



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 – 2022

[JANUARY 2019 – DECEMBER 2022]

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FOREWORD FROM MINISTER

Government had committed itself to improve the economy through the implementation of strategic projects and reforms that will significantly change the course of the Fijian economy. This requires Government to act differently by ensuring that strategic programs and reforms are implemented to uplift the economy in the short term and set it on a path for better economic growth and stability. The State needs to utilise all its levers (policy, regulations and shareholding) to exert greater influence on the economy.

Our achievements have been driven by the establishment of a modern and inclusive Fijian Constitution, along with an unprecedented programme of administrative reforms across Government; substantial and consistent public investment and a concerted effort to position Fiji as the hub of economic activity and regional engagement in the Pacific. Fiji has also emerged as a respected advocate on some of the great challenges facing humanity, including climate change, sustainable development and the preservation of our oceans.

The Strategic Plan outlines our action agenda for the Ministry of Justice over the next 4 years, 2019-2022. It provides a clear direction and outlined our key strategic priorities aligned to our national development plan.

STATEMENT FROM PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR JUSTICE

The Ministry of Justice is committed to ensuring that people of Fiji have increased access to justice which is the basis of this 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

The Ministry of Justice is undertaking the mammoth task of digitizing its records and digitalising processes, and at the completion of this project, the four main registries [Titles, Companies, BDM and Official-Receiver's office] will be able to provide most of its services online. This will stop multiple trips to the registries, increase efficiency and will no doubt contribute towards economic growth.

I commend this framework to the entire staff of my Ministry, key stakeholders and the Fijian people we serve.

Introduction & Background

Aim

The aim of the Strategic Plan is to identify goals, set strategies and actions for the Ministry and to develop a plan to achieve the Ministry's goals. The Strategic Plan aims to facilitate the role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Justice and ensure the sound management of Government resources. As such, it sets a clear pathway for the Ministry to achieve those goals within its allocated resources in a timely manner.

Summary of situational analysis

In order to achieve the strategic objectives, there needs to be a clear understanding of the Ministry's resources and capabilities, as well as areas that require improvement. The Ministry will be undertaking, through a limited staff engagement process, an initial risk assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), as part of its planning efforts during 2018. The SWOT analysis will focus on the challenges and opportunities that must be addressed or overcome to ensure achievement of Ministry objectives.

Strategic Priorities

The Ministry's Strategic Plan will be subject to regular reviews, and includes an approach of aligning the relevant strategic objectives highlighted in the National Development Plan [NDP], and various relevant public sector reform initiatives. The Ministry's SWOT analysis will subsequently augment these strategic priorities.

	Ministry Strategic Priorities	Source of Priority
1	Access to justice	NDP priority 3.1.11 P 66 Decentralising services by establishing Births, Deaths and Marriages offices Digitisation of records and digitalisation

Five Year Budget Forecast

Ministry Budget Categories	2018-2019 (Appropriation)	2019-2020 (Appropriation)	2020-2021 (Appropriation)	2021-2022 (Projected/ Estimate)	2022-2023 (Projected/ Estimate)	2022-2023 (Projected/ Estimate)
Operational Budget	7,374,300	4,386,50	4,406,40	4,019,40	4,019,400	4,019,400
Capital Budget	763,000	107.50	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
TOTAL	8,137,300	4,584,500	4,561,100	4,142,000	4,142,000	4,142,000

Ministry Goals

The Ministry's goals define how the plan's vision will be achieved. Number of goals have been identified and are aligned directly to the strategic priorities. The skills and experience of the Ministry's resources are the key drivers in achieving the strategic priorities.

Goals

The Ministry of Justice has developed a four-year strategic plan that identifies key priorities and goals that will move the organisation towards necessary change and modernisation.

The strategic priorities require changes to reflect the ministry's commitment to provide the best possible services to all Fijians by modernising and streamlining processes in four registries. The strategic plan was developed through extensive discussions among the ministry's senior management team.

This strategic plan identifies a future direction for the ministry that will provide context and guidance for decision makers and members of the public.

Access to justice

In terms of operations, better leveraging technology processes and better resource allocation practices are essential to ensure the ministry has the right people with the right skills to meet its strategic goals. In line with the Ministry's vision, mission and values, we would specifically focus on modernizing processes, and promoting responsible, evidence-based decision making.

The strategic plan looks ahead by identifying key Ministry goals and initiatives that will support the priorities outlined above and to be a high performing organisation with a continuous focus on developing the knowledge and skills of staff and to deliver excellent customer service to the Fijian people. Provide quality service to the public and deliver an enhanced range of on-lines services.

Mission

To ensure excellence in service delivery, efficiency and transparency in meeting public expectations and requests

Values Integrity - We commit to practicing the highest ethical standards, and to demonstrate honesty and fairness in our actions.

- **Accountability** – We accept responsibility for our actions, and we make business decisions based on experience, and sound judgment.
- **Excellence** – We demonstrate pride, enthusiasm and dedication in everything that we do, and we commit to delivering the best outcomes for all Fijians.
- **Collaboration** – We practice a highly consultative, professional and participative approach in all our customer and stakeholder engagement interactions.
- **Teamwork** – We treat our colleagues with respect and value all contributions.

2021 - 2022 Ministry of Justice Strategic Priorities & Outcomes

Strategic Priorities (from the National Development Plan)	Goal/s	Strategy	Outcomes (i.e. impact of achieving the goal)	How will the outcome be measured?	Targeted performance (i.e. KPI)
Increase access to justice	BDM services have been de-centralised and future goal is to serve the public through online services provided by the Ministry of Justice	Open more offices in other districts including maritime zones; Streamline the processes to reduce the waiting time for customer and each customer application can be processed within a shorter time. Digitalise all the registries	(1) Less people at the counters in Suva, no long queue in one centre [Accessibility of Government Services to rural communities.] [Reduce number of clients waiting time]. [Processing time] (2) Meet the total output expected of opening 12 [locations] new BDM offices throughout Fiji as per the national development plan	(1)Monthly assessment/tracking of the number of people that visit our office and obtaining a monthly reports from these districts offices [Number of births, deaths and marriages registered] [Turnaround time of registering births, deaths and marriage] [Accurate and timely registration] [Number of complaints resolved]	Maximum number of people in Fiji registered; Average turnaround time at the counter to be less than 10 minutes; No multiple trips to legal registries to get things done;
Provide all legal registries services online	Have a online platform for legal registry services	Singapore team working on the BPR before	People can make applications online and there is no	Collection of online data and IT analytics	Minimum number of people visiting

	<p>using online payment;</p> <p>Eliminate or reduce the number of physical visits to the legal registries by the customer for any type of registration</p>	<p>implementing system;</p>	<p>need to visit the four registries; [Efficient and effective registration] Ultimately when full automation and adoption of digital certificates can be realized, the visit to the BDM office to complete birth, death registration shall be minimized</p>		<p>the four registries and tracking the number of people using online services</p>
<p>Records to be updated diligently</p>	<p>Maintenance of timely updated and correct people information during their entire life cycle and their status via any given transactions that happened in Fiji;</p> <p>Minimize data fragmentation;</p> <p>Tighten the control of BDM management of data by standardizing/legalizing the proof documents.</p>	<p>To achieve that the process, information needs to be verified so that it is accurate and can be trusted;</p> <p>Increase the data quality and ensure data integrity for people data;</p> <p>Improve the completeness of people data in BDM by introducing effective processes and system to provide the public with a convenient and secured method self-declaration and update the people status</p>	<p>Up to date records and clean data available for data users</p>	<p>Daily checks and maintenance by the investigation team [Accurate and reliable data]</p>	<p>Data verification showing minimum or no mistake;</p> <p>Reduce the errors encountered so that amendment is minimized which reduces inconvenience caused to customer</p>
<p>Business processes are restructured and redesigned</p>	<p>review and enhance operational structure and operation procedures to improve customer service and customer satisfaction as the first priority for immediate implementation;</p> <p>Amendments to the relevant Acts and Regulations to provide better</p>	<p>Review existing processes and procedures including manpower structure on roles;</p> <p>Awareness programs and training programs need to be considered responsibilities</p>	<p>analyse and redesign the key business processes to achieve the performance objectives in time, quality, cost and effort;</p> <p>apply best practices and lessons learned from the service process redesign projects by other public sector agencies</p>	<p>concurrently revise the standard operation procedures (SOP) to strengthen and align the necessary activities for the new redesign processes</p>	<p>More streamlined processes and practice consistent with the SOPs</p>

	legalisation environment for the redesigned processes				
Strengthen our Civil Registration Vital Statistics system (BDM)	Have a well-connected, and up to date CRVS system so clear and precise statistics is generated for decision making	Connect system with MOH&MS and all births and deaths to be recorded as and when it happens	Meet the goals under the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade' for 2015-2024 declared in the 2014 Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific which adopted the Ministerial Declaration to 'Get Every One in the Picture' and proclaimed the 'Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade' for 2015-2024	Everyone will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development	A well-functioning civil registration system is characterized by the accurate, timely and universal (100%) registration of vital events; provision of legal documentation for each vital event registered; and the ability to derive accurate, complete and timely vital statistics based on registration records



Sharvada Sharma
Permanent Secretary for Justice



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Clarification on Issues Identified from the Ministry of Justice Annual Report; 2018-2019

The Ministry of Justice (**Ministry**) is tasked with the essential responsibility of administering justice and maintaining legal integrity. This is achieved through its four key registries: the Registrar of Titles, the Registrar of Companies, the Registrar General, and the Official Receiver's Office.

Each registry plays a critical role in registering documents, upholding official records, and maintaining essential legal documents that underpin the rule of law and public trust. Additionally, the Ministry oversees the Justice of the Peace service, which ensures accessible legal support at the community level. Together, these functions enable the Ministry to provide a robust legal framework, supporting fair and transparent justice for all.

Roles of the Ministry

Corporate Services Division

- Providing indispensable administrative support to ensure the seamless functioning of the Ministry's diverse mandates.

Registrar of Companies office

- Custodian of business registrations, promoting entrepreneurship, investment, and regulatory compliance in Fiji's dynamic commercial landscape.

Official Receiver office

- Overseeing insolvency proceedings and safeguarding the interests of creditors and debtors in accordance with established legal frameworks.

Births, Deaths, and Marriage's office

- Upholds the sanctity of vital civil registrations, preserving families' legacies and facilitating legal documentation critical for personal and legal purposes.

Registrar of Titles office

- Managing land tenure records and facilitating land-related transactions. The Ministry exercises its authority as an entity obligated by law for the purpose of:

Justice of the Peace

- Administering oaths, certifying documents, facilitating legal processes, and providing community outreach on legal matters.



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Issues and Responses

2018-2019

1. *In reference to page 8,*

- a. *The Committee notes that the digitization project for legal registries was implemented for the reported year and clarification is sought on its progressive state.***

Response

In 2018, the scanning of majority of land, titles and deeds documents was concluded. This project was undertaken by recruiting project officers and Yalamanchili through Government ITC.

In May 2019, the Singapore Corporation Enterprise, carried out the Business Process Redesign report and the Functional Requirements report for the Office Registrar of Titles.

The Registrar of Companies underwent the reregistration process in 2019 where all businesses and companies that existed reregistered with the Registrar of Companies office.

The e-BDM system was also introduced in 2019 whereby birth certificates can be requested online. Also registration of births can be done online. However, BDM has partially digitised. There is still a need to check records that are not on the system for verification.

Under 1.1 the Committee noted that the Corporate Services Division is responsible for planning, but there is no mention of any Strategic Development Plan or Costed Operational Plan for the Ministry. Additionally, there is no reporting against targets of such plan. Can the Ministry explain this?

Response

The Ministry had a Strategic Development Plan from 2019 – 2022 which focused on modernisation and streamlining processes for its four legal registries namely the Office of the Registrar of Titles, Births Deaths and Marriage office, Registrar of Companies and the Official Receivers office.

The Ministry also has a costed operational plan for 2018 – 2019 whereby there was investment on the workforce. The organisation structure and person to post are explained in the costed operational plan.



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b. The Committee noted that there is no mention on the gender analysis (staff breakdown) of the workforce and also the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals for the reported years. Can the Ministry explain this?

Response

The Ministry from the person to post is aware of the individual staff and the number of male and female in the workforce and in the districts and divisions from 2018 – 2019. The P2P has always been updated by the administration department.

Similarly the Ministries recruitment is in line with the civil service guidelines strictly on Open Merit Recruitment System which ensures fairness to all.

The Ministry's Strategic Development Plan are in line with the National Development Plan which ties with the Strategic Development Plan mainly on providing access to justice, reducing inequality, achieving gender equality and inclusivity principles.

2. In reference to page 13, the Committee noted that on 1 August 2018, the Fiji Government introduced a Parental Assistance Payment Program ('PAPP') to assist low-income earners with cost associated with young children born on or after this date. The Committee seeks clarification on the status of this programme, what impact it had and the development progress throughout 2018 to 2022.

Response

a. Clarification on the PAPP Duration:

The Parental Assistance Payment Program (PAPP) was implemented from 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2020. The program aimed to provide financial assistance to low-income families with children born within this period, supporting early childcare needs and promoting timely birth registration.

b. Program Overview:

Under the PAPP, \$1,000 was deposited into an account opened for each eligible child, with parents assigned as trustees. Parents were permitted to withdraw \$500 upon opening the account, while the remaining \$500 could only be withdrawn when the child enrolled in Year 1 at Primary School.

c. Impact of the PAPP:

The program successfully provided financial relief to many low-income families, ensuring they could meet essential childcare needs such as baby supplies, food, and healthcare. The structured withdrawal mechanism promoted both immediate and future financial support aligned with the child's development.



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Furthermore, the program had a significant positive impact on birth registrations. During the period under review, 95% of children born were registered on time, with very few late registrations. This improvement fostered better public service delivery by ensuring more accurate population data.

d. Development Progress (2018–2022):

2018–2019: The PAPP was introduced and actively promoted, with strong participation from eligible families.

2020: Although the program concluded on 31 July 2020, challenges arose during the pandemic, such as delays in opening accounts and processing withdrawals. The government provided support to ensure minimal disruption.

Post-2020: Feedback gathered from the program's participants highlighted its positive impact on families. Suggestions to expand coverage and refine eligibility criteria are currently being considered in policy discussions to inform future programs.

The PAPP has been an effective initiative, delivering financial support to families while encouraging timely birth registration. We are committed to further evaluating its outcomes and working with stakeholders to explore improvements for similar programs in the future.

3. *In reference to page 14, the Committee notes that in April 2019, the Fiji Government launched a birth registration mobile application called the eservices, under the 'digitalFiji' application that enables public to register births online. Clarification is sought on the status of the Application and how well the program worked throughout 2018-2022.*

Response

a. Status of the Application:

The birth registration mobile service was launched in April 2019 under the 'digitalFiji' initiative. This e-service allows parents to register births online, streamlining the registration process and enhancing accessibility, particularly for those in urban and semi-urban areas.

b. Challenges and Current Usage:

Despite the introduction of this digital solution, adoption has been limited. On average, we receive no more than two applications per month through the mobile registration platform. A key challenge is that many citizens in remote areas and some overseas customers are not yet aware of or familiar with the service.



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c. Recommendations for Improvement:

To increase the effectiveness of the program, we recommend the Ministry undertake nationwide awareness campaigns to ensure that parents and guardians understand how to access and use the service. Key aspects to promote include:

- Registration through the app is free.
- The first birth certificate is issued free of charge for every new registration.
- Encouraging parents to use this convenient service to avoid delays in birth registration.

d. Proposed Awareness Strategy:

Countrywide outreach: Teams from the Ministry can travel to remote areas and communities to demonstrate how to use the application.

School and tertiary institution programs: Awareness campaigns should be conducted in secondary schools and tertiary institutions to educate young adults, teachers, and parents about the app's benefits and usage.

e. Impact Review (2018–2022):

While the mobile application has simplified the registration process for many, its potential remains underutilized. With increased awareness efforts, we expect a rise in online registrations and improved access to essential birth-related services.

We are committed to working with the relevant stakeholders to implement these awareness initiatives and ensure the mobile birth registration service reaches all Fijian citizens, both locally and overseas.

4. *In reference to page 15, The Committee noted that there were certain agencies that co-hosted the awareness program for the reported year and clarification is sought on the status of the 'REACH' program and the progress of the awareness program throughout 2018-2022.*

Response

a. Overview of the REACH Program

The REACH (Rights, Empowerment, and Cohesion for Rural and urban Areas) program has been a collaborative initiative involving multiple ministries, ensuring that no one is left behind. Through this program, essential services—including marriage, birth, and death registrations—are brought directly to communities, eliminating the need for people to travel or incur transport costs. This approach has significantly improved access to public services, especially for individuals living in remote areas.



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2. Impact and Progress (2018–2022):

The REACH program made significant strides by coordinating efforts among ministries to provide critical services at people's doorsteps. As a result, many marriages, births, and deaths were successfully registered during these outreach events, with the public expressing appreciation for the convenience and cost savings.

3. Challenges Due to COVID-19:

Unfortunately, the program's completion was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The last outreach activity was conducted at Sawani Village in Nadi, Bua, before restrictions were imposed, and people were required to stay indoors. Due to these interruptions, the program has not yet covered all parts of Fiji as initially planned.

4. Recommendation for Completion:

Given the program's importance in reaching underserved communities, it is essential to resume and complete the REACH program. We recommend that future outreach efforts focus on areas not yet covered to ensure that all Fijian citizens, regardless of location, have access

5. *In reference to page 18, the Committee noted that the Ministry's work is guided by old Acts, and clarification is sought on whether there is an intention of reviewing these Laws namely the Charitable Trusts Act 1945, Religious Bodies Registration Act 1881, The Money Lenders Act 1938 and The Credit Union Act 1954.*

Response

Registrar of Titles is guided by legislations that include the Land Transfer Act 1971, Charitable Trust Act 1945, Religious Bodies Registration Act 1881 and the Registration Act 1879. There is a need for these legislations to be reviewed considering that it is archaic. These laws need to be relevant and up to date with changes to society. ROT will greatly benefit from it in terms of the services being provided to the public and the registration of documents.

6. *In reference to page 20, the Committee noted the replacement of the manual system by the Registrar of Company system and clarification is sought on the progress of this change.*

Response

The ROC office has a fully automated system which came into effect in June 2019 and all registration and lodgement for any business and companies are done online using the ROC portal.

The office is continuously trying to enhance the ROC portal and works closely with the Digital Government Transformation Office ('DGTO') to improve certain aspects of the portal to make it user friendly as much as it can. One such major enhancement that



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the office was able to achieve is make the renewal of application automated, whereby any client who has lodged a renewal application for their businesses or companies now receive their renewal certificate instantaneously upon payment.

7. In reference to page 23, the Committee noted that \$300,000.00 was allocated for the opening of new offices in Nasinu, Lakeba and Rotuma for the decentralization of BDM services. The Committee seeks clarification if there are plans by the Ministry to decentralize other services such as managing of deeds and titles, to other remote areas in Fiji. |

Response

The Registrar of Titles office based in Suva is the only Office that governs the Titles and Land Deeds dealings for the whole of Fiji. Current developments are underway on the digitization of the Titles Office on which there is engagements with ADB for technical assistance. Further, the Titles office is expanding its services in providing searches to the general public through the Ministry of Justice Office in the Divisions around the country.

a. The Committee noted that the Strategic Development Plan for 2017 to 2022, established a target to develop 12 new BDM sites. Can the Ministry explain how well this target was achieved?

Response

The Ministry of Justice in the decentralisation of its services was able to open 13 BDM offices around the country which were done in phases. Currently the services provided are not only for BDM office but also in expanding other services for Registrars of Companies and the Registrar of Titles Office of the Ministry.

The office that was newly opened are 6 within Viti Levu, 3 in Vanua Levu and 4 in the Maritime zones.

The newly opened offices are Nasinu, Vunidawa, Korovou, Keyasi, Navua, Tavua, Nabouwalu, Taveuni, Savusavu, Levuka, Kadavu, Lakeba and Rotuma.

8. In reference to page 25, the Committee seeks clarification on the meaning of the abbreviation CFA as listed under the Bankruptcy and Liquidation Receipt and Payment Analysis?

Response

The abbreviation CFA in full is the **Consolidated Fund Account** of the Government which collects all revenue for all Government Ministries.



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9. *In respect to the Financial report on page 24, the Committee seeks clarification on the reason(s) why revenue is collected for two separate years given that the budget allocated was for the 2018-2019 fiscal year.*

Response

The Ministry wishes to seek apologies in the misrepresentation of the graph shown and correctly it should be for 1 fiscal year 2018 – 2019.

2021-2022

10. *In reference to page 12, the Committee noted that the Fiji Government had committed to the Asian and the Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade (2015-2024) and clarification is sought on the outcome of this resolution.*

Response

a. Overview of the CRVS Decade Commitment:

The CRVS Decade (2015–2024) is a regional initiative aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems to ensure that every individual in the region has legal proof of identity and access to public services. Fiji has been committed to this initiative, aligning national strategies with the CRVS goals to strengthen the registration of births, deaths, marriages, and other vital events.

b. Achievements and Outcomes (2015–2024):

Improved Registration Coverage: Fiji has made significant progress in increasing birth and death registrations, particularly through the REACH Program and other outreach initiatives. Currently, 95% of births are registered on time, contributing to better population data management and public service delivery.

- **Enhanced Access to Services:** The development of mobile registration services under the digitalFiji initiative has provided additional channels for citizens to register births and access certificates online. This has streamlined processes and reduced barriers for families, especially those in rural and remote areas.
- **Strengthened Inter-Ministerial Collaboration:** As part of the CRVS Decade objectives, ministries and agencies have worked together to integrate data and improve coordination in managing vital statistics, ensuring the accuracy and consistency of national records.
- **Legal Identity and Social Inclusion:** With increased awareness of the importance of civil registration, citizens now have better access to education, healthcare, and social services, as legal identity is a prerequisite for many public services.



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c. Challenges and Next Steps:

COVID-19 Disruptions: The pandemic impacted registration efforts, particularly outreach programs to remote areas, delaying progress in some communities.

Further Awareness Campaigns Needed: To achieve full registration coverage by 2024, continued awareness programs are essential, particularly in remote areas and among marginalized populations. The Ministry will intensify efforts to promote mobile registration services and ensure that everyone benefits from the CRVS system.

d. Commitment to the Final Phase:

As the CRVS Decade approaches its conclusion in 2024, Fiji remains committed to achieving full registration coverage and strengthening vital statistics systems. We are actively working with stakeholders to identify gaps and accelerate progress in the final phase, ensuring that Fiji meets the CRVS Decade targets.

11. *In reference to page 13, the Committee noted that there were 4,942 registered deaths for the reported year and clarification is sought on why there are delays in registering deaths.*

Response

The delays in registering deaths are primarily attributed to the following factors:

- 1. Lack of Awareness:** Many individuals are unaware of the legal requirement to register deaths promptly.
- 2. Geographical Barriers:** Residents in remote or rural areas face challenges in accessing registration services.
- 3. Administrative Delays:** Sometimes, supporting documents such as medical certificates are not submitted on time.
- 4. Cultural Practices:** Some families delay registration due to traditional mourning periods.

We are working on initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of registering deaths promptly and improving access to registration services. With increased public awareness, we aim to reduce the number of delayed registrations in the coming years.

12. *The Committee noted that the 2022 report showed that no applications were received from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development to register Justices of Peace (JP), of the staff. Clarification is sought on whether the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development is continuing to register their staff as Justices of Peace.*



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Response

The Justice of Peace application can be made to the Ministry of Justice offices simply by filing a form and provide some documents such as ID and police clearance. Individual, church leaders, community leaders, emerging leaders of society that are interested in undertaking Justice of Peace services in their community make such applications with the Ministry.

They undergo interviews if they are selected based on merits of having a good standing in society and can speak, read and write. Upon interviews, they are informed of whether they are successful, and the Ministry would prepare for their induction and swearing in ceremonies.

If the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development or any other is interested, they can apply for them to be considered.

13. In reference to page 15, the Committee notes that with the new ROC system established in 2019 applicants can lodge online and receive business certificate instantaneously upon payment. The Committee seeks clarification whether there is a vetting process in place before any renewal certificate is issued.

Response

There is no vetting process in place before any renewal certificate is issued since the vetting is done at the initial stage of registering a business. Vetting is only done when there are any changes to the business.

- a. ***The table shows the times taken for processes to be implemented. Have targets been set to further improve these process times, and how well has the Ministry achieved the revised targeted process times?***

Response

The Office has 3-5 working days turn-around time on Business and Company registration from 2021 till to date. This has improved ROC office's service delivery. This has been achieved through the dedication the ROC team has put forward in assisting the members of public. It is through the online system the office has been able to manage its workload and maintain optimum standards on service delivery.

3-5 working days are basically to vet, verify and approve the applications as ROC has 3 stages of internal process to register the business or companies.

The ROC office is continuously working on processing the business and companies' application at least within 3 working days.



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To reduce the processing time to less than 3 working days, the ROC office will need extra staff and IT equipment such as laptops, printers/ Scanners and WIFI since ROC office can process the applications online.

14. In reference to page 19, the Committee noted that the Ministry was allocated an Operating Budget of \$782,014.00 for Fijian Vaccine Pass with an actual expenditure of \$153,222. The Committee seeks clarification on the lapsed appropriation for this allocation and reason(s) why it was not fully utilized.

Response

The lapsed Appropriation was due to the short period in which the revised budget was given towards the closing of the Financial year 2021-2022. The main component of the budget was for Project staffs salaries which could be accommodated only for the last 2 pays when the Financial year was closed.

15. The Committee noted that Graphs on pages 16 and 17 relate to discrete measures for which there are no trends. Clarification is sought on why did the Ministry choose to draw a line graph instead of bar graphs, as the issues graphed do not represent a trend?

Response

The Ministry chose to use a line graph instead of a bar graph for displaying registration and bankruptcy statistics to highlight trends and changes over time more effectively. Line graphs are especially useful for illustrating patterns, as they allow for a smooth connection between data points, making it easier to observe any increases, decreases, or fluctuations across different time periods. This is essential for data like registrations and bankruptcies, where understanding trends, such as seasonal changes or long-term growth and decline, is often more valuable than comparing isolated values.

By using a line graph, the Ministry assist viewers to quickly grasp the overall trajectory of the statistics, leading to clearer insights for decision-making.

-----**END**-----

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

2019-2022 CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL REPORTS - MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

SUBMITTEE: Ministry of Justice

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Parliament

DATE: Thursday, 7th November, 2024

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON THURSDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 2024, AT 2.14 P.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Justice

In Attendance:

1. Mrs. Selina Kuruleca - Permanent Secretary
2. Mr. Collin Yabaki - Director Corporate Services
3. Ms. Makereta Sotutu - Actg. Registrar General
4. Ms. Sereana Ligani - Principal Accounts Officer
5. Ms. Lavenia Navolaca - Senior Aministrativ Officer

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Good afternoon, honourable Members and members of the public, the secretariat, viewers who are tuning in live and ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone especially the views who are watching this session live on the Walesi platform and on the internet. At the outset, honourable Members and members of the public, for information purpose, pursuant to Standing Orders 111 of the Standing Orders of Parliament, all Committee meetings are open to the public. Therefore, please note that this submission is open to the public and the media is also streamlined live on Parliament's website and social media platforms. However, please be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111, there are only a few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure and these include:

- (a) National security matters
- (b) Third party confidential information
- (c) Personnel or human resource matters
- (d) Committee deliberation and development of Committee's recommendation reports.

This is a parliamentary meeting and all information gathered is covered under Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. In terms of the protocol of this Committee meeting, please minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. Please note that all the questions to be asked are to be addressed through the Chair. That being said, I would now like to introduce the honourable Members of the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

Honourable Members, before I give the floor to our submittees to introduce themselves, I take this time to welcome on behalf of the Standing Committee of JLHR and Parliament as a whole, we welcome you this afternoon for our public submission. As you are well aware, the Committee has touched on your annual reports primarily 2018 to 2022 which is a consolidated report for the Committee and we will be tabling it in the upcoming sitting which is in December. I take this time, on behalf of Parliament and the Committee to welcome you to the Parliament precincts. At this juncture, honourable Members and members of the Ministry of Justice, I wish to sincerely thank you all for availing yourselves for this meeting. We thank you for time and hope that you will avail yourself for any further inquiries that the Committee may have in this matter.

(Introduction of representatives from the Ministry of Justice)

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Mr. Chairman, clarifications were sought for the Consolidated Annual Reports for the Ministry of Justice from 2018 to 2022. I will start with each question as we go through them and we will also allow each member of the Ministry of Justice team to respond. I trust that you all have a copy of our report. Before I go any further, I was tasked to come and share the greetings of the honourable Minister for Justice. He says to say, “hello” to the Members of the Standing Committee.

Clarification sought for 2018 to 2019 in reference to page 8, 1(a).

a) The Committee notes that the digitization project for legal registries was implemented for the reported year and clarification is sought on its progressive state.

Response: In 2018, the scanning of majority of land titles and deeds documents was concluded. This project was undertaken by recruiting project officers and Yalamanchili (a vendor from India) was brought on board to carry out the digitisation works for the Titles Office. They were contracted through Government ITC.

In May 2019, the Singapore Corporation Enterprise carried out the Business Process Redesign Report and the Functional Requirements Report for the Office of the Registrar of Titles.

The Registrar of Companies underwent the reregistration process in 2019 where all businesses and companies that existed reregistered with the Registrar of Companies Office.

The e-BDM system was also introduced in 2019 whereby birth certificates can be requested online. Also registration of births can be done online. However, BDM has been partially digitised. There is still a need to check records that are not on the system for verification.

Under 1.1 the Committee noted that the Corporate Services Division is responsible for planning, but there is no mention of any Strategic Development Plan or Costed Operational Plan for the Ministry. Additionally, there is no reporting against targets of such plan. Can the Ministry explain this?

Response: The Ministry acknowledges that the Corporate Services Division is tasked with planning responsibilities. A Strategic Development Plan was indeed established for the period from 2019 to 2022. This plan focused on modernizing and streamlining processes for key legal registries, including the Office of the Registrar of Titles, the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Office, the Registrar of Companies and the Official Receiver’s Office. However, this plan does not include specific reporting matrix or targets against which progress could be measured.

Additionally, the Ministry implemented a Costed Operational Plan for 2018 to 2019, which focused primarily on workforce investment. This plan outlined the Ministry’s structure and the allocation of personnel to specific roles, detailing financial projections related to these objectives. Nevertheless, the operational plan also did not incorporate measurable targets for ongoing evaluation and reporting.

We recognise that. Thank you for highlighting that in your clarification. So moving forward, the Ministry recognizes and has established clear, measurable targets and a regular reporting framework to enable more effective tracking of strategic and operational objectives. Steps are being taken to incorporate these elements in future planning cycles to ensure accountability and alignment with the Ministry’s goals.

b) The Committee noted that there is no mention on the gender analysis (staff breakdown) of the workforce and also the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals for the reported years. Can the Ministry explain this?

Response: The Ministry from the person to post establishment positions is aware of the individual staff and the number of male and female in the workforce from 2018 to 2019. We can also provide that record for the information of this Committee.

Similarly, the Ministry's recruitment is in line with the Civil Service Guidelines using the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS).

The Ministry's Strategic Development Plan is in line with the National Development Plan. The Plan prioritises on providing access to justice, reducing inequality, achieving gender equality and inclusivity principles.

The Ministry will continue to ensure that we report on gender breakdown from here onwards. Again we apologise for that shortcoming and we will ensure that our reports in future more accurately reflect on the achievements of SDG 10, 16 and 17.

2. In reference to page 13, the Committee noted that on 1st August, 2018, the Fiji Government introduced a Parental Assistance Payment Programme (PAPP) to assist low-income earners with cost associated with young children born on or after this date. The Committee seeks clarification on the status of this programme, what impact it had and the development progress throughout 2018 to 2022.

Response:

- a) Clarification on the PAPP Duration: The Parental Assistance Payment Programme (PAPP) was implemented from 1st August, 2018 to 31st July, 2020. The programme aimed to provide financial assistance to low-income families with children born within this period, supporting early childcare needs and promoting timely birth registration.

The process facilitated by the Ministry of Justice involved parents registering their children's births and assisted in providing a letter for the opening of the child's bank account. The Ministry of Finance was responsible for the financial aspects of this programme, including any payouts, which were contingent upon the parents opening a bank account for the child. Under this Programme, parents received two (2) cash payments - \$500 at the time of registration and the other \$500 when the child enrolls in Year 1 to support with school supplies or other needs. If there were any outstanding payments related to the financial assistance or support programme associated with the registration, it would depend on the specific agreements and timelines established by the Ministry of Finance and the bank. Tabulated are the breakdown of birth registration from 2018 to 2020:

Year	Number Registered
2018	17,938
2019	18,942
2020	16,724

The Fiji Government through 2018-2019 announced the \$1,000 Parenthood Assistance Payment Programme (PAPP) for new born children effective from 1st August, 2018 to 31st July, 2020. So it was during that period only and the child must be born on or after 1st August, 2018.

b) Programme Overview:

Under the PAPP, \$1,000 was deposited into an account opened for each eligible child, with parents assigned as trustees. Parents were permitted to withdraw \$500 upon opening the account, while the remaining \$500 could only be withdrawn when the child enrolled in Year 1 at Primary School.

c) Impact of the PAPP:

The programme successfully provided financial relief to many low-income families, ensuring they could meet essential childcare needs such as baby supplies, food, and healthcare. The structured withdrawal mechanism promoted both immediate and future financial support aligned with the child's development.

Furthermore, the programme had a significant positive impact on birth registrations. During the period under review, 95 percent of children born were registered on time, with very few late registrations. This improvement fostered better public service delivery by ensuring more accurate population data. Prior to the introduction of the PAPP, the estimated rate of registration was as follows:

- 2017 – 94 percent
- 2018 - 91.1 percent
- 2019 - 95.5 percent
- 2020 - 79.5 percent
- 2021 - 59.3 percent

d) Development Progress (2018 to 2022)

2018 to 2022: The PAPP was introduced and actively promoted, with strong participation from eligible families.

2020: Although the programme concluded on 31st July, 2020, challenges arose during the pandemic, such as delays in opening accounts and processing withdrawals. The Government provided support to ensure minimal disruption.

Post-2020: Feedback gathered through feedback forms from the programme's participants highlighted its positive impact on families. Suggestions to expand coverage and refine eligibility criteria are currently being considered in policy discussions to inform future programmes. To be eligible for the Programme:

- 1) The child must be born on or after 1st August, 2018;
- 2) The child must be a Fijian citizen by birth;
- 3) The child's parents or legal guardian must have a combined annual income of \$30,000 or less, or, if the father is not living with the mother, the mother's annual income must be \$30,000 or less;
- 4) The child's birth must be registered;
- 5) The child must have a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) issued; and
- 6) The applicant must be a Fijian citizen and resident.

Applications must be made within 12 months of the date of birth of the child. The PAPP has been an effective initiative, delivering financial support to families while encouraging timely birth registration.

We are committed to further evaluating its outcomes and working with stakeholders to explore improvements for similar programmes in the future.

3. In reference to page 14, the Committee notes that in April 2019, the Fiji Government launched a birth registration mobile application called the “e-services” under the digitalFiji application that enables public to register births online. Clarification is sought on the status of the application and how well the programme worked throughout 2018-2022.

Response:

a) Status of the Application:

The birth registration mobile service launched in April 2019 under the digitalFIJI initiative has significantly streamlined the birth registration process for parents in urban and semi-urban areas. However, we recognize that rural and maritime areas face additional challenges in accessing digital services due to factors like limited internet connectivity and geographical remoteness. This is one of the reason our awareness Team are targeting the remote and maritime areas to register births so that no one is left behind.

b) Challenges and Current Usage:

Despite the introduction of this digital solution, adoption has been limited. On average, we receive no more than two applications per month through the mobile registration platform. A key challenge is that many citizens in remote areas and some overseas customers are not yet aware of or familiar with the service.

c) Recommendations for Improvement:

To increase the effectiveness of the programme, we recommend the Ministry undertake nationwide awareness campaigns to ensure that parents and guardians understand how to access and use the service. Key aspects to promote include:

- Registration through the app is free.
- The first birth certificate is issued free of charge for every new registration.
- Encouraging parents to use this convenient service to avoid delays in birth registration.

d) Proposed Awareness Strategy:

Countrywide outreach: Teams from the Ministry can travel to remote areas and communities to demonstrate how to use the application. The new FY2024 – 2025 has a budget of \$50,000 to cater for all awareness programmes for the Ministry.

School and tertiary institution programmes: Awareness campaigns should be conducted in secondary schools and tertiary institutions to educate young adults, teachers, and parents about the app’s benefits and usage.

e) Impact Review (2018-2022):

While the mobile application has simplified the registration process for many, its potential remains underutilized. With increased awareness efforts, we expect a rise in online registrations and improved access to essential birth-related services.

We are committed to working with the relevant stakeholders to implement these awareness initiatives and ensure the mobile birth registration service reaches all Fijian citizens, both locally and overseas.

4. In reference to page 15, the Committee noted that there were certain agencies that co-hosted the awareness programme for the reported year and clarification is sought on the status of the REACH programme and the progress of the awareness programme throughout 2018-2022.

Response:

a) Overview of the REACH Program

The REACH (Rights, Empowerment, and Cohesion for Rural and urban Areas) programme has been a collaborative initiative involving multiple ministries, ensuring that no one is left behind. Through this programme, essential services—including marriage, birth, and death registrations are brought directly to communities, eliminating the need for people to travel or incur transport costs. This approach has significantly improved access to public services, especially for individuals living in remote areas.

2. Impact and Progress (2018–2022):

The REACH programme made significant strides by coordinating efforts among ministries to provide critical services at people’s doorsteps. As a result, many marriages, births and deaths were successfully registered during these outreach events, with the public expressing appreciation for the convenience and cost savings.

Tabulated below is the number of Roadshows the Ministry participated from 2017 - 2022:

Year	Number of Roadshows
2017	4 roadshows and also in partner with iTaukei Affairs on 6 awareness outreach programmes
2018	1 Government Roadshow
2019	3 Government Roadshows
2020	2 Government Roadshows and 1 iTaukei Roadshow
2021	None
2022	1 Roadshow

3. Challenges Due to COVID-19:

Unfortunately, the programme’s completion was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The last outreach activity was conducted at Sawani Village in Nadi, Bua before restrictions were imposed, and people were required to stay indoors. Due to these interruptions, the programme has not yet covered all parts of Fiji as initially planned.

4. Recommendation for Completion:

Given the programme's importance in reaching underserved communities, it is essential to resume and complete the REACH programme. We recommend that future outreach efforts focus on areas not yet covered to ensure that all Fijian citizens, regardless of location have access.

MRS. S. LIGANI.-

5. In reference to page 18, the Committee noted that the Ministry's work is guided by old Acts, and clarification is sought on whether there is an intention of reviewing these laws namely the Charitable Trusts Act 1945, Religious Bodies Registration Act 1881, The Money Lenders Act 1938 and The Credit Union Act 1954.

Response:

Registrar of Titles (ROT) is guided by legislations that include the Land Transfer Act 1971, Charitable Trust Act 1945, Religious Bodies Registration Act 1881 and the Registration Act 1879. Given that these laws, some of which date back to the late 19th century, are now archaic, there is an urgent need to review and update them. This would bring them in line with current societal expectations, improving the efficiency and accessibility of the Registrar of Titles' services. A review could be realistically initiated within the next 12-18 months, ensuring the laws are phased into relevance and providing clear benefits to both the ROT and the public.

6. In reference to page 20, the Committee noted the replacement of the manual system by the Registrar of Companies system and clarification is sought on the progress of this change.

Response:

The ROC office has a fully automated system which came into effect in June 2019 and all registration and lodgement for any business and companies are done online using the ROC portal.

The office is continuously trying to enhance the ROC portal and works closely with the Digital Government Transformation Office (DGTO) to improve certain aspects of the portal to make it user friendly as much as it can. One such major enhancement that the office was able to achieve is make the renewal of application automated, whereby any client who has lodged a renewal application for their businesses or companies now receive their renewal certificate instantaneously upon payment.

7. In reference to page 23, the Committee noted that \$300,000.00 was allocated for the opening of new offices in Nasinu, Lakeba and Rotuma for the decentralization of BDM services. The Committee seeks clarification if there are plans by the Ministry to decentralize other services such as managing of deeds and titles to other remote areas in Fiji.

Response:

The Registrar of Titles office based in Suva is the only Office that governs the Titles and Land Deeds dealings for the whole of Fiji. Current developments are underway on the digitization of the Titles Office on which there are engagements with ADB for technical assistance. Further, the Titles Office is expanding its services in providing searches to the general public through the Ministry of Justice Office in the Divisions around the country.

a. The Committee noted that the Strategic Development Plan for 2017 to 2022, established a target to develop 12 new BDM sites. Can the Ministry explain how well this target was achieved?

Response:

The Ministry of Justice in the decentralisation of its services was able to open 13 BDM offices around the country which were done in phases. Currently the services provided are not only for BDM office but also in expanding other services for Registrars of Companies and the Registrar of Titles Office of the Ministry. The office that was newly opened are 6 within Viti Levu, 3 in Vanua Levu and 4 in

the Maritime zones. The newly opened offices are Nasinu, Vunidawa, Korovou, Keyasi, Navua, Tavua, Nabouwalu, Taveuni, Savusavu, Levuka, Kadavu, Lakeba and Rotuma.

MRS. M. SOTUTU.-

8. In reference to page 25, the Committee seeks clarification on the meaning of the abbreviation CFA as listed under the Bankruptcy and Liquidation Receipt and Payment Analysis?

Response:

The abbreviation CFA in full is the Consolidated Fund Account of the Government which collects all revenue for all Government Ministries.

9. In respect to the Financial Rreport on page 24, the Committee seeks clarification on the reason(s) why revenue is collected for two separate years given that the budget allocated was for the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

Response:

The Ministry wishes to apologise in the misrepresentation of the graph shown and correctly it should be for one fiscal year 2018 – 2019.

2021-2022

10. In reference to page 12, the Committee noted that the Fiji Government had committed to the Asian and the Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade (2015-2024) and clarification is sought on the outcome of this resolution.

Response:

a. Overview of the CRVS Decade Commitment:

The CRVS Decade (2015–2024) is a regional initiative aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems to ensure that every individual in the region has legal proof of identity and access to public services. Fiji has been committed to this initiative, aligning national strategies with the CRVS goals to strengthen the registration of births, deaths, marriages, and other vital events.

b. Achievements and Outcomes (2015–2024):

Improved Registration Coverage: Fiji has made significant progress in increasing birth and death registrations, particularly through the REACH Programme and other outreach initiatives. Currently, 95 percent of births are registered on time, contributing to better population data management and public service delivery.

- Enhanced Access to Services:

The development of mobile registration services under the digitalFIJI initiative has provided additional channels for citizens to register births and access certificates online. This has streamlined processes and reduced barriers for families, especially those in rural and remote areas.

- Strengthened Inter-Ministerial Collaboration: As part of the CRVS Decade objectives, ministries and agencies have worked together to integrate data and improve coordination in managing vital statistics, ensuring the accuracy and consistency of national records.

- Legal Identity and Social Inclusion: With increased awareness of the importance of civil registration, citizens now have better access to education, healthcare and social services, as legal identity is a prerequisite for many public services.

c. Challenges and Next Steps:

COVID-19 Disruptions: The pandemic impacted registration efforts, particularly outreach programmes to remote areas, delaying progress in some communities.

Further Awareness Campaigns Needed: To achieve full registration coverage by 2024, continued awareness programmes are essential, particularly in remote areas and among marginalized populations. The Ministry will intensify efforts to promote mobile registration services and ensure that everyone benefits from the CRVS system.

d. Commitment to the Final Phase:

As the CRVS Decade approaches its conclusion in 2024, Fiji remains committed to achieving full registration coverage and strengthening vital statistics systems. We are actively working with stakeholders to identify gaps and accelerate progress in the final phase, ensuring that Fiji meets the CRVS Decade targets.

MRS. L. NAVOLACA.-

11. In reference to page 13, the Committee noted that there were 4,942 registered deaths for the reported year and clarification is sought on why there are delays in registering deaths.

Response:

The delays in registering deaths are primarily attributed to the following factors:

- 1) Lack of Awareness: Many individuals are unaware of the legal requirement to register deaths promptly.
- 2) Geographical Barriers: Residents in remote or rural areas face challenges in accessing registration services.
- 3) Administrative Delays: Sometimes, supporting documents such as medical certificates are not submitted on time.
- 4) Cultural Practices: Some families delay registration due to traditional mourning periods.

We are working on initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of registering deaths promptly and improving access to registration services. With increased public awareness, we aim to reduce the number of delayed registrations in the coming years.

12. The Committee noted that the 2022 report showed that no applications were received from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development to register Justices of Peace (JP) of the staff. Clarification is sought on whether the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development is continuing to register their staff as Justices of Peace.

Response:

The Justice of Peace application can be made to the Ministry of Justice offices simply by filling a form and providing the required documents such as valid photos, ID and police clearance. Individuals such as church leaders, community leaders, emerging leaders of society that are interested in undertaking Justice of Peace services in their community make such applications with the Ministry.

They undergo interviews if they are selected based on merits of having a good standing in society and can speak, read and write. Upon interviews, they are informed of whether they are successful, and the Ministry would prepare for their induction and swearing in ceremonies.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development is welcome to submit applications as per their need. The Ministry will also raise awareness with other government ministries on the importance of having registered JPs on staff to facilitate service delivery on the ground.

13. In reference to page 15, the Committee notes that with the new Registrar of Companies (ROC) system established in 2019, applicants can lodge online and receive business certificate instantaneously upon payment. The Committee seeks clarification whether there is a vetting process in place before any renewal certificate is issued.

Response:

There is no vetting process in place before any renewal certificate is issued since the vetting is done at the initial stage of registering a business. Vetting is only done when there are any changes to the business. These changes includes but not limited to; change in ownership, change in business activity, change in addresses and cessation of business names.

a. The table shows the times taken for processes to be implemented. Have targets been set to further improve these process times, and how well has the Ministry achieved the revised targeted process times?

Response:

The Office has 3-5 working days turn-around time on business and company registration from 2021 till to-date. This has improved ROC office's service delivery. This has been achieved through dedication. The ROC team has put forward in assisting the members of public. It is through the online system that the office has been able to manage its workload and maintain optimum standards on service delivery.

The 3-5 working days are basically to vet, verify and approve the applications as ROC has 3 stages of internal process to register the business or companies.

The ROC office is continuously working on processing the business and companies' application at least within 3 working days.

To reduce the processing time to less than 3 working days, the ROC office will need extra staff and IT equipment such as laptops, printers, scanners and WIFI since ROC office can process the applications online.

14. In reference to page 19, the Committee noted that the Ministry was allocated an Operating Budget of \$782,014.00 for Fijian Vaccine Pass with an actual expenditure of \$153,222. The Committee seeks clarification on the lapsed appropriation for this allocation and reason(s) why it was not fully utilized.

Response:

The lapsed appropriation was due to the short period in which the revised budget was given towards the closing of the Financial year 2021-2022. The main component of the budget was for Project staffs salaries which could be accommodated only for the last two pays when the Financial Year was closed.

15. The Committee noted that Graphs on pages 16 and 17 relate to discrete measures for which there are no trends. Clarification is sought on why did the Ministry choose to draw a line graph instead of bar graphs, as the issues graphed do not represent a trend?

Response:

The Ministry chose to use a line graph instead of a bar graph for displaying registration and bankruptcy statistics to highlight trends and changes over time more effectively. Line graphs are especially useful for illustrating patterns, as they allow for a smooth connection between data points, making it easier to observe any increases, decreases, or fluctuations across different time periods. This is essential for data like registrations and bankruptcies, where understanding trends, such as seasonal changes or long-term growth and decline, is often more valuable than comparing isolated values.

By using a line graph, the Ministry assist viewers to quickly grasp the overall trajectory of the statistics, leading to clearer insights for decision-making.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Madam PS and your delegation for those responses. Honourable Members, I will now open the floor for questions. I have a question, this one in particular that I put into the set of questions that we sent over to you, it is all about decentralisation. My question is basically on the issue of decentralisation because this is what I have faced throughout this year. I have people coming all the way from Saqani, right in the interior of Vanua Levu for the registration of their Deed. What I have been informed is that they is no office for registration in the North and understanding your responses, there is this engagement with Asian Development Bank (ADB). What is the timeline for this? When will this reach the offices in Labasa and Savusavu? You have the BDM in Savusavu and Labasa, we are thankful for that, what about other services? What is the accepted timeline because people will ask, we need to tell them something?

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman for the question. The ADB is finalising the preliminary report which we have had a chance to look at. It indicates that this will be a very very big exercise, approximately worth \$40 million for Registrar of Title (ROT) alone. In the next 12 months, we hope to be able to release the framework on the phases of implementation as well as find the funding. Like I said, ROT alone will cost \$40 million, if we do it for all the four registries, we envisage again from the preliminary report that has come out, it will go over on the north side of \$60 million. So timeline right now, I can only say that the final report should be out in the next couple of weeks, and then from there the recommendations and the timeline which we then will have to work with across the ministries and without the donor partners. Sorry, I cannot be more specific than that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, questions for our submittees?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Just a couple of questions, through you Chair, please. To PS and her team, in particular on the PAPP, I just wanted to know, was it taxed or not taxed?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Not taxed.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Okay.

Both honourable Usamate and I put exclamation marks after the 2021 estimated rate of registration, it went from 94.0 percent in 2017 down to 59.3 percent. He whispered to me that that was probably because the programme had ended by then.

I will ask my questions later, thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I want to congratulate the Ministry for the report that you have put in. I have a number of concerns and I would like to raise them with you. One is the whole issue of planning. One of the things that I have noticed that you had a strategic plan that I have had a look at. It does not seem to be well written. I have also had a look at your Costed Operational Plan for only one year, that is also not well written. Obviously in a good ministry, you have all these things in line, they are lined up to the National Development Plan. In the old development plan for 2017 to 2022, there were specific targets there for decentralisation. In this development plan, there is nothing here on your Ministry. So I am thinking, you are looking forward, you are going to learn from that, you need to move forward. As parliamentarians, we want to make sure the money that is given to you, you have a targeted plan to address it, and it gets done. So my request to you, how are you going to fix this because if you do not have a plan, you can end up anywhere and you think you are successful. If I look at your report, it is all about activities. Reporting should be on targets. How well have we achieved the targets? If the targets have not been articulated, then how well do we know that we have achieved what we are supposed to achieve? So those were my big concerns. Maybe I can get back some response from you on those issues.

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, through you, honourable Usamate, yes we accept that and we know that this has been shortfall in the Ministry. We have had a meeting with a donor partner this morning and that is exactly the issue that we have highlighted to the donor partner and this is what is in the plan, that by end of January, the donor partner has gone away, we will write up the TOR which we will then come and vet, the job that that person is to do, is to bring, is to verify, clean up, expand and clearly articulate our strategic plan, our COP business plan, align it to the National Development Plan.

Prior to coming to this meeting, I had a brief meeting with the honourable Minister and he has also again highlighted exactly what I just highlighted. We have learnt from that, from the period of 2017 to 2022 and again the difficulty of the separation of the Ministry of Justice as such in this National Development Plan, there are a whole set of factors that went into it. Primarily the main one was because it was consolidated into just one Ministry, both with us and the Attorney-General's Chambers. Now that we are separated, it is our intention, after this Committee meeting and the next two weeks to seek a meeting with the Planning Office at the Ministry of Finance, maybe it will not be in the plan as such, but some clear targets that we can work with the Ministry of Finance in how we can achieve our SDGs as well as achieve the National Development Plan targets. Yes, we have had that meeting this morning because we are also as concerned as you are that this was overlooked for the past couple of years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the gender analysis, I am thankful that you are going to give that in the future, but just of the top of it, what percentage of your staffing is female over the years, has that trend changed and especially I noticed that in your classification of your post, you have senior management executive and you have the Technical and Support in the GWE. In terms of the proportions of females in that top level, what would they be and what are the trends been the coverage of this plan from 2018 to 2022?

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Mr. Chairman, while Lavenia is just looking at the statistics which we had also just pulled up, there is definitely more women than men in the Ministry of Justice.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is that good?

MR. C. YABAKI.- No, not good.

(Laughter)

MRS. S. KURULECA.- She will just pull up the figures and

MS. L. NAVOLACA.- Currently we have 114 females and 61 males around Fiji with the Ministry of Justice.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So 60:30?

MS. L. NAVOLACA.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- And in your top category, your senior executive management, what percentage of that are females? I think you have three classifications – top level, technical and something and another one at the bottom.

MR. C. YABAKI.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, thank you honourable Usamate. There are females than males in the top positions.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Are you happy?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Last question before the honourable Bulitavu. I am very interested in one of your statements here that 95 percent of the registrations are on time. I want to take you to the table for the 2011-2022 report. If you look at this particular table, page 11, it talks about new birth registration for 4,019 for the first six months then another 5,000, that is about 9,000. And you look at the late birth registrations, it is 1,014 for the first few months then 5,000. So it is about 6,000 over 10,000, that is roughly 60 percent this late. You get my drift? So I do not understand where you are getting these figures that 95 percent of the registrations of birth is on time because from this one table, it is about 60 percent is late or do you have a different definition of where you said 95 percent is up to-date? Do you understand what I am saying? Can you just clarify, maybe my definition of on time registration is different from the one that you are using?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, through you, actually we have improved on the present one. We have done registrations where some places were not registered, students attending school and they were not registered. We have gone far so our outreach programme has developed that skills where they were registered; in remote areas, some in Ba, some were done in Lau. So we continue to do that outreach programme where we see children at school are not registered, not only for births but also for deaths and also for marriage. Some couples are living together they are not married. What they did, they wrote the date that they were together and we confirmed that it was done on the islands of Koro and Lau where the Marriage Officer did marriage initially on the spot and they were registered.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think what you are talking about is actual registration because in the documents here, you said “on time registration”. According to your own table, about 60 percent were late. How you are defining it is 95 percent are registered but not all on time?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes, not all on time.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Through you Mr. Chairman, *vinaka* Madam PS, as a long-time Member of the Committee to look at these annual reports from 2018 to 2021 is quite long (overdue). I thank, hope and look forward to the new leadership and also with the new Director Corporate Services that the timely reporting will come in, I guess it was due to the consultation that was there between then the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Attorney-General and now that you have a separate PS, the Ministry will be more focussed rather than before. I think the accounts before was run by one man but I hope that moving forward that things will improve with donor partners coming in also ADB plus the meetings you have mentioned this morning. I had a chance to respond to your Minister in the last sitting of Parliament with his Ministerial Statement on the outreach programme. I am thankful that that is being done in the rural areas, not only the registration of birth certificates, marriage but also the death certificates as well because sometimes our landowning units in the rural areas, they cannot achieve their 60 percent, when they go to the VKB because some have not been crossed off. So that service has really helped a lot especially to identify those who have passed on and also have that certificate that will allow them to cross it off.

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is the end of the decade of the CRVS to make sure that everyone is a legal person. You had the general statement that you are moving towards the accomplishment of that goal. I believe that that goal is that everyone that is born is registered, the statistics are produced, even the records are in place, et cetera. It has been ten years, how well has the Ministry progressed to achieving the requirements of that decade? What its targets were, what your mission was? I remember this because I was at the ESCAP when these things were discussed and I was part of the government delegation at that time, so I am very interested in where we are in terms of the aims for that decade.

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, we can definitely put together the targets that the Fijian Government had put against the decade and present that in a separate paper to the Committee.

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Vinaka*.

MRS. S. KURULECA.- I just wanted to respond to the comment made by honourable Bilitavu. Thank you very much for that. Just for the information of this Committee, this awareness and this outreach programme means that the team not only does the BDM but also the registration of companies and other services that the public needs. One upcoming awareness outreach programme is to Rotuma on 28th November, so what we envisage will happen, because of that, the other services that the Ministry does, we were going with FRCS to make sure that you register your TIN, we are going with FNPF. So if you are registering a company, make sure that your employees also get the FNPF benefits. So even though I think, over time, the perception of the Ministry of Justice is BDM, but there are other services. We are trying very hard, even I have corrected several times this week that we must refer to the Ministry of Justice services and not only BDM because of the other essential services that we provide that needs the other government bodies (FRCS, FNPF, Corrections, Elections). All of that tie back into the services that we provide.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, one of the reasons that I asked about the Ministry, one of the questions was whether you still have a targeted approach to get the Ministry of Rural Development people as JPs because you notice, in your earlier reports, there was a separate line there for JPs that come from that Ministry. Obviously there is a reason for that because they are all over the place; that was why that question was there. In your earlier reports, there was a separate line – JPs from this particular Ministry. That is why we were interested whether there is still that trend that you were working with them to register their staff, to make sure that people have access to the service? Is that something that you still work together with that particular Ministry to make sure that you can provide that JP service in the rural and maritime areas?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Mr. Chairman, yes JPs has grown throughout Fiji where we have registered them as JPs. We are working with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs for the *Mata ni Tikina* to help our people in the rural areas and also with rural maritime. For your information, honourable Members, you are all JPs as well under the law. We have increased our target in areas where we have only one or two but we have increased. Its flocking with applications and we are also targeting the retired civil servants to help out in the communities in terms of the need.

Just adding on to what Madam PS had talked about in the registration of companies, it is also money given by the Ministry of Trade. So what we do, we register them. The teams going out to do registration because they need registration. We take the staff from FRCS and FNPF in terms of any help they could give. When they are registered they are able to get money from the Ministry of Trade and it is happening at the moment in rural areas. That is why we can see in Bua, a flock of people coming for registration of their small business companies.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Anymore questions?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is that grants for small micro enterprises? They need to have a TIN number before they can get the service.

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You talked about that “e” thing for the birth certificate, the registration that it was a bit of an issue because you said it is very low take up. I am just wondering how are you going to get people because there are more followers in this country than people. So I am just wondering what else we are going to do to make sure that people can use that or is it just a lack of awareness; why is it that people are not using it?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Sometimes it is the connectivity that hinders the registration. Also in some areas they use Digicel and Vodafone – some areas is catches, some it does not. So they are just comfortable coming face to face for registration.

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, maybe just an added comment and this is one of the questions I asked on Tuesday after I joined on Monday was, what is going wrong because there are more people, more registered mobiles in Fiji than there is actual population; I think three times more. Apart from low connectivity or no connectivity we still have a very set mindset of the face to face interaction. We need to tell people that it is okay that you do it on the machine. When talking with our BDM people, one of the very pointed comments that was made is, it is like having an ATM card and also the deposit and withdrawal slips. A lot of people still want to go inside the bank, never mind they have to line up for hours, but that is still the human interaction that a lot of our population seems to be still on that mode instead of the full digitalisation. So when you are talking about awareness or the move towards digitalisation, I think a lot more work needs to be done from a whole of government approach to get everyone on board, and also being very mindful that AI is coming but then a lot of the stuff on our phones is still not Fijian as such. So I am a Fijian and rural dweller and I cannot speak Fijian or Indian and cannot speak English, how on earth do I use this app if it is not language friendly. A bigger government approach would need then to be initiated to fix the problem instead of only worrying about the infrastructure.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, it was also what honourable Usamate asked about awareness. I see that the Financial Year 2024-2025 has a budget for \$50,000 to cater for all awareness programmes for the Ministry. How often do you use radio?

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Mr. Chairman, I will respond then I will allow the team to respond. It is a very small budget; I agree totally. So one of the things that we are exploring and we have had conversations with Walesi about this because Walesi is government-owned or FBC, so we are hoping that the radio broadcast, we have also identified personnel. We are now looking at the content of what is to go on this broadcast because everyone is still on the radio as well compared to trying to get out there and do all these awareness programmes. But having said that, coming from my experience in the bigger Ministry, we are very good at looking for money and I can assure you that this will take off.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just one more question. Do you currently have a Costed Operational Plan for this Financial Year?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Next time you will report, you will report against the target in that plan.

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Not just the series of activities?

MR. C. YABAKI.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, if there are no other questions from the honourable Members, are there any final comments from PS and her team?

MRS. S. KURULECA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to come and clarify this. We give you our assurance that we will improve, that this is lessons learnt from being a consolidated ministry to a standalone ministry. We are still getting our human resources into place. It is not an excuse but just to help with explaining where we have come from and where we intend to go.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Madam PS. Honourable Members, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I take this time to thank the Ministry of Justice as a whole. Madam PS, firstly congratulations again on behalf of the Committee on your appointment and your staff who are here with us this afternoon. Thank you very much ladies and gentleman for being here with us this afternoon. We take note of the comments that you have provided and we will be looking forward to your upcoming reports, should they come through the Committee, then we will be looking for more dialogue in the near future. Other than that, we wish you well and thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

The Committee adjourned at 3.17 p.m.

