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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

(1) Rakiraki Town Council January-July 2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports

ENTITIES: (1) Rakiraki Town Council and Ministry of Local Government

VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)

DATE: Monday , 15th 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, 15TH JUNE, 2026, AT 09.06 A.M.

The Committee resumed at 10.25 a.m.

Submittees: Rakiraki Town Council

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------|
| (1) Mr. Sailosi Sawana | - | CEO |
| (2) Mr. Peni Naduaniwai | - | Special Administrator |
| (3) Mr. Sanmogam Goundar | - | Special Administrator |
| (4) Ms. Salesia Buka | - | Administration Manager |
| (5) Ms. Deepika Goundar | - | Finance Manager |

Ministry of Local Government

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| (1) Mr. Navin Chandra | - | Manager Finance, Ministry of Local Government |
| (2) Ms. Rejieli Sivo | - | Principal Research & Policy Officer |

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, representatives from the Rakiraki Town Council and also representatives of the Ministry of Local Government, members of the media and the public; good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to the Big Committee Room. For those of you who are joining us live, we also welcome you.

I wish to advise that pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically, Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the media and to the public. Therefore, this meeting is open to members of the public for their comments via the comment section and also to members of the media who will be interested in reporting on the Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report.

If there is any sensitive information relating to this submission that cannot be disclosed publicly, such information may be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a closed session. However, this is only permitted in the following circumstances: matters relating to national security, third-party confidential information, personnel or human resource matters, and also during the Committee's own deliberations as we develop our report back to Parliament.

I wish to remind honourable Members and also those of you joining us from Rakiraki and the staff from the Ministry of Local Government that all questions and all comments should be directed through me, the Chairperson. Viewers following this meeting live on *Facebook* can submit their questions via the comment section, but please note that only relevant questions will be considered by the Secretariat and the Committee. Members of the Standing Committee may interject during the submission. Alternatively, if you prefer, we can wait until the end of the presentation to raise our questions.

I want to remind all those 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. We will not condone any libel or slander, and all information presented to the Committee should be factual. In terms of meeting protocols, movement within this meeting room should be kept to a minimum, and we ask you turn your mobile phones to silent.

I want to now introduce to you the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

(Introduction of Committee Members and Secretariat, Rakiraki Town Council Officials and Officials from the Ministry of Local Government)

Today, the Committee will receive a virtual submission from the Rakiraki Town Council in relation to the Rakiraki Town Council January-July 2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports. I now invite the representatives from the Rakiraki Town Council and the Ministry of Local Government to proceed with their presentation. *Vinaka*.

MR. P. NADUANIWAI.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Before we do our presentation, we would like to acknowledge and show our appreciation this morning. Greetings all the way from Rakiraki Town Council.

We would like to thank you this morning. Even though it is a rainy season, it does not deter us from having to do our presentation. So, I would like to welcome all of you – Madam Chairperson and Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs; honourable Sharma as Deputy Chairperson, as well as the other honourable Members. Thank you for accepting us this morning. I will not take much of your time but would like to hand over to the CEO to make our presentation. *Vinaka vakalevu*.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Good morning, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Good morning, Sir. Please, proceed.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. The outline of our presentation this morning is the overview of the Council, gender analysis, SDG alignment reports and the summary of Annual Reports from January 2020 to August 2020 to July 2021.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, Rakiraki Town Council was declared on 1st July, 2010. We have 527 ratepayers, 22 staff, 389 business operators, 328 market stalls and 166 vendors.

On gender analysis, you can see from the table the staff composition of the Council with 18 male and three female. For market vendors, we have 57 male and 109 female. Even though there is disparity between male and female employees, support for women entrepreneurs is evident with the high number of women vendors in the Market. Facility available to women vendors include the women's accommodation to support rural women vendors. Women vendors are vulnerable during flooding and a common practice for the Council is to allow the market to open during daytime flash flooding to keep women, children and senior citizens safe from the risk of crossing flooded roads.

On the next slide is the Council activities aligned to SDG goals. For this, we are also required to present to the Committee, so we managed to meet four SDGs. SDG 1 - no poverty: The opening of the new Rakiraki Market has ensured that it provides spaces for families to earn money in the Ra Province. The Rakiraki Town Council also hosts flea markets to provide opportunities to non-vendors to earn a decent living.

The second is SDG 2 - zero hunger: The new Rakiraki Market ensures the availability of fresh produce at a cheaper price.

The third SDG is SDG 5 - Gender Equality: The new Market empowers women vendors to participate in the business world, which is usually dominated by men.

The last SDG is SDG 10 - reduce inequality: The Rakiraki Market increases women vendors' earning power. Achieving SDGs is a challenge to the Rakiraki Town Council due to limited funding.

Madam Chairperson, we would like to highlight to you the Annual Reports that have been submitted so far from the Rakiraki Town Council. Financial Statements for last year, 2024-2025 was completed and submitted to the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG). The last Annual Report that we submitted was 2020-2021 Annual Report, which we are also discussing today. However, our Annual Reports from 2021 to 2025 have been compiled but not yet printed.

The next slide outlines the summary on the major activities for January to July 2020 Annual Report. Firstly, the people of Ra celebrated the opening of the new Rakiraki Market on 2nd June, 2021. Secondly, the planting of trees around Rakiraki Town as most of the trees were damaged after *TC Winston* in 2016. Similarly, there were concerns on stray dogs which resulted in a dog trapping exercise in the Rakiraki area. Fourthly, is the mosquito control works during cyclone season, just to control the spread of dengue fever. Fifth is the house-to-house visit for source reduction of mosquitoes. Sixth is the new financial year from August to July, introduced to all Municipalities. That is only reporting from January to July 2020.

The following are major activities in August 2020 to July 2021:

- (1) *TC Ana* and *TC Yasa* hit Fiji with flooding experienced in Rakiraki.
- (2) COVID-19 pandemic caused lockdown around Fiji.
- (3) Change in financial year affected the rates collected from August 2020 to July 2021, which amounted to \$58,420.
- (4) Proposed upgrade of the first floor of Rakiraki Market – mezzanine floor.
- (5) Initial work on concept plan.
- (6) Architectural design was approved.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the next slide shows the upgrade plan of the first floor of Rakiraki Market. There are six office spaces with two restaurants, a coffee shop and around 12 cubicles for SMEs. We had submitted our budget and it was approved in this current year. Unfortunately, because of the increase in fuel prices, the project was put on hold. However, we have also submitted our new budget request for the next year's budget.

The next slide outlines some of the activities that were carried out – beautification, flowerbed maintenance, bench and shelter painting, Uluda Steps maintenance, rock lining and installed benched branches, as well as tree planting.

In conclusion, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, with the difficulties and obstacles faced by the Council, there is always an opportunity for growth in Rakiraki. Through sound investments in the right places, you will see the burst of developments in Rakiraki. *Vinaka*.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much. Sir, you also have before you a list of questions that the Committee sent to the Town Council. Would you mind continuing with the answers to those questions? We will just keep it brief because we do have copies of your replies. We just wanted to check on things like flooding ...

Stint 17 and drainage infrastructure, for example, in Question No. 1. My question always remains when there is flooding in Vaileka, how much knowledge does the Town Council and Local Government have of what is happening upstream of the little river that goes right through Rakiraki Town? How is that affecting the flooding or how is that increasing the flooding through Vaileka?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, for the question. Rakiraki is a floodprone area. We have raised that with our Ministry and also with the Ministry of Waterways for dredging and desilting of drains. Now, there are three agencies that are responsible for all the drains around Rakiraki Town and within the town boundary, namely, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), Ministry of Waterways and Rakiraki Town Council.

To minimise the impact of flooding, regular drain desilting was carried out on the farm drains around Ra Province, including those near the Rakiraki Town and across the Naqoro Flats. Town drains were routinely cleaned by the Rakiraki Town Council, and road drains outside Town were desilted by FRA contractors. The routine drain desilting cleared blockages and reduced flash floodings around Rakiraki. However, the main challenge is the desilting of the Vaileka Creek, as it was last desilted in 2018.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Sir. Because we already have the answers to the questions sent to us and we have them in front of us, if you do not mind, I might open the floor to questions from the honourable Members of the Committee on any questions that are not covered by your responses to our questions.

I am going to open the floor now, Sir, and I think honourable Sharma has a question to ask you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, my question is to the Ministry of Local Government because the Annual Report for Rakiraki Town Council is 2020 to 2021. How do you monitor these Reports done by all of the Councils in general and why are they so late? Can we have a timeframe for all Councils in the future that by this particular period it should be done? All

these past years, questions of accountability and transparency will surely creep in and then we cannot even hold people who are responsible, accountable.

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, in terms of the pending accounts, there has been delays in the finalisation of Council accounts, in order for the Councils to submit their annual reports to the line Ministry and through the line Ministry to Cabinet Office and to Parliament so at times like the audits. The narratives for the Annual Report are completed, however, we await the finalisation of the Financial Statement before it is actually published by the Council and submitted to the Ministry.

There have been issues with records management which Councils face that causes delay in the preparation of the financial accounts and the reconciliation process. So, when actual reconciliations are not in order, the Councils face difficulties in finalising their Financial Statements.

In terms of our administrative role on a monthly basis, we do follow up with Municipal Councils in terms of their update on their Financial Statements, as well as on their Annual Reports. That forms part of our management report to the Executive Management in terms of where the Councils are sitting with their Annual Reports and with their Financial Statements.

MR. N. CHANDRA.- We also have an internal audit team set up in the Ministry where we actually perform regular audits to the Municipal Councils which add value to their operations and processes and also check on some of the challenges Councils are facing in terms of their audit. Thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- So, you are saying that going forward from 2026, we should see Councils reporting at a much quicker timeline with reduced laxity and improved recording and data systems because if someone sits with years of data, who is held accountable?

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Yes, we do understand that there has been change of staff and staff turnover and records were not kept properly. Actually, this has been raised in mini audits of the Councils - issues on records management, delays in the submission of the FS for auditing. We have actually emphasised that in forums, we have regular forums and also have captured as part of KPIs.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- If records are not kept properly, should they not be sent to FICAC?

MR. N. CHANDRA.- There have been strategies implemented by the Council internally.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- That is why it goes wrong. As a Committee Member, what I need is a strong framework so that this laxity does not continue, please. We would want it in written, because this cannot go on. We cannot have people or the public saying, “Oh, the Council is corrupt” or “people are there taking this, taking that”, or “years of data”, or “ratepayer funds not accounted for”. We cannot go on with that. We strongly request the Council to come up with a framework, or if there is one, to recommend to the Committee on how we can go forward with this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, honourable Sharma. I think that request is particularly for the Ministry, not for Rakiraki Town Council, because the Ministry is the line Ministry for all the Town Councils. I wonder if I could ask the Rakiraki representatives if they have any issues that they would like to highlight to the Committee before I open the floor for questions.

For you gentlemen and ladies representing the Rakiraki Town Council, is there anything you would like to share with the Committee at this moment?

MR. S. SAWANA.- May I respond to that?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, you can go ahead.

MR. S. SAWANA.- As we have highlighted, we have completed all the Financial Statements and that is very important for the Council. It is being audited forever, so we were not able to print the Annual Report. However, all our Financial Statements have been audited and submitted to Finance.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Sir. If you would not mind, Sir, I think honourable Lal has a question for the Town Council and also for the Ministry.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, my question is to the CEO and maybe, if the Ministry Officials can also answer. There was a recommendation by one of the Standing Committees of Parliament that the drainage maintenance funding be reinstated. Has that happened? If not, why? Thank you, Sir.

If you want to answer that too from the Ministry of Local Government after that.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, the funding was a one-off, and that was approved in 2018. It was just a one-off funding to the Rakiraki Town Council and we have managed to upgrade the drains into concrete drains. However, that funding, because it's just a one-off, we are liaising with the Ministry, who is also supporting and assisting the Council in the upgrade of the drains.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Sir. I will open the floor to the representatives from the Ministry.

MS. R. SIVO.- Madam Chairperson, I believe this was taken back to the Ministry of Waterways back then.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Can you elaborate on that?

HON. V. LAL.- Can I just add to that? When there was Ministry of Waterways, every year, the drainage maintenance funding was given. Then the time came when this was withdrawn, so the Standing Committee on Social Affairs recommended that this funding be reinstated because smaller Town Councils do not have enough funding. So it was recommended that this be reinstated. My question is, why has that not happened because as per the CEO, he is saying that they have, again, requested but it is not there.

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, we acknowledge the receipt of budget proposal from all Municipal Councils in terms of drainage. We have submitted our request, however, like certain Ministries, they have different portfolios. As for this, the budget was considered under the Ministry of Waterways.

I recall from 2018-2019 financial year, till to date, there was no specific budget allocated under Ministry of Local Government for drainage. However, there were actually other funding that were given, for example. wage collection subsidy, other capital projects, but specific for drainage, it was not given.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

HON. V. LAL.- I see now, because Rakiraki is a flood-prone area. That is why I am saying that if it is not there, then it should be given so that the small Councils can afford that.

Anyway, I will ask another question to the CEO. What is the progress on the relocation of the dumpsite in Naria? There have been a lot of talks in regards to that. I had raised this issue in Parliament, there have been complaints, and there is a school nearby. The Report states that there have been talks, but can you brief us on that? Can you tell us about the progress on that, please?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, the initial process of identifying and securing a suitable alternative site was shelved by Rakiraki Town Council. An alternative solution was initiated by the Ministry of Local Government to have a central landfill for the Western Municipalities, similar to the Naboro Landfill. The Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Lands are collaborating to identify a suitable sites for the Western Landfill. Consultants were engaged to identify sites with suitable land type, deep groundwater tables, and away from residential areas. Currently, the process is still in stage of identifying suitable sites.

Thank you, Sir. I might hand the microphone over now, open the floor to the representatives from the Ministry of Local Government for an update on what the CEO has just mentioned about the rubbish dump in Rakiraki, please.

MS. R. SIVO.- Madam Chairperson, the Ministry of Local Government is working closely with the Ministry of Lands in trying to secure a landfill for the Western dumpsites. As we speak, we are still liaising with the relevant agencies, including our transaction advisor, who is leading this project. We have identified a few sites, but we are still waiting for the clearance of the land from the Ministry of Lands.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, I may express my frustration, as this is an old report. Every year we come here, we hear the same thing - that it is in the process, they have been liaising with different Ministries, and it is actually frustrating. Is there any timeframe? We should set up timeframes. The report is 2021, now, it is 2026, and we are still negotiating with the stakeholders. How long will it take? Is there any timeframe that the contract will be done?

MS. R. SIVO.- Thank you so much, Sir. This Western Landfill initiative was endorsed in Cabinet in 2024. One of the challenges that we are facing now is just trying to secure land for this Landfill. As we speak, we have commenced with the initiative for the Sigatoka dumpsite rehabilitation, so we came up with the 'two bins' initiative.

Yes, we are trying to finalise this before the end of this financial year. We have chosen Sigatoka as the pilot dumpsite, as it is sitting on the National Trust area. So, we are trying to first start with Sigatoka, and then follow through with the rest of dumpsites in the Western Division. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Sivo.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, to the Ministry of Local Government, it is quite a shame that your PS is not here and you two have the pressure of answering things or not answering things as we want and the Council wants to hear. I hope Ms. Sivo will pass this message on to her.

To the CEO, my question is; with the recent fuel price increase, what I heard was that the stall fees and the parking fees might increase. Is that true, or where are we? This is a question that was sent to me two or three weeks ago. So, if you can just elaborate on that, CEO?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, similar to all other businesses, Rakiraki Town Council is also affected with the hike in fuel prices. We have already submitted our request for an increase in fees, increase in charges for the Rakiraki Market. It has been approved by Cabinet and now it is with the Office of the Solicitor-General (OSG) for vetting. Hopefully, if that fees/charges is gazette, it will then be implemented and will also boost our operation here in Rakiraki.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, sir. I will open the floor now for Ms. Sivo and Mr. Chandra from the Ministry of Local Government. Thank you.

MS. R. SIVO.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. As mentioned by CEO Rakiraki, this was also endorsed in Cabinet, along with the stall fees for Laqere and Levuka, as well as for Tavua. As of now, we are still awaiting the OSG's clearance on this fees. It is still pending with OSG.

Thank you, Ms. Sivo.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, I have a question to the Ministry of Local Government and even the CEO for Rakiraki Town Council can share his input here. We have seen departments and organisations working in silos, and this is mostly from the public. This is also an opportunity to highlight the ongoing issues regarding drainage and streetlights. When there is an issue, what people would share with us is that it is about passing the buck. “Give it to WAF”, or “give it to the Council”, or “it is under FRA, it does not come under us”, and it is like organisations or departments are moving away from what they are responsible for.

Can the Ministry of Local Government elaborate on the challenges? I am sure they must have had a feedback mechanism in their department where they receive these kind of issues where people do not know whom to go to. They go to the Council to fix the streetlight, the Council says it is not their problem and it is not under them. Is the Ministry bringing reforms where it probably goes back to the Council? What is currently happening? That is what I want to know.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, if I may?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Sure, go ahead, Sir.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you. For repairing of streetlights and footpaths, it has always been a challenge for the Council. We appreciate the complaints received on those issues. However, a small council, like Rakiraki Town Council, we have limited finances. After getting approval from FRA, we repaired part of our footpaths and have also installed solar lights in certain areas whereby, during any power outage, the streets can still be properly lit.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Sir, for your response. I wonder whether the Ministry of Local Government would like to respond, or we will open the floor again for more questions from honourable Members.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- We would like to hear from the Ministry.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, honourable Sharma. We will ask Ms. Sivo to answer that question.

MS. R. SIVO.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. At the end of March, Cabinet endorsed the transfer of maintenance of the Councils' assets, that is, the maintenance of footpaths, the drainage, as well as the streetlights. Right now, we are awaiting the clearance of the MOU between FRA and Municipal Councils, and following this MOU, the Councils will then implement these changes.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, my supplementary question on that is now, when the transfer is being made, how does the Ministry of Local Government ensure that there are proper channels of reporting lines? We are already seeing so much issues with just basic few thousands of dollars but now, with this millions of maintenance work, how will a department or system be in place where proper reporting lines are there?

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, the grant funding that is released to Municipal Councils, whether it is a capital grant or an operating grant, is actually attached to a Grant Agreement. On a Grant Agreement, we have certain requirements, such as the implementation schedule where it is clearly demarcated what the funds should be used for, the reporting timelines, the documents that they need to produce, in terms of requesting for grant funding. In-house, the Ministry also implemented the checklist for grant release to Municipal Councils. This checklist is drawn, aligning it to the Ministry of Finance's checklist for grant funding in terms of payment in excess of \$80,000. We have actually have these controls in place in terms of grant funding.

In terms of the acquittals submitted to the line Ministry, we actually perform audit in terms of aligning it to the implementation plan. Also, when our Internal Audit Division within the Ministry perform the audits, they also touch the grant funding, that is, the funding that is released to Municipal Councils. So, those are some of the ways that the Ministry has strengthened governance in terms of grant funding is concerned.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Mr. Chandra.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, my question is to the CEO. I can see from your response here in regard to the Rakiraki Market First Floor Upgrade that a grant was provided in the

2025-2026 budget, which is from 1st August last year to July this year. Now, I heard from the CEO that due to the current fuel crisis, but the crisis just came in now. CEO, you were waiting for this time to finish just two more months - June and July, for the last budget, and you said that due to the fuel crisis, this project is on hold? Can you explain that, please?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Sir. Over to you, CEO.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. During the increase in fuel price crisis, we received advice that the capital project will be on hold, so one of those capital projects is the Rakiraki Market First Floor Upgrade. So in our PSIP, we have already submitted our request for this capital project for the 2026-2027 Budget.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. I will give the floor over to the Ministry of Local Government representatives to clarify that.

MR. N. CHADRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, in the 2025-2026 financial year, which is the current year, \$300,000 is allocated to Rakiraki Town Council for the Rakiraki Market First Floor Upgrade. The tender was actually called and the evaluation actually took place. The line Ministry have submitted the technical report to the Fiji Procurement Office for Government Tender Board approval. So, we wait for the approval before we can go ahead with the contract management.

Following that, since the project will spill over to the next financial year, we have actually taken and submitted that as part of the next financial year's budget which is 2026-2027, and we are positive that the budget for the Rakiraki Market First Floor Upgrade will be provided.

HON. V. LAL.- My question, Madam Chairperson, is why are these capital projects delayed when the budget was approved? A total of \$300,000 was approved which was from 1st August. So, why towards the end of the financial year? Why not before that? If they had started the project in August, it would have been finished by now but now, there is an excuse that there is a fuel crisis. When the funds are approved, the project should start as soon as possible.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, honourable Lal. Can you clarify that, again, for us, Mr. Chandra, from the Ministry of Local Government. Thank you.

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, in as far as the terms of the tender is concerned, the Council did the scoping of the project and it was submitted to the line Ministry. So, there have been clarifications and also inspections done by the line Ministry, together with the assistance from the other stakeholder. There have been some changes made in terms of the design, the scope, so it took a while, and it was actually pursued in the second quarter of the current financial year. It was tendered out, so the tender process took about more than a month and we are in the third and further quarter now. We submitted the tender documents and the technical report was done in the third quarter. There were some issues which was clarified by the Ministry, and we are still waiting for directive from the Government Tender Board.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you for that clarification.

Honourable Sharma, we have a total of maybe five minutes before we have to end this meeting. So, please, let us know who you are directing your question to.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, my question is to the CEO of Rakiraki Town Council and also the Ministry. If you can both elaborate. We have the local government, for example, the Rakiraki Town Council, and then we have Advisory. First of all, my question is, to the Ministry of Local Government on the performance measure of the SAs and CEO of Town Councils, and then from the CEO of Rakiraki Town Council, you have these Advisories. Now, people reach out to these Advisories for various issues. Do we have data or a list of issues sent to the Advisories, who bring them to the Council and the list of issues that the Council send to the Ministry of Local Government? I want to see this channel. Is there one and is it effective? Can you elaborate on that? The Ministry of Local Government can answer that first, and then the CEO.

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, in terms of how the SAs are appointed, the Ministry issues them with their employment letter, together with their KPIs. The performance of SAs is monitored by our Internal Audit Team, together with other support officers in the Ministry.

In terms of the performance of the Councils, in the forum that we have – CO's Forum and SA's Forum, issues of challenges that Councils face are actually discussed. It is also open for all Councils to have discussions and have a sister city relationship – if Councils lack expertise, how the other small Councils or medium Councils can assist. We also have that arrangement. We have dealt with issues like bulk procurement initiative where we actually achieve economies of scale.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Another done, what has been done for Rakiraki?

MR. N. CHANDRA.- The Ministry has assisted Rakiraki Town Council with garbage compactor trucks. We have given them a garbage compactor truck in this financial year, as well as in previous years too. We have supported them in terms of the CEO salary subsidy. We have also provided assistance in terms of the waste collection subsidy.

In consultation with other stakeholders, we have given them a 4 x 4 truck that helps them with building inspections. In terms of other requests, we also have an allocation, in the current year, on flood relief. We actually assist Municipal Councils in terms of the damages that are sustained in the towns. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Mr. Chandra.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, this question is directed to the CEO. In the first slide, it says that there are 328 market stalls and I can see that there are only 166 vendors. Are all your stalls given out? By the numbers, if they are all given out, then how do you do the allocation – whether some are receiving one or some are receiving five. Thank you, Sir.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you. Madam Chairperson, through you, the Rakiraki Town Council is the only Council in Fiji where market vendors are allocated only two stalls. All market vendors here in Rakiraki receive two stalls, compared to other markets where market vendors can own more than 10 or 12 stalls, or more than that. It was done through lottery, so whoever picks the number, they will be given the stall, but only two.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I see. Thank you very much, CEO. One final question from honourable Sharma.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, my last question to the CEO, the reporting mechanisms by the Advisory, does it come under the Council?

MR. N. CHANDRA.- Yes.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Sir. I got clarity from the Ministry of Local Government.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Just one more question, Madam Chairperson. Thank you, CEO and your Team, for the work that you are doing at Rakiraki Town and I noted with concern that you have a break-even budget during the reporting period.

Also, there were some recommendations to improve your revenue through the increase of some levies and renting out of your facilities, as well as proper rate collection from ratepayers. I would like an update on those. In your proposal, how are you looking at increasing your revenue in order to fulfill the mandate of your Council?

My other question is to the Ministry of Local Government. If we have a municipal council election, how would you transition from the current Administration?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. When we submitted our request to increase fees, we assessed that the increase would be around 30 percent of the current revenue that we are actually collecting. Now, the increase in fees is not only for market stalls, it is also for the taxi stand, the carrier stand and the minibuss stand. We currently collect around \$146,422. The proposed new fees will result in the Council collecting \$214,113, so we are still awaiting the gazetting of the fees. Once the fees have been gazetted, then the Council will implement the new fees.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, CEO. I am going to ask the representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, if they have any closing statements before I come back to you, CEO, for any closing statements from the Rakiraki Town Council before we end this meeting.

MS. R. SIVO.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the Ministry would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to respond to comments and questions as per the Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report. The Ministry continues to liaise very closely with the Council in regards to their revenue collection, and we request all the Councils to continue advocating on the way forward, on how to implement strategies for their revenue collection. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Sivo. Are there any final words from your CEO, Mr. Sawana?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, we always look forward to support and assistance from Government, especially the grants, as we do not have that financial capability to address or conduct our daily operations. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance by the Ministry of Local Government.

Before concluding, Madam Chairperson, we would like to highlight that we are also working on acquiring the FSC Sports Ground. There is a bit of delay, but we hope that the Council, together with assistance from the Government, we will finally acquire that ground. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, CEO. Before I close this meeting, I just wish to draw the attention of the Rakiraki Town Council, in particular, the representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, to the requirements of Standing Orders of Parliament, in particular, Standing Order 121(6)(b), which provides that the Minister responsible for the relevant Department or Ministry must table a substantive report to the Standing Committee's Report within 21 days of receiving the said Report.

In that regard, the Committee looks forward to receiving the Rakiraki Town Council's formal response to the Committee's Review Report in relation to your January-July 2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports within the prescribed timeframe, following the tabling of the Report in Parliament. What we will do, Sir, is we will write formally to yourself, but also to your Ministry, because it will then be the responsibility of your line Minister to respond to our recommendations, which will go before Parliament at a later sitting date.

I wish to thank you very, very sincerely, Sir, and all your members from Rakiraki - Mr. Peni Naduaniwai, Mr. Sanmogam Gounder, yourself as CEO, Ms. Buka and Ms. Goundar, for joining us this morning, as well as from the Ministry of Local government, thank you, Mr. Chandra and Ms. Sivo. I also want to thank the Members of the Committee and the Secretariat for your time today.

On that note, I declare this meeting closed. *Vinaka*.

The Committee adjourned at 11.24 a.m.

Written Response



ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY JAN-JULY 2020 & AUG 2020-JULY 2021

OUTLINE

1. Overview of the Council
2. Gender Analysis
3. SDG Alignment
4. Reports
5. Summary of Annual Reports.

RAKIRAKI TOWN COUNCIL

Declared: 01/07/2010

Population: 6,489

Ratepayers: 527

Staff: 22

Business Operators: 389

Market Stalls: 328

Vendors: 166



GENDER ANALYSIS RTC ACTIVITIES

Category	Male	Female
Council Staff	18	3
Market Vendors	57	109

Note: Even though there is disparity between male and female employees, support for women entrepreneurs is evident with the high number of women vendors in the market. Facility available to women vendors including Women Accommodation to support rural women vendors. Women vendors are vulnerable during floodings and a common practice for the Council is to allow the market to open during daytime flash flooding to keep women, children, and senior citizens safe from the risk of crossing flooded roads.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES ALIGNED TO SDG GOALS

SGD 1 – No poverty

- The opening of the new Rakiraki market has ensured that it provides spaces for earning money for families in the Ra Province.
- RTC also hosted Flea Markets to provide opportunities to non-vendors to earn a decent living.

SDG 2 – Zero Hunger

- The new market ensures the availability of fresh produce at a cheaper price.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality (People)

- New market empower women vendors to participate in business world usually dominated by man.

SDG 10 – Reduce inequality (Prosperity)

- Rakiraki Market increased the women vendor's earning power.

Note: Achieving Sustainable Development Goals is a challenge to RTC due to limited funding.

REPORTS

Rakiraki Town Council.

- ☐ FS 2024-2025 completed.
- ☐ FS 2024-2025 audited.
- ☐ AR 2020-2021 submitted to Parliament.
- ☐ AR 2021-2025 Compiled but not printed



JAN-JULY 2020 MAJOR ACTIVITIES

1. People of Ra celebrated the opening of the new Rakiraki Market on 02/06/21.
2. Planting of trees around Rakiraki Town.
3. Concerns on stray dogs resulted in Dog Trapping exercise in Rakiraki.
4. Mosquito Control Works during Cyclone Season.
5. House2House visit for source reduction of mosquitoes.
6. New Financial Year Aug-July introduced to all municipalities.

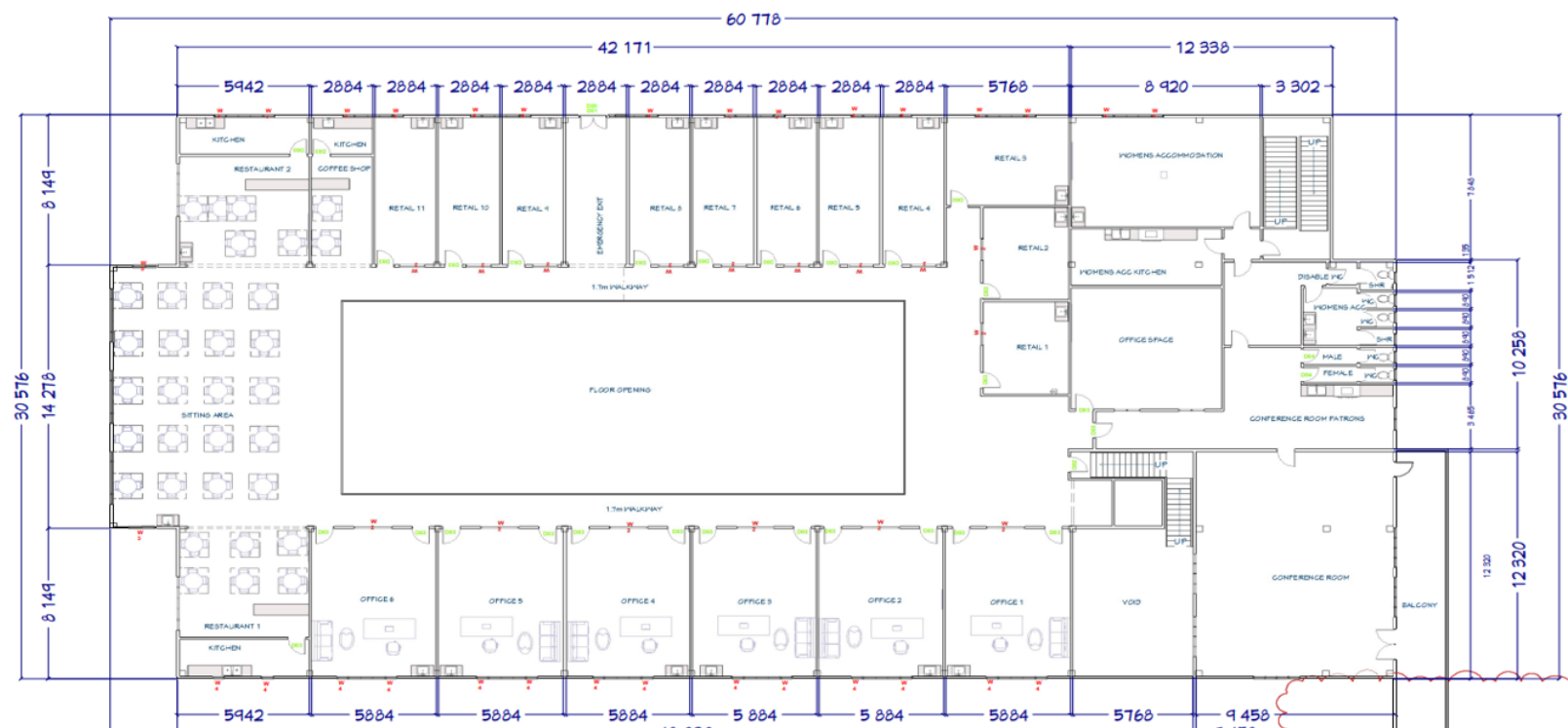


AUG 2020-JULY 2021 MAJOR ACTIVITIES

1. TC Ana and TC Yasa hit Fiji with flooding experienced in Rakiraki.
2. COVID 19 pandemic caused lockdown around Fiji.
3. Change in financial year affected Rates collection \$58,420.
4. Proposed upgrade of Rakiraki Market 1st Floor. Mezzanine Floor.
5. Initial work on concept plan.
6. Architectural design approved.



RAKIRAKI MARKET 1ST FLOOR UPGRADE



BEAUTIFICATION

- Flowerbed Maintenance
- Bench and shelter painting
- Uluda Steps Maintenance
- Rock Lining and install benches
- Tree planting.



CONCLUSION

With the difficulties or obstacles faced by the Council, there is always an opportunity for growth in Rakiraki. Through sound investments in the right places will see burst of developments in Rakiraki.

VINAKA

