



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review Report on the 2018 - 2019 Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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Chairperson's Foreword

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Review of the Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report 2018-2019*.

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

As part of the scrutiny process, the Committee received written responses from Ministry of Housing and Community Development together with additional information during the site visit. The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agency under review.

The Ministry's administrative history reflects consolidation, expansion, modernization, realignment and various achievements including integration of housing programmes, expansion of home ownership, formalization of informal settlements and strengthened partnerships with stakeholders.

The modernisation of rural housing development has sharpened focus on urban housing and settlement upgrading, the Ministry has evolved into a robust institution delivering accessible, affordable and sustainable housing solutions in alignment with Fiji's National Development Plan.

Furthermore 1,500 households were assisted through the First Home Ownership Initiative and leases were secured for 48 informal settlements. While Government continues to provide subsidies towards Public Rental Board and HART which supported vulnerable families.

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development expanded its Housing Assistance to fire victims which was extended to rural and maritime areas while Disability Housing Assistance continued through direct government funding. The Koroipita Model Town Project received co-funding from Fiji government, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Rotary Clubs of Fiji.

The following were some of the major highlights of the Ministry's activities for the year 2018-2019:

1. First Home Ownership Initiative was expanded to households earning \$50,001– \$100,000.
2. First Land Purchase Programme targeted households earning \$50,000 and below.
3. Debt Relief Assistance was introduced through the Housing Authority of Fiji hence eight household were assisted with the total sum of \$150,992.

4. The Informal Settlement Upgrading Program (ISUP) was strengthened with surveys, Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and engineering plans hence \$3.2 million was spent on squatter upgrading and resettlement.
5. Rural housing assistance program assisted household earning \$15,000 or below with material cost for housing.
6. Public Rental Board received \$1.3 million grant to assist 1,186 tenants with rental and social cost subsidies under the Public Rental Housing Subsidies program.
7. To support the vulnerable families the Ministry provided \$311,250 for the reconstruction and maintenance of the HART Village.
8. The Ministry assisted 27 families affected by accidental fire with total payout of \$135,000.

To conclude, I sincerely thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Community Development and their officials for their services and contributions to this review process and commend the implementation of our recommendations.

I am thankful to the Hon. Members, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo, Hon. Viam Pillay, Hon. Aliko Bia, Hon. Parveen Bala and Hon. Ketan Lal for their invaluable contribution and support.

I would like to thank the Secretariat for their dedication in compiling this report.

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



...

Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

Acronym

| | |
|--------|--|
| HART | Housing Assistance and Relief Trust |
| ISUP | Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme |
| NHP | National Housing Policy |
| NZMFAT | New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade |
| PRB | Public Rental Board |
| RISE | Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments |
| SO | Standing Order |

Committee Members

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

The Members of Committee are:



Chairperson



Deputy Chairperson



Member



Member



Member



Member

1.0 Introduction

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report for 2018 -2019 was tabled in Parliament on 20th November 2023 and it was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs pursuant to Standing Order 109(2)(b).

Standing Order 109(2)(b) empowers the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

1.1 Committee Procedures

Deliberations on the Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report for 2018-2019 commenced in January 2026. The Committee reviewed the report, prepared questions and sought clarifications on key issues of interest from the Ministry.

A public submission was held with the Ministry of Housing and Community Development on 28th January 2026. Upon receipt of all pertinent information addressing the Committee's queries, the report was finalised and subsequently endorsed on 6th March 2026.

During the site visit 17th February to 26th February 2026, the Social Affairs Committee visited the Cuvu Settlement in Nadroga, Ledrusasa Settlement in Votualevu in Nadi, Siberia, Vatia, Batanikama, Vunika and Vunivau settlement in Labasa where the Ministry of Housing and Community Development is currently undertaking its housing development projects.

Responses from the Ministry of Housing and Community Development can be accessed via the following link:<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 Background

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development was established in 2018 as a stand-alone institution, consolidating all urban housing previously under Ministry of Local Government. It was mandated to increase home ownership, improve access to affordable housing and strengthen community development for low and middle income households and informal settlements hence these establishment aligned Fiji's housing governance with the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

National Housing Policy (NHP) was first adopted in 2011 setting a vision of "Accessible and Affordable Housing for All". The NHP was an attempt to address the fragmented approach to housing policy and supply that existed at the time and provided an enabling approach to assist all stakeholders in the housing sector to collectively perform effectively.

The following policies outlined problems and issues in the housing sector during the review period (2018-2019) and addressed them with interventions across all dimensions of the housing sector:

- Public and Social Housing
- Informal Housing
- Regulatory and Institutional Reforms
- Planning Environment and Climate Change
- Land & Infrastructure Housing
- Residential Infrastructure
- Village Housing
- Building materials and Construction Industry

3.0 Key Findings

The Committee identified the following key findings:

- 3.1 The Committee noted that the Ministry attained development leases for 48 settlements around Fiji.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that the Ministry's First Home Ownership Initiative was expanded to include households earning between \$50,000 to \$100,000.
- 3.3 The Committee noted that there were not enough affordable homes available on the market to match the funds allocated to the grant recipient of the First Home Ownership Initiative.
- 3.4 The Committee noted the Ministry's effort to engage TLTB and landowners through Talanoa or consultation sessions to assist tenants.
- 3.5 The Committee noted that the Rural and Maritime Housing Assistance program assisted the Ministry in addressing significant housing challenges in the rural and maritime areas.
- 3.6 The Committee noted the lack of awareness to educate all stakeholders on formal and informal housing.
- 3.7 The Committee noted that the sitting tenants have ongoing dispute on the allocation of lots.

4.0 Recommendations

The Committee recommends the following

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that the Ministry must deliver development work on time and sitting tenants are given first priority to attain the developed land.
- 4.2 The Committee recommends that the Ministry should continue with its First Home Ownership Initiative and government must allocate more funding to provide more decent and affordable housing.
- 4.3 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Housing develop more housing models to assist the recipients of the First Home Ownership Initiative program.
- 4.4 The Committee recommend that the Ministry continue with high-level consultation on behalf of the tenants with TLTB and landowners.
- 4.5 The Committee recommends that Ministry must prioritize effective means of transporting building materials to those who qualify for Rural and Maritime Housing Assistance program.
- 4.6 The Committee recommends that Ministry of Housing create an awareness program regarding the importance of acquiring legal land and building proper houses.
- 4.7 The Committee recommends that the Ministry review its dispute resolution mechanism to address the allocation of lots.

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Analysis

(Information below is provided by the Ministry of Housing and Community Development)

5.1 SDG Analysis

SDG 11 Target: By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums. While housing is explicitly articulated in Target 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is a key component of sustainable development across all the goals. Good housing drives access to basic services, contributes towards inclusive growth, and supports the development of a sustainable future, with a direct impact on the factors that contribute or mediate the effects of climate change. Investment in affordable housing will therefore have a profound and direct impact on at least 14 of the 17 SDGs

5.2 Gender Analysis

5.2.1 Employees based on Gender 2018-2025

| Year | Female | Male | Total |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2018-2019 | 3 | 36 | 39 |
| 2019-2020 | 3 | 36 | 39 |
| 2020-2021 | 8 | 29 | 37 |
| 2021-2022 | 9 | 21 | 30 |
| 2022-2023 | 9 | 21 | 30 |
| 2023-2024 | 10 | 16 | 26 |
| 2024-2025 | 15 | 16 | 31 |

6.0 Conclusion

The Social Affairs Committee supports the Ministry of Housing and Community Developments effort in developing housing projects for lower and middle income earning Fijian Citizen and further provide financial assistance to residence in informal settlements who intend to have decent housing. The Committee entrust that the recommendations outlined in this report will support the Ministry in achieving its objectives by providing more efficient service to the people of Fiji.

Committee Members' Signature

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:

| Committee Member | E-Signature |
|--|---|
| Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu Chairperson |  |
| Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure Deputy Chairperson |  |
| Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Member |  |
| Hon. Viam Pillay Member |  |
| Hon. Parveen Bala Member |  |
| Hon Aliko Bia Member |  |
| Date: 6th March, 2026 | |

Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

SUBMITTEE: Ministry of Housing and Community
Development

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Parliament

DATE: Wednesday, 28th January, 2026

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST/WEST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS ON WEDNESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 11.17 A.M.

Present

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Hon. I.S. Vanawalu | Chairperson |
| Hon. A. Bia | Member |
| Hon. V. Pillay | Member |
| Hon. A.N. Tuicolo (virtual) | Member |
| Hon. P.K. Bala | Member |

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Housing

In Attendance:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Mr. Manasa Lesuma | Permanent Secretary |
| 2) Mr. Emosi Raqisei | Project Manager |
| 3) Mr. Timoci Naleba | General Manager, PRB |
| 4) Ms. Tepola Kulavati | Director Housing |
| 5) Mrs. Helen Koi | Senior Accounts Officer |
| 6) Mr. Poasa Verevakabau | Manager Finance, Housing Authority |
| 7) Mr. Francis Shackely | Senior Technical Officer |
| 8) Ms. Susana Rounds | Senior Policy Officer |

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, members of the public, secretariat, dear viewers, ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone who are here in this room, especially the viewers watching this public hearing session this morning.

At the outset, for information purpose, pursuant to Standing Order 111 of the Standing Orders of Parliament, all Committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, please note that this submission is open to the public and the media, and it is also being aired live via the *Walesi* platform and streamlined live on Parliament's website and social media platform.

For any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this morning that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. Please be advised that Standing Order 111, in the following circumstances, permit non-disclosure of information:

- National security matters;
- Third party confidential information;
- Personnel or human resources matters; and
- Committee deliberation and development of any Committee's recommendation within the report.

This is a parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act 1965. Please bear in mind that we do not condone slander

or libel of any sort. Any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts. In terms of protocol of this Committee meeting, please minimise the use of mobile phones and ensure all phones to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress.

I wish to also remind honourable Members and our guests that all questions to be asked are to be addressed through the Chairperson.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

Today, the Committee will be hearing a submission from the Ministry of Housing and Community Development. This is in relation to the Ministry of Housing and Community Development 2018-2019 Annual Report. Before us, we have representatives from the Ministry, and I would like to thank them for availing themselves to appear for this hearing. Due to the essence of time, you may give your response briefly. The Members will intervene with their supplementary questions during your presentation.

(Introduction of team from Ministry of Housing and Community Development)

MR. M. LESUMA.- I acknowledge and thank the honourable Committee for the opportunity to present our responses to the questions that were sent to the Ministry with regards to the 2018-2019 Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report. We have been issued 15 questions and the team has sent our responses to the Secretariat and hopefully we will be guided by the visual through the screen this morning. But I will try to be brief in my response, and the team will stand ready to assist me to clarify, should there be a need to clarify any questions or responses that will be presented this morning.

If I may begin, with regards to the financial performance of the Ministry, the questions raised:

Question 1:

What were the key revenue stream for the Ministry of Housing during this period, and how did they evolve over the years?

The Ministry's primary source of revenue for the 2018-2019 financial year is the government's budgetary allocation, which progressively increased to support the expansion of housing initiatives and operational needs.

The Ministry is a service-oriented agency rather than a revenue generating entity. Importantly, future revenue generation was anticipated through the sale of lots under the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme across 48 settlements where the Ministry holds development leases. These sales were expected to complement government funding and provide a sustainable stream of income to reinvest in the housing development. Allocations also supported key programmes such as the First Home Ownership Initiative, the Housing Assistance to Fire Victims, and grants to the social housing providers, including the Housing Authority, HART and Habitat for Humanity.

Question 2:

Can we provide insights into the major expenditures and how it has contributed to the operational efficiency?

The expenditure patterns in 2018, in the review period demonstrates the Ministry's focus on both operational delivery and capital investment. Operating expenditure totalled \$2.58 million, covering salaries for established staff...

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman through you, in regards to Question 1, as PS has mentioned, the development lease was with the Ministry for the 48 settlements and it was expected that the sale of these lots will complement Government funding. Did this happen?

MR. N. LESUMA.- Not in this period, honourable Member. We have actually completed Ledrusasa and Cuvu. There are others that we are still currently, with regards to the 48 that is mentioned in this response.

MR. E. RAQISEI.- There is a total of six that are currently at construction phase. We have one in Vuniika, Labasa. The ones in Lautoka are at Tore and Field 4. In Ba at Valewaquyaya and Tavela. Those are the projects that are currently at construction phase and one in the Central Division in Sakoca.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, so once you will complete this construction, then you will start to sell these lots.

MR. N. LESUMA.- Yes. We have a lot allocation policy that actually derives how much we can actually sell the lots, it depends on the total combined salary of the applicants themselves. There is an economic social survey that is conducted and through that survey, we are able to capture the data in terms of how much the combined salary each family is actually earning, and through that there is a formula that the Ministry uses to be able to determine what each family will pay. It is also subsidized by government, like for those who are earning less than \$50,000, there is a formula for that. They pay far less than what is expected for those who are earning more than \$50,000 or those sitting between the threshold of \$50,000 to 100,000.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman through you, PS, is there any timeframe for any of these development leases? By when will you be able to see it to the the....

MR. N. LESUMA.- For the six ongoing ones, we are now doing the process of lot allocations. That would be happening in this financial year and with the ones that are currently ongoing at the moment, we will be completing that towards the end of the year and that process will take place next year. For the ones that are almost completed now, the team as we speak, in the last weekend and likewise for this coming weekend, they will be at the Tavela because we have actually completed the works and they are now issuing letters and providing this much needed awareness so that those living in these settlements are made aware of the actual process. So, for that one that would probably be happening within this financial year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, PS have just mentioned about the formula. Can you let us know what the formula is because what I have heard that there has been some change in terms of payment from the tenants? So, what is the formula that you have now?

MR. N. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, for those earning more than \$50,000, there is a valuation that is done so we are able to know the value of the land according to the market rate. For those within the higher threshold in terms of their salary, they will have to purchase the land on market rate according to what the valuation is for the actual property. For those who are earning less than \$50,000, there is a subsidy that is actually offered through the Ministry, depending on the total income. If they are contributing 20 percent, 80 percent is subsidised by Government. If it is 30 percent, then 70 percent is offered by Government. If they are able to provide 40 percent, then 60 percent is offered by Government. That is currently the formula being used for those sitting in a threshold of \$50,000 and less sitting tenants.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS, you may continue.

MR. M. LESUMA.- .. and government wage earners, travel and communication, maintenance and operations, and operating grants. Of this, \$1.3 million was directed to operating grants and transfers, supporting subsidies and assistance to social housing providers.

Capital expenditure was substantially higher, totaling \$9.21 million, and underscored the Ministry's commitment to infrastructure development through informal settlements, upgrading, resettlement programmes, and development leases, and targeted support to providers such as the Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART), Habitat for Humanity, and the Public Rental Board (PRB), alongside the debt relief initiatives. These investments were aligned with the National Development Plan and contributed to improved housing accessibility.

Operational efficiency was enhanced by consolidating rural and urban housing programmes under the Ministry, reducing duplication and ensuring streamlined service delivery. On policy and regulatory framework, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman through you, while we are on Public Rental Board, we are getting all sorts of comments in regards to those tenants who have been asked to move. What is the current status of that? Is PRB going to compensate, are you going to find a land for them to resettle? What is the real story about them?

MR. T. NALEBA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, the condition of the building is unsafe, and that is public information now. In terms of relocating them, we have been working closely with the Ministry in terms of financial assistance. Yes, it has yet to come through to PRB, but I know PS is making some arrangements to have that done.

In terms of relocating them immediately, PRB has a few flats available right now. Those who qualify are moved into our empty flats. Some have opted to travel back to the village. For those, we normally pay for their logistics. A few have opted for that, and we have paid for their transportation back home to the villages. Two already, one to Vanua Levu and one to Ra. Others have applied for housing authority, the new developments that are currently ongoing that that has yet to be confirmed, because they have their own procedures. Some have qualified in the first assessment. I know that ten will go to the barrel draw which will determine the final outcome.

Those with social welfare assistance, we have had discussions with HART if they can be moved to some empty flats provided by HART. The HART facilities right now have empty ones, but are run down. We are asking them if we could repair, but then there has to be some arrangement on the maintenance and ownership of those buildings, because there is a substantial amount of money that PRB has to put in to fix those homes. That, so far what PRB is currently doing.

Question 3:

What major changes in National Housing Policy were implemented during this period and how did they impact service delivery?

MR. M. LESUMA.- The Ministry's work during the 2018-2019 period was guided by the National Housing Policy (2011), which set the vision of "Accessible and Affordable Housing for All", recognising the evolving challenges in the housing sector. The Ministry initiated a review of the policy with the technical support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The review aimed to upgrade strategic interventions and provide clearer guidance for stakeholders.

In terms of programme delivery, the First Home Ownership Initiative was expanded to include households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, with grants of \$5,000 for purchasing and \$20,000 for constructing first homes. For households earning \$50,000 or below, the grant was increased to \$15,000 for purchasing and \$30,000 for constructing. Additionally, the First Land Purchase Grant at \$10,000 was introduced to assist households in securing residential land. These changes broadened access to housing assistance and ensured inclusivity across the income categories.

Question 4:

Were there any amendments to regulations that directly affected the members of the public?

Our response is, yes. During the 2018-2019 review period, there were policy adjustments and programme expansions that directly affected the members of the public. Though not in the form of sweeping legislative amendments, the most significant changes were tied to the First Home Ownership Initiative and related to housing assistance programmes.

As I had raised in my earlier response, for those earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 became eligible for grants to \$5,000 to purchase and \$20,000 to construct their first homes, and those again earning less than \$50,000 or below, the grant was increased to \$15,000 for those purchasing and \$30,000 for those constructing. In addition to that, the First Land Purchase Grant of \$10,000 was introduced to assist families in securing residential land. These changes directly impacted the public by expanding eligibility, increasing grant amounts and providing new pathways to home ownership. The Ministry also facilitated debt relief assistance through the Housing Authority, allowing households facing genuine financial hardship to restructure or reduce their mortgage obligations.

Furthermore, the regularisation of the land ownership was supported by Government grants to cover survey costs, enabling more Fijians to obtain registered land titles and secure tenure. Together, these programmes and adjustments functioned on regulatory changes in practise, since they altered eligibility criteria, benefit levels and access to housing support.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in regards to Question 4 and the First Home Ownership for the construction of first home programme, it is a very good programme. The data down below shows the number of Fijians who have benefited. Are there challenges faced by the Ministry in providing this initiative to the communities?

MR. M. LESUMA.- We do not see any challenges. One of the challenges that we used to have in the past was the delays in processing. However, we have managed to formally establish a portal, where people can apply online.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman through you, what I am trying to say, the demand must be very high for this programme.

MR. M. LESUMA.- The demand is high, but as we speak, the funds are never exhausted. One of the problems that we are now trying to fix now is the shortages of homes. We feel that there was a lot of limitations particularly because people did not have enough, there was not enough homes available in the market which was also one of the contributing factors during that period. However, we found that even in years after the 2019 period, we did not exhaust the grants. It was still available, because it really depended on those who qualified and those who applied.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, Permanent Secretary when you mentioned that there are not a lot of homes available on the market, do you mean that the allocation per household cannot match the homes available, or simply there are no homes available in the market?

MR. M. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in both scenarios. We did not have enough homes. As we speak, Housing Authority is not only selling the land, but we are now building homes and making that available.

We also see, in terms of our assessment of the increase in formal settlements, a classic example is those coming all the way from Labasa with expired leases along Cunningham Road. They have the means to buy a home, but most of them are in that *vakavanua* arrangement because there is just not enough available in the market at the moment. We feel if we are able to address by providing more homes, it will help us with the problem faced with informal settlements.

In terms of those who cannot afford, we are also in the process of reviewing this same initiative as we speak now, we are yet to submit this to Cabinet. Because we have also realised that even though we target those earning less than \$50,000, the banks are only serving those in the upper threshold of that. Those between \$30,000 to \$50,000, the banks are easily serving these customers. Those that are left out are those earning less than \$30,000. We are trying to re-modify this policy so that we are able to also, there is a targeted intervention to help those in the lower part of the threshold. Most of those also living in our informal settlements are within that threshold. Hopefully, that goes through to Cabinet, a pilot programme that we also have initiated and if that is endorsed by Cabinet, then that is probably another way of assisting those that probably would not be able to afford a home.

Question 5:

With regards to infrastructure development, what were the key infrastructure p projects or capital works undertaken in 2018-2019?

Infrastructure development was a central focus of the Ministry's work during the period. Key projects included the completion of low-cost housing developments in Kalabu, Naqere, and Simla, funded through government capital grants exceeding \$9 million. The

Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme also received significant investment, with \$10.5 million allocated and \$3.2 million utilised to facilitate squatter upgrading and resettlement. These projects provided access to essential services such as water, sewerage, drainage, and electricity, while securing tenure through 99-year leases.

HON. P.K. BALA.- PS, how many development leases do you have right now for informal settlements?

MR. M. LESUMA.- We still have 48.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Out of 48, how many development leases have expired?

MR. E. RALISIA.- There is currently a few of the settlements, around 14 that have expired, and we have been going with ongoing consultations with the iTLTB and also the land owning units for the renewal of the leases. But in some cases, the landowners are quite reluctant to extend the leases again, but we are still having consultations with them. Hopefully they will give the approvals for consents.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the reason why I raised that, because initially, a large sum of money has been paid to iTLTB to be provided to the respective *mataqali*. The understanding was that there has to be development because it is a win-win situation. What you have said and what I have been hearing, there are a lot of development leases that were obtained are now not renewed. The money that was initially given has gone down to the drain. If that is the case, then what will happen to the tenants that are residing in those respective informal settlements where the development lease will not be renewed?

MS. T. KULAVATI.- Mr. Chairman, just to respond to the honourable Member's question, the amount that has been invested with iTLTB through the processes of the planning phase of the informal settlements, what they had highlighted to us was that the landowners did not see development happening as of yet, over the years. So, they were reluctant to actually renew the leases but the Ministry has been working in having a consultant to carry out the scheme, the geotechnical, the topographic, and EIA. That takes time because we have to liaise with our stakeholders and get their comments, and sometimes that prolongs the processes.

We have an understanding now with iTLTB through information sharing and consistent briefs that has been provided to them to continuously conduct awareness with the landowners that planning phase is being conducted. And we are looking at once consultations has been done and approval of the engineering plans, that we will go into construction. We carry on from there and request for budget for construction.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You have not answered my last bit of question and that was, those informal settlements where there was development lease and now with those leases not being renewed, what will happen to the sitting tenants? Are they going to go back into that *vakavanua* arrangement or the Ministry will intervene or iTLTB will intervene?

MR. M. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, we understand where the honourable Member is coming from. This is a challenge that the Ministry is currently facing. We are still continuing to engage with iTLTB to convince the landowners. The concern raised by the honourable Member is a concern that we are also very much concerned about because if that happens, then they will be sitting again on that *vakavanua* arrangement, which we do not want.

I think the solution to this problem is more *talanoa* and consultation with the landowners. We are able to tell them in terms of the improvements and the challenges that government has. Whilst there are 48 government leases, with the number of contractors that are available in the market, we can do the whole, if all the work that has been raised by Madam Director, in terms of the engineering plan, et cetera has been completed, there are enough contractors to do the work.

The issue is that these works are very costly (civil works). For three communities that we do, it would probably cost us more than \$15 million just for three communities. It is a commitment that is done in the first year and we try and ask the Ministry of Finance, this would be the commitment for the second year. If you give us \$15 million for these four communities this year, next year it would be this much. Would the Ministry of Finance be able to support us? So, most of the problems that we have had was, how much government can afford to do these projects? Whilst that probably contributes to the delay in some of the civil works that we do, we are doing our level best in meeting with the landowners to convince them to extend those that have expired.

Also, what we have done is, we are also now working with a non-government organisation which is called Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments (RISE). We have come up with a plan where we have given them the 48 informal settlements that we have and we have also identified those that we will not be able to do in the next two to three years. So, what RISE does is, they come up with various engineering interventions to help the community. What we have actually done, it is still in its early stages.

For those communities that we probably would not reach in the next two or three years, we are now engaging with these non-governmental organisations to work on these communities; to put into implement better drainage or better roads whatever civil works. It is not going to be a duplication of work when we come in but they will be slowly addressing some of the civil needs of the community while we continue with our Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme (ISUP)..

Hopefully through that, the landowners will be convinced that government still has a plan to come to their settlements and communities. Because we have noted the issue that have been raised by the honourable Member is a problem if we do not engage more with the communities. If we are able to come up with a solution with regards to our engagement with RISE, then that is an added bonus for us particularly in helping convincing the landowners that eventually we will reach them for the civil works.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I will tell you why this was brought in at the first place. This was to protect landowners and for them not to run around for money when this *vakavanua* arrangement was there. We all know that obtaining 48 development leases, we cannot start work at one point in time. I know people are saying that we have not done that. That was not the idea. The idea was to make things easier for the landowners so that they get their money on a timely manner. If these are renewed, then again they will get that type of money, rather than them running to each door and collecting money - \$50, \$100, \$200. So, if you can take note of this, this was the initial idea.

MR. M. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, we have taken note of the comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, PS, for that. Let us continue with our presentation.

MR. M. LESUMA.-

Question 6:

How did the Ministry ensure sustainability in its infrastructure development plans?

Sustainability was ensured by incorporating climate-resilient designs and aligning projects with the National Development Priorities and the SDGs.

Question 7:

Were there any delays or budget overruns on major projects and what measures were taken to mitigate them?

While some projects experienced delays, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, due to land tenure negotiations and contractor capacity, the Ministry mitigated these challenges through phased implementation, stricter monitoring and reallocation of funds.

Question 8:

With regards to affordable housing, since 2014 Home Ownership Grant was given to 1,569 Fijian households. As per table, please provide the breakdown.

In the table before us, honourable Committee Members, the reporting period of 2018-2019, the First Home Ownership Initiative was expanded to include households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, with grants of \$5,000 for purchasing and \$20,000 for constructing first home. Additionally, in the period of 2018-2019, the first land purchase grant of \$10,000 was introduced to assist households in securing residential land.

In the table before you, in the period of 2017-2018, there was a total of 1,569. But in the reported period of 2018-2019, there were two new interventions introduced by the Ministry, which were Category Two for the First Home Initiative for those earning between \$50,000 to \$100,000 and also the First Land Purchase Grant of \$10,000 that was introduced to assist households in securing residential land.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, PS if an updated list can be also provided as of current date.

MR. M. LESUMA.- We will do that, Mr. Chairman.

Question 9:

For Housing Accessibility, can the Ministry update on its informal settlement upgrading programme initially planned for Sakoca, Tavela, Field 4, Tore, Lovu Seaside, Nabare, Delai Saweni, Valewaquyaya, Vunika, Caubati, Wakanisila, Sasawira, Nadonumai, Tauvegavega, Tukutora, Vunivau A and Vunivau B.

This, honourable Members and Mr. Chairman as tabulated before you. For Vunika, Vunivau A and Vunivau B, this is actually in Labasa. For Vunika, construction is now progressing, which is 5 percent completed.

For Vunivau A and B, also in Labasa, both are in planning phase, scheme plans are being prepared. For Valewaquyaya and Tauvegavega in Ba, Valewaquyaya - construction is 65 percent completed. Construction is currently in progress and planning phase for Tauvegavega. For Lautoka sites, for Field 4, we are now 92 percent completed.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, you mentioned about Tauvegavega, Ba. Initially when the scheme was done, I am just giving one example, there were about 100 houses. People (left, right and centre) have been building houses. How are you managing that? Are you taking into account the initial phase scheme plan that was done or revising that or are you going to leave those who have just come in now? What is the solution to that?

MR. E. RAQISEI.- For the projects in Tauvegavega in Ba, what the consultant has done is they are currently at engineering phase. The scheme plan has been approved, but in terms of the engineering, again they go back and see if there is anything that is obstructing the works or planned places where sewer lines or water lines are being placed. They are also being mindful of the current structures and those that have been built illegally.

In terms of what the team is doing, we have a monitoring team at the Ministry that also goes out and sees if there are any illegal extensions or illegal construction, where tenants are issued with stop-work notices. During the construction phase, should those legal extensions are still existing, we also give them a notice through the Development of Informal Settlement Act, and there are also ways where we can give them notice to remove any illegal construction to allow works to be done.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Those whom you are mentioning now, if they had built their houses after the scheme, where the roads have come in or something like that when the engineering plan will be done, what I am asking is, those who came after the survey was done — will they be considered?

MS. T. KULAVATI.- Mr. Chairman through you, they will be considered once we conduct the lot allocation exercise, because they came in after. If their lots are not in obstruction of the construction, they will purchase the lot at market price, because they were not captured initially, before the engineer went into to do the scheme plans and engineering plans and because they came and illegally constructed their homes, they will purchase the lot at market price.

MR. M. LESUMA.- For Field 4 in Lautoka, it is 92 percent completed. For Lovu, Nabare, and Delaisaweni, these are all in planning phase, with tender evaluation. For Tukutora, this is still in planning phase, likewise with Tore, 95 percent completed and construction is ongoing; and for Tavela in Nadi, it is 99 percent completed, and we are now also carrying out lot allocation processes for the Tavela site. For Nadonumai in Lami, this is still in planning phase. For Caubati in Suva, we are now in the tender documentation phase with procurement office. For Sakoca, we are also 92 percent complete and Wakanisila and Sasawira in Nasinu and Nausori, they are both in planning and engineering plan phase.

Question 10:

Rural Maritime Housing - How did the two rural housing assistance schemes support the Fijian households with an annual income up to \$15,000?

The rural maritime housing assistance programme was transferred to the Ministry in 2018-2019, consolidating all housing programmes under one roof. The programme targeted households earning \$15,000 or below annually and offered two types of assistance:

- Under Scheme One – applicants paid the full cost of materials while benefiting from Government tender pricing and free delivery, which was particularly valuable for maritime communities.
- Under Scheme Two – applicants paid one-third of the material cost, with the Ministry covering the remaining two-thirds.

This programme addressed the significant housing challenges in the rural and maritime areas where nearly half of Fiji's population resides and many homes are of poor quality.

Question 11:

Subsidies for Public Rental Housing – How is the Ministry of Housing monitoring the rental areas handled by the Public Rental Board from the tenants?

The Ministry monitors the rental areas managed by the Public Rental Board through the combination of grant oversight, subsidy criteria and tenant compliance mechanisms. Each year the Government provides grants to PRB to subsidise rental costs for low-income households, and the Ministry ensures that these subsidies are applied according to established eligibility frameworks. For example, under the 2016 and revised 2021 subsidy criteria, tenant contributions are calculated based on weekly gross income after statutory deductions with the minimum contribution set to ensure fairness. The Ministry reviews PRB's reports on how subsidies are allocated, the number of tenants assisted, and the utilisation of government grants.

Monitoring also involves regular audits and financial reconciliations to confirm that funds are used for their intended purposes. For the period, PRB received \$1.3 million in government grants, which assisted 1,186 tenants, out of which 912 were supported through rental subsidies and 274 through social cost subsidies. These figures were reported back to the Ministry and verified against expenditure records.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman through you, just a matter of interest. During our site visit to the Public Rental Board, we were taken to Navua. Any update on that?

MR. T. NALEBA.- Mr. Chairman through you, honourable Member, we are currently doing the geotech assessment of the area, knowing that that area is near the river. We have done the first initial assessment, and they have recommended a few methods that we can take, but we have asked them to do a full geotech assessment. Also we have done the advertisement for house construction, for engineers to recommend the methodology without having to do geotech requirements for all, but only for specific places where we will build a house because the cost will be too high if we do for all the areas, which is which is 10 acres. So instead of 10 acres, we just put it on 800 square metres per lot.

MR. M. LESUMA.-

Question 12:

Can the Ministry update on the type of assistance provided for Assistance and Relief Trust for the Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART)?

The HART continued to provide shelter and support to vulnerable families, particularly women and children with little or no regular income. In 2018–2019, government grants enabled the reconstruction of housing blocks and maintenance of HART villages, directly assisting 832 families across the Central, Western, and Northern Divisions. These interventions not only provided safe housing, but also empowered individuals to become resourceful and productive, contributing to long-term poverty reduction.

Question 13:

With regards to Sustainable Development Goals – How well has the Ministry of Housing and Community Development achieved all its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The Ministry's programmes contributed directly to Fiji's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ISUP aligned with SDG11 by making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

The First Home Initiative and Rural Housing Programmes supported SDG1 (No Poverty) by reducing housing insecurity. Partnerships with HART and Habitat for Humanity advanced SDG5 (Gender Equality) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities) by ensuring vulnerable groups have access to housing assistance. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrated the Ministry's role in advancing national and global development priorities.

Question 14:

Gender Equality - Please provide the number of staff as per the table below.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, in the reported period, there were 36 males and 3 females staff, a total of 39 under the Ministry of Housing. As we speak, we have 35 staff, with 20 males and 15 females. There is a great increase in the number of females now working in the Ministry of Housing.

Question 15:

With regards to Performance - Please explain how well you have performed against the targets of your operational and strategic plans?

Overall, the Ministry performed strongly against the operational and strategic targets in the reported period. Key achievements included the expansion of the First Home Initiative, initiation of settlement upgrades under the ISUP programme, the consolidation of rural housing programmes and the delivery of subsidies to social housing providers. While some capital projects underspent due to the demand driven nature of grants and delays in land tenure processes, the Ministry ensured that all applications received were assessed and that resources were utilised efficiently.

A strategic alignment with the National Development Plan and the National Housing Policy provided a clear framework for delivery, ensuring measurable progress in accessibility and affordability and inclusivity.

With that, Mr. Chairman and honourable Committee Members, are the responses for the 15 questions that was sent to the Ministry with regards to the 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Also further to that Mr. Chairman, the secretariat had also emailed and provided a request if we could provide any administrative history of the Ministry of Housing, we will forward that to the secretariat so the Members are able to understand and made aware of this information.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much PS for the in-depth presentation. On that note, honourable Members any further supplementary questions?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman through you, PS and the team, thank you for a very thorough presentation this morning. Just out of curiosity, a comment, maybe a question that would come later as well. I grew up in an informal settlement as well and looking at the housing issues that we currently have which have dragged on from previous years, this is an issue, that if not taken as a concern, it will become a crisis. As the role of government and as Members of Parliament, we have not put more emphasis on the issue of affordable housing. And when you look at one of the fundamental basic human rights is the right to affordable housing.

My worry is, with the growing numbers of informal settlements in the urban and city areas, do you think that there is a need for more initiative to be brought to government and as Members of Parliament as well, so that more affordable housing is there for the people? In terms of awareness, I believe that more awareness should be done to our education system, because the informal settlement issue, I have a Melanesian background, this is a generational issue.

Growing up, we thought that it was right living in this illegal settlement. But I think awareness and in terms of education need to go down right to our education level to educate our students that you need to build proper housing, you need to have a legal land so that you can build a proper house. Because the way we are working right now is that we are reactive to issues that are happening now. When there is an increase in informal settlement, then there is a drive to have more housing initiative; that is my concern. Like you have said PS, it is a two-way system here – one is from government and the other is from the ministry working very hard to get things on the ground.

MR. M. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, the comments raised by honourable Member is a good one. I have never thought of it that way in terms of providing awareness to the schools, it has always been targeted to those that are currently employed (adults). We have been working with organisations to provide this awareness, never have I come across the need for us to raise this awareness to the schools. We will definitely look at that and see how we do that package for the schools.

I totally agree in terms of more initiatives that needs to be implemented to assist or to support home ownership. There are few that we are also looking at that we are still waiting to get through to Cabinet. Government, we have been directed through Cabinet to come up with a resettlement, relocation and resettlement programme for the next five to 10 years for the informal settlements. So, that is the work that we are also doing and we hope after this relocation, those that will be relocated will be able to get a title through lease arrangements with iTLTB. We are also working with iTLTB and Ministry of Lands to address some of those

issues. We totally agree that a lot of the work that we are now doing also in the past years up until now are very much reactive because there has never been enough housing stock available in the market which is something that we are now aggressively trying to address.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS, just an added value to what we have discussed here this morning on the item on gender equality. Looking at the figures that you have submitted today, remember that is a national issue when we talk about SDGs. Hopefully, you can improve on that in our next reporting. Currently, whatever is up we do appreciate that. It will help us in our deliberation especially when we talk about SDGs when trying to submit this Report back to Parliament for tabling.

Secondly, we are still in a draft format finalizing our reports. Maybe there is a need to get some correspondence back to us on what are the major challenges that you face. We have been through the report, we scrutinized the report and we believe there is a huge task for the Ministry to come up initially at state level and from there we will try to help you out in accommodating your request when we table to Parliament before it is actually debated. They call it a process whereby we will help you out in addressing the recommendations that will be tabled and debated in Parliament.

That is just a thought that you can go back and submit back to us in due course. We are thinking about by next sitting to table this to Parliament. On the 17th, for the next nine days, we will be doing our site visit exercise. That is our normal process and procedure which we have to undergo. Whatever discussed today is more or less like theory, actual on the ground, it will determine when we do our site-visit exercise.

Honourable Members, any other important notes?

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- (Inaudible)

MR. M. LESUMA.- Mr. Chairman, the Ministry does not have any properties that is on offer for rent unless Housing Authority....

MR. P. VEREVAKABAU.- Mr. Chairman, we just have an office space at our building at Valelevu which is leased out to Police Prosecution at a rate that is adopted from 1990s. So, it is not at a commercial rate at the moment. There was no review of the rental.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- At this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you all for availing yourselves especially PS and your team for this public hearing session. We thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourselves for any further queries that the Committee may have on today's submission.

The Committee adjourned at 12.20 p.m.