

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2019- 2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports

1.0 Please provide all the policies in place that guide the implementation of all the programs provided by the ministry.

Some of the policies are as follows:

- ✓ Fiji Social Assistance Policy
- ✓ Board of Visitors Policy for the State Administrated Aged Care Homes.
- ✓ National Child Safeguarding Policy
- ✓ National Gender Policy
- ✓ Women's Plan of Action (2010 – 2019)

In addition to the above, we also have the following:

- ✓ Costed Operational Plan
- ✓ Ministry's Strategic Plan
- ✓ Transport Policy
- ✓ OHS Policy
- ✓ Financial Manual
- ✓ Relevant regulations

2.0 The Committee notes that in the 2020-2021 Annual Report, the Ministry was allocated \$138.8m for Family Services Unit for the 8 programs. What was the utilization and non-utilization rate for each programme? What were the reasons for the non-utilization of funds? What was the allocation for 2020-2021?

	Budget Category	Budget Allocation 2020-2021	Utilization	Balance
a.	Grants to Voluntary Organisations	\$200,000	\$74,000	\$126,000
b.	Child Protection Allowance	\$12,386,631	\$11,191,711	\$1,194,920
c.	Family Assistance Scheme/Poverty Benefit Programme	\$38,336,758	\$33,671,670	\$4,665,088
d.	Food Allowance for Rural Pregnant Mothers	\$1,200,000	\$631,000	\$569,000

e.	Bus fare Programme for Old/Disabled Persons	\$6,500,000	\$3,830,442	\$2,669,558
f.	Social Pension Scheme	\$55,301,389	\$51,759,850	\$3,541,539
g.	Assistance to Fire Victims	\$100,000	\$78,000	\$22,000
h.	Review of the Social Protection Programmes	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$0
	TOTAL	\$114,044,778	\$101,256,673.00	\$12,788,105

(source: Fiji Budget Estimates and Financial Management Information System)

Tabled above is the utilization for the programmes in Financial Year 2020-2021. Some of the major contributing factors to the non-utilization of fund were due to the:

- ✓ Reduction in the bus fare allowance from \$40per month to \$20per month to \$10per month, which was a strategy to minimize movement (COVID Protocols).
- ✓ There was no field assessment conducted or new approvals for all the six Social Protection Programmes (COVID movement Restriction).

3.0 The Committee welcomes the effective measure taken by the Ministry to meet SDG 1 To end poverty in all its forms everywhere through the implementation of its Poverty Benefit Scheme, can the Ministry specify what is the proportion by age and sex that have benefited from the Scheme? What were some of the challenges faced during the years under review and how best has this been addressed?

The current stats on number of beneficiaries under the Family Assistance Scheme indicates 54% Females and 46%Males assisted. Department had generated a list of beneficiaries by age to explore on the training opportunities towards Welfare Graduation Program whereby 12.2% of the beneficiaries were aged below 45 years old.

To further strengthen the disaggregated reporting, Ministry is working on an interim solution under the social protection reform agenda as an immediate solution to address the data integrity, recording and payment issues. It has conducted a digitization exercise in late 2023 to update an automated form to capture the existing data that included Sex and Age desegregation.

	Personal Particulars														Financial Particulars			Program Particulars					Household Particulars			Death Particulars		Next Kin Of Information										
No	BRN	er Type	er ID	er Def	First Name	Last Name	Program Identifier	Sex (F/M)	Address (Settlement/Street Name/ House Number)	Address (Locality/Suburb/Village)	City/Town	Province	Phone	Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY)	Place of Birth	Marital Status	Education Level Completed	Source of Livelihood	Ethnicity	Identification	Relationship Status	Service	Int Account	Approved Payment Amount	Program Status	Date Registered (DD/MM/YYYY)	Date of Case Approval (DD/MM/YYYY)	Date of Exit (DD/MM/YYYY)	Attending Welfare Officer	Approving Welfare Officer	First Name of Household Head	Last Name of Household Head	Household Head's BRN	Life Status	Date of Death (DD/MM/YYYY)	Full Name	Relationship	Phone
3	863746	Joint card			Ram	Piyare	LAB/SPS/185/13	Male	Y-corner Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	30/07/1941	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	14-6685	Housech	'Westpa	1E+11	100	Active	25/05/2	23/06/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Piyare	1E+05	Alive		Mahend	Child	8343259	
4	858755	Joint card			Raj	Dei	LAB/SPS/200/13	Female	Mateniwai Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+05	21/08/1942	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	04-5481	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	09/08/2	05/03/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Raj	Dei	3E+05	Alive		Deo dut	Child	8364816	
5	854203	Joint card			Ramrati		LAB/SPS/1140/13	Female	Cogeloa Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	13/01/1942	Waiqele	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	2E+08	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	20/06/2	23/11/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Rati	3E+05	Alive		Sudha d	Child	8430260	
6	852340	Joint card			Ramrat Singh		LAB/SPS/213/13	Female	Korovatu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	10/03/1942	Korovatu	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	18-3321	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	28/06/2	10/11/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ramrat Singh		3E+05	Alive		Jashwin	Child	8873931	
7	839716	Joint card			Ram	Pati	LAB/SPS/208/13	Female	Cogeloa Labasa	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	26/05/1937	Cogeloa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-7874	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/02/2	07/01/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Pati	3E+05	Alive		Ashwini	Child	8080403	
8	872540	Joint card			Ramesanile		LAB/SPS/216/13	Female	Cogeloa Labasa	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	13/07/1940	Cogeloa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	18-1081	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	27/02/2	04/02/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Sansile	8E+06	Alive		Ashrita	Child	295606	
9	838811	Joint card			Ram	Raji	LAB/SPS/1163/13	Female	Yunivsu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	07/01/1936	Nabuna	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-8361	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	31/10/21	06/10/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Raji	838811	Alive		Aneel Pi	Child	3219850	
10	8510341	Joint card			Ram	Piari	LAB/SPS/1018/13	Female	Valebasoga Laba	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	15/04/1945	Nirua	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-8189	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	14/07/2	31/07/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Piari	2E+06	Alive		Kamal D	Child	3376585	
11	811035	Joint card			Ram	Ratti	LAB/SPS/1153/13	Female	Yunivsu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	08/11/1934	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-8341	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	07/07/2	26/11/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Ratti	3E+05	Alive		Ajay Pri	Child	3242531	
12	856763	Joint card			Ratnamma		LAB/SPS/885/13	Female	Yunivsu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	21/06/1936	Tabucol	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-5933	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	28/06/2	03/04/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ratnamma		3E+05	Alive		Leela Nc	Child	3361608	
13	87247	Joint card			Ram Pri Sharma		LAB/SPS/513/13	Male	Boubale Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	05/02/1930	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	13-3321	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	28/06/2	13/01/2013		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ram	Sharma	17247	Alive		Usha	Child		
14	810063	Joint card			Raj	Kumari	LAB/SPS/1124/13	Female	Botinikama Laba	Labasa	Macust	1E+08	25/12/1934	Bucasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-3331	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	07/10/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Raj	Kumari	3E+05	Alive		Sudshila	Child	3703571	
15	812446	Joint card			Rajwanti		LAB/SPS/190/13	Female	Bombale Bulileka	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	30/07/1935	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-7788	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	28/08/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Raj	Wati	3E+05	Alive		Dharam	Child	3346400	
16	885552	Joint card			Ramnaresh		LAB/SPS/643/13	Male	Naleba Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	13/12/1937	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-0641	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	28/04/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ramnaresh		3E+05	Alive		Ravind i	Child	3218830	
17	853112	Joint card			Ramawadh		LAB/SPS/388/13	Male	Siberia Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	05/12/1942	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	18-7506	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	14/07/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ramawadh		3E+05	Alive		Naren P	Child	3383979	
18	813454	Joint card			Ramawdh		LAB/SPS/204/13	Male	Cogeloa Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	23/05/1935	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	18-0818	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	28/06/2	04/03/2019		Ali Moh	Muris S	Ramawdh		3E+05	Alive		Paulini V	Relative	8310147	
19	886700	Joint card			Manoa	Saladro	LAB/SPS/1047/13	Male	Yunivsu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	17/04/1949	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	13-3681	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	01/05/2	26/07/2019		Ali Moh	Muris S	Manoa	Saladro	3E+06	Alive		Maria R	Child	3088331	
20	852819	Joint card			Melaisa	Ravei	LAB/SPS/1136/13	Female	Yaudigi Labasa	Labasa	Macust	7E+06	08/02/1942	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	18-6214	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	13/12/21	22/03/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Melaisa	Ravei	3E+05	Alive		Rajesgr	Child	3319155	
21	820226	Joint card			Mul	Chand	LAB/SPS/158/13	Male	Bulileka Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	07/12/1941	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	03-0731	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	30/08/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mul	Chand	1E+06	Alive		Gyan W	Relative	8816357	
22	836004	Joint card			Mani	Lal	LAB/SPS/620/13	Male	Vitandra Bulileka	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	05/03/1933	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	12-0821	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	28/03/2020		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mani	Lal	1E+06	Alive		Jiwan D	Child		
23	843912	Joint card			Mani	Lal	LAB/SPS/865/13	Male	Bucasa Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	17/02/1943	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	12-0910	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/03/2	25/05/2022		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mani	Lal	3E+06	Alive		Shareef	Child	3638841	
24	887224	Joint card			Nahome Aziz		LAB/SPS/142/13	Male	Botinikama Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	12/07/2021	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	01-2631	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	12/07/2	04/03/2019		Ali Moh	Muris S	Moham	Aziz	1E+07	Alive		Zahid A	Relative	3606677	
25	847114	Joint card			Nimohan Ali		LAB/SPS/113/13	Male	Valebasoga Laba	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	04/11/1931	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	01-0441	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/03/2	04/03/2019		Ali Moh	Muris S	Moham	Ali	1E+07	Alive		Vasema	Child	2142109	
26	847551	Joint card			Malakee Suga		LAB/SPS/752/13	Female	Korotari Labasa	Labasa	Macust	2E+06	01/05/1942	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	13-7907	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	22/03/2	25/03/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Malakee Suga		2E+06	Alive		Abay Ci	Child	3261609	
27	835388	Joint card			Munassar		LAB/SPS/503/13	Male	Yunivsu Labasa	Labasa	Macust	3E+06	21/03/1937	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	13-1034	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	01/08/2019		Ali Moh	Muris S	Munassar		3E+06	Alive		Amar Ci	Child	3410615	
28	862666	Joint card			Manuek Sharam		LAB/SPS/353/13	Male	Nagigi Labasa	Labasa	Macust	1E+07	25/12/1939	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	13-544C	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	08/04/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Manuek		3E+05	Alive		Nisha Ki	Child	8337030	
29	857433	Joint card			Mackin Khan		LAB/SPS/143/13	Male	Valebasoga Laba	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	23/06/1942	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	11-6005	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	25/05/2	25/03/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mackin Khan		8E+06	Alive					
30	8227113	Joint card			Mohami Yusuf		LAB/SPS/1113/13	Male	Tustus Labasa	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	11/10/1943	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	Indo-Fij	25-0321	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	22/05/2	15/06/2021		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mohami Yusuf		8E+06	Alive		Jamula	Relative	8404785	
31	886132	Joint card			Mariyasa Basiki		LAB/SPS/622/13	Female	Valebasoga Laba	Labasa	Macust	8E+06	23/04/1938	Labasa	Married	Primary	No Inco	ITaukei	02-2061	Housech	'Westpa	1E+10	100	Active	07/07/2	24/03/2020		Ali Moh	Muris S	Mariyasa Basiki		8E+06	Alive		Dinomi	Relative	8312319	

Refer to the columns highlighted in yellow.

The data collected for the 6 Social Assistance programs is currently being cleansed and validated against BDM data before it will be migrated into the automated system designed and developed. This system is currently being tested to generate the required reports and payout files.

Following is a snapshot of the designed and developed interim solution:

SPN	Full Name	BRN	City/Town	Program	Date of Entry	Status
1010422316	LOATA VULAWAI	355828	Naitasiri	Care and Protection Allowance	22/04/2024	SUBMITTED
5030419736	MILI WHIPPY	789654	Magodro	Food Allowance for Pregnant Mothers	19/04/2024	IN-PROGRESS
6040419168	MILI GUCAKE	159634	Bureta	Bus Fare Assistance	19/04/2024	SUBMITTED
2080419687	ROSE MARY	09080715	Dama	Family AssistanceScheme	19/04/2024	SUBMITTED
4040419127	ALBERT WHIPPY	963258	Nabukelevu	Disability Allowance	19/04/2024	SUBMITTED
1020418879	SAMU SAMSON	52356	Ravitaki	Social Pension Scheme	18/04/2024	IN-PROGRESS
3050325239	VARAMUE ASENA	1011315	Itu'tiu	Social Pension Scheme	25/03/2024	IN-PROGRESS
1010319151	MEREONI NAISOLA	206273	Navatusila	Care and Protection Allowance	19/03/2024	IN-PROGRESS
4010321387	ALIPATE MATAITOGA	1063020	Nailaga	Disability Allowance	21/03/2024	REQUEST-EDIT
4080319532	SAULA RATUADI	1676208	Cawa	Disability Allowance	19/03/2024	IN-PROGRESS
2080319697	SAMUELA RASAVUCAMA	438684	Naitasiri	Family AssistanceScheme	19/03/2024	REQUEST-EDIT

The following are some of the challenges faced during the years under review with suggested way-forward:

Challenges	Ways to Address
Cases reviewed and assessed for continuation of allowance over a long period.	Ministry is currently reviving the Welfare Graduation Program to ensure beneficiaries are aware that it is a temporary safety net whereby they will need to work together with the officers on the economic empowerment programs.
Review of the assessment criteria - overdue	The assessment criteria, proxy mean test (PMT) using the recent Household, Income & Expenditure Survey (HIES) data to be updated under the reform agenda
Loss of automated systems resulting in manual processing	Support from Development partner to build an interim solution to address specific priority needs of the Ministry (digitization of beneficiary data on a centralized system and generation of automated payout files) whilst

	the comprehensive strategic MIS solution is developed.
Absence of interoperability with relevant databases across Government Ministries, eg. BDM data from civil registries	Following extensive discussion and negotiation, an agreement has been reached between MWCSP and Ministry of Justice re access to the BDM system and integration to the MWCSP's MIS solution to ensure there is no duplication and beneficiary data is updated in real time as recorded in the civil registry.
Variation in data integrity and standardization across the district offices.	Digitizing data using a standard template and an extensive data cleansing. In consultation with Digital Fiji, we are following the recommendation to use data dictionary across interim and strategic solution.
Documentation and filing	New files created based on the limited archived data from previous solutions.

4.0 Fire Victim Grants of \$100,000, is the allocation of \$1000 to fire victims enough?

Based on trends as tabulated below, the Ministry is of the view that the allocation for Fire Victim Grants is sufficient.

Budget Category	Financial Years	Budget Allocation	Utilization	Balance
Fire Victims Relief	2020-2021FY	\$100,000	\$78,000	\$22,000
	2021-2022FY	\$100,000	\$81,000	\$19,000
	2022-2023FY	\$100,000	\$87,180	\$12,820
TOTAL		\$300,000	\$246,180.00	\$53,820

Furthermore, kindly note that the Fire Victim grant with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection covers those that are not insured or a recipient of our Social Protection Programme recipients'. Additionally, Ministry of Housing also provides assistance for Fire Victims [\$5000].

5.0 Under the Care and Protection Allowance Program, the Committee notes that there was an increased allocation by \$4.3m from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021. What is the Ministry doing in addressing young children living on the streets? Are there statistics? How can the Ministry with NGOs, CSOs, donor agencies and other government ministries improve the livelihoods of homeless children?

Care and Protection Allowance Scheme: is provided for children in kinship care, single parented children, widows with children, prisoner dependents and their children, and children in residential care. This is to encourage children being maintained within the family setup.

What is the Ministry doing in addressing young children living on the streets?

The Ministry has formed a technical working group with government agencies, civil society organisations and faith-based organisations in trying to address the issue of street kids.

The Taskforce for Street Dwellers which operates under Operation Loloma, comprises of:

- a) Faith Based Organisations - The taskforce is currently working with Methodist Church in securing a location to setup a rehabilitation center for our street kids. We are also working with Salvation Army, Hanisi Ministries (Ark of Hope), St.Vincent Home and Assemblies of God to provide shelter on a short term basis while the Ministry works with the families.
- b) Civil Society Organisations –The taskforce works closely with Aruka, Olafou, Empower Pacific and Medical Services Pacific to assist with intervention and profiling of our cases on the streets. Inspire Pacific provides counseling and mentoring for the children building programs around the children that they conduct intervention work with. When needed there is free grooming services also provided to the children.
- c) Higher Education Institutions and learning institutions – the taskforce works closely with relevant ministries and higher education institutions in enrolling our children into courses as well as schools if they want to return to school.
- d) Government Ministries – the taskforce is chaired by the Deputy Police Commissioner. Members include: Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Employment.
- e) Business Houses – The taskforce has worked closely with business houses like Vodafone and Leadership Fiji to provide the much needed, hygiene kits as well as warm clothes and sleeping bags for the children.

With no budgetary allocation in financial year 2020-2021, the Ministry had depended on partners for shelter, reintegration programs of the children back to their families as well as proving shelter either in Residential Homes for children or with families that were providing accommodation during the COVID 19 Pandemic and Post Tropical Cyclone Yasa and Ana.

Some of the challenges faced by the Ministry are:

- ✓ The Ministry continues to seek a budget line for the Technical Working Group for Street dwellers.
- ✓ Fiji does not have a rehabilitation centre for Children. We are currently working with the Methodist Church and Salvation for shelter needs.

Statistical data on street kids are as follows

- ✓ Lautoka – 33 children, out of which 6 were placed at a children's Home. Most of the children have either been united with their families or relatives. There are children who have not been profiled, this is mainly due to their state when approached for information, often resulting in the taskforce taking the children for needed care or treatment at health centres or hospitals.
- ✓ Suva – There are 6 full time children on the streets. However, we have identified an additional 11 who come into town and main centres during the day from Jittu Estate. We have also noted that there are 6 to 10 children who are sheltered by a family in Nakasi.
- ✓ Nadi – 5 children profiled were accompanied by a parent or relative. They would beg in the morning and late in the afternoon than return home.
- ✓ Nakasi and Nausori – mainly children in these areas were used for begging but accompanied by parents. These two areas showed that children from nearby areas would be loitering in town with peers sniffing glue.

How can the Ministry with NGOs, CSOs, donor agencies and other government ministries improve the livelihoods of homeless children?

Just to clarify Fiji does not have children who are homeless. Each child we profiled was able to identify a relative or parent that they could be returned to. However, for those that continue to live on the streets, they had informed us that it was more of choice and preference as they:

- ✓ Had the freedom to do what they wanted.
- ✓ Had the freedom to get money without being scolded.
- ✓ Had tried living with relatives whom they felt, were too demanding. So, returned to the streets.
- ✓ The children get 3 meals a day while living on the streets from members of the public, clothes, and pocket money.

The children were in contact by phone or Facebook with their siblings. There were shared incidences where the children would meet their mothers or siblings on the street who would buy them clothes, food and give their pocket money.

6.0 What are some of the effective mechanisms considered by the Ministry for the appropriate design and effective delivery of programs in ensuring that it achieves its intended objectives? What could be some of the challenges in achieving its intended course? Does the Ministry have the necessary

**database in ensuring the eligibility criteria are accurate and up-to-date?
Please explain.**

One mechanism considered by the Ministry is to conduct a reform on the social protection program with the objective to improve the program targeting, review and update the existing policies, procedures and programs, conceptualize the MIS design, its implementation and staff training needs for the reforms.

A business process review of the Fiji Department of Social Welfare's (DSW's) social assistance schemes was conducted with the support from the World Bank and the Australian Government. The review recommended strengthening business processes and systems for the effective and efficient delivery of social protection services to the target group.

A social Assistance Policy with its implementation plan was endorsed in 2021. Ministry had engaged specialized roles and consultancy services to undertake a detailed technical review of the six key social assistance schemes administered by the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), namely the Family assistance Scheme (FAS), Social Pension Scheme (SPS), Care & Protection Scheme (C&P), Disability Allowance Scheme (DAS), Bus fare concession program (BFC) and Food Allowance for Rural Pregnant Mothers (FARPM).

Some of the key focus areas in FY2023/24 are:

- ✓ Adjustment of Social Assistance benefit amounts
- ✓ Convert Food Voucher to cash
- ✓ Reduce voucher printing and explore electronic payments with Post Fiji
- ✓ Review SOP for all 6 Social Assistance Programs.
- ✓ Convert Busfare to cash for SPS and DAS beneficiaries; draft Cabinet paper (Status: Consultation with MoF)
- ✓ Revive Welfare Graduation program (In Progress)
- ✓ Review proxy mean test for FAS (In Progress)
- ✓ Obtain Cabinet approval on Adaptive Social Protection Strategy and its implementation Plan
- ✓ Design and Develop an interim IT solution as a building block to the strategic MIS solution.
- ✓ Draft TOR to engage MIS firm to develop comprehensive strategic MIS solution.

Ministry currently has databases that needs to be updated and upgraded to provide the expected outcome. The status of the proposed Management Information system are noted in (3) above.

Challenges faced:

In addition to the challenges stated in (3) above are:

- ✓ Lack of commitment from stakeholders resulting in delayed responses
- ✓ Capacity and Resourcing (High staff turnover at ITC)

7.0 The Disability Allowance Scheme budget allocation increased by \$4.36m from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021. Please elaborate more on the number of terminations. What does it entail? Is the Ministry considering collaborating with other agencies in creating an environment that is user-friendly by all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities?

The terminations for this allowance is normally done when the recipient passes away, and the family claims for Fiji Care Insurance.

Collaboration - The Ministry continues to use the community sweep approach to identify our clients. Given that the target group for this program is a person that is permanently disabled, therefore in consultation with Organisations for Persons with Disabilities and Fiji Disable Peoples Federation who helped co-designed the programme, we had look at three different entry points that an application can be referred:

- ✓ A phone call by a concerned member of the public or relative on a case needing to be visited.
- ✓ A referral by an organisation or school. For example, when organisations for persons with disabilities conduct member meetings, at times an invitation is received for the Disability Unit to assist members fill a Disability Allowance Application.
- ✓ A walk in application.

To assist with this work, the Ministry has employed 14 Disability Welfare Officers that are stationed in 14 districts right through out Fiji.

8.0 The Committee is interested to know more on the Economic Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities (EEP). How many people (disaggregated date for gender and age group) have benefitted from such program, what were some of the challenges and how best can government address such issues or boost involvement?

Tabulated below is the number of people that have benefitted from the programme

Sex	Male	Female	Total
Number	38	22	60

Challenges that the Ministry faced when implementing the program

- ✓ Support from family members towards the projects.
- ✓ During COVID, the revenue from the projects was diverted towards supporting the whole family, therefore resulting in failure of some projects

To address the challenges, the Ministry is approaching development partners (JICA, Singapore and KOICA) for training opportunities towards Mentoring and Coaching training for persons with disabilities in employment. Furthermore, there is need to change the mindsets of caregivers towards persons with disabilities so future business ventures can be a success.

9.0 What is the current status of the Child Justice and Child Care and Protection Bill?

Both Bills were presented in Cabinet on Tuesday 7th May by Honorable Ditoka.

10.0 Older Persons Unit – what is the long-term plan for psychologically challenged residents? Are they getting proper health care services? How often is this undertaken? Is there a specialised psychologist?

There is a *National Minimum Standards for homes on the care of older persons* (2018:27) on Standard 7(6) highlights that: 'The residents' psychological health is monitored regularly and preventative and restorative care is provided.'

The Ministry currently has a Memorandum of Understanding with Ministry of Health who provide the technical care when the need arises.

The residents of the 3 state Golden Age Homes have routine visitations to the hospitals and the doctors also visit the residents at the home. To assist with this partnership on site at each home, there are nurses stationed to help with treatment and referral.

There is no specialised psychologist based at the Golden Age Homes, but we are assisted with medical interventions when the need arises.

11.0 What is the progress of the Golden Age Home in Labasa?

The renovation and construction work for the Golden Age Home Labasa, was completed in 2023. Currently the home occupied by 30 residents.

12.0 National Domestic Violence Helpline – In the 2020-21 Annual Report, 3,612 genuine calls were received at the helpline. How soon was help provided? Of the numbers recorded, how many cases has led to deaths (if any)? What sort of issues are reported? Does the Ministry have the necessary resources and capabilities to attend to such emergency calls? Also identify challenges faced by the Ministry in attending to cases.

The Domestic Violence Helpline 24 hour telephone counselling (Mobile Counselling) provides the emotional support and options for clients to make choices for themselves. The Fiji Women's Crisis Center is administering the DVHL. They provide a 24 hour counselling service over the phone anytime of the day or night hence emergency assistance is also provided such as shelter if the need arise. They refer cases to relevant agencies based on the survivors consent. We have requested FWCC for

further breakdown on interventions and deaths (if any) for the reporting period, however this information is forthcoming from FWCC.

In terms of issues received are:

- ✓ Domestic Violence: Reported cases of domestic violence emerges as the most prevalent form of violence survivors sought assistance for. This indicated a pressing need for interventions and support services to address intimate partner violence within households.
- ✓ Rape: each reported case represents a survivor seeking help after experiencing the survivor drama of sexual assault.
- ✓ Attempted Rape: survivors sought help after narrowly escaping sexual assault. Although fewer in number, attempted rape cases underscore the potential for escalated violence and the urgent need for preventative measures and support services.
- ✓ Sexual Harassment: The reported cases suggest survivors sought assistance for experiences of sexual harassment such as unwanted advances or inappropriate behavior. Addressing these cases requires both preventative and supportive interventions to ensure survivors safely and wellbeing.
- ✓ Attempted Suicide: Survivors experiencing suicidal ideation or attempts may access different resources or helplines tailored or mental health support.

Resources and Capabilities

The Ministry through the Department of Social Welfare has statutory responsibilities for the care and protection of children and most importantly the management of child abuse and neglect cases of children in Fiji.

The Government of Fiji recognises the seriousness of Gender Based Violence (GBV) as well as the long-term socioeconomic impacts that violence has on communities and is committed to build “a society free of all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence” and to empower and enable all women and girls to participate fully alongside men and boys.

Demonstrative of this commitment, the Government has taken several measures to help address the root causes, contributing factors and consequences of VAWG. These measures include:

-a National Domestic Violence Helpline 1560

-a National Child Helpline 1325

-the Service Delivery Protocol (SDP) for Responding to Cases of Gender Based Violence

The aim of the SDP is to ensure the provision of appropriate, timely and quality services for GBV survivors, together with accountability and justice for perpetrators. It is a binding agreement that commits front-line service providers to a common set of

principles and guidelines to ensure that all women and girls who experience GBV receive the best care, treatment and support in the aftermath of GBV incidents.

The signatories of the SDP include: on behalf of the Government, the MWCSP, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS), the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Fiji Police Force, the Legal Aid Commission and the Judicial Department; and CSOs that are key front-line GBV service providers, including FWCC, MSP, Empower Pacific, Homes of Hope and the

Salvation Army. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) and, in the context of disaster risk reduction and management, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), which oversees the Fiji National Cluster System, are also key Government partners for the SDP.

The Ministry through the SDP ensures a collaborative and interagency approach in ensuring standard operating procedures for interagency response to GBV.

13.0 What is the progress of the "Shelter Guideline" (page 35 of the 2020-2021 AR)?

The Fiji Government is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all citizens, and especially women and children, hence these guidelines are critical to ensuring that those who need safe accommodation and shelter are protected and treated with dignity and respect, and have access to the services they need in a timely manner. The Shelter Guidelines was formulated after a series of consultations with Government Ministries and Departments, Non-Government Organizations, Development partners and shelter service providers. The Fiji National Gender Policy identifies shelters, refuges and safe houses as a key component of victim support for survivors of gender based violence (GBV) and tasks the government with approving minimum guidelines for their establishment. The policy highlights that professional counselling services, income generation for victims of GBV and coordination of services constitute minimum services for shelter service providers.

Endorsement by Cabinet:

The Fiji National Shelter Guidelines on Responding to Cases of Gender Based violence was endorsed by Cabinet in December, 2023.

The development of the Shelter Standards:

The development of the Shelter Standard is part of the greater platform towards gender based violence survivors support services. Shelters provide secure accommodation for survivors providing essential aspects of protection, services and resources which enable women who have experienced abuse and their child/children

to recover from the violence, to rebuild self-esteem, and to take steps to regain a self-determine and independent life.

The proposed Official Launch of the Fiji National Shelter Guideline would be:

- ✓ To socialize and introduce the newly endorsed Guideline of the Fiji National Shelter on Responding to cases of gender based violence.
- ✓ To make a wider awareness of the existing Guideline with its guiding principles and the minimum standards for shelter providing services.
- ✓ To acknowledge and celebrate the milestone achievement of the completion of the Fiji National Shelter Guideline.

14.0 Under the Women's Economic Empowerment program, how many women have benefitted from the program and taken the initiative as part of their business?

For the period 2020 to 2021 below were the WEE programs reported that directly involved women:

- ✓ Tie and Dye Training - 2 in the Western Division
- ✓ IGP Planning, review and coordination - 2 in the Western Division and 4 in the Northern Division
- ✓ Grants to Women Institutions (4 Institutes)

For the period 2019 to 2020 these were the WEE programs reported:

- ✓ Divisional Craft shows - 1 in the Eastern Division and 1 in the Northern Division and 3 in the Central Division.
- ✓ Skills training tie and dye - 2 in the Western Division
- ✓ Handing over Sewing Machine - 1 in the Central Division
- ✓ Sewing Training - 1 Western and 1 Northern Divisions

We have had difficulty in retrieving this data due to issues such as:

- ✓ the IT system bring compromised a few years back and officers were not able to access their data,
- ✓ High staff turn-over and non-transference of administrative data

However, the Department is working on retrieving this data and strengthening data storing methods to save information for future reporting.

15.0 Can the Ministry explain further on the unreconciled variances for both financial years? The Committee notes that there was a huge variance in 2020-2021 (Page 51). What has the Ministry implemented to reduce any variance or discrepancies?

Variance in SPP

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection has created 2 new accounts position to assist with the increasing budget lines in the Social Protection Programmes.

- ✓ Accounts has created a Reconciliation Policy which is currently in draft and is being piloted.
- ✓ Mode of payments are shared with the districts and field office to reconcile payments made at district levels.
- ✓ Rejected payments are checked and sent back to the districts for their needed action.
- ✓ Capacity Building is conducted with clerical officers in the field as well as accounts, to identify where the gaps are, and putting practices into place to ensure issues are dealt with.
- ✓ We now conduct general postings on a monthly basis to rectify any misposting in any Social Assistance Programs.
- ✓ There has been a greater working partnership with the program managers to ensure that RIEs are submitted 2 weeks before the quarter ends.
- ✓ The Ministry is working with DFAT to develop a Social Assistance Information System, which should fix the variances.

GL for salaries and wages

The Ministry continues to strengthen our Human Resources Unit by recruiting new positions to enable the process requirements are met.

An issue we are facing is the high staff turnover in the field . At times HR does not get sufficient notice of resignation and as such, notification to accounts is late. This Financial Year Corporate has visited all our offices, holding meetings at district level, to try and address our HR issues, and working towards improving our processes.

To strengthen coordination, Accounts team and Corporate are meeting on a monthly basis to share information and discuss challenges we are facing.

16.0 How can the Ministry improve on its internal controls in order to qualify for an Unqualified Opinion? The Committee notes that in 2019-2020, the Ministry was issued with a qualified opinion taking into consideration the weak control systems identified by the Auditors (Page 32).

- ✓ Cabinet has endorsed the reform of the Social Assistance Programs which looks at the holistic program systems and processes.
- ✓ There are clear roles for those in the chain, ensuring a value chain analysis is conducted.

- ✓ The Ministry has recruited staff dedicated to monitor the SPP payout and reconcile with the General ledger. Furthermore the Poverty Monitoring Unit conducts an impact assessment annual basis.
- ✓ We have improved the timeline for the RIE submission to Ministry of Finance.

17.0 The Committee notes significant savings in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020 and notes that majority of the savings is due to COVID-19 restrictions, does the Ministry have any Business Contingency Plans in place in ensuring that its core services are not affected during such hard times?

The Ministry at the moment does not have a contingency plan however we have taken positive steps by developing the risk management plan in the FY 2022-023.

The Risk Management Plan matrix has a agreed management strategy which is the basis for the business continuity plan or contingency plan.