



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review Report on the 2022-2023 Ministry of Itaukei Affairs, Culture and Heritage 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 *Review Report on the 2022-2023 Ministry of Itaukei Affairs, Culture and Heritage Annual Report*.

This report reflects the Committee's deliberations and key observations arising from the public hearing held on 12 November 2025. Our analysis identified critical areas requiring attention, including financial sustainability, digital transformation, cultural heritage preservation and governance reforms.

The Committee notes that revenue from VKB registrations and board fees remains minimal, resulting in heavy reliance on government allocations. While commendable progress has been made in digitising VKB records and expanding registration to overseas communities, challenges persist in mobilising participation and ensuring secure digital access. Similarly, the preservation of manual records and the rehabilitation of heritage sites such as Levuka demand urgent and sustained investment.

Policy reforms, including the re-establishment of the Great Council of Chiefs and the introduction of the Fiji National Cultural Policy, mark significant milestones. However, effective implementation will require adequate resourcing and stakeholder engagement. The Committee also acknowledges efforts to strengthen leadership capacity, promote gender equality, and align initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals. Nonetheless, gaps remain in performance reporting, customary title resolution and rural development strategies.

In light of these findings, the Committee has formulated targeted recommendations aimed at enhancing financial autonomy, accelerating digital transformation, safeguarding cultural heritage, and improving governance and transparency. These recommendations underscore the need for innovative funding mechanisms, robust digital infrastructure and integrated approaches to rural development and cultural preservation.

The Committee trusts that these insights will guide the Ministry in addressing current challenges and advancing its mandate to protect and promote iTaukei heritage, governance, and socio-economic development. The Committee supports initiatives that will uphold the cultural identity and well-being of all iTaukei communities.

I take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Secretary and management of the Ministry for their services and contributions to this review process.

I also thank the Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo, Hon. Aliko Bia, Hon. Viam Pillay and Hon. Parveen Bala, for their invaluable input and support.

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



.....

Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

Acronym

GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
MP	Member of Parliament
SO	Standing Order
TLAT	ITaukei Lands & Appeals Tribunal
TLFC	ITaukei Land Fisheries Commission
VKB	Vola ni Kawa Bula

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). Members of the Committee are:



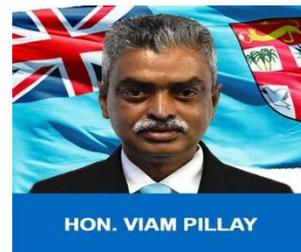
HON. ILIESA SOVUI
VANAWALU

Chairperson



HON. RATU RAKUITA
S. VAKALALABURE

Deputy Chairperson



HON. VIAM PILLAY

Member



HON. ALIPATE TUICOLO

Member



HON. PARVEEN KUMAR

Member



HON. ALIKI BIA

Member

1.0 Introduction

The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture and Heriatge 2022-2023 Annual Report was tabled in Parliament on 14th March 2025, and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Standing Orders 109 (2)(b) allows 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 Ministry of Itaukei Affairs Annual Report commenced in October 2025. The Committee read through the reports, prepared questions and sought clarifications on key issues of interest, from the Ministry.

The Committee held Public Submission with the Executives of the Ministry of Itaukei Affairs on 12th November 2025.

Upon receipt of all pertinent information pertaining to the Committee's queries, which was subsequently endorsed on 13th February 2026.

The responses from the Ministry of Itaukei Affairs can be viewed at the following link <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 Background

The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage & Arts Annual Report 2022–2023 outlines the Ministry’s efforts to strengthen good governance, cultural preservation and socio-economic empowerment for the iTaukei people. The report is prepared in accordance with the Financial Management Act 2004, which requires government ministries to present audited financial statements and updates on their operations to Parliament.

During the reporting period, the Ministry continued to advance its vision of a transformed iTaukei family for a better Fiji, supported by strategic priorities in governance, wellbeing, cultural conservation, economic empowerment, and language preservation. The Permanent Secretary emphasized a shift toward iTaukei centred and community led approaches, strengthening collaboration with trusted local entities to ensure meaningful development outcomes.

Key functions highlighted in the report include:

- administration of iTaukei land, leadership and fisheries governance,
- safeguarding iTaukei language, culture and heritage,
- implementing national cultural and creative industry initiatives,
- formulating policies that advance iTaukei wellbeing and
- supporting national events, traditional governance structures and stakeholder forums.

Overall, the annual report provides a comprehensive account of the Ministry’s legislative responsibilities, achievements across its divisions and progress in strengthening the cultural, social and economic foundations of iTaukei communities in Fiji and abroad.

3.0 Key Findings

- 3.1 The Committee noted that the Revenue collection from VKB certificate and board fees is minimal.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that VKB registration for overseas iTaukei communities has expanded to the UK and Australia, but challenges remain in mobilising participation and ensuring secure digital access.
- 3.3 The Committee noted that the manual VKB records face preservation challenges despite digitisation efforts.
- 3.4 The Committee noted the re-establishment of GCC, and new policies require effective implementation to safeguard our culture.
- 3.5 The Committee noted Levuka heritage site rehabilitation and other cultural projects require significant funding beyond initial allocations.
- 3.6 The Committee noted that the filling of customary titles is hindered by funding constraints, population mobility and disputes.
- 3.7 The Committee noted that the ongoing Leadership training for iTaukei leaders needs strengthening.
- 3.8 The Committee noted Gender equality remains a challenge in technical roles and leadership representation.
- 3.9 The Committee noted the performance reporting and SDG alignment needs strengthening.
- 3.10 The Committee noted the Cultural heritage legislation is outdated and requires review.
- 3.11 The Committee noted that public engagement of the Ministry and transparency mechanisms require enhancement.
- 3.12 The Committee noted the Ministry's Financial challenges during 2022–2023 were addressed through prioritization and transfer of funds.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that the Ministry to establish a dedicated trust fund account for VKB-related revenue, strengthen partnerships with the iTaukei Trust Fund and develop income-generating initiatives.
- 4.2 The Committee recommends the development of a secure digital platform for VKB registration, implement robust cybersecurity measures and conduct targeted awareness campaigns through Fijian diplomatic missions to increase diaspora engagement.
- 4.3 The Committee recommends that the Ministry allocate resources for climate-controlled storage, strengthen the preservation unit, and secure additional funding for safekeeping of physical records.
- 4.4 The Committee recommends that the Ministry ensure adequate funding and capacity-building for GCC operations and expedite the rollout of the Fiji National Cultural Policy and related frameworks through stakeholder engagement.
- 4.5 The Committee recommends that the Ministry prioritize completion of Levuka rehabilitation, explore international funding opportunities and create more bi-lateral partnership with other international heritage sites and countries.
- 4.6 The Committee recommends the increase in the Ministry's budgetary allocation for title dispute resolution, implement mediation mechanisms, create economic opportunities and infrastructure development in rural areas to reduce migration.
- 4.7 The Committee recommends the Ministry to expand leadership training programmes such as Vuli Sausauvaki ni Vanua and succession planning initiatives, ensuring coverage across all provinces.
- 4.8 The Committee recommends the Ministry to formalise gender representation targets at executive levels, finalise the MOU with Soqosoqo Vakamarama, and implement gender-based violence awareness programmes across provinces.
- 4.9 The Committee recommends the Ministry to improve monitoring and reporting systems to track progress on SDGs.
- 4.10 The Committee recommends the Ministry to expedite review of archaic cultural laws and enact the Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture (TKEC) Bill to protect intellectual property and enable income generation.
- 4.11 The Committee recommends the continuation of nationwide roadshows, stakeholder forums and institutionalise feedback mechanisms to inform policy development.
- 4.12 The Committee recommends for the Ministry to develop a medium-term financial strategy to reduce reliance on ad hoc reallocations and ensure predictable funding for critical projects.

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Analysis.

This information below was provided by Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

The Ministry's work aligns broadly with SDGs through environmental sustainability (e.g., natural resource management), cultural preservation (e.g., ICH safeguarding), and social inclusion (e.g., empowering iTaukei well-being and good governance):

This includes:

SDG 1 (No Poverty) — economic empowerment programs and allowances (Turaga ni Koro, Mata ni Tikina) support livelihoods/household resilience.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) — wellbeing/food & nutrition programs (component of Wellbeing strategic priority).

SDG 3 (Good Health & Wellbeing) — WASH and community resilience components under Wellbeing.

SDG 4 (Quality Education) — language/culture promotion, leadership curriculum and capacity building.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality) — COP promotes non-discrimination and social inclusion, gender mainstreaming.

SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities) — village governance, demarcation, and community planning.

SDG 13 (Climate Action) — conservation, ridge-to-reef approach, resilience and disaster preparedness.

SDG 15 (Life on Land) — conservation & preservation of natural resources, protection of catchments, traditional knowledge use.

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions) — strengthened vanua governance, TLFC/TLAT adjudication, improved records and transparency.

(Each output above is reflected in the COP's strategic priorities and outputs, linked to the Ministry and iTaukei Affairs Board joint Strategic Development Plan 2025 -2030).

The Ministry contributed to the development of the Fiji National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls for the period 2023–2028, with particular emphasis on addressing gender-based violence within traditional settings.

A Mid-Term Review of the NAP was conducted by the Ministry to assess progress on gender mainstreaming initiatives, and the relevant papers were subsequently submitted to the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC).

Below is the gender breakdown of the Ministry’s staffing for the period under review:

Year	Male	Female
2022	86	74
2023	92	85

In addition, the Ministry recently registered the first female surveyor in Government. This milestone is expected to pave the way for increased representation of female staff across all Government Ministries.

6.0 Conclusion

The Committee acknowledges progress in policy reforms, cultural preservation, and community engagement but notes ongoing challenges in financial sustainability, digital transformation, infrastructure development and governance.

The recommendations provided aim to strengthen financial autonomy, accelerate digital services, safeguard cultural heritage and improve transparency.

Implementing these measures will enable the Ministry to better serve iTaukei communities and protect Fiji's cultural identity for future generations.

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. Alikia Bia Member	
Date: 13 February, 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 ITAUKEI AFFAIRS

SUBMITTEE: **Ministry of iTaukei Affairs**

VENUE: **Committee Room, Parliament**

DATE: **Wednesday, 12th November, 2025**

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, 12TH NOVEMBER, 2025 AT 9.13 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee : Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Mr. Jone Navakamocea | - | Permanent Secretary |
| 2. Mr. Paula Tuione | - | Acting Deputy Secretary Operation |
| 3. Mr. Sipiriano Nemani | - | Director Heritage and Arts |
| 4. Mr. Anasa Tawake | - | Manager iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture |
| 5. Mr. Kitione Vesikula | - | Acting Chairman iTaukei Lands & Fisheries Commission |
| 6. Mr. Waisea Radelanimati | - | SAO Admin Officer |
| 7. Mr. Charles Ryland | - | Principal Technical Officer |
| 8. Mr. Joseph Kacilala | - | Director Corporate Services |
| 9. Mr. Vereniki Nalio | - | Acting Manager Policy |

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members of the public, Secretariat, dear viewers, ladies and gentlemen — a very good morning to you all. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to this meeting, especially those who are watching this public hearing session. At the outset, and for information purposes, I wish to highlight that 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 today's submission is open to both the public and the media, and is being aired live via the *Walesi* platform as well as livestreamed on the Parliament website and social media platforms.

Should there be any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this morning that cannot be disclosed publicly, such information may be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. I wish to remind everyone that Standing Order 111 permits non-disclosure of information in the following circumstances:

- National security matters;
- Third-party confidential information;
- Personnel or human resources matters; and
- Committee deliberations and the development of the Committee's recommendations and reports.

This is a Parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act 1965. Moving forward, please bear in mind that slander or libel of any sort will not be condoned. Any information brought before this Committee must be factual and accurate. In terms of meeting protocols, I kindly request that mobile phone usage be minimised and that all devices be placed on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I also wish to remind Honourable Members and our guests that all questions are to be addressed through the Chair. I now invite the Members of the Committee to introduce themselves.

(Introduction of Committee Members).

Today, the Committee will be hearing submissions from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in relation to the Ministry's Annual Report for 2022–2023. We have representatives from the Ministry and members of the executive team present, and I would like to thank them for availing themselves for this hearing.

Due to time constraints, I kindly request that responses be kept brief. I repeat, due to the essence of time, please provide concise responses, after which Committee Members may intervene with supplementary questions during your presentation. I now invite the officials from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to introduce themselves and then proceed with their presentation.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Honourable Assistant Minister and Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Affairs, thank you for your warm welcome this morning. It is indeed an honour and a privilege for us to appear before the Committee. I have brought a comprehensive team with me today to do justice to the Ministry's Annual Report for 2022–2023, and to ensure that we provide accurate and thorough responses to any questions the Committee may have. This team consists of our senior executives and heads of divisions, whose work is reflected in the report. I will also introduce them to you so that, should the Committee require further assistance in the future, you may contact them directly.

(Introduction of officials from Ministry of iTaukei Affairs)

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- I now invite the Deputy Secretary to take the floor and present the PowerPoint presentation that was circulated earlier by the Secretariat, and to briefly take us through the major issues highlighted therein.

MR. P. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, and honourable Members of the Standing Committee, very briefly, our presentation this morning consists of only four slides. The purpose of these slides is to outline the key objectives, provide our responses to the questions that were raised, and then conclude. In total, we received 18 questions, and these have been grouped into thematic areas to allow us to deliver our responses in a structured manner.

- Finance: Questions 1–3, covering financial matters, VKB registration, and board fees.
- Policy and Legal Framework:
 - Question 4 relates to policy changes.
 - Question 5 concerns regulatory changes.
- Infrastructure and Sustainability: Questions 6 and 7.
- Customary Matters and Digitalisation: Questions 8, 9 and 10, relating to customary titles, leadership, and the digitalisation of VKB records.
- Cultural and Heritage Matters:
 - Question 11 on revocable beautification and cultural heritage.
 - Question 12 on the Resource Owners Forum.
 - Question 13 on cultural heritage preservation.
- Public Engagement: Questions 14 and 15, addressing our approach to public engagement and consultations.
- SDGs and Gender Equality:
 - Question 16 concerns SDG alignment.
 - Question 17 concerns gender equality.
- Staffing: Question 18.

Honourable Chairman and Members, the key objective of our appearance this morning is to respond clearly and accurately to all issues raised by the Committee. We anticipate that after this session, we will be able to clarify all matters that require explanation. In addition, we value this platform because it enables us to understand the expectations of the Committee, identify areas of improvement, and strengthen our future implementation and reporting.

To conclude our brief presentation:

- We acknowledge the importance of the Annual Report as a document that captures the Ministry's performance for the year 2022–2023.
- Equally, this briefing session is important as it allows us to discuss matters reported during that period, receive valuable feedback from the Committee, and incorporate these insights into future undertakings.

That concludes our presentation. We will now proceed to the Committee's questions. The responses are hyperlinked, and we kindly request the Secretariat to open the hyperlink which contains the Ministry's detailed responses to all 18 questions. We apologise for not being able to include all information in the PowerPoint slides. However, the Committee has been provided with the full Word document and Excel file detailing our responses.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, may I kindly request the Secretariat to click on the hyperlink provided so that we may open the detailed responses to the questions raised by the Standing Committee. This will allow honourable Members to follow the Ministry's explanations as we briefly highlight key points from each response. Mr. Chairman, Sir, again through you, I would also like to invite honourable Members to refer to the hard copies of the documents that have been provided. Our Deputy Secretary will now very briefly take the Committee through the structure and main content of the responses, after which we will be happy to receive any supplementary questions or requests for clarification from Members of this august Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Since we have the hard copy in front of us, it would be more practical for us to proceed with that version while the Secretariat works on getting the link operational. I will ask the Deputy Permanent Secretary, through the Chairman, to take us through the document question by question — just a brief overview — so that Members may intervene with supplementary questions as we move along.

MR. P. TUIONE.-

Question 1. How has the revenue earned by Ministry of iTaukei Affairs during the 2022/ 2023 period impacted the development of iTaukei community?

Mr. Chairman, Sir, very briefly, the Ministry has two main revenue streams:

- VKB registrations, and
- Board fees.

However, the revenue generated from these two sources is not sufficient to directly drive or significantly impact development initiatives for iTaukei communities. As a result, the Ministry relies primarily on its annual budget allocation, which in the 2022–2023 financial year stood at approximately \$15 million. Within this allocation, there are capital projects that support communities through economic empowerment programmes, social development initiatives, and other activities that contribute to the sustainable development of iTaukei resources. That is the brief summary for Question 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- May I intervene on Question 1. In relation to the Ministry's budget, while we have been informed of the allocation for 2022–2023, the Committee would appreciate receiving information on budget trends over the preceding years, as well as projections moving forward. This will help us understand whether there are any patterns in the Ministry's funding — particularly in light of the budget constraints you have highlighted.

If the Ministry could provide this data after the meeting, it would greatly assist the Committee. Having the trend analysis, together with the justification for major projects, will allow us to better assess the Ministry's resourcing needs. This information is important because, as you have rightly mentioned, when funds are allocated, Government must be able to justify the outcomes, and the

Committee needs clarity on how effectively those funds have been utilised. We have encountered similar issues in other institutions, and the lessons learned emphasise the importance of having clear budget trends and evidence-based justification. This will guide the Committee in formulating its recommendations, particularly regarding how best we can support the Ministry in its development programmes.

Ultimately, when we present our report to Parliament, these insights will form the basis of a more informed and credible submission, especially in relation to project implementation, budget trends, and forward planning.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, apart from the budget, I would like to raise the matter of VKB registration. In our previous meeting, there was a suggestion that VKB registration should also be carried out in other countries. Could the Ministry provide an update on the progress of this initiative since our last meeting?

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may respond, and also request the Acting Chairman of TLFC to further elaborate on this matter. Regarding our diaspora, you will be aware that we recently returned from the United Kingdom in May, where we successfully carried out VKB registration for our diaspora community, which includes individuals up to the third generation in the UK. We registered over a thousand individuals, which is a significant achievement.

Similarly, we recently visited Australia during the Fiji Day celebrations and achieved a substantial number of registrations there as well. This clearly demonstrates that our people are moving overseas, and there is an ongoing need to engage with our diaspora. Yes, we are actively working on this initiative, and there are further plans to expand VKB registration among our diaspora overseas in the future.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would like to ask, for those being registered in the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* (VKB), is there a registration fee required?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, the registration into the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* is free of charge.

HON. V. PILLAY.- You have mentioned your VKB registration and board fees in your presentation. That is why I am raising this.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, what has been stated in the submission actually refers to the payment for VKB certificates as proof that an individual has been recorded in the iTaukei Landowners' Register. The cost is 60 cents per copy for the certificate issued.

However, the actual registration of an iTaukei does not require a fee. It only involves providing a birth certificate and completing a few forms before the individual is entered into the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*.

HON. V. PILLAY.- So basically there is no fees?

MR. J. TUIONE.- No fees, except for the VKB certificate and the VKB copies, if you want to obtain a copy.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, what are some of the current challenges faced by the Ministry in registering the diaspora in other countries? While there have been successes,

some countries still require teams to travel for registration. Apart from these achievements, what obstacles or difficulties are being encountered in this process?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, over the last 10 years, the Ministry has undertaken periodic visits — approximately once a year or every two years — to countries such as the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. One of the main challenges we face in registering the diaspora is encouraging the iTaukei themselves to come forward and be registered. Many members of the diaspora have become accustomed to life overseas and may have limited linkages to their home country. This has prompted the Ministry to plan regular visits, to create awareness and provide opportunities for registration. Through these engagements, we aim to not only facilitate registration but also encourage the diaspora to reconnect with their roots, including their land ownership, and potentially explore avenues for investment back home.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- If I may add, Mr. Chairman, Sir, the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission is currently undertaking a digitalisation project. At present, this work is internal, allowing access primarily through the provincial councils within the country. Looking ahead, given the growing demand from our diaspora overseas, the long-term plan is to enable digital and online services. This would allow the diaspora to securely access registration services from abroad, for example, via Fijian High Commissions, while maintaining robust security measures.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, one more question. The VKB registration is fully digitised, and this process started in 2014. What is the Ministry doing regarding the upkeep or safekeeping of the records that were previously maintained manually?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, if I may, with the project on data transfer from the VKB manual in 2014, which ended in 2016 before the database was set up, we trialled six provincial officers to set up the system, allowing one to come to the provincial office and view the VKB digitised copy. So far, we have regularised 14 provinces, where there are 14 VKB officers.

Moving forward, as the PS has stated, we are looking at setting up the platform so that eventually a person living overseas can access it. However, we need budgeting, technical assistance such as hosting of the software system, a software engineer, and security measures beyond ITC, which is the Government's hosting of all its documents. Perhaps there needs to be further discussion on the project.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, for the information of the team, we have actually visited your office where the VKB registration process is being carried out. My question is, what about the manual records? Your team mentioned that they were facing challenges regarding the safekeeping of those documents. I am asking what the Ministry is doing to ensure these documents are also kept safe, now that all this information is digitised.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, there is a preservation unit where a conservation officer and his assistants are now operating from the office. They visit the 14 offices to manage the upkeep of the books, including repairs and making suggestions on how to maintain them. This includes purchasing drawers for safekeeping and recommending improvements at offices where additional registry space is needed, as the book rooms are already full.

Other measures include air conditioning to maintain the books at the proper temperature. I believe, Honourable Member, that we will also be requesting a budget for this in the future.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, that is why I raised that issue. It was also mentioned to us during our last visit. The Ministry is facing some challenges, which we can consider later in our meeting while preparing the report.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will take note of that explanation.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would like to thank the iTaukei officers who are here this morning. I appreciate the hard work they have done so far. Looking at the annual report, I am concerned that we, as Parliamentarians, Ministers, and Assistant Ministers, may suggest many initiatives for the Ministry, but you are limited by the funding allocated to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. I have seen your response to Question 1. I feel sorry for the Ministry, because all the revenue earned is directed to the Government Consolidated Fund. You mentioned this is due to the absence of a trust fund account.

As a result, the Ministry solely relies on the funds allocated by Government. I would like to know whether more can be done in terms of the relationship between the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Trust Fund. I am aware of the work the Ministry does, including various projects in iTaukei communities. Should there also be funding from the iTaukei Trust Fund to support this work, given that all revenue is currently directed to the Government Consolidated Fund? I am interested in understanding the relationship between the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Trust Fund.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, If I may respond to the questions from Honourable Aliki Bia. Yes, there is a close working relationship with the iTaukei Trust Fund. The iTaukei Trust Fund operates under its own Act and Board. They have assisted the Ministry over the past two years in funding the Worldwide Leadership Programme, part of which is executed by the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission, in terms of traditional governance, including visits to the provinces to confirm chiefly titles in various districts and provinces.

Of course, dialogue can continue, but the iTaukei Trust Fund was primarily established for self-funding of the GCC. Now that the GCC is being resurrected, they have programmes funded by the iTaukei Trust Fund, which are channelled through the iTaukei Affairs Board and then released to the GCC. I hope I have answered your question.

2. Can the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs provide insights into the major expenditure and how they contributed to operational efficiency?

Briefly, Mr. Chairman, Sir, we have an allocation of about \$1.1 million in our budget. However, the main capital expenses are on SEG-6. These are grants used by the Government, including grants to the iTaukei Affairs Board, iTaukei Provincial Councils, and Nadave, totalling about \$9.6 million. These grants are very important, as they empower the iTaukei Affairs Board to deliver its core responsibilities regarding the well-being and governance of the iTaukei.

They also support the empowerment of our *turaganikoro* and *mata ni tikina* through their allowances, enabling them to fulfill their responsibilities in *vanua* leadership, which directly impacts the economic and social development of iTaukei communities. There are also grants for cultural institutions, including the Fiji Museum, the Fiji Arts Council, and the National Trust of Fiji, which directly support the Ministry's mandate to preserve heritage, traditional knowledge, and culture.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, if I may intervene, what is the future of the Fiji Museum? Will we continue in the same form, or is there any plan for its development?

MR. S. NEMANI.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Fiji Museum, as you know, is a statutory body established under the Fiji Museum Act, along with aligning legislation regarding the

preservation of archaeological and paleontological collections. At this point, Honourable Member, the Fiji Museum receives the majority of its funding through a Government grant provided annually. The Museum also has the option of accessing external funding from institutions such as UNESCO and other international organisations. Additionally, the Government provides capital funding to facilitate the expansion of the Fiji Museum and to safeguard collections that are over 100 years old. The Museum is working on developing a state-of-the-art research facility adjacent to the storage collection, allowing researchers to access the collection.

Benchmarking against international museums, the focus is not only on exhibitions, but also on transforming the Museum into a learning institution. It is intended to be an educational space, enabling knowledge sharing between practitioners and custodians of artifacts, as well as with younger generations, ensuring continuity and sustainability. The current challenge is the Museum's facilities. With the capital funding provided, efforts are being made to expand the Museum so that it becomes a fully-fledged institution accessible to the public and all citizens.

3. Were there any significant financial challenges faced during 2022 – 2023, and how were they addressed?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the question relates to some of the significant financial challenges faced during 2022–2023 and how they were addressed. Very briefly, Sir, budget limitations were experienced, especially in SEG 1, 2, 3, and 4. To address this, smart planning was undertaken, including prioritisation, re-diversion, and virement of funds to areas of greatest need. Through this approach, we were able to facilitate the required activities by prioritising work and reallocating funds. One major challenge was prioritising critical activities within the first 100 days. The Coalition Government assisted us in determining these priorities, enabling us to finance initiatives critical to the iTaukei communities. Overall, the challenges were addressed through careful planning, execution, and prioritisation of deliverables.

4. What major policy changes were implemented during this period, and how did they impact on the core function of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs?

There were several policy changes, including the review of the iTaukei Administration, iTaukei Land Trust Board, and iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission. The main aim was to modernise and improve systems for delivering services to iTaukei landowners. The first key change involved the well-being of iTaukei communities, requiring major changes in the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). The GCC was re-established and promoted the *Solesolevaki* framework, which highlighted how iTaukei institutions can share resources and technical expertise to develop iTaukei resources with tangible impact.

Another policy was the Fiji National Cultural Policy 2023–2033, which improves and protects the status, preservation, and intellectual property of iTaukei heritage. A socio-economic initiative, the Village Improvement Scheme, was revived to empower villages, improve basic facilities, generate income, and enhance community livelihoods. Redefinition of iTaukei boundaries was another critical initiative. Properly demarcated boundaries provide opportunities for financial development and socio-economic growth.

The Ratu Sukuna Day Celebration 2023 focused on visionary leadership and education, highlighting the importance of these principles for younger generations. Overall, these policies improve digital governance, transparency, and sustainable economic empowerment for iTaukei communities.

5. Were there any amendments to regulations that directly affected iTaukei Community?

- Review and amendment of the iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940 restored landowners' control over land leases, including consent processes.
- iTaukei Land Trust Lease and License Amendments Regulation 2023, aligned with Bill 70, improved fairness and transparency in land lease distribution.
- Amendment to Regulation 11 of the iTaukei Land Trust Gravel Regulation increased royalty rates for extraction of sand, gravel, and related materials, improving financial returns to iTaukei landowners.
- iTaukei Affairs Amendment Bill 2023 re-established the GCC and reinforced traditional governance structures, strengthening the livelihood of iTaukei communities.

The overall impact of these amendments is the enhancement of economic and social development, transparency, and land administration for iTaukei communities.

6. What were the key infrastructure projects undertaken in 2022-2023 and how did they improve service delivery?

The QE Management System was recently installed in the TLFC, improving coordination, online recording, and reporting for policy and leadership decisions.

- Infrastructure projects included land surveys and demarcation. A total of 34.6 kilometres of unsurveyed iTaukei land were surveyed, and 28.76 kilometres of village boundaries demarcated. Data for 74 villages were plotted into GIS, completing the redefinition survey.
- Department of Culture projects, including the Deed of Cession site beautification project, received \$50,000, further enhancing infrastructure for iTaukei communities.

7. How did the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs ensure sustainability in its infrastructure development plans?

Capacity building improved staff knowledge and skills for handling and maintaining infrastructure. Training was provided for registered surveyors, and technical teams were actively involved. Funding support ensured ongoing maintenance and repair, and cultural, heritage, and environmental considerations were embedded in policy advice to enhance social, economic, and environmental outcomes for iTaukei well-being.

8. Can the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs provide some of the major challenges encountered while filling customary titles in the 14 provinces.

The main challenge is funding limitations. Filling positions requires operational visits to communities, including formal and informal sittings. Disputes may require additional visits. Visiting 14 provinces is expensive, and limited budgets constrain the ability to conduct this critical work effectively.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Through you, may I intervene? How many titles are in dispute? You may recall that during the last public submission, I raised the matter of the title of Marama na Tui Ba. We were assured that the Board is working to compile that data.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir: Through you, if I may respond to the question from Honourable Bala. I will address the second question first, Sir. For your information, we sat at Nailaga, Ba last week, on Wednesday and Thursday, for a court sitting regarding the title of the Tui Ba. The delivery of the judgment on who will be the Tui Ba — Nailaga, the *yavusa* of Vanua o Tilivabukuya, in the *yavusa* Tivo — will take place next week on Friday, the 21st. That answers your question

regarding the Tui Ba, Sir. Regarding the number of titles, Sir, we can never always confirm, as it depends on the agreement among the members of the *mataqali* and *yavusa*.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The title is in dispute?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, as I mentioned, the title is in dispute and cannot always be confirmed. Whenever we receive the numbers in a given year, we enter them into the programme. Our target is four formal sittings per year, but disputes continuously arise for the Commission. This is why we also hold informal sittings first, giving the parties the opportunity to resolve matters before the Commission convenes. When the Commission sits, the law takes precedence over traditional obligations.

A second challenge is population mobility. Many people in the villages are moving to urban areas or overseas, making it difficult to confirm that some *mataqali* have members present in the villages. Numbers are required to complete the process, and the movement of people complicates the Commission's ability to fill these positions.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, if that is the case, what is the Ministry doing to ensure that people, especially the youth, remain in the villages? I understand that many are drawn to town and city life, but if no action is taken, our villages may eventually become empty. Is there any plan, or does the Ministry foresee a strategy, to retain people in the villages?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, If I may, the Ministry is indeed working on this. One of the first steps is creating opportunities in our villages and improving and developing their resources. The Solesolevaki framework supports this by enabling us to create opportunities, build capacity, and empower communities to utilize their resources effectively.

Honestly, the Ministry cannot achieve this alone. A whole-of-government approach is required, allowing collaboration to create opportunities for people to remain in their villages, improve their livelihoods, and develop their resources.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, regarding the issue raised by Honourable Bala, I have a suggestion for the senior officials present this morning. When we discuss economic growth as a country and as a Government, Parliamentarians consider it in totality. Economic growth is usually discussed for Fiji as a whole. Would it be appropriate for the Minister of Economy to conduct detailed economic growth analyses by province? This would allow the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to identify development issues in each province and collaborate with relevant Government ministries to implement targeted projects, ensuring that economic growth considerations are addressed at the provincial level.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I may elaborate on the points raised by Honourable Praveen Bala and Honourable Alikia Bia. Firstly, creating economic opportunities in rural areas is very important. This requires a whole-of-government approach, facilitated through the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) Review that has been undertaken. This framework aims to enhance coordination and collaboration across ministries to identify development opportunities in the various provinces, based on their resource endowments.

Discussions with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development have focused on having provincial administrators develop a provincial development plan, to which all sector ministries will align. At the Ministry, we have a Commercial Development Unit within Tabacakacaka iTaukei (ITAB), staffed by a Commercial Manager and four Senior Economic Managers. The plan is to appoint 14 officers and post them to the 14 provincial councils to conduct scoping and profiling of

villages and *tikina*, identifying resources, small income-generating opportunities, MSMEs, and large-scale investment potential. This economic and socio-economic profiling will enable the preparation of proposals, which are first discussed by a provincial working committee including the PA, the Agriculture Officer, the Women's Interest Officer, and heads of relevant Government ministries. Proposals are then aligned with funding agencies for support.

Secondly, rural-urban migration presents a major challenge. Labour shortages in agriculture affect food and nutrition security in communities. Visits to villages reveal reliance on tinned foods and noodles during lunch and sometimes dinner, contributing to the high incidence of NCDs. To address this, the Ministry has signed MOUs with the Ministry of Agriculture on food and nutrition security. We have also signed MOUs with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama, who actively engage with rural communities on health, nutrition, and the preparation of healthy foods, including vegetables.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the final challenge concerns the pending issues of Earth Truth or Herbert Myth or Legend. These are particularly challenging, as misinformation has caused disputes and some have questioned the information in the Vola ni Kawabula. However, through the dedication of our staff, these issues have been managed effectively.

9. What initiatives were introduced to improve leadership skills amongst the iTaukei leaders during this period?

Initiatives were introduced to improve leadership skills among iTaukei leaders during 2022–2023.

- The first is TLFC leadership awareness, targeting title holders. This programme aims to capacitate them on leadership, governance, and development responsibilities.
- The second initiative is Vuli Sausauvaki ni Vanua. This programme works alongside the iTaukei Affairs Board, training leaders and community members to understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders and community members, contributing to socio-economic development in villages.
- The third initiative is Vuli ni Sausauvou, focused on succession planning for future leaders. Participants are trained in governance, economics, and well-being.
- The final initiative is Bose Vanua, a recent programme targeting core leaders, including liuliu ni yavusa, mataqali, tokatoka, and those registered in the Vola ni Kawabula. They are trained to understand their roles and responsibilities, maintain peace and stability, and contribute to socio-economic development in their villages.

10. Can the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs update on the digitalization of the Vola Ni Kawa Bula (VKB) Record?

The Ministry has updated the digitalisation of the Vola ni Kawabula, which we have already discussed.

11. According to the Ministry's Annual Report 2022-2023, \$50,000.00 was given to Levuka Town Council for the Deed of Cession Site Beautification Project. Please provide an update on its development.

Concerning the annual report and the \$50,000 allocated for the Levuka Town Council, this funding is for beautification. To complete the entire project, a total of \$300,000 is required. The \$50,000 provided has enabled the completion of Stage 1, including preliminary scoping and

necessary regulatory work. Of this, \$42,369 has been utilised. The project is planned to continue in 2025–2026, with an additional budget of \$300,000 to complete it.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, May I intervene? I was reviewing this report and noted that the total cost to complete the project is \$300,000. This amount comes after the initial \$50,000. Initially, the scope of work was prepared, and the total cost was calculated to be \$300,000.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, the \$50,000 was provided to the Levuka Town Council as a preparatory payment for the basic scoping of the site. After completing the scoping exercise and preparatory work, the Council was able to ascertain the actual cost of the total rehabilitation of the Levuka Deed of Cession Site. One key consideration, Honourable Member, is that the work must conform to the Outstanding Universal Values that underpin Levuka's designation as a World Heritage Site. From this initial exercise, it became clear that some key aspects of the rehabilitation would cost more than the initial \$50,000 grant provided to the Council.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is exactly what I am saying. We visited the site, and I believe it would have been better if the initial scope had been fully completed, so that budgeting could have been aligned with the submission. Regarding the heritage buildings, in Parliament, the Honourable Prime Minister assured funding to restore them to their original form. How far has progress been on that initiative?

MALE REP.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, the rehabilitation work to restore Levuka to its state of Outstanding Universal Value as a World Heritage Site is estimated to cost more than \$40 million. This assessment was made following Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, and through pockets of assistance rendered, very little progress was achieved toward the rehabilitation of the Levuka site. With the recent deployment of funds through the Department of Culture for Capital Works, one major achievement has been the rehabilitation of a significant building, the Levuka Community Centre, which is now ready for opening.

However, other residential buildings have remained idle since Cyclone Winston in 2016. Our primary focus is currently to provide assistance to these households so that the buildings can be restored to heritage standards, in accordance with World Heritage Values. At this stage, the focus is on buildings that are currently inhabited, with plans to move on to rehabilitating other buildings in need of restoration. Most of these were damaged or destroyed during Cyclone Winston. The majority of funding comes from the Government, and while there is limited scope for international funding, most of the restoration costs must be met by the Government. Currently, progress is focused on restoring residential houses that require rehabilitation.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, as per the information from the Honourable Minister in Parliament, the work has already commenced. Some residential homes have already received assistance, while a number remain pending. According to him, a budget of \$1.5 million was allocated for this purpose. Can the Committee be informed of the number of residential homes that have been assisted so far and the number still pending? If the data is not immediately available, it can be provided later.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, ten houses are currently on our list to receive the first round of assistance. We are following operational procedures as required by the Ministry of Finance. This involves clearly delineating the grant allocation for each house, determining how much the occupants can contribute, and how much the Government can provide. Once this procedural process is completed, we will be able to roll out the assistance.

Technical experts from Japan have visited the site three times to assess these houses and identify areas where funding can support restoration efforts. The deployment of funds will occur once the grant agreements are finalised for the ten houses. Additionally, six public buildings have also been assessed by these conservation experts and may receive assistance from the Government's capital works grant.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, as you have mentioned that grants will be provided to the ten houses, there must still be a number of houses pending assistance. What is the average cost anticipated per house? Specifically, what is the average grant required for each house to complete its renovation?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, the initial assessment conducted after Cyclone Winston in 2018 estimated the cost to restore each household at \$1 million. Following our assessment and the involvement of technical experts to ascertain actual costs, the average restoration cost is now estimated at approximately \$10,000 to \$15,000 per household. It is not necessary to demolish the entire house; rather, repairs are focused on components to maintain the integrity and authenticity of each house. This represents a significant reduction from the initial assessment. The \$10,000 to \$15,000 per house covers the work required to restore or rehabilitate each house to its authentic state.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I may, I would like to add that, given the Government's commitment to restoring heritage site buildings across Fiji, it is important to consider how the funding or grants provided can be recouped. We need to collaborate with the Ministry of Tourism and Local Government to elevate the marketing of Levuka as a heritage town and site, thereby strengthening and increasing tourism-related activities within the township.

There is also potential for bed-and-breakfast accommodations, allowing residents and property owners to benefit from tourism opportunities. From a tourism perspective, and as a learning experience, it is important to document and showcase heritage sites, educating schools, communities, and visitors about our history. Heritage site tourism is a significant industry overseas, and similar opportunities should be developed here in Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, a supplementary question, Sir. You mentioned the sharing formula and that it is currently being formulated. What will be the percentage allocation between the Government and the landlords?

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, a socio-economic analysis was conducted on site to assess the income generated by each household targeted for assistance among the ten houses. The assessment revealed varied income levels among the property owners, with most residents being senior citizens. One key consideration is addressing cost-sharing on a case-by-case basis, to determine the level of support each household can receive. This proposal will need to be submitted to the Ministry of Finance and, of course, the Solicitor-General's Office for approval.

12. Can the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs update on the iTaukei Resources Owners Forum that was conducted in 2023 and how it benefited the resource owners?

Mr. Chairman, Sir, and Honourable Members: Question number 12 relates to the iTaukei Resource Owners Forum conducted in 2023 and how it benefitted resource owners. This was the first year the forum was held, on 30th March 2023. The main objective of the session was to provide awareness and informative sessions, enabling iTaukei resource owners to understand available opportunities and outcomes.

Resource owners and businesses were invited to attend, to provide insights on processes and systems that could be followed. The primary purpose was to empower resource owners, allowing them to understand what opportunities exist and how they could utilise and develop their resources.

Several partnerships were endorsed and signed during the session, including eight key agreements. One example is with Juice Fiji Limited, which works with resource owners on native traditional herbs for juice production. Discussions also commenced with Merchant Finance and MTD. As of today, through the Ministry and Government support, 46 iTaukei businesses have been assisted. The Government provided a subsidy for the first three years, amounting to approximately \$1.5 million, while Merchant Finance contributed about \$22.7 million to date.

The forum plays a critical role in providing pathways and opportunities, and this is how iTaukei businesses have been supported.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is very interesting to hear, especially given that the initiative started in 2023 but is already operational with support from relevant stakeholders, particularly in terms of financing. Hopefully, moving forward, more participants will engage with this platform to further develop iTaukei businesses.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I will request the Director of Culture and Heritage to take the Committee through question number 13.

13. Can Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, provide an update on the progress on preservation of Fiji's Cultural Heritage since 2022?

MR. S. NEMANI.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, and Honourable Members of the Standing Committee, the Committee has before it a list of activities undertaken by the Ministry during this period.

One of the key achievements was the passing of the Fiji National Cultural Policy, which took 20 years to complete. This policy addresses major initiatives at the national level relating to the safeguarding of Fiji's diverse cultural heritage. By "safeguarding," we refer to promoting, preserving, transmitting, raising awareness, advocacy, and other actions defined under this term.

Another significant achievement, and thanks to members of this Committee for their involvement, was the passing of the Fiji World Heritage Act 2024. During this period, extensive consultations were conducted to ascertain the impacts and address issues raised by communities regarding the implications of the Act. This legislation is crucial for the protection of sites such as Levuka, as well as potential sites including the Sigatoka Sand Dunes, Sovi Basin, and the Yadua Taba Iguana Crescent in Bua.

During this period, preliminary work was undertaken to review heritage legislations. Many of Fiji's cultural legislations are archaic, with some dating back to the 1930s, and require updating to meet modern protection and safeguarding requirements. Key acts under review include the Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Prehistoric Interest Act (POAPI), the National Trust Act, and the Fijian Museum Act.

The Department also worked on intangible cultural heritage, which refers to unseen heritage such as rituals, ceremonies, traditional dances, and chants. Projects undertaken include mapping Rabi and Kioa islands and documenting traditional skills, languages, and other cultural elements of communities. A key achievement during this period was the development of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Framework, which is mandatory under the UNESCO 2003 Convention ratified by Fiji in 2010. The draft framework is currently in the consultation phase with technical assistance

from the South Pacific Commission. Once finalised, it will be submitted through the appropriate authorities.

The Department also addressed protocols and conventions relevant to Fiji's heritage, including the UNESCO Underwater Heritage Convention, which seeks to protect underwater heritage such as shipwrecks and traditional sites like the sunken islands near Moturiki and Burotukula. A preliminary workshop was conducted to assess Fiji's readiness and identify resources and assets that require documentation and protection under international law.

Another milestone was Fiji sending a 30-member delegation to the Melanesian Spearhead Group Festival of Arts and Culture in Vanuatu in 2023. Fiji has been confirmed to host the next festival in 2026, with necessary funding provided by Government. The Institute of Language and Culture has also contributed significantly to preserving Itaukei cultural heritage. One of its major activities is cultural mapping, which has covered all 14 provinces over 18 years. The current focus is on consolidating, editing, and entering this data into a database funded by the Itaukei Trust Fund Board. This work helps identify the owners of cultural resources, which will be essential should laws on traditional knowledge and expressions of culture be enacted.

As part of the mapping exercise, the Institute also conducts special revitalisation skills initiatives and workshops at the request of communities. Practitioners lead these workshops to facilitate knowledge transmission, especially for endangered skills. The Department is also reviewing the monolingual dictionary under its purview.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, regarding the earlier statement by the Permanent Secretary on generating income and revenue through our heritage sites, has the Department or Ministry explored practices from other jurisdictions? I raise this point because some countries have been very successful in this area.

For example, during CPA meetings, delegations are often taken to heritage sites, including their ports of entry, which are actively visited by their citizens. How can we improve our heritage sites to implement similar practices? Has the team had opportunities to study other jurisdictions to learn best practices so that, over time, we can generate income to benefit local communities?

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, certainly, one component is preservation and conservation, and the other is income generation and sustainable livelihood. We are still in the early stages of cultural mapping and developing the database, alongside working on legislation to facilitate income-generating activities, particularly to ensure that benefits are distributed to the rightful owners of the cultural heritage and arts.

In other countries, virtual tourism has been used effectively. This involves translating the database into an online product accessible to overseas audiences interested in learning about the arts, culture, and traditions, with a fee applied per access. Security is a critical consideration to ensure ownership and protection of cultural heritage and arts. We are exploring artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to safeguard the database while disseminating the cultural resources. Consultants on AI are expected to be engaged in the coming weeks. AI offers significant benefits but also presents risks, so robust security measures are essential.

Additionally, the Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture (TKEC) Bill, expected in the December meeting of Parliament, will provide a framework to support these initiatives. We are also considering WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) mechanisms to patent heritage, arts, and culture for commercial income generation. The challenge is that these cultural assets are community-owned rather than individually owned, which requires careful consideration in the patenting process.

I hope this response addresses your question.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, and honourable Members, the next item relates to the Ministry's engagement with the public and stakeholders to ensure transparency in decision-making. A budget of \$60,000 was allocated for a roadshow in the Yasawa Group, which took place from 31 October to 3 November 2022. The roadshow was facilitated under the Integrated Rural Development Framework, with the Commission of Western and various government agencies participating. The primary objective was to create awareness, empower rural iTaukei communities, and provide education on services offered by agencies such as BDM, FNPF, and VKB registration.

The roadshow also helped mitigate disputes in the field. By the end of the four-day programme, communities in the Yasawa Group were well-informed, and transparency in the handling of information was achieved. Additionally, MOUs signed by the Ministry underscore the partnerships and provide further transparency in operations. The iTaukei Stakeholder Consultative Forum of iTaukei institutions also enables broader and well-informed consultations for all parties. This addresses the question regarding public and stakeholder consultation.

15. Were there any public consultations or feedback mechanisms that influenced policy changes.

Question 15 relates to the public consultation feedback mechanisms that influence policy changes. Mechanisms were in place during the period under review to guide policy changes, including the review of the Great Council of Chiefs, the iTaukei administration, and the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission. Some Bills were repealed following proper consultations with provincial councils, *tikina* councils, and villages. These consultations enabled the Ministry and institutions to implement policy changes effectively.

As highlighted by the Director of Culture, public consultations for the Fiji Heritage Bill were also conducted with support from the Parliamentary Standing Committee, the Office of the Solicitor-General, and peer reviews of the Fiji National ICH Framework. These consultations contributed to both policy reviews and the development of new policies to improve Ministry service delivery.

16. How the specific Sustainable Development Goals assisted the Ministry in its long term goals and please if you could highlight on each of the SDG relevant to the Ministry.

Nine SDGs have been used to guide the development of the Strategic Development Plan, aligning with the Ministry's COP deliverables.

- SDG 1: No Poverty – Economic empowerment initiatives through the iTaukei *turaga ni koro* and *mata ni tikina* provide incentives to deliver responsibilities, including food planting and socio-economic development.
- SDG 2: Zero Hunger – Aligns with the MOU with the Ministry of Agriculture, focusing on food and nutrition security. Provincial council offices collaborate with Agriculture to implement initiatives.
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being – Includes community resilience and well-being initiatives, a core mandate of the Ministry, aimed at facilitating healthy living and standards of life.
- SDG 4: Quality Education – Promotes cultural education, leadership curriculum, and capacity-building initiatives under the SDP and COP to improve education for children and communities.
- SDG 5: Gender Equality – Governance initiatives within the iTaukei Affairs Board and Development Services Division promote non-discrimination, social inclusion, and gender equality, while ongoing efforts are needed to address gaps.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, perhaps I may add a brief comment. The executive team, and in the future all levels of leadership, need to address gender equality more actively. I have raised this point because it is frequently asked in Parliament. Hopefully, in future development planning, your team will consider opening up opportunities across all areas, particularly in gender representation. Gender equality is a fundamental right for all and not a special privilege for any group. This is something that can be considered, Permanent Secretary, in our declarations.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, we take note of your comment. If you look at the gender composition of the Ministry, it is almost on an equal path. In some areas, particularly technical fields such as surveying, the workforce is largely male-dominated due to the nature of the work, which involves going out to communities and mapping land boundaries in hilly terrain. Nevertheless, we take note of your comment.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, moving to SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, we actively participate in coordination efforts, particularly through some of our capital projects. For example, the Village Improvement Scheme aims to enhance our villages and communities.

Regarding SDG 13, Climate Action, through the National Resource Owners Council, we explore how to better manage, utilize, and develop our natural resources, taking into account climate change and related challenges. Various forums and institutions within the Ministry contribute to this work, which forms part of our deliverables.

For SDG 15, Life on Land, our efforts focus on conservation, preservation of natural resources, protection of catchments, and safeguarding traditional knowledge. These are key areas through which we contribute to this SDG.

SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, is supported through leadership training and awareness programs. By strengthening vanua governance, leaders are better equipped to maintain peace, uphold justice, and ensure the proper functioning of institutions.

17. Can the Ministry update its Gender Equality policies?

Mr. Chairman, Sir, for Question 17 regarding gender equality policies, the Ministry actively participates in the development of the National Action Plan (NAP) for 2023–2028, addressing gender-based violence against women and girls. A mid-term review was conducted, and our team collaborated with other agencies to ensure gender mainstreaming within the NAP. A paper on this was submitted to the Great Council of Chiefs and was positively endorsed. This remains a critical focus for the Ministry moving forward.

Additionally, as previously stated by the Permanent Secretary, we are working with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei under an MOU to jointly address issues related to gender equality policies.

MR. J. NAVAKAMOCEA.- If I may elaborate, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, gender equality, gender-based violence, and violence against women and girls are sensitive issues, particularly given our traditional setting. Workshops have been conducted across the country, attended by chiefs, chairpersons of provincial councils, youth leaders, and leaders of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama from each province.

During these workshops, concerns were raised not only by male members but also by female members of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama regarding how the language and messaging are disseminated to the wider community. When working with the Ministry of Women, it is important to note that many of the presenters, particularly from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, have experienced violence themselves and are highly emotional.

To address this and ensure the appropriate tone and language are used, the Ministry has engaged the Soqosoqo Vakamarama to collaborate with the Ministry of Women in developing a manual for dissemination of the National Action Plan at provincial, *tikina*, and *vanua* levels. This manual is intended to be easily understood and acceptable to all stakeholders.

We have yet to sign the MOU, which has been submitted to the Solicitor-General's Office. Once finalised, it will enable the Soqosoqo Vakamarama to undertake this work. In addition, a training manual will be developed for the dissemination of the National Action Plan on gender-based violence and HOKIT within traditional settings.

MR. J. TUIONE.- Mr. Chairperson and honourable Members, regarding staff employed during the period 2022–2023, in 2022 there were 86 males and 74 females. In 2023, the number increased to 92 males and 85 females.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The question I wish to raise, just to wrap up, concerns gender equality. When discussing year-wise staff distribution, I refer back to our earlier discussion on the importance of leadership at all levels. This is where gender equality becomes particularly relevant. I suggest to the Permanent Secretary and the team that, when reviewing this, they consider a clear formula for distribution at the executive level. This will enhance transparency for deliberations in Parliament on this subject.

At this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you all, especially the Permanent Secretary and the executive team from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. Thank you very much for availing yourselves to this public hearing session. We appreciate your time and contributions, which provide us with a broader understanding of how the Ministry operates, as reflected in the annual reports for 2022–2023. We hope you will make yourselves available for any further queries the Committee may have regarding today's submission.

On that note, I declare this meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 10.48 a.m.