the next reporting, we would like to see more transparency regarding response time from Ministries because if they do not respond to you in five, six, or ten days, then you do not even have an answer. One Permanent Secretary has not responded to my email for over two years. I will not give a name but, again, I think the honourable Prime Minister has spoken about the performance tracking of Permanent Secretaries. I think that is key, because they are the CEOs of the Ministry, so I guess, more transparency on the reporting times. That will make your work easier, and there will also be quite some good information for the complainant as well, to see where the backlogs are, or which particular person in the Ministry is not responding to the issues raised with them. It is not just the PS, but their Personal Assistants as well. We have seen these issues for decades, and they need to be mitigated and resolved. That is just my comment.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, a follow-up question on honourable Sharma's question. Is there a digital dashboard tracking for all complaints?

MR. G. KATONIVUALIKU.- At the moment, Madam Chairperson, all databases are kept and we are still working with ITC on the digital lodgement of complaints throughout Government. This is in discussion with the Ministry of Civil Service at the moment, but for the OPM, we are recording it. There is a Database Officer on full-time recording it in Excel.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, just looking forward, what is the OPM's top priorities in the next three years, as well as looking at the legislative policy and budget that is required from Parliament to support the effectiveness of the OPM.

DR. L. KOROVAVALA.- Madam Chairperson, the OPM has three roles -

- (1) to support the national leadership of the Prime Minister;
- (2) coordination, formulation and delivery of policies across the Government system; and
- (3) to serve the Prime Minister.

All these is counted in one word - oversight.

The approach that we take at the OPM is a 'drone approach', if we can use that. It means that we take the National Development Plan (NDP) and the vision document, and we scan the whole Government system. We look at Ministries. What are Ministries doing in order to track and deliver on the goals of the NDP and the vision document? Where we see that there is a slowness, where we see that a particular sector needs to step up, we have a conversation with that sector. However, at the same time, we look for opportunities to assist a particular sector. That is what we have done so far in trying to open up doors. Two things that we look at - new money and new market.

We, at the OPM has an oversight role - look for opportunities to deliver both of these, so we look at the current system. For example, in foreign relations, if the Trade Missions in foreign countries are delivering on what their target were, or if they are not, and if they are not, what is the 'why'? Which product is making inroads into market at their destination country? Is Fiji Water, Fiji Beer, Ginger, Noni? Are they?

We allocate, for example, \$8 million to one Trade Mission. What return do we get from there? If it is not, we, as the OPM step back and see, should there be a redirection of this? Are we focussing on the wrong market, or the wrong product? Are we pushing a product to a market that the market does not want, or should we go and study the market and see what products can that market accept, then come back and redevelop that product? Then we have a communication with that particular sector or that Ministry. If we are looking at, for example, the health side, we look to the other countries in the world. Who and what strategy are they using to, particularly, capture and control or cope with a particular disease outbreak? What lessons can we bring to Fiji? How can OPM, as its oversight role, open opportunities to be able to do that?

There are trade negotiations. We have certain positions in approaching trade. Are those positions negotiable at this stage? If we had certain difficulties, what are the means that

we can do to fall and have a bypass route, to get onto the table without having to fix the trade agreement first?

We have done that already and now, our External Trade people are able to sit at the table because we have used the alternative approach, and that is what the OPM oversight role is doing. We look at the system, scan the whole system. The system declares and dictates the outcome. What the system has will also produce the output. Some of the outputs we have today is because the system designed it to be that, so in the functional review that is what we are looking at.

There are three Ministries under the Prime Minister – the OPM, Ministry of Strategic Planning and Ministry of Civil Service. So, we look at three components - the oversight role of the OPM, the National Planning - the strategic planning part, and the capability part which is the Ministry of Civil Service. We look at these three and sequence ourselves in a way that we are able to create the opportunities for Ministries and sectors to be able to deliver.

We try to understand all the Ministries. What are their priorities? What is holding them? What are the challenges for them? How can we help them alleviate and manage those obstacles. Then we look abroad. The countries that look at us, we are the hub, then we need to think and behave like one. What are the things we need to take on board here as a hub in order to be able to do that? If we facilitate and help Fiji as a hub of the Pacific, that comes with responsibility, but it comes with opportunities and rewards as well.

At the moment, there are two particular Pacific Island Countries that are indicating that they want to relocate to Fiji because of rising sea level. There are issues that we need to talk about. This is the Taskforce that is headed by the OPM at the moment. So, we are trying now to scan, not only Fiji but the region, and locate Fiji in that particular region and see what we can do, what should we do and how. Here, we are looking at opportunities - we are looking at EEZ management, airspace management, relocation, land allocation and tenure and we are looking at livelihood. These are the things that the OPM is scanning and reaching out to different Ministers because they have the mandate and the resources, and say, “Can we sit together? Can we look at this?”

If we look at Fiji in 2050, then work backwards. What is the kind of policy decisions we need to make now and how does that policy affect the next step, and the next step, and the next step? So, it is a sequencing issue - sequencing with impact, huge impacts. If you are looking at Fiji as a hub, then there is a different lens we are wearing. We look at our internal. At the moment, our foreign policy position is, Pacific family regionalism first. So, that look puts Fiji at the centre - at the front of how the region behaves and responds to issues that are confronting

us. However, it is also saying that we need to take leadership and responsibility first, so that is a big ask for a nation like ours.

However, at the moment, the OPM, in its oversight role, is doing that, not alone, but in coordination with other Ministries. We speak with other Ministries at the same time. We try to move together because we are a small economy and our strength is taking advantage of the mistakes of others, not us. We do not have the luxury nor resources to be able to make our own mistakes. We have to learn, as we move along, and reinvest those lessons in the way we strategise and move forward. However, for us, the key is coordination, and coordination is communication, and communication is relationship.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- *Vinaka saka vakalevu*, Dr. Korovavala. I think those remarks were the perfect way to end this session and we thank you.

Just before I close this meeting, I just wish to draw the attention of the OPM to the requirements of Standing Orders of Parliament, particularly Standing Order 121(6)(b), which provides that the Minister responsible for the relevant Government Department must table a substantive response to a Standing Committee Report within 21 days of receiving that report. So, in this regard, the Committee looks forward to receiving the OPM's formal response to the Committee's Review Report on the Office of the Prime Minister and the Fijian Immigration Department 2019/2023 Annual Reports within this prescribed timeframe, following the tabling of our Report in Parliament, which will happen soon. The Committee trusts that the response will address the findings and the recommendations contained in the report and assist Parliament in its ongoing oversight role.

At this point, honourable Members, members of the Secretariat, I wish to sincerely thank Dr. Korovavala, the Permanent Secretary for the OPM and your Executive Team, for making yourselves available for this submission. We appreciate your time and your cooperation, and we look forward to your continued engagement, should the Committee require any further information.

Vinaka saka. I now close the meeting.

The Committee adjourned at 9.35 a.m.

Written Response



**Office of the Prime Minister and Fijian Immigration Department Annual Report
2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.**

**RESPONSE TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
DEFENSE**

Parliament of Fiji
Government Buildings, Suva

Mon. 8 June 2026
14:30 Hours

Question 1:

The Committee previously noted that the Rotuma Subvention Fund was not utilised due to the non-submission of audited accounts and recommended strict adherence to financial reporting requirements to ensure timely release of funds. While subsequent Annual Reports from 2020-2021 to 2022-2023 indicate continued administration and monitoring of the Rotuma Subvention Fund, there is no explicit reference to whether the issue of non-compliance has been resolved.

Could the Office clarify what corrective measures have been implemented since the review to ensure compliance with audit requirements, and whether the Rotuma Subvention Fund is now being fully accessed as intended?

OPM Response:

To address the Standing Committee's concerns about the underutilization of the Rotuma Subvention Fund, we have put several practical measures in place to fix these gaps and tighten up our financial reporting:

- Clearer Controls and Timelines: We have established stronger internal controls and set clear, strict timelines for preparing and submitting audited accounts. These procedures have been clearly communicated to everyone managing the fund.
- Hands-on Support and Training: Our Finance Division has stepped in to provide regular technical support and capacity-building training. This ensures financial records are kept properly and that everyone fully understands the audit requirements.
- Active Monitoring: We have stepped up our oversight and follow-up processes. We now closely track project requests, quarterly financial acquittals, and audited accounts, while conducting regular reviews to evaluate the assistance being provided.
- Better Teamwork: We have improved coordination between our Office, relevant authorities, and the Council of Rotuma to ensure all compliance checkboxes are ticked before any funds are released. Recently we have established a Commissioner for Rotuma where all Rotuma matters are channeled to .

These measures have shown positive results. Audit compliance has significantly improved, allowing us to process and release funds much faster. The Rotuma Subvention Fund is now active and being used exactly as intended, while still maintaining strict financial and audit controls.

Question 2:

What problems have been faced by the Ministry that affect service delivery?

OPM Response:

Between the 2019–2020 and 2022–2023 reporting periods, the Office of the Prime Minister faced a mix of operational, internal, and external challenges that impacted our service delivery across various departments.

The main hurdles we encountered include:

- The COVID-19 Pandemic: This was undoubtedly our biggest disruptor. Lockdowns and health restrictions forced us to rapidly switch to remote work and virtual services. It limited our ability to conduct field visits, hold community consultations, and engage directly with the public, all while we were stretched thin trying to coordinate the national crisis response.

- A Massive Surge in Public Demand: Through the Prime Minister's Open Door Policy, the Customer Service Centre, and our Public Relations Unit, we saw a massive spike in public complaints and requests for help. In the 2020–2021 financial year alone, we handled over 8,000 cases. Coordinating responses across multiple government agencies put immense pressure on our staff and resources.
- Staffing and Resource Constraints: Keeping up with growing workloads was a constant battle. Key units faced staffing shortages while trying to balance policy coordination, project monitoring, community development, and rising public expectations for fast service.
- The Growing challenges of Going Digital: While OPM made great strides in modernizing systems, especially for immigration and permit processing, the transition wasn't seamless. It required significant upgrades to our IT infrastructure, intensive staff training, and extra funding to get everything integrated and running smoothly.
- Logistical Hurdles in Remote Areas: Serving maritime and isolated communities (like Rotuma, Rabi, and Kioa) is always a challenge. High travel costs, unpredictable weather, and poor connectivity frequently delayed project rollouts and made monitoring very difficult. Government have put in place shipping subsidy to cushion this hurdles.

Despite these hurdles, OPM actively worked to improve service delivery by upgrading our digital platforms, tightening up our complaint management systems, and collaborating better with other government agencies.

Question 3:

How has the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) strengthened its core mandate of coordinating the whole of government policy delivery between 2019 and 2023?

OPM Response:

Between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023 financial years, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) progressively strengthened its core mandate as the central coordinating authority for whole-of-government policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This strengthening was achieved through institutional reforms, enhanced Cabinet governance arrangements, improved inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and a stronger emphasis on accountability, policy coherence and results-based implementation.

At the heart of this role, we continued our constitutional duty: supporting the Prime Minister as the Head of Government and Chair of Cabinet, while acting as the central hub that turns national priorities into practical, and measurable programs across the country.

1. A key development during this period was the strengthening of Cabinet decision-making processes through enhanced policy scrutiny, coordination and oversight arrangements. Policy proposals from line Ministries and Departments were thoroughly evaluated to ensure alignment with national goals, were financially sustainable, and were doable before they ever reached Cabinet. This was driven by three pivotal committees reinstated in 2023 when the new Coalition Government resumes:

- Cabinet Sub-Committee on Budget: strengthened oversight of fiscal policy, budget prioritisation and public expenditure alignment with Government objectives ensuring sector priorities perfectly matched available national funds.
- Economic Strategy Committee: Coordinated economic policies across various sectors to spearhead national growth, investment, and post-pandemic recovery.
- Development Sub-Committee: enhanced policy coordination by providing focused oversight of major development initiatives, infrastructure programmes and strategic national projects. This strengthened Government's ability to prioritise investments, monitor implementation progress and improve coordination between ministries responsible for delivering key development outcomes.

Together, these governance mechanisms contributed significantly to improving policy coherence, reducing duplication, strengthening collective decision-making and ensuring that Cabinet decisions were informed by broader whole-of-government considerations rather than isolated sector perspectives.

2. Beyond Cabinet, OPM has expanded its hands-on role in running complex projects that require multiple agencies to work together.

During these three years, we also focused heavily on modernizing how the government works. We pushed for new, tech-driven systems to make public services faster, more transparent, and easier for citizens to use.

3. The OPM expanded its role as a central enabler of development, especially for complex projects requiring multiple ministries to work

together. This included direct oversight of community development initiatives, small grants programs, and rural/maritime development.

- Grassroots Impact: OPM smoothed out the delivery of cross-cutting initiatives, including community development, small grants programs, and rural/maritime governance.
- Modernization: OPM championed digital transformation and tech-driven systems across departments to make government services faster, more transparent, and highly responsive.
- Donor Alignment: OPM took charge of managing partnerships with international development partners, making sure donor funding was directed exactly where national priorities needed it most.

4. In tightening Monitoring, Accountability, and Integration, OPM actively worked to align every single ministry's annual plans with overall national objectives, reducing fragmented spending and wasted public resources. Furthermore, tougher internal tracking systems to follow up on Cabinet decisions and commitments, ensuring ministries implemented and reported on their mandate were introduced.

5. These reforms have positioned the Office of the Prime Minister as the central institutional anchor for driving policy coherence, supporting strategic decision-making and ensuring that Government priorities are translated into tangible national development outcomes.

Question 4:

What major structural or administrative changes were introduced across this period to improve service delivery?

OPM Response:

Instead of large-scale institutional restructuring between 2019 and 2023, the OPM introduced targeted, progressive reforms to modernize systems, improve teamwork, and tighten accountability across government.

Six key changes were made:

- Cabinet Office Upgrades: Streamlined the submission process, improved inter-ministerial consultations, and created a tighter system to

track Cabinet decisions. This ensured policies were synchronized and implemented on time.

- Clearer Internal Roles: Reorganized internal workflows and drew clearer lines of responsibility between the OPM's policy, admin, and oversight divisions, boosting day-to-day organizational efficiency.
- Immigration Digitalization: Automated processes within immigration and border management. Shifting away from manual paperwork reduced bottlenecks, sped up application processing, and secured data integrity.
- Stricter Grants Management: Overhauled the internal processes for assessing, approving, and monitoring small grants and community programs, ensuring high transparency and alignment with national goals.
- Enhanced Monitoring Systems: Upgraded tracking and reporting tools for government programs and Cabinet decisions, creating a stronger culture of performance accountability based on hard data.
- Structured Inter-Agency Links: Established formal engagement channels between the OPM, line ministries, and statutory bodies, successfully reducing fragmented policy execution.
- Minimum Optimum Approach: Maximizing the Output. Have an output focused approach.

By focusing on digital tools, smarter workflows, and strict tracking, the OPM modernized its existing framework to become a highly efficient, responsive central hub for whole-of-government service delivery.

Question 5:

What were the lessons learnt during covid and what steps have been taken to mitigate?

OPM RESPONSE

Lessons Learnt	Description	Steps to Mitigate
Over-Centralization Slows Down Crisis Response	During the peak of the pandemic, decisionmaking was heavily concentrated at the apex level. The OPM learned that a lack of decentralized authority to divisional commissioners (Northern, Western, Central, and Eastern divisions) created bureaucratic bottlenecks, delaying localized lockdowns, relief distribution, and public health enforcement.	To ensure that the OPM and the wider civil service remain resilient against future pandemics, climate disasters, or economic shocks, the following mitigation strategies were prioritized: 1. Accelerating the Digital Transformation of Government The OPM lead by example in transitioning away from paper-based bureaucracy to robust digital governance frameworks. Action: • Implement secure, government-wide cloud architecture to allow seamless remote Cabinet meetings and digital signature approvals. • Expand the digitalization of the Department of Immigration (e-passports and online permit tracking) to ensure border management can adapt to changing health or security requirements instantly.

		2. Decentralizing Decision-Making and Empowering Local Authorities Shifting from a top-heavy command structure to a nimble, localized framework. Action: • Formalize standard operating procedures (SOPs) that automatically devote specific operational powers to Divisional Commissioners during a declared State of Natural Disaster or Public Health Emergency. This allows rural and maritime zones to react without waiting for capital-level clearance. • Introducing the Checklist system . 3. Establishing a Consolidated National Social Registry To fix the data gaps exposed during relief distribution, the government requires a unified data ecosystem. Action: • Establish a centralized, cross-agency digital database that links the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), and municipal registries. This ensures that in a future crisis, financial aid or physical rations can be deployed transparently and accurately. 4. Building Fiscal Buffers and Diversifying Development Funding To protect grass-roots public service delivery from sudden budget cuts. Action: • Create ring-fenced contingency reserves specifically for the OPM's Small Grant Scheme and rural water/electricity projects, ensuring community development does not halt during
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		economic downturns.
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Question 6:

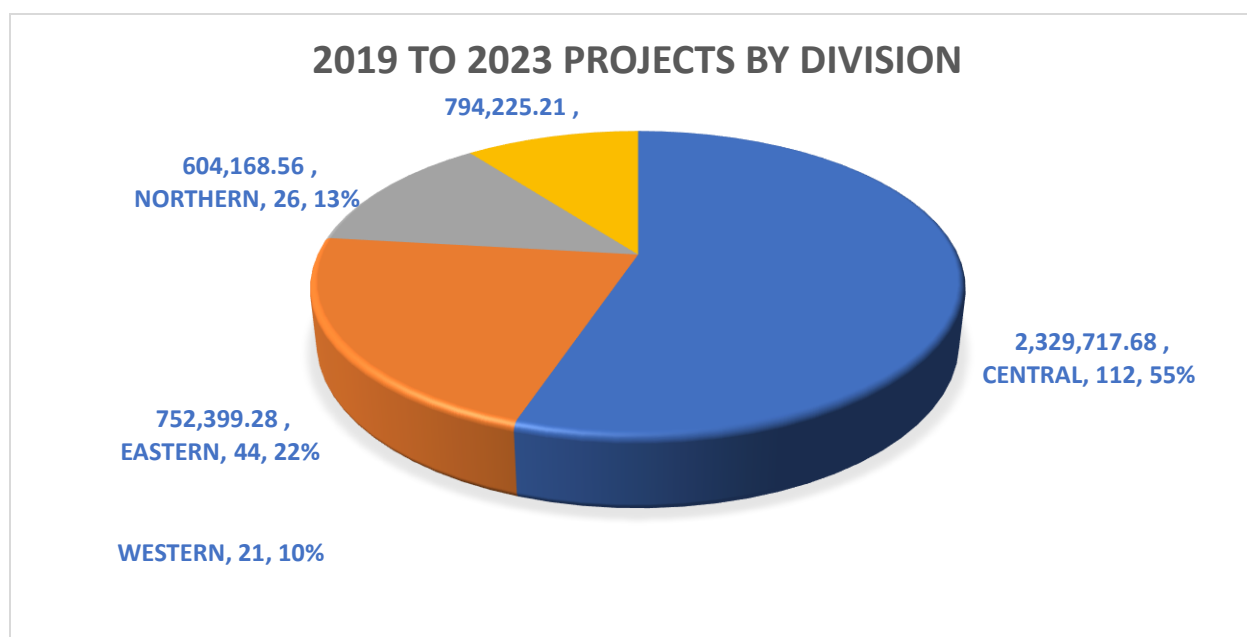
Are the grants from the OPM dedicated or deliverable-based grants? Please provide breakdown of these grants by location and province.

OPM Response:

The grants from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) are deliverable-based grants. They are tied to specific, measurable project outcomes—such as completing a rural water system, building community infrastructure, or hitting project milestones—rather than being open-ended financial assistance. Funds are strictly released and monitored based on progress and compliance.

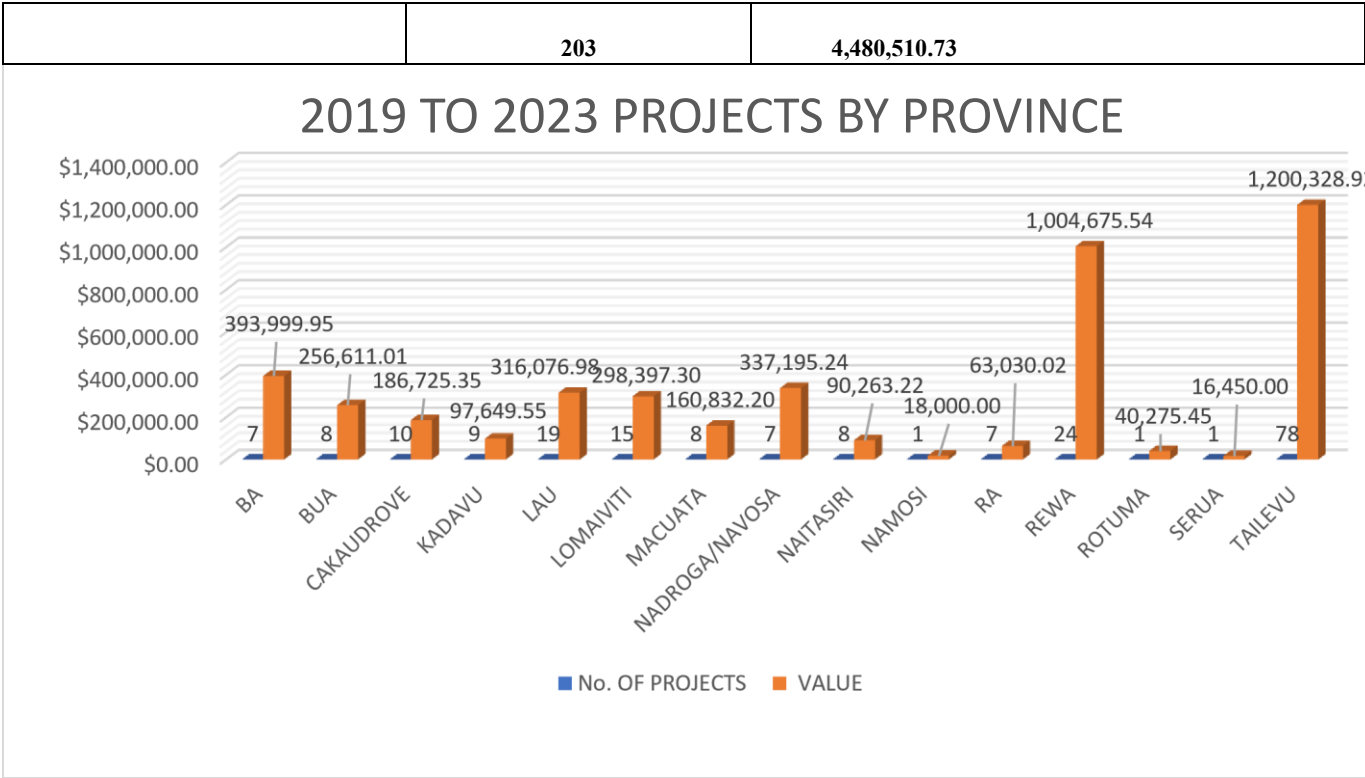
Grant Distribution by Division

DIVISION	No. OF PROJECTS	VALUE
CENTRAL	112	2,329,717.68
EASTERN	44	752,399.28
NORTHERN	26	604,168.56
WESTERN	21	794,225.21
	203	4,480,510.73



Grant Distribution by Province

PROVINCE	No. OF PROJECTS	VALUE
BA	7	393,999.95
BUA	8	256,611.01
CAKAUDROVE	10	186,725.35
KADAVU	9	97,649.55
LAU	19	316,076.98
LOMAIVITI	15	298,397.30
MACUATA	8	160,832.20
NADROGA/NAVOSA	7	337,195.24
NAITASIRI	8	90,263.22
NAMOSI	1	18,000.00
RA	7	63,030.02
REWA	24	1,004,675.54
ROTUMA	1	40,275.45
SERUA	1	16,450.00
TAILEVU	78	1,200,328.92



The Central Division focuses heavily on upgrading community infrastructure, supporting periurban settlements, and improving rural access to basic services.

Grants in the Western Division are strategically targeted toward water security, climate resilience, and boosting rural livelihoods in farming and cane-producing areas.

The Northern Division grants align closely with the "Look North" policy, focusing on poverty alleviation, rural connectivity, and supporting maritime communities

For the Eastern Division, assistance are targeted at transportation access, women’s group income generating initiatives and maritime connectivity.

Question 7:

How are rural and remote communities benefiting from OPM interventions?

OPM Response:

The OPM steps in to deliver crucial support directly to rural and remote communities, particularly when no budget allocations are available from NGOs or other government ministries during the financial year. These targeted

interventions directly improve daily life by upgrading basic infrastructure and essential services.

Key benefits and projects include:

- Better Access and Mobility: We build crossings, footbridges, and village access roads. This makes it much easier for communities to reach essential government services and transport their agricultural produce to markets.
- Safer Schools: We fund critical renovations and maintenance work on school facilities, creating a safer, more supportive learning environment for students.
- Clean Water Access: We improve health and daily living by drilling boreholes and setting up water reticulation systems, giving villages reliable access to clean, safe drinking water.

From 2022 onward, we intentionally shifted our focus toward development catalyst projects. These are strategic investments specifically designed to open up market access, improve transportation, extend rural electrification, upgrade education, and secure water supplies.

By focusing on these foundational areas, our interventions don't just provide short-term relief, they create long-term social and economic benefits that permanently lift the quality of life for rural and remote communities. (Please you may refer to questions 14 as well on how it aligns with SDGs)

Question 8:

How are complaints lodged by the public directed to the relevant Ministries?

OPM Response:

The OPM processes public complaints through a clear, systematic workflow. We handle two main categories of submissions:

- Verbal Complaints: Received in person (face-to-face) or over the telephone.
- Written Complaints: Received via mail, email, or our official social media platforms.

Once a complaint is received, our team reviews and assesses the specific issues raised. From there, the process moves forward as follows:

1. Formal Referral (MEMO): We send an official Memorandum directly to the Permanent Secretary of the relevant line ministry. This MEMO includes the full details of the complainant and the exact issues that need to be resolved.
2. Strict Timeline: We give the ministry a strict 7-day deadline to investigate the issue and update the OPM on their proposed resolution and way forward.
3. Active Follow-Up: Our team doesn't just hand off the issue; we actively track and follow up on the complaint via email to ensure the ministry responds on time and the citizen's issue is resolved.

Question 9:

How do the relevant Ministries report back to OPM on the complaints that have been resolved?

OPM Response:

When a citizen lodges a complaint with the OPM—whether through walk-ins, emails, letters, or directly during the Prime Minister's public engagements—the OPM acts as the central sorting hub rather than the resolving body. We formally delegate the issue to the responsible line ministry, which must then report back using a structured two-step process:

The assigned ministry thoroughly investigates the issue (whether it concerns housing grants, infrastructure, or social assistance). Once they take corrective action and fix the problem, they must compile a formal closure file. This file acts as proof of resolution and must include:

- A clear summary of their findings.
- The exact actions taken to fix the issue.
- Solid evidence of the resolution (such as signed inspection forms, receipts, or official letters sent to the complainant).

Via a Formal Return Memorandum, the ministry must officially close the case with OPM to maintain strict administrative accountability.

- The PS-to-PS Channel: Accountability is managed at the highest administrative level. The Permanent Secretary (PS) of the handling ministry sends a formal Return Memorandum or resolution report directly back to the Permanent Secretary of the OPM.
- Final Status Update: This official report explicitly details how the matter was settled and confirms that the complaint file has been formally closed on their end.

Question 10:

What process does OPM follow to resolve complaints?

OPM Response:

Because the public issues brought to the OPM vary greatly, we do not use a one-size-fits-all method. Instead, we evaluate the specific nature of each grievance and apply a tailored Complaint Resolution Process (CRP).

Depending on the intent and type of the complaint, we deploy one of five specialized approaches to resolve it:

1. Compliance Approach – deals with complaints that requires enforcing standard rules, regulations, or legal obligations that a government department must meet. This is then referred to the line Ministry concerned.
2. Process Oriented Approach – refers to complaints that links to administrative delays or confusion. OPM step in to map out the exact bureaucratic steps required, unblock the bottleneck, and guide the case smoothly through the system.
3. Negotiations Approach – refers to complex disputes that require mediation. OPM act as a neutral ground to facilitate discussions between the complainant and the relevant government bodies to find a mutually agreed-upon solution.
4. Mitigation Approach - Deployed for urgent or sensitive issues where immediate relief is necessary to reduce hardship or prevent a problem from escalating further.
5. Projectisation Approach - Reserved for community-wide or infrastructure-based complaints. If an issue requires a physical build or long-term resources (like a broken water system or damaged bridge), we turn the complaint into a structured, trackable development project.

Question 11:

Why do certain types of complaints remain unresolved, and what strategies are being developed to address them?

OPM Response

While OPM aims to resolve every issue raised, we recognize the fact that some complaints may remain unresolved due to legal, financial, or jurisdictional boundaries. These typically fall into four categories:

- **Regulation and Policy Limitations:** Some requests directly conflict with existing laws, civil service regulations, or government policies. The OPM cannot bypass established legal frameworks to grant an exception.
- **Budgetary Constraints:** Many valid complaints require immediate infrastructure or financial assistance. If there is no current budget allocated or if funds for that financial year are already exhausted, the project must be put on hold.

Office of the Prime Minister | Page

- **Personal Issues:** OPM frequently receive grievances that boil down to private disputes—such as family disagreements or personal conflicts—which fall entirely outside the scope of government intervention.
- **Civil Matters:** Complaints involving land disputes, private contract breaches, or legal arguments between individuals are civil matters. These can only be legally resolved through the court system, not by an executive government office.

To ensure these issues are not simply ignored, OPM uses them as valuable data to improve the system. When patterns emerge within these unresolved categories, we formally propose Way Forward strategies to the OPM Policy Division and the relevant line ministries. By sharing this feedback, we work to update outdated policies, recommend budget adjustments for the upcoming financial year, and streamline administrative processes so fewer citizens find themselves stuck in these loopholes in the future.

Question 12:

What percentage of senior management position (Principal/Manager or above) are held by women?

OPM Response:

The OPM is committed to maintaining an inclusive workforce where women's empowerment is a priority. This alignment supports the government's broader stance on advancing gender equality across the civil service.

Currently, women hold approximately 25% of our senior management roles, which includes leadership positions classified at Salary Band G and above.

Table 3: Table depicting number of roles filled by women in senior officer to senior management roles

YEAR	Decision Making Roles – Number (Band G & above
2019-2020	18 (25%)
2020-2021	16 (22)
2021-2022	20 (30%)
2022-2023	16 (25%)

Question 13:

As per Standing Order 110(2), can the OPM provide evidence that equal opportunity is given to all staff regarding:

- a. Training programmes
- b. Leadership development
- c. Decision-making roles OPM Response:

The OPM is committed to promoting a fair, transparent, and inclusive workplace. Opportunities for professional growth, career advancement, and institutional participation are equally accessible to all staff members based on merit, organizational needs, and established civil service guidelines.

Training Programmes

- i. Training opportunities are communicated to all eligible staff through circulars and emails.
- ii. Staff nominations for training are based on identified learning and development needs, job requirements, and approved training plans.

Table 4: Training Attendance by Gender

YEAR	No. Female Attendees	No. Male Attendees	Overseas	Leadership Training
2019-2020	31	38	4	5
2020-2021	49	37	1	6
2021-2022	88	83	0	8
2022-2023	45	41	0	2

Leadership Development

- i. Eligible officers are encouraged and nominated to participate in leadership and management development programmes offered by the Ministry of Civil Service and other training providers.
- ii. Opportunities for acting appointments, committee/taskforce participation, and supervisory responsibilities are provided to develop leadership competencies.

Table 5: Table depicting number of leadership training by Gender

YEAR	Leadership Training	Female	Male
2019-2020	5	2 (40%)	3
2020-2021	6	3 (50%)	3
2021-2022	8	2 (25%)	6
2022-2023	2	1 (50%)	1

Decision-Making Roles

- i. Staff are represented on various committees, taskforces, and working groups where they are able to contribute to discussions and decision-making processes relevant to their areas of responsibility.
- ii. Unit meetings, management meetings, and consultative forums provide opportunities for staff to share views and contribute to operational and strategic decisions.

Question 14:

How does OPM ensure that programmes such as the Small Grant Scheme align with SDGs?

OPM Response:

OPM ensures that programmes such as grants are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by conducting assessments and dialogue with the stakeholders that are consistent with the National Development Plan and relevant SDG targets. The programmes are designed to benefit rural and remote communities, with a strong focus on improving infrastructure, education, and access to clean water.

Through these interventions, OPM contributes to sustainable community development by addressing basic needs, improving living conditions, and promoting inclusive growth in underserved areas.

The grants align with key SDGs as follows:

- SDG 1 (No Poverty): Improves livelihoods and income opportunities
- SDG 2 (Quality Education): Improve Schools facilities and Infrastructure.
- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation): Expands access to safe water

- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy): Promotes rural electrification
- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure): Builds resilient infrastructure
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Targets disadvantaged communities
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities): Enhances rural and maritime settlements
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Supports climate-resilient infrastructure

Question Question 15:

What systems are in place to measure the impact of development projects on communities?

OPM Response:

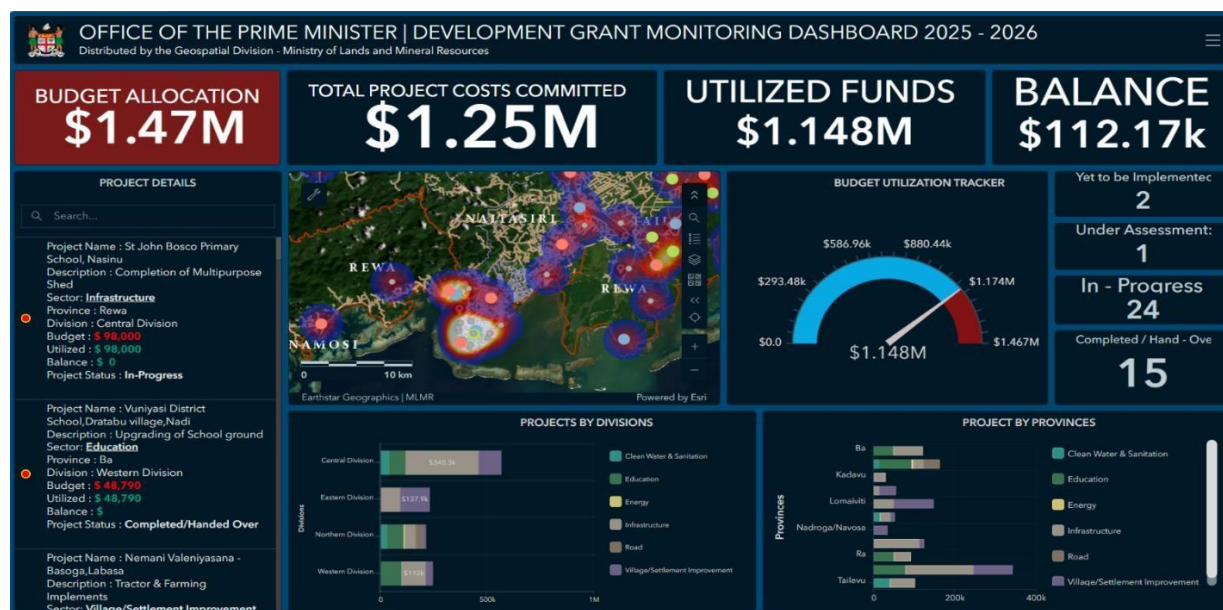
The OPM uses a dual-layer monitoring and evaluation framework to track both the physical progress of our development projects and their actual impact on the communities they serve.

Our oversight system relies on two main mechanisms:

1. To ensure projects are truly improving daily life, our Project Officers conduct regular field assessments. This includes:
 - On-Site Inspections: Making regular physical visits to project locations to verify progress.
 - Community Consultations: Holding direct meetings with villagers and residents to gather firsthand feedback on how the project is benefiting them.
 - Local Governance Liaison: Partnering closely with the Provincial Administrator's Offices across all four divisions to track long-term regional impacts and ensure local alignment.
2. To protect public funds and maintain high construction standards, specialized technical officers and subject-matter experts oversee every phase of implementation.
 - Sign-Off Inspections: Experts conduct rigorous structural and technical inspections at every major stage of a project.
 - Deliverable-Based Payments: No phase or milestone payments are ever released to contractors without an official, verified technical report.

By combining direct community feedback with strict technical signoffs, this system ensures total financial accountability, high-quality output, and guarantees that every project achieves its intended social and economic goals.

The system provides real-time information .



Question 16:

What were the major operational challenges faced across the review period?

OPM Response:

During the review period spanning 2019 to 2023, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)—operating at the apex of government administration—navigated a uniquely volatile operating environment. There were, several core operational, financial, and administrative challenges impacted the ministry's policy implementation and oversight capabilities.

Listed below some major operational challenges faced during the review period:

1. COVID-19 Disruptions

The arrival of the pandemic in 2020 drastically altered the OPM's operational workflows.

- **Crisis Management Strain:** As the lead coordination body, staff resources were heavily diverted from standard strategic development goals to emergency response oversight, border management, and national deployment logistics.
- **Workforce Adaptability:** Transitioning to virtual cabinet management and hybrid workflows initially strained communication infrastructure. The OPM had to completely rethink its high-level diplomatic and bilateral logistics, switching heavily to virtual highlevel engagements (e.g., managing virtual UNGA and regional summits).

2. Natural Disasters and Small Grant Scheme Volatility

Between 2019 to 2023, Fiji was struck by multiple severe weather events, including Severe Tropical Cyclone Harold (2020) and TC Yasa (2020).

- **Emergency Capital Diversion:** The OPM's Development Cooperation and Facilitation Division (DCFD), which manages the Prime Minister's Small Grant Scheme, faced severe pressure.
- **Implementation Delays:** The structural damage caused by 14 consecutive tropical cyclones across recent cycles meant field project monitoring, village/settlement infrastructure improvements, and educational aid projects were frequently stalled or deferred due to accessibility issues and immediate relief priorities.

3. Supply Chain and Global Inflation Pressures

Post-pandemic recovery from late 2021 through 2023 introduced significant macroeconomic challenges that directly trickled down to OPM-monitored projects.

- **Procurement Bottlenecks:** Rising costs and severe unpredictability in global freight, fuel, and construction materials deeply impacted the implementation of Capital Projects under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).
- **Value for Money Discrepancies:** Shifting material costs forced the OPM to continually adjust project valuations, making budget accuracy a moving target

4. Administrative and Capacity Constraints in Cabinet Paper Scrutiny

A recurring internal challenge for the OPM's Cabinet Office was managing the quality of submissions from line ministries.

- **Inconsistent Reporting:** The OPM noted structural gaps in how individual ministries prepared Cabinet papers, policy briefs, and Quarterly Project Performance Reports (QPPR).
- **Training Gaps:** To address this bottleneck, the OPM had to dedicate extensive internal resources to run recurring, cross-ministry training sessions on Cabinet Paper writing and financial compliance, pulling core staff away from standard long-term strategic planning.

5. Post-Election Transition and Governance Alignment

The end of the review period (late 2022 into 2023) saw a massive political shift following the December 2022 general elections, which brought in the People's Coalition Government.

- **Institutional Realignment:** Transitioning from the previous administration's localized, centralized framework to a new coalition cabinet model required an immediate overhaul of administrative policies.

- Policy Reactivation: The OPM had to instantly pivot toward new guidelines, including rebuilding national strategic planning wings, modernizing archaic laws and setting up new transparency measures, which required rapid institutional adaptation from civil servants.
