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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

- (1) 2021-2022 Annual Report**
- (2) 2022-2023 Annual Report**

ENTITY: Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection
VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)
DATE: Tuesday, 24th March, 2026

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON TUESDAY, 24TH MARCH, 2026 AT 9.10 A.M.

Present

- (1) Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. R.R. Sharma - Deputy Chairperson
- (3) Hon. P.K. Ravunawa - Member (4) Hon. I. Tuiwailevu - Member
- (5) Hon. V. Lal - Member

Apology

Hon. T.R. Matasawalevu - Member

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection In Attendance:

- (1) Ms. Selina Kuruleca - Acting Permanent Secretary
- (2) Ms. Arieta Tagivetaua - Director Children
- (3) Mr. Veremo Muria - Director Social Protection
- (4) Ms. Mereoni Tuimuru - Director Poverty Monitoring Unit
- (5) Ms. Amelia Nairobi - Acting Director Women
- (6) Ms. Emi Bainimarama - Head of Admin Finance
- (7) Ms. Rozia Bi - National Coordinator for Social Protection Reforms

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- A very good morning, honourable Members and our submittees from the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, our viewers and those of you from the media. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to the Big Committee Room.

I wish to advise that pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the public and the media. If there is any sensitive information relating to this submission that cannot be disclosed publicly, that information can be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a closed session, but this will only be permitted in circumstances including matters relating to national security, third-party confidential information, personnel or human resource matters, and during our own Committee deliberation as we prepare reports to go back to Parliament.

I wish to remind all honourable Members and the submitters that all questions and comments should be directed through the Chairperson. For viewers following this meeting live on *Facebook*, you can submit your questions via the comments section, but only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee. Members of the Committee may interject during your answering of the questions that we have sent to you before, or otherwise we will wait until the end of your submission.

I want to remind everyone that this is a parliamentary proceeding and all information provided is protected under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. We will not condone any slander or libel of any sort, and all information that is presented to the Committee should be factual. Please, turn your mobiles on silent and we ask that we keep movement to a minimum because the cameras will be on as well.

Now, I introduce to you, and I am sure you have met them before, the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

(Introduction of Committee Members and Secretariat)

Today, honourable Members and members of the public, we will receive an in-person submission from the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection in relation to their 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports. I now invite the Acting Permanent Secretary, Selina Kuruleca, to introduce her team before they proceed with her submission.

(Introduction of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection Officials)

MS. S. KURULECA.- Madam Chairperson, with your permission, we will get straight into it. There are about 10 sections of questions. Each section has about four questions to five questions.

(A) Strategic Governance and Policy Alignment

Question No. 1:

How does the Ministry measure the impact of its programmes beyond outputs?

The Ministry measures the programme impact by assessing how interventions improve household wellbeing, resilience and long-term outcomes, rather than focussing solely on outputs. Through the Poverty Monitoring Unit (PMU), which is headed by Mereoni who is at the far end, eight programmes were assessed across key sectors using baseline data, field

surveys, indicator line tools and stakeholder validation to determine effectiveness, identify gaps, and inform recommendations.

Findings show significant improvements in household income, living standards, market access, food security and community infrastructure, alongside positive social and child wellbeing outcomes. From a social protection standpoint, the Ministry tracks whether households graduate from assistance and remain independent, reflecting sustained resilience. This approach is being strengthened through the Adaptive Social Protection Framework, which links social assistance to resilience building, shock responsiveness, and long-term wellbeing.

Question No. 2:

What mechanisms are in place to ensure alignment with international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and translates that into tangible national outcomes response?

We translate our obligations through a comprehensive policy, institutional and coordination framework that aligns national commitments with gender equality objectives. For the information of this Committee, we have also established the Fiji Human Rights Taskforce, which was initially supposed to meet once every quarter, but we are currently meeting once a month, so we prepare our responses, which we anticipate to be tabled or reported to Geneva before the end of this year.

Question No. 3:

How effectively are cross-ministry collaborations functioning, particularly for gender mainstreaming and poverty reduction initiatives?

Our response is that it has been quite effective. It depends on the different programmes that are running. One of the biggest programmes we have in the Ministry is the REACH Programme, where it is not only the Ministry of Women, but across all sectors - Education, Justice and Health. We also have Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and the Legal Aid Commission, who form part of this outreach programme. Recently, you would have noticed in the news the reporting of Moira two weeks ago, which was also in conjunction with the International Month of Women.

Question No. 4:

What are the key policy gaps identified during the reporting period and what corrective actions are planned?

The CEDAW community's concluding observations in Fiji's State Report highlighted persistent gaps, including limited awareness and application of CEDAW among rural iTaukei women with

disability and diverse women. Again, this is why there was a need to really beef up on the REACH programme that went out there.

Cabinet had also approved the 5-year CEDAW Implementation Plan to strengthen legal frameworks, build institutional capacity and raise awareness, expanding gender transformative capacity, development and gender-responsive budgeting. The Committee will be aware that the Ministry of Finance, through Finance Circular No. 2 of 2026, approved gender-responsive budgeting to be included in this new financial year.

I will stop there, and I will ask Ms. Bainimarama, Budget Performance and Financial Management, to please respond to the questions listed.

MS. E. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the questions are as follows.

(B) Budget Performance and Financial Management

Question No. 1:

The Ministry received significant allocations. How does the Ministry justify variances between allocation and utilisation, such as the 84 percent utilisation of the Poverty Benefit Scheme?

The variance between allocation and utilisation within the Department of Social Protection, such as the 84 percent utilisation under the Poverty Benefit Scheme, is mainly from ongoing beneficiary reviews in case replacement that delayed uptake of allocated funds, administrative bottlenecks related to completing assessments and obtaining full documentation and accounting adjustments, including invalid cheques, returned and redeposited, as well as Post Fiji reimbursements based only on cash vouchers and delays caused by late receipt of RIEs from the Ministry of Finance.

These variations do not represent a loss of funds. This was published in the dailies. The variances that were reflected, which summed up to \$28 million, were caused by the delays that I had mentioned, but that has been deposited back into the Government's Drawings Account.

To address the underlying causes, the Ministry is implementing social protection reforms to strengthen budget credibility through improved forecasting and planning, alongside the development of an Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System (IBMIS) to support real-time case processing, faster decision-making, better coordination of payouts and, ultimately, more efficient and optimal resource neutralisation.

Question No. 2:

What were the main reasons for under-utilisation or over-utilisation across programmes?

Again, the Department of Social Protection's under and over-utilisation of programme funds stems mainly from delays in onboarding beneficiaries due to incomplete documentation, the prioritisation of reviews and exits over new intakes, alongside operational constraints that slowed disbursement. Under-utilisation also resulted from:

- vacancies within the Ministry;
- late recruitment of technical assistance under the SPP reform;
- delayed implementation of child protection allowance adjustments;
- incomplete tender processes for the women's institutional shelter;
- late engagement of the software developer for the Social Welfare Management Information System;
- project cost variations dealing with Barefoot College construction to the next financial year; and
- unavailability of suppliers for large capital equipment purchases.

Over-utilisation occurred primarily in SEG6 for major SPP programmes, transport assistance, housing, social protection and family assistance, where budgetary allocations were insufficient for the number of recipients, as well as across SEGs3 to 7 operational budgets due to increased outreach and activities beyond approved funding levels, requiring internal savings to meet the shortfalls. These patterns reflect administrative procurement and operational challenges that affect the timely and efficient use of allocated resources.

When we request budget for these social protection programmes, we normally give the figure for the utilisation for the previous year, but we work with what we are given, so that is mainly when over-utilisation happens.

Question No. 3:

How does the Ministry ensure value for money in major social protection expenditures?

Social protection delivers immediate relief by providing cash and support to vulnerable households to meet basic needs, especially during shocks. Under Fiji's Adaptive Social Protection Reforms Programme, we also prevent deeper poverty, protect children's development, reduce negative coping strategies, and build resilience and economic participation.

The Ministry ensures effective delivery through improved targeting; digitisation to reduce leakages and periodic programming expenditure reviews, supported by internal and external

audits; and beneficiary reviews and oversight by the Poverty Monitoring Unit to maintain accountability and impact.

Question No. 4:

Given the cash-based accounting system, how does the Ministry track long-term liabilities and programme sustainability?

The Ministry ensures oversight and long-term liabilities and programme sustainability through strategic planning and strong financial management. This is achieved through alignment with the National Development Plan and mid-term expenditure framework, supported by annual budgeting with forward projections based on beneficiary trends and programme costs. The programmes are designed with time-bound assistance and regular reviews, which help manage fiscal exposure and prevent open-ended liabilities.

The Ministry is also strengthening data-driven targeting and efficiency through ongoing social protection reforms, while promoting a welfare-to-workfare approach that links beneficiaries to livelihoods and economic participation, thereby, reducing long-term dependency. In addition, the development of an integrated management information system will enhance real-time tracking, forecasting, and decision-making.

Overall, while cash transfers remain flexible and responsive, the Ministry complements this with fiscal discipline, improved systems, and a focus on resilience and self-reliance, to ensure long-term sustainability of social protection programmes.

Question No. 5:

What internal controls are in place to prevent fraud, leakages, or mistargeting of welfare assistance?

The Ministry has resolved to draft and implement strong internal controls and governance measures to safeguard welfare assistance from fraud, leakages and mistargeting. These include:

- clear standard operating procedures;
- segregation of duties;
- regular eligibility verification; and • robust audit and compliance processes.

Continuous programme monitoring further strengthens oversight.

In addition, the development of an integrated management information system will reduce errors, prevent duplication and fraud, enable real-time data validation, and enhance overall

transparency and accountability. Together, these measures ensure that assistance is delivered with integrity, efficiency and proper stewardship of public resources.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- In relation to your answer to question (B)1, you were speaking about an IBMIS. Can I go back to your annual report of the years under question here?

In 2022-2023, the auditor also said, as he did in the previous year; “The Ministry does not maintain a comprehensive list of receipts or benefits under the Social Protection Programme and a database to include their detailed information”. What you are saying there is, you are fixing this issue?

MS. E. BAINIMARAMA.- Yes.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- How far along is it now, Ma'am?

MS. E. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Chairperson, may I ask the National Coordinator to comment on that because we are working on the social welfare information system.

MS. R. BI.- Madam Chairperson, to respond to that, the IBMIS was built in two phases. One was the Social Protection Management Information System as an internal control where we are currently digitising all records and would be automating the payment system. That system is already built, developed, and we are in the process of digitising the records at the moment. The bigger one, which is an end-to-end system, which would also require registration, assessment, monitoring, evaluation and everything - the end-to-end process, that system is currently in progress. We are almost finalising the development of that. Just to answer, in the short term, we have a system already built and we are digitising the records.

MS. S. KURULECA.- In addition to that, we want to have all the family assistance people on by June-July this year. It has already started and we are also training the staff. The system, with the support of DFAT, is quite comprehensive. If you check for ‘Selina’ who is a recipient, you can also then pick out if Selina is doubledipping in three, four or five programmes that I had already enrolled in. In the manual system, we cannot check that because Selina can come here and go to Nadi or go to another one. However, with this new IBMIS system, all of these double-dipping will be found out.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- In that system, are you desegregating data along ethnicity?

MS. S. KURULECA.- Yes.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

MR. V. MURIA.- The next section is as follows.

(C) Programme Effectiveness - Social Protection.

Question No. 1:

The Poverty Benefit Scheme assisted over 24,000 households. What percentage of national poverty does this represent?

The Poverty Benefit Scheme has now been renamed to Family Assistance Scheme, and it targets the poorest 10 percent of the household. At the moment, current recipients are around 24,000 households. That is roughly 52 percent of the 45,721 households, identified as living below the poverty line in the 2019 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). This indicates a strong reach, but also clear coverage gaps caused by targeting limitations, accessibility challenges in remote areas, and programme capacity constraints.

To improve equity and accuracy, the Ministry is advancing key social protection reform, just like what Ms. Bainimarama has mentioned. With that, we are also updating the Proxy Means Test, using the latest HIES data, and incorporating findings from a technical review by development pathways, which showed that the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Child Protection Allowance and Social Pension Scheme, collectively reach around 22 percent of Fiji's population. These reforms aim to strengthen programme design, enhance targeting efficiency and expand equitable coverage, reinforcing Ministry's commitments to a more effective, inclusive and sustainable social protection system that reduces poverty and vulnerability nationwide.

Question No. 2:

What is the beneficiary review process and how effective are the beneficiary review processes?

In here, we can see that 3,063 reviews were conducted within the reporting period, in removing ineligible recipients. The beneficiary review process involves periodic assessments of individuals and households receiving assistance, to determine their continued eligibility under the programme. This includes a review of:

- household composition. For Family Assistance, it is a household assessment. Over time, we go back and check. If there are five family members in the initial application, the officers will have to go back and see that five are still there. If there

are three or two, then we have to decrease the amount to reflect the current household.

- socioeconomic conditions.
- financial circumstances.

Some, when they apply, they do not have a source of income. When we go back, maybe someone in the family graduated and secured a job. That is a ground for review of their case as well. Based on the outcome of the reassessment, the assistance may be adjusted, increased or decreased, maintained at the current level or terminated, where beneficiaries are found to be no longer eligible, and they are able to stand on their own two feet.

The 3,063 reviews conducted to date have primarily focused on updating the beneficiary records. As the National Coordinator has mentioned, we are currently digitising our manual records. That is why a lot of reviews have been facilitated by the officers, because we are going back to the families either to get incomplete documents or full set of documents and, at the same time, doing a holistic review of their cases.

There are some limitations as well. As the honourable Minister has mentioned in Parliament, we have 108,000 beneficiaries currently under our system. With that comes challenges in terms of covering all during one financial year to review all the cases. Sometimes, we re-strategise and review according to the years that they come into the system. To strengthen the effectiveness of the review process, the Ministry is processing the following improvements:

- Implementation of a management information system to enable timely data-driven reviews and automated triggers for reassessment.
- Enhancement of targeting tools including an update to the Proxy Means Test.
- Ongoing social protection reforms aimed at improving programme integrity, efficiency and responsiveness.

These efforts are expected to enhance the Ministry's ability to accurately identify ineligible beneficiaries, improve data quality and ensure that assistance is better targeted to those most in need.

With the system in place, Madam Chairperson, the system will be able to flag cases to us. We will be integrated into the Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) System. If someone passes on and they register him or her there, the system will be able to flag to us that this person passed away. However, now, we have to do it manually. We are catching up on that regard, and we are thankful to DFAT for their commitment to build this system so that we can use it.

Question No. 3:

What measurable progress has been made under the welfare-to-workfare approach?

The Ministry's welfare-to-workfare approach focusses on transitioning beneficiaries from dependency on social assistance to economic empowerment and self-reliance. To date, measurable progress has been achieved through skills development and training, to enhance employability and entrepreneurial capacity, provision of seed capital and resources to support the establishment or expansion of income-generating activities, and referral and links to employment opportunities with both the public and private sectors.

Under the National Development Plan, the Ministry is committed to supporting 300 beneficiaries under the Welfare Graduation Programme by 2027. We are aligning our targets towards the National Development Plan and are working according to that.

Question No. 4:

How does the Ministry ensure that social assistance does not create long-term dependency?

The Ministry ensures that social assistance does not create long-term dependency through a combination of time-bound support, regular reviews, as I had mentioned earlier, and structured graduation pathways through the Welfare Graduation Programme. Before, we used to give a social protection programme and it becomes a generational assistance, but we have made some changes to that. The family assistance schemes, those who are looking at assisting the poorest of the poor, we are giving only three years to five years. We have to continuously review throughout that period to see that we are able to empower them to go on to other things rather than just relying on the assistance provided by Government.

We have the regular beneficiary reviews and the graduation strategies. I believe this has been highlighted in our social media pages and the Fiji Government where the honourable Minister is going around handing over empowerment welfare graduation items for recipients to start their businesses and we start training them to be independent.

Question No. 5:

What monitoring systems are in place to ensure targeting and accuracy of vulnerable populations?

During the reporting period, the Poverty Monitoring Unit transitioned from using paper questionnaires to the Kobo Tool application to enhance the entire data collection and reporting process. The Director Poverty Monitoring Unit is also here, who can give more information into this.

The Ministry has also established a range of monitoring and targeting mechanisms to ensure that social assistance reaches the most vulnerable population accurately and efficiently. The key system approaches include:

- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):
These guide officers in applying eligibility criteria consistently, ensuring that assessments are conducted in line with approved policies and standards of the Ministry.
- Proxy Means Test (PMT):
The Ministry's poverty-targeted programme utilises an in-built PMT model based on the national HIES data to objectively assess household poverty levels and determine eligibility.
- Categorical targeting and community validation:
The eligibility is further strengthened through categorical criteria and community-based validation process, which help verify household circumstances and minimise inclusion and exclusion errors.
- Multi-stakeholders collaboration:
The Ministry works closely with communities, NGOs and other Government agencies, enabling manual data sharing and coordinated service delivery with strengthened validation process and ensure relevance of assistance.

With the IBMIS development, that is currently what we are trying to do to connect everyone so that we are talking to each other and not working in silos. At the moment, when our beneficiaries come and apply, we totally depend on what they see, so we are not able to do any background checks on whether they own any property in town. Those are the things that we are targeting when we use the new system.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Mr. Muria. I am mindful of the time. I thank you very much for all the answers to all the questions.

I know that we sent you a whole heap of questions, as Madam PS said, but because we have to excuse one of our Members of the Committee in the next 20 minutes, I wonder if we could open up the floor to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee for any questions that you need to ask now, and then we can carry on.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- We thank the Officials for the comprehensive answers to the questions. My question is on the Family Benefit Scheme. The eligibility to be enrolled into the Scheme, is it available online or how do people get to know about this assistance that is available?

MR. V. MURIA.- In terms of the information about assistance, we normally provide that during our outreach or when we do the REACH programme. All our officers are out on the field advocating for the programmes that are available within the Ministry, and we have these officers all around Fiji who go out using existing platforms like *Bose vakoro*, *Bose ni tikina* and Provincial meetings, they are there to provide the population or the general public, with assistance.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Perhaps, you can list out some of the general programmes that are currently available from the Ministry to help our population, for our benefit and for the benefit of the viewers as well?

MR. V. MURIA.- We have the:

- (1) Family Assistance Scheme that targets the poorest of the poor, the families. It is family assistance and assessment. For that particular programme, the requirement is the birth certificate of all family members. There will be an applicant, the head of the household, so they have to provide all the birth certificates of the family members, TIN, plus three passport size photos.
- (2) Social Pension Scheme. This is for the pensioners - the elderly who are 65 years and above. It is pension tested, so if they want to apply for this programme, they should not be receiving any other form of pension from the Government or FNPF or After Care Fund.
- (3) Care and Protection Allowance. This is specifically designed for vulnerable children, single parents, single mother, single father parents, prisoner dependents, and children being looked after by grandparents. This programme specifically addresses the vulnerable children. They should be under 18 years and in school.

For majority of the programmes, the requirement is the birth certificate. We need to have their birth certificates and for Care Protection programme, they need to provide school letters, confirmation of enrolment from school and support letter from community figures, passport size photo and TIN letter for the applicant.

- (4) Disability Allowance Scheme. This is specifically targeting persons living with disabilities. We have our assessment form in the Office, but the main documents required are birth certificate, TIN and passport size photos. If we know someone who needs to be assisted through this, we can either reach out to all our officers, or we also have complaints line that is available on our website. They can call us or just visit our office in all the major cities and towns.

- (5) Transport Allowance Scheme. We are providing transport assistance to our elderly and persons living with disabilities. For those living with disabilities and our pensioners who are 70 years and above, their \$26 worth of transport assistance is deposited in their bank account. It goes with their allowance. It is up to them the mode of transport that they want to choose. For those who are 65 years to 69 years, they are still using the e-transport card. They have to redeem and continuously use that until they reach 70 years, where we can give them cash top-up on top of their allowance. When they come and fill the disability assessment form, they are also eligible for the transport assistance so we will assess them at the same time, and the same goes for social pension scheme.
- (6) Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher. This is a programme that we work with the Ministry of Health to encourage early booking for pregnant mothers. I believe this is a coordination between Ministry of Health so we encourage mothers to go and do their booking early where they can fill the form at the same time, and the form will be forwarded to us for processing and then the payment will be facilitated.

In a nutshell, Madam Chairperson, those are the six programmes that we have under the Department of Social Protection and the Ministry.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- What would be the minimum income for a household to be able to access this assistance? I also noticed that you are looking after the 52 percent from the HIES. What is the Ministry going to do about the other 48 percent?

MR. V. MURIA.- I believe for the Family Assistance Scheme, it covers 58 percent, but there are other programmes that cover the rest. If you are looking at the poorest of the poor, 24,000 families are already covered, but there are other programmes, such as Care and Protection Allowance, Disability Allowance and Social Pension Scheme, that covers the rest of the families. If you are specifically looking at families, then we already covered 24,000, and every new budget, we are onboarding new families and graduating some. So, some are coming in and some are going out.

HON. V. LAL.- On the same issue, we receive a lot of complaints when people apply for social protection schemes. We have been told that when welfare officers go and visit their homes and when they see they have these basic amenities, like the freezer or TV, they say, “Oh, you do not qualify. You have a freezer there, you have a TV there and you do not qualify.” How do you justify that, because you do not eat freezer or TVs, you need food, and they do not have any source of income? How do you justify that by having freezers or TVs at your place, you do not qualify for assistance?

MR. V. MURIA.- The Family Assistance Scheme uses PMT. All that is part of the assessment. They have to do a home visit, see what you have in the house, look at maybe your electricity bill and what is your source of income. They will bring all that information. We are using a

database to assess them, so the decision on whether to assist any family does not rely on the welfare officers. We bring that information and we feed it into the system. It automatically calculates the scores and then it tells us whether they are eligible or not.

That is how we are doing it, but we also have provisions for special considerations. If the system declines it, then the officer will have to justify, “we need to assist this family because they are facing this, this, and that”. We are not limited by the system but we also have a human element that can cover, but we do not want to use that a lot because the system is there to guide us.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think the reason for that question was – correct me if I am wrong, honourable Lal – some elderly people may get gifts. A child may buy them a fridge, son may buy them a TV, but they are not earning any money. Someone else is being supported by someone else. That was probably the reason for that.

MR. V. MURIA.- We are considering all that in the assessment. Sometimes, we just want the applicants to be honest with us when we ask questions on where they got all the items. That is captured in the assessment and then a decision is made on the case.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, on that, when you talk about the system, obviously, the system seems a bit flawed because last week exactly, what was shared to me was a lady was denied the assistance because her children had given her gifts. However, that assistance is her monthly income for her survival, so you really need to look at the system and the receipts.

We cannot even depend on the officers because not many will be like, “Okay, I am moved by this lady or this elderly person's life or how she lives her daily life.” I think that balance needs to be created, not depending on the staff or the inspectors but also a system that knows human emotion. Remember, these are elderly people of our society. One of the reasons of brain drain is when people think, “okay, I am going to get old but I will have no assistance available for me in this country, so I better leave.” These are things, I think, you really need to consider when it comes to this assistance.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Just a question on human resources. Do you have enough people on the ground? Is there a gap? Do you need more people to be inspecting and visiting homes? These are the things we need to know because we are putting together our report and everyone is getting their budget submission ready in every Ministry, and we want to be able to support any of your major asks.

MS. S. KURULECA.- There is definitely a staffing shortage, so we are trying to double up on roles that people play when they go out in the field. That is one - a staffing shortage. The second response to that is, there is a need for continuous capacity building. As honourable Sharma rightly pointed out, sometimes we want to just focus on the system and not consider other elements or maybe, we were not trained in that area.

One of the things that the Ministry has started embarking on is the training of our officers in extra counselling skills to be able to ask the relevant questions, to get the information, and then make the assessment or recommendation. I think, specifically, of the case that you had read last week and we tried to reach out to that family.

There was also another case where a 92-year-old was cared for by a 75-year-old grandnephew and both of them could not move, and so mobility was an issue. Their complaint came through a media posting. We responded and our response was calling the Ministry of Health because Ministry of Health should be able to do house visits and getting Ministry of Health and our officers on the ground to go there, provide medical assistance and then what are the welfare benefits. They had never applied for welfare benefits.

I think that is another issue, that as officers, we are also very aware that a lot of people out there who are still not applying. We cannot go out there and tell 850,000 people to come here and apply. We want people to get off the welfare system, obviously, through proper processes and assessments, but if people are not applying, that is another big issue.

We also have issues, for example, where people are dumped and the titles are changed. That is a big issue currently with our elderly population. We are currently reviewing the National Ageing Policy, which we hope will then review the Act for older persons. Again, this is coming up very strongly because there are some children of elderly parents who take advantage. “I need to go and get a loan, but I can only get a loan or only get my FNPF if the title of the house is in my name”.

I suppose parents give the title. Then the next thing is, as soon as the title is in their name, they say, “thank you but, please, look for your own place. Then the problem becomes housing at St. Giles Hospital, St. Vincent, then we are looking around very intensively of where we can house these people because their own children have put them out on the street because the title is in their name. From the Ministry of Justice, if I may, we are working with the Public Trustee to give us some templates. Can we put in some caveats? “You can take the title of the house, but I am not going to relocate this room until my demise or something.” We are just trying to figure out how.

Yes, help your child get the title so that they can renovate or rent out, but still they worked hard during their time to get the house and the title, but why? Just small things like that. Maybe, we need lessons in humanity and kindness as a people, because this is more than just a social welfare, health or education issue. This is a whole group of people, our people, us, included that we are not responding to the way that we need to respond to not only the elderly, but our children as well. Yes, capacity building will definitely help our HR and looking beyond ownership and what it really means to be a human being. It is sad.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, PS, for highlighting that. My next question is, when you talk about the protection of women, children and elderly persons, which you have highlighted on a bit, what are the legislative reforms happening? I have the previous report that was tabled to Parliament, and I have the current annual report slightly two years back or so, but what are the legislative reforms? You being in the capacity coming from the law and justice side, you would be in the best position to answer this in terms of women, children and elderly persons. I spoke about the Family Law Act as well. I was informed about a clause there that you cannot just unlawfully take anyone's property or so. These things, I have been reached out on. What are your views?

MS. S. KURULECA.- Thank you, honourable Sharma. The legislative programme includes the Child Justice Act 2024, the Adoption Act 2020, Child Care and Protection Act 2024 for children, and the Family Law Act 2003 for women included. One of the things that is coming out very clearly, as more work is being done, is the way we have operationalised these Acts, the regulations and the rules, some of it need to be tweaked. Through the honourable Minister for Women and the honourable Minister for Justice, one of the things we are looking at as lead up to His Excellency the President's Address is looking at the whole legislative programme and what areas need to be tightened.

Obviously, the Parliament process for reviewing or changing an Act is a bit long for a reason. There are provisions for exceptions where the honourable Minister can make an instruction. That is one area we are exploring, particularly for the Child Care and Protection Act 2024 and the Child Justice Act 2024.

In terms of the Adoption Act 2020, we are working very closely with the Judiciary to regularise that. We are anticipating that once all the regulations, operations, rules and forms are completed by July this year, we will have this out there.

The Family Law Act 2003 is a bit more intense, and we have not had a proper look at it. We have started with the other three, but it is a part of our legislative programme. We have been fortunate in the Ministry of Justice where we have had the support of DFAT, who is helping us with legislative programmes and our review.

In the Ministry of Women, we also have the National Action Plan (NAP) for the prevention of violence against women and girls, and we are also drafting a National Action Plan for the prevention of violence against children. These two will have a very common intersect, and the idea behind it is to ensure that women, girls and all of our children are protected. I think when it was just the women and girls, because of the title, people forgot that there is also a very vulnerable group of young boys that we are not taking care of.

It is our anticipation that through the legislative programme, as well as the support of our technical partners, we will be able to review all of these in this current Parliamentary Calendar year. It is definitely in the plan.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I am very mindful and I am sure other members of the team are ready to speak. Maybe after your question, honourable Lal, we can just go through the room and, perhaps, those of you who are ready to speak, may speak to your areas of expertise, please.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Acting PS. We all know that there are so many people out there who are not aware of the schemes available. As a Ministry, how often do you do outreach to these people and do awareness programmes so that they know that they qualify for, the age groups and those things? How often is this awareness programme done?

MS. S. KURULECA.- Maybe, I will allow Director Mereoni to talk about our REACH programme.

MS. M. TUIMURU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, REACH Programme is a Ministry-led programme. It was developed to enhance access of vital information and public service to our rural, remote and maritime islands. When it started, it was with the UNDP, funded by the Government of Japan, and then in 2018, it was moved to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation at the time.

For REACH, we usually have it at all four Divisions. In terms of identifying potential venues of this programme, we usually take it to our rural and remote areas where there are difficulties in accessibility, and we take the services right to the doorsteps of our rural communities. Going back to your question, how do we identify it? In consultation with our Divisional Commissioners and our Roko Tui Office, that is how we identify areas where the REACH Programme is usually taken to.

In terms of our REACH, it is a multi-agency approach whereby the Ministry involves other stakeholders that are part and parcel of this Programme. Not only our state, we also invite our

non-state actors in terms of our financial institutions, educational institutions, and other partners, even the private sector, that usually come in to help Government in taking out their services to our rural communities.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Given data sharing challenges, what timeline is set for achieving full interagency data integration?

MS. S. KURULECA- It is an ongoing piece of work but Government, in 2024, allowed Ministries to exchange data without the need for an MOU or MOA being signed. However, when we come to Family Assistance or any schemes, we also need to talk to FNPF and FRCS. Right now, data sharing is viewed only for those agencies - they have to ask, then we can give. However, for the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education, we can freely share data.

I guess, long and short, it is ongoing. There is no restriction between Ministries, but in terms of going to an organisation outside of the Ministry, including iTLTB, FRCS and FNPF, each time, the request must come directly to the Permanent Secretaries of the various Ministries where you are asking data from, then we can supply it.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- The Ministry has funding that they allocate to these organisations. What trend have you seen in terms of the growth of women as entrepreneurs, women empowerment, women getting into businesses and using local resources? Where are we? What does the data say? Is it effective? Is it worth every taxpayer's penny?

MS. A. NAIROBA.- For Government, we do not have all the resources to be able to make outreach to our communities. That is where we provide grants and assistance to women's institutions, NGO grants to our women's groups and women-led organisations, who have the capacity and the outreach to the local communities to be able to provide capacity building for women out in the communities and raise awareness as well. This is where we work very much in collaboration with our women-led organisations and women's groups across the country.

Through our National Action Plan on Women's Economic Empowerment, we have identified the challenges, that women are not able to have access to markets and all the other challenges. We have seen that we need to be working very closely with other Government agencies, which the Ministry cannot do alone, which is where we provide those kind of grants and opportunities for women institutions across the country. You might have noticed some of the success stories our women entrepreneurs have invested in through our women's economic empowerment grants. We had invested in grants that will be able to make expansion on whether it is to build up their new businesses or expansions, and supporting their communities, villages and settlements.

We have seen support in terms of them having to identify their markets, but it is still a challenge for those who are out there in the maritime areas. How do we get to work closely is, we work closely with our development partners, banking institutions and financial institutions within Government to see how we can expand the work that we do in ensuring that women are able to meet and be resilient when it comes to disaster, as the impacts of disaster has an impact on their work and their entrepreneurial activities as well. Having some sort of smart agriculture incentives as well. This is where we work very much in collaboration across the other Government Ministries to support them.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do you have any data on existing businesses, businesses that have started off but have not survived?

MS. A. NAIROBA.- We would be able to provide you that in writing as well in terms of the success stories and where women have expanded through.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do you also have data on when you give grants to these organisations, how much is administrative cost and how much is actually tangible output gone?

MS. A. NAIROBA.- Yes, for the grants that we provide, majority of them are for programme implementation on the ground, to provide empowerment programmes across the country with women from all walks of life. We are looking at women in terms of women institutions who provide these opportunities on women's economic empowerment, gender-based violence programmes and gender climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives. That is where we have provided our support through, to be able to have that coverage across the Divisions as well.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- You would agree that inclusion is necessary for empowerment and growth. Where is the space for empowerment for men in all of these - not young boys, but men?

MS. S. KURULECA.- We are a ministry that believe that the men must come with - women cannot do this alone, whether we are talking about it as a welfare issue, a justice issue or an education issue. The grants for the women, whether they apply for it as an individual or through an organisation or a co-op, they must submit their business plan, the trustees, all of those. There are applications where the men are already there and included in the applications. The man is the head of a household and the partner is doing the fishing and I am going to do the cooking of the fish that the man buys.

In terms of a specific grant only for them, it is not going to be administered through the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, but they can apply for the grant through the Ministry of Trade - small business grants of \$3,000, \$5,000, or \$1,000, what have you.

In terms of registration, the Ministry of Justice can provide companies that have continued to renew their registration because they are operating and we can also provide information on those who have not renewed their registration. However, one of the things that is quite clear and it also exists in the SME is that, for them to be able to continue to receive funding, they must make sure that their business plan is working, they have accounts, the bank and the rest of it.

I guess it is a very comprehensive process, but if everyone reports back, for example, if Selina took \$5,000 this year, if she does not come back next year, unless the Ministry goes out to find her, it will be quite difficult. We are anticipating that with the IBMIS system, all of these things will just pop up. We have asked the designers of the programme to have alerts. If this file is due to be checked, what is happening here? So, we are hoping that that will also be flagged in the system. Someone just takes the money and, initially, it was supposed to be for a canteen, but instead of buying the things for the canteen, they are just buying things to eat. We are hoping that this is picked up.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- As you can tell, it has been very difficult to keep within our time, because it is a very, very important topic to talk about.

HON. V. LAL.- We know there was a time when it was mandatory for all children of school-going age to be in school. What we have noticed recently, Ma'am, especially after COVID-19, that a lot of children who are of school-going age, are seen loitering around, selling food, involving in these illegal activities. What has happened? Is there some restriction of the law, or what is your Ministry doing about it?

MS. S. KURULECA.- Children going to school, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Children, Ministry of Youth and the Fiji Police Force and everyone needs to get involved. What we have done is, we do street sweeps. Children who are supposed to be in school, we will take them back to their homes and to their parents where they have identified where they live. That is the other bit of this, because not all of them are telling us truthfully where they live or who their parents are. The Child Justice Act allows 2024 for the Ministry of Justice to go and do age verification. If you are 15 years and you are saying you are 19 years, but we see you are 15 years, we can verify the age and then take you back to your parents or *vanua* or wherever.

We have been in consultation with the Fiji Police Force last month. We are going to first chance, second chance, then after that, we need to be realistic about the powers that exist

with the Director Children. We can ask the Police now to prosecute negligence. That has always been there, but I guess as a community, as a society, we are hoping that once you are brought back by the relevant authorities, then parents will take charge. However, children go there for two days and then they run away again for whatever reason about the situation happening at home.

It takes a whole of society. When we see all these children loafing around and they should not be loafing around, they look like they should be in school, our own families and extended families, need to make sure that they go to school. Going to school and staying in school are the two things that we need to get right. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women cannot do it alone. There needs to be a more concerted effort.

We have really beefed up on our street sweep, not only for children, but also for our elderly. We have noticed an increase in our elderly at bus stops in the morning when it is cold and we know that we are still in cyclone season. Sunday morning sweeps have also happened. We are talking with St. Vincent and other homes, our Golden Age homes, to try and put them in there.

In cases where we know that the officer has gone to do the street sweep and has noticed that there might be a mental health issue, we have contacted St. Giles and tried to get them in there for proper assessment before any other intervention. Yes, we are definitely exploring some charges on negligence, not only for our children but also our elderly, where they had been pushed out of their homes because the title has gone to their adult children.

MS. A. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, from the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone, every single individual, families, communities, agencies and bodies that are already doing something or putting in effort to protect children. I notice your labelled pin, Madam, thank you for championing children and child protection.

I would like to take this opportunity to raise some of the issues and I know that the response by Madam PS has covered most of what was the response in child protection. To highlight some of the emerging issues, one of which is online bullying, where the abuse is happening outside the physical space and now online. That is an emerging issue that we are facing and we are having to deal with that. It comes with the need for capacity building.

I have also noticed the response provided by Madam on staffing. We are a new department, we are going on to our second year as a department and a lot of legal reforms and legislations we are currently undergoing, includes a drawing up of the regulations. I want to acknowledge

your contribution in ensuring that the Child Justice Act and the Child Care and Protection Act were enacted, as well as the Adoption Act, which will commence soon.

We would like to raise the importance of one of the questions, and it was one of my favourite questions, about case resolution rate. Because we are a new department, we are working on indicators as well, on how to work with indicators and outcomes for children. I think using those questions to inform us of what the outcomes will be, it will be very important for the Department of Children, and we want to acknowledge everyone who has contributed to protect the children in this country.

The question on how effective our juvenile justice and residential services in terms of rehabilitation outcomes, this is effective for us, since our programmes support rehabilitation. However, with the new legislations and regulations in place, we hope to get more programmes. We want to test more programmes, and we see that it is contextualised to Fiji's context, and we want to create more protective environment for our children. There are also mechanisms in place, such as the National Coordinating Committee on Children. This is a multisectoral Committee that advises Government as well as implement our commitment through the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Very briefly, I would like to take this time to thank you and request for support for the Department of Children, and allowing different agencies and Ministries to help support when we come to request for preventative efforts in the communities. We are aware that there are *iTaukei* families and *iTaukei* issues in terms of children. There are also issues of children in other different communities, and we want to see that it is tailormade for communities, as well as individuals. Child protection is, in a lot of cases, individualised, so our effort is targeted towards the needs of a particular child, so we want to see that in the new legislation of case management approach. That, Madam Chairperson, is a report from the Department of Children.

MS. R. BI.- Very quickly, I am just going to highlight and say that social protection reforms are going to address a lot of issues. We are all looking forward to the IBMIS, that is going to address a lot of audit issues that have been raised, and digitise all records, ensuring this integration as well with the relevant agencies.

Secondly, on the Proxy Means Test, it is going to move, shift a bit from asset to consumption, so that is going to address a lot of concerns that have been raised. We are strengthening Standard Operating Procedures, not only provide training to the team on SOPs, but also doing inclusive social protection delivery, looking at it from a humanitarian centred approach.

The Social Protection Communication Plan is also being drafted at the moment, and that is also going to create a lot of awareness on the programmes, and ensure that these reforms are well communicated, not only internally to the staff, but also to the public.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, we are also working towards that. Holistically, I would say social protection reforms are going to really address a lot of issues and challenges that have been highlighted over the years.

MS. A. NAIROBA.- Whilst we are still in March, on behalf of executives, I would like to thank all Government agencies, institutions, and women's groups from the private and public sector, for celebrating International Women's Day. I believe that this has really raised awareness in terms of the recognition and the contribution of the work of our women and mothers across the region, and with the adult sector, and in our society. Something that we would like to see that other international days, like Pinktober, could be really celebrated and recognised and done across the same as how we did for International Women's Day.

I will probably add on in terms of the outcomes on our National Action Plan on the prevention of violence against women and girls. We recently had a mid-term review on the National Action Plan, and we had seen something that we would like to strengthen - the work on our prevention across Government and Government agencies. As you have seen in the response, it has brought about changes in terms of our gender based violence coordination across Government, within our CSO partners and institutions, having our national shelter guidelines for every safe houses housing gender-based violence survivors. This is something that the Government is grateful for, and the service delivery protocols that we would like to have in place as well.

Madam PS has also mentioned some of the reforms that we would like to do and one of particular as well under National Action Plan is the Domestic Violence Act. We have seen a bit of gaps in terms of how women and girls are actually reporting gender-based violence cases when you are out in the maritime areas, looking at access to justice services and services in the rural communities. That is something that we see, that it is not really something that we can work in isolation, but how do we work across Government and institutions that will be able to address that as well.

In terms of women representation across sectors and looking at how we are working in addressing genderbased violence, women's economic empowerment, and gender and climate change and disaster risk reduction, it is really a whole of Government approach and how do we get to really work together in deliberating and supporting our women and girls in development in the next five years or 10 years or so.

Specifically, on the question in terms of how do we get the involvement of men and boys in the communities, that is something that has already been working on the ground, in our communities and with our stakeholders. When we also go out to the communities, we work in collaboration with other CSO partners and NGOs, undertaking gender roles and gender trainings as well. That is also something that we would like to see, when we conduct trainings or awareness in the communities, not only that men are always accessible to these trainings, but there are parallel programmes that are happening on the ground.

Whilst the mothers are accessing training opportunities, we also have moms and dads, and we also have awareness programmes for the children that might be working parallel, and considering the gendered care roles that women play. How do we ensure that this is valued in households? How do we share those gendered roles to be able to look after the children while our mothers get access and excel from their development in the rural communities as well? There is already work around. It is probably just a matter of strengthening and working more in collaboration with our men and counterparts, and we need to work together, just reiterating what Madam PS has mentioned.

HON. V. LAL.- This is not really a question, but a comment, but you can always respond to this. This is in regards to bus assistance given to our elderly. Initially, what used to happen is, this used to cover a period of three months. They were given a certain amount and it covered three months. In that case, they were able to actually plan their trip, especially for those who go long distances. What has happened now, it is given monthly, and especially for long distances, they can go wherever they want to, but that is not enough for them to return, so it makes it difficult. Then next month, they just top-up the amount used. Again, you do not have that enough. How is the Ministry dealing with it, and how can we improve on it?

The elderly, when they are alone, they feel lonely, they want to go and spend some time, but they cannot be staying there for a month. If you are out of your office, you cannot get that money. Can you make it easier for all people, please, and work on that?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Just a word to the Ministry. Governments come and go, Civil Service members will come and go, the Committee Members will come and go, but we need to be aligned to the changes that we want, the National Development Plan. What I am coming to is, if there can be a precedent set, where when we look at a new report, the Committee is updated on the key findings and the Committee recommendations from the previous report that was tabled to Parliament? If your Ministry can very kindly inform our Secretariat of the key findings and the Committee recommendations that have been kicked off from the previous report that was tabled so that, at least, we are aware that these issues have been dealt with?

I have heard of the Child Care and Protection Bill, which I see is in the pipeline, but there are many more here before me, if the Ministry can consider. I think this is something, as a Committee, we will be telling other submittees as well, so we can be aligned, rather than getting derailed with our commitments, et cetera.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, honourable Members. To the staff of the Ministry, I just want to say, “thank you again for your time”. Thank you for answering our questions so succinctly, and I hope that you will mind if we come up with more questions, we will just send them to you, and you can send back your written replies.

The Committee adjourned at 10.23 a.m.

Written Response



**Responses prepared by the Ministry of Women,
Children and Social Protection**

23 March 2026

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Questions for the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports

A. Strategic Governance and Policy Alignment

1. How does the Ministry measure the impact of its programmes beyond outputs (e.g. reduction in poverty, improved child protection outcomes)?

Response: The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection measures programme impact by assessing how interventions improve household wellbeing, resilience, and long-term outcomes rather than focusing solely on outputs. Through the Poverty Monitoring Unit, eight Poverty Alleviation Programmes were assessed across key sectors using baseline data, field surveys, indicator-aligned tools, and stakeholder validation to determine effectiveness, identify gaps, and inform recommendations. Findings show significant improvements in household income, living standards, market access, food security, and community infrastructure, alongside positive social and child-wellbeing outcomes. From a social protection standpoint, the Ministry tracks whether households graduate from assistance and remain independent, reflecting sustained resilience. This approach is being strengthened through the Adaptive Social Protection framework, which links social assistance to resilience-building, shock responsiveness, and long-term wellbeing to ensure programmes create lasting improvements in people's lives.

2. What mechanisms are in place to ensure alignment with international conventions such as CEDAW and CRC translates into tangible national outcomes?

Response: Fiji translates its CEDAW obligations into national outcomes through a comprehensive policy, institutional and coordination framework that aligns national commitments with gender equality objectives. Key policies—including the National Gender Policy, Women's Plan of Action, the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All

Women and Girls (2023–2028), the Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Policy, and the National Development Plan—embed CEDAW principles across sectors to eliminate discrimination and advance women’s rights. The Department for Women, as Fiji’s National Women’s Machinery, leads coordination, advocacy and policy guidance, working closely with civil society, NGOs and development partners, and conducting whole-of-government consultations—such as those held for Fiji’s 6th Periodic CEDAW Report in June and July 2023—to ensure coherent implementation. Strengthening gender data systems, including through the Fiji Country Gender Assessment, and building capacity across ministries to integrate CEDAW into planning and programming further support evidence-based decision-making and a unified national response to gender inequality.

3. How effectively are cross-ministry collaborations functioning, particularly for gender mainstreaming and poverty reduction initiatives?

Response: The REACH Programme is a government-led initiative designed to improve access to essential information and public services for rural and remote communities by deploying a multi-agency outreach model that brings ministries, departments and partner organizations together to deliver integrated services in one location, reducing barriers caused by distance, transport costs and limited information. Established in 2015 with USD 2.6 million funding from the Government of Japan and coordinated by UNDP, the programme expanded from pilot sites in the Northern and Eastern Divisions to nationwide coverage in 2016, before being formally handed over to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in 2018 with an annual government budget that has fluctuated between \$32,000 and \$300,000. Through its outreach, REACH provides legal information, social welfare and poverty alleviation support, child protection services, counselling and psychosocial assistance, basic health services, financial literacy training and public awareness on government programmes. Between 2015 and 2025, it reached 176 districts and 1,595 communities across all 14 provinces—including Rotuma—engaging 61,890 participants, with women representing 56% of beneficiaries. Complementing this, cross-government collaboration on gender equality has strengthened through mechanisms such as the 6th CEDAW State Report process, gender mainstreaming initiatives under the Institutional Capacity Development programme, and gender-responsive public budgeting with the Ministry of Finance, which integrate gender considerations into planning, budgeting and policy implementation. Within social protection, reforms aimed at advancing gender-responsive approaches—such as using HIES data for programme targeting, improving MIS integration, and enhancing coordination through consultations and technical working groups—have supported more effective service delivery, although data-sharing challenges persist.

4. What are the key policy gaps identified during the reporting period, and what corrective actions are planned?

Response: The CEDAW Committee’s Concluding Observations and Fiji’s State Report highlight persistent gaps including limited awareness and application of CEDAW among rural, iTaukei, women with disabilities and diverse women; the absence of a

comprehensive anti-discrimination law aligned with CEDAW; and continued barriers to women's access to justice due to distance, cost and limited services. Government's corrective actions, which include implementing a Cabinet-approved five-year CEDAW Implementation Plan to strengthen legal frameworks, build institutional capacity and raise awareness; expanding gender-transformative capacity development and gender-responsive budgeting to improve policy coherence and accountability; and enhancing gender-disaggregated data systems to better inform planning and evaluation. Complementing this, the Department of Social Protection has identified gaps in system integration, graduation pathways and fragmented data systems, and is taking corrective action through strengthened inter-agency coordination and data-sharing arrangements, development of collaborative livelihood and employment pathways, and rollout of an integrated Management Information System to improve targeting, monitoring and overall system efficiency.

B. Budget Performance and Financial Management

1. The Ministry received significant allocations (e.g., \$147.7m in 2022–2023). How does the Ministry justify variances between allocation and utilisation, such as the 84% utilisation in the Poverty Benefit Scheme?

Response: The variance between allocation and utilisation within the Department of Social Protection, such as the 84% utilisation under the Poverty Benefit Scheme is mainly from ongoing beneficiary reviews and case replacements that delay uptake of allocated funds, administrative bottlenecks related to completing assessments and obtaining full documentation, and accounting adjustments including invalid cheques returned and re-deposited, Post Fiji reimbursements based only on cashed vouchers, and delays caused by late receipt of approved RIEs from the Ministry of Finance.

These variations do not represent a loss of funds.

To address the underlying causes, the Ministry is implementing Social Protection Reforms to strengthen budget credibility through improved forecasting and planning, alongside the development of an Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System (IBMIS) to support real-time case processing, faster decision-making, better coordination of payouts, and ultimately more efficient and optimal resource utilisation.

2. What were the main reasons for underutilisation or overutilisation across programmes?

Response: The Department of Social Protection's under and over utilization of programme funds stems mainly from delays in onboarding beneficiaries due to incomplete documentation and the prioritization of reviews and exits over new intakes, alongside operational constraints that slowed disbursement. Underutilization also resulted from vacancies within the Ministry, late recruitment for technical assistance under the SPP Reform, delayed implementation of Child Protection Allowance adjustments, incomplete tender processes for the Women's Institution shelter, late engagement of the software

developer for SWMIS, project cost variations delaying the Barefoot College construction to the next financial year, and the unavailability of suppliers for large capital equipment purchases. Overutilization occurred primarily in Seg 6 for major SPP programmes (TAS, SPS, FAS) where budget allocations were insufficient for the number of recipients, as well as across Seg 3–7 operational budgets due to increased outreach and activities beyond approved funding levels, requiring internal savings to meet shortfalls. These patterns reflect administrative, procurement, and operational challenges that affect the timely and efficient use of allocated resources.

3. How does the Ministry ensure value for money in major social protection expenditures?

Response: Social protection delivers immediate relief by providing cash and support to vulnerable households to meet basic needs, especially during shocks.

Under Fiji's Adaptive Social Protection reforms, programs also:

- Prevent deeper poverty,
- Protect children's development,
- Reduce negative coping strategies, and
- Build resilience and economic participation.

The Ministry ensures effective delivery through improved targeting, digitization (MIS) to reduce leakages, and periodic program and expenditure reviews, supported by internal and external audits, beneficiary reviews, and oversight by the Poverty Monitoring Unit to maintain accountability and impact.

4. Given the cash-based accounting system, how does the Ministry track long-term liabilities and programme sustainability?

Response: The Ministry ensures oversight of long-term liabilities and program sustainability through strategic planning and strong financial management.

This is achieved through alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) and medium-term expenditure frameworks, supported by annual budgeting with forward projections based on beneficiary trends and program costs. Programs are designed with time-bound assistance and regular reviews, which help manage fiscal exposure and prevent open-ended liabilities.

The Ministry is also strengthening data-driven targeting and efficiency through ongoing Social Protection Reforms, while promoting a welfare-to-workfare approach that links beneficiaries to livelihoods and economic participation, thereby reducing long-term dependency.

In addition, the development of an integrated Management Information System (MIS) will enhance real-time tracking, forecasting, and decision-making.

Overall, while cash transfers remain flexible and responsive, the Ministry complements this with fiscal discipline, improved systems, and a focus on resilience and self-reliance to ensure long-term sustainability of social protection programs

5. What internal controls are in place to prevent fraud, leakages, or mistargeting of welfare assistance?

Response: The Ministry has resolved to draft and implement strong internal controls and governance measures to safeguard welfare assistance from fraud, leakages, and mistargeting. These include clear Standard Operating Procedures, segregation of duties, regular eligibility verification, and robust audit and compliance processes. Continuous program monitoring further strengthens oversight. In addition, the development of an integrated Management Information System (IBMIS) will reduce errors, prevent duplication and fraud, enable real-time data validation, and enhance overall transparency and accountability. Together, these measures ensure that assistance is delivered with integrity, efficiency, and proper stewardship of public resources.

C. Programme Effectiveness – Social Protection

1. The Poverty Benefit Scheme assisted over 24,000 households—what percentage of national poverty does this represent?

Response: The Poverty Benefit Scheme, now the Family Assistance Scheme, targets the poorest 10% of households, and current coverage supports about 24,000 households, roughly 52% of the 45,721 households identified as living below the poverty line in the 2019 HIES. This indicates strong reach but also clear coverage gaps caused by targeting limitations, accessibility challenges in remote areas, and program capacity constraints. To improve equity and accuracy, the Ministry is advancing key Social Protection Reforms, including updating the Proxy Means Test using the latest HIES data and incorporating findings from a technical review by Development Pathways, which showed that the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Child Protection Allowance, and Social Pension Scheme collectively reach around 22% of Fiji's population. These reforms aim to strengthen programme design, enhance targeting efficiency, and expand equitable coverage, reinforcing the Ministry's commitment to a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable social protection system that reduces poverty and vulnerability nationwide.

2. What is the beneficiary review process? How effective are the beneficiary review processes (3,063 reviews conducted) in removing ineligible recipients?

Response: The beneficiary review process involves periodic reassessment of individuals and households receiving assistance to determine their continued eligibility under the program. This includes a review of:

- Household composition,
- Socio-economic conditions, and
- Financial circumstances.
- Based on the outcome of the reassessment, the assistance may be:
- Adjusted (increased or decreased),
- Maintained at the current level, or
- Terminated where beneficiaries are found to be no longer eligible.

The 3,063 reviews conducted to date have primarily focused on updating beneficiary records and ensuring data accuracy. In cases where there is evidence of improved living standards, beneficiaries deemed ineligible are removed from the program. While this demonstrates that the review process is functioning, its overall effectiveness in systematically identifying and removing ineligible recipients remains constrained.

The main limitation is resource capacity, with approximately 135 field officers across 19 Welfare Offices responsible for administering social protection programs and servicing over 108,000+ beneficiaries nationwide. This significantly affects the frequency, depth, and coverage of reviews.

To strengthen the effectiveness of the review process, the Ministry is progressing the following improvements:

- Implementation of a Management Information System (MIS) to enable timely, data-driven reviews and automated triggers for reassessment;
- Enhancement of targeting tools, including updates to the Proxy Means Test (PMT); and
- Ongoing Social Protection Reforms aimed at improving program integrity, efficiency, and responsiveness.

These efforts are expected to enhance the Ministry's ability to accurately identify ineligible beneficiaries, improve data quality, and ensure that assistance is better targeted to those most in need.

3. What measurable progress has been made under the "welfare to workfare" approach?

Response: The Ministry's "welfare to workfare" approach focuses on transitioning beneficiaries from dependency on social assistance to economic empowerment and self-reliance.

To date, measurable progress has been achieved through:

- Skills development and training to enhance employability and entrepreneurial capacity;
- Provision of seed capital and resources to support the establishment or expansion of income-generating activities; and

- Referrals and linkages to employment opportunities within both the public and private sectors.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), the Ministry has committed to supporting 300 beneficiaries under the Welfare Graduation Program by 2027. Currently, the Ministry is working with approximately 200 beneficiaries, indicating steady progress towards achieving this target.

While the program is still in its early stages, initial outcomes demonstrate positive movement towards:

- Improved livelihood opportunities,
- Reduced dependency on welfare assistance, and
- Increased participation in economic activities.

The Ministry continues to strengthen this approach through ongoing Social Protection Reforms, improved targeting, and enhanced program design to ensure that beneficiaries are supported with sustainable pathways from welfare to workfare.

4. How does the Ministry ensure that social assistance does not create long-term dependency?

Response: The Ministry ensures that social assistance does not create long-term dependency through a combination of time-bound support, regular reviews, and structured graduation pathways.

Key measures include:

- **Time-bound assistance:** Social protection programs are designed with defined durations to encourage transition. For example, the Family Assistance Scheme (formerly Poverty Benefit Scheme) is generally provided for 3–5 years, while the Child Protection Allowance is provided for up to 5 years, subject to review.
- **Regular beneficiary reviews:** The Ministry conducts periodic reassessments of households to determine continued eligibility, ensuring that assistance is only provided to those who remain in need and identifying beneficiaries whose circumstances have improved.
- **Graduation strategies:** Eligible beneficiaries are progressively linked to the Welfare Graduation Program, which supports their transition from welfare to workfare through skills training, income-generating opportunities, and employment linkages.
- **Conditional and targeted support:** Assistance is structured to address immediate needs while promoting self-reliance, with increasing emphasis on economic empowerment and livelihood support.

While implementation of the graduation approach is still evolving, these measures collectively aim to ensure that social assistance serves as a temporary safety net, while enabling beneficiaries to move towards sustainable livelihoods and reduced dependency over time.

5. What monitoring systems are in place to ensure targeting accuracy of vulnerable populations?

Response: During the reporting period, the Poverty Monitoring Unit transitioned from using paper questionnaires to the KOBO Tool application to enhance the entire data collection and reporting process. This shift aimed to improve questionnaire design by allowing logical flows and linking between different sections, ensure accurate and reliable data capture in the field, enable timely data cleaning and verification of responses, and link survey coordinates directly to ArcGIS Online for spatial analysis. Additionally, the integration of KOBO Tool streamlined report writing by providing organized, high-quality, and easily accessible data for evidence-based decision-making

The use of ArcGIS Online and Kobo Toolbox during the impact assessment survey by the Poverty Monitoring Unit significantly enhanced the accuracy, efficiency, and reliability of data collection and analysis. KOBO Tool allowed real-time, field-based data capture, reducing manual errors and speeding up the survey process, while ArcGIS Online enabled spatial mapping of monitored projects, visualizing beneficiary locations, project coverage, and service gaps. Mapping projects on ArcGIS Online is particularly important for improving decision-making, as it provides geo-referenced insights that help identify priority areas, optimize resource allocation, track project performance, and support evidence-based planning and interventions across communities.

The Ministry has established a range of monitoring and targeting mechanisms to ensure that social assistance reaches the most vulnerable populations accurately and efficiently.

Key systems and approaches include:

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** These guide officers in applying eligibility criteria consistently, ensuring that assessments are conducted in line with approved policies and standards.
- **Proxy Means Testing (PMT):** The Ministry's poverty-targeted programs utilize an inbuilt PMT model based on national Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data to objectively assess household poverty levels and determine eligibility.
- **Categorical Targeting and Community Validation:** Eligibility is further strengthened through categorical criteria and community-based validation processes, which help verify household circumstances and minimize inclusion and exclusion errors.
- **Poverty Monitoring Unit:** The Ministry's Poverty Monitoring Unit conducts ongoing monitoring and review of social protection programs, providing evidence-based recommendations to improve program efficiency, effectiveness, and targeting accuracy.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** The Ministry works closely with communities, NGOs, and other government agencies, enabling manual data sharing and coordinated service delivery, which strengthens validation processes and ensures relevance of assistance.

Social Protection Reforms and MIS Development: As part of ongoing reforms, the Ministry is developing an integrated Management Information System (MIS) with interoperability across government systems. This will:

- Enable automated application and validation of eligibility criteria,
- Improve data accuracy and real-time monitoring,
- Strengthen targeting through enhanced assessment tools, and
- Support adaptive social protection and professional, consistent case management.

Collectively, these systems ensure that the Ministry continues to strengthen targeting accuracy, transparency, and accountability, while improving the overall effectiveness of social protection programs.

D. Child Protection and Welfare Services

1. With 1,780 reported child welfare cases in 2021–2022, what trends are emerging and what preventive strategies are in place?

Response: The emerging trend highlights a rise in online forms of abuse, particularly cyberbullying. Additionally, cases of sexual abuse and grooming have become increasingly prevalent, occurring both through digital platforms and in physical settings.

These trends are being addressed within the framework of the Child Care and Protection Act 2024, which reinforces the State’s responsibility to safeguard children from all forms of abuse, including those facilitated through technology. Current preventive strategies include:

- Strengthening national awareness initiatives on child protection and online safety targeting children, parents, and communities
- Promotion of reporting pathways, including the Child Helpline (1325), to facilitate early identification and intervention
- Enhanced inter-agency coordination between social welfare services, the Fiji Police Force, and the education sector (NCCC & IAC).

2. What is the case resolution rate and average response time for child protection cases?

Response: Child protection cases are primarily reported through the National Child Helpline (1325), the Fiji Police Force, and the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. Most cases are handled through referrals, support to families, and followup monitoring, rather than going to court. For high-risk cases, these are presented to court and result in children placed under care.

The resolution of the cases depends on the severity of the case. As per the Act, case reports/written reports need to be submitted within 72 hours after the reporting of the cases. Cases such as Neglect or low risk cases are usually addressed within that period. However,

high risk cases like sexual abuse require in depth intervention and collaboration of partners such as Police and Medical professionals - these cases usually take longer to resolve.

3.Are current staffing levels sufficient to manage the volume and complexity of cases?

Response: With the establishment of the Department of Children, current staffing levels are challenged to effectively manage the increasing number of cases being reported and referred to the Ministry. With the emerging issues such as the online abuse and neglect, these have placed pressure on existing officers. However, it is important to note that the Department is being developed and strengthened in a phased approach.

As the Department continues to expand, it is expected that we will be better equipped and resourced to improve response time, case management and overall service delivery.

4.How effective are juvenile justice and residential services in rehabilitation outcomes?

Response: This is effective for us as the programs supports rehabilitation. The current practice places emphasis on rehabilitation, reintegration and best interest of the child. The residential homes for children that works with the Ministry provides structured care, supervision and access to education and life-skills programs. For some of these cases, these types of interventions have contributed to positive behavioural change and successful reintegration into families and communities.

5.What oversight mechanisms exist for state-run homes and childcare institutions?

Response: Oversight of state-run homes and children's institutions is undertaken by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection through the Department of Children. These homes operate within an established regulatory framework guided by the Minimum Standards, Standard Operating Procedures, and the Child Care and Protection legislative provisions, which collectively set out the requirements for care, protection, and service delivery.

Key oversight mechanisms include the regular review of individual case plans, as well as the supervision and monitoring of care plans to ensure that the developmental, emotional, and protection needs of children are adequately met. The Department of Children also conducts periodic audits of residential homes to assess compliance with the Minimum Standards, identify gaps, and ensure that corrective actions are implemented in a timely manner.

In addition, Residential Forum meetings are convened with Home Managers to provide a platform for coordination, information sharing, and the discussion of operational challenges, policy updates, and best practices. These forums strengthen accountability and promote consistency in service delivery across institutions.

Further oversight is reinforced through routine visits by welfare officers, incident reporting and review mechanisms, and ongoing engagement with the workers and children. Collectively,

these measures support continuous monitoring, strengthen governance, and ensure that the best interests of children remain central to the operation of all residential care facilities.

E. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

1. How does the Ministry measure the impact of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) grants, given only 40 recipients received \$40,000 total?

Response: The Ministry measures the impact of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) grants by tracking how recipients use the \$1,000 support to start or expand income-generating activities, improve household income, and increase participation in local economies, especially among informal-sector women. Although only 40 women were supported in FY2022–2023, the grants directly enabled grassroots entrepreneurship and informed broader national action, including the development and Cabinet endorsement of the Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (WEE NAP), which now drives coordinated, multi-sector implementation across four priority pillars: Women at Work, Women in Business, Women's Financial Inclusion, and Women's Health and Wellbeing. Monitoring, follow-up visits, and linkages to training and finance ensure grants lead to sustained outcomes.

2. What follow-up monitoring is conducted to assess sustainability of income generating projects?

Response: The Ministry conducts systematic follow-up through Divisional Offices using standardized WEE Monitoring and Success Story templates, which capture progress, sustainability, and challenges over multiple financial years. Monitoring includes site visits, direct engagement with women entrepreneurs, and documentation of outcomes, supported by the Poverty Monitoring Unit to ensure consistency and evidence-based reporting. This approach helps confirm sustained business activity, improved livelihoods, and opportunities for further support through training, finance, and market linkages.

3. What concrete outcomes have resulted from National Action Plan consultations on Gender-Based Violence?

Response: The National Action Plan has generated tangible national impacts, including strengthened GBV coordination, updated National Shelter Guidelines, a revised Service Delivery Protocol, and expanded prevention initiatives across schools, policing, and the civil service. Key achievements include a gender analysis of the Online Safety Act, progress on the Rapid Attitude Survey, ethical GBV reporting work with the Fijian Media Association, strengthened prevention leadership through the Great Council of Chiefs, development of a civil service GBV Toolkit, and the first combined International Women's Day parade by disciplined forces—demonstrating growing national commitment and a strengthened enabling environment for longterm violence prevention.

4. How effective are awareness campaigns (e.g., Pinktober, Rural Women's Day) in delivering long-term behavioural change?

Response: Awareness campaigns like Pinktober, International Women’s Day, and Rural Women’s Day effectively increase national visibility, public engagement, and knowledge on gender equality and women’s rights, supported by helplines and community programmes. They contribute to strong civic participation reflected in high female voter turnout; and women comprising 59% of civil servants. However awareness campaigns alone are insufficient to drive sustained behavioural change, especially in rural and marginalised communities where rights awareness and access to services remain limited. Lasting change occurs when campaigns are paired with services, economic empowerment, and institutional reforms, which the Ministry continues to strengthen through integrated approaches aligned with national frameworks.

5. What barriers continue to limit women’s participation in leadership and economic activities?

Response: Women’s participation is constrained by structural and social barriers, including low labour force participation (39%), concentration in low-paid informal work, significant wage gaps, heavy unpaid care burdens, limited access to finance and markets, low financial inclusion, and high levels of gender-based violence that undermine economic productivity. These constraints are reinforced by restrictive social norms, limited leadership representation (9.1% in Parliament, 10% CEOs), and geographic and institutional barriers that reduce access to services. The WEE NAP adopts a whole-of-government approach to address these cross-cutting barriers and advance substantive economic and leadership opportunities for women.

F. Poverty Monitoring and Data Systems

1. How reliable and up to date is the poverty data used for programme targeting?

Response: The PMU uses reliable and up-to-date poverty data by aligning its tools with national standards, using the 2019–2020 HIES as the statistical benchmark, and conducting direct beneficiary interviews that capture current living conditions and before-and-after changes. This combination ensures data accurately reflects real household circumstances and is fit for programme targeting. The Ministry is also updating its Proxy Means Test (PMT) using the latest HIES to keep targeting methodologies current.

2. What progress has been made on implementing the Social Adaptive MIS system, and how will it improve service delivery?

Response Significant progress has been made toward establishing an integrated MIS supported by revised SOPs that standardize registration, eligibility, case management, payments, and reporting across all schemes. The new Integrated Beneficiary Management System (IBMS) will streamline processes, enable better coordination, strengthen auditability, and improve transparency. Once operational, it will deliver faster, more efficient, and more accountable services to vulnerable households.

3. How does the Ministry evaluate whether poverty programmes are achieving measurable reductions in poverty levels?

Response: The PMU evaluates poverty programme impact through structured impact assessments that identify gaps, provide recommendations, and support evidence-based adjustments by programme implementers. Follow-up tracking verifies whether recommendations are acted upon and checks if beneficiary outcomes and community-level conditions improve over time, ensuring accountability and continuous programme improvement.

4. Are there gaps in data collection, reporting, or analysis that affect policy decisions?

Response: Yes. Fragmented data systems, limited cross-government data sharing, inconsistent updates, and incomplete or outdated information create gaps that affect targeting accuracy and policy design. Verification often reveals changes in beneficiary circumstances or delays in project implementation, leading to inefficiencies and duplication. Strengthening real-time data updating, integrating systems, and improving verification processes are critical to improving decision-making and programme effectiveness.

G. Human Resources & Institutional Capacity

1. With notable staff movements (resignations, transfers), how is institutional continuity maintained?

Response

Succession Planning: The Ministry has directed developed succession planning and succession strategies for key positions to capture knowledge before staff exit through retirement or resignation.

Acting Appointments: To bridge immediate gaps, the Ministry internally advertised expressions of interest to identify talents for roles that became vacant to keep departments operational.

Advertisements of Vacant positions: The Ministry in as much as practicable advertise vacancies and maintain the 4 months' timeline to fill in the positions

2. Are staffing levels adequate across departments, particularly in frontline service delivery areas?

Response Staffing levels across departments, particularly in frontline service delivery, remain constrained.

Officers are recruited based on open merit selection criteria, and the Ministry continues to invest in capacity building in key technical areas. However, the recent expansion of the Ministry, including the establishment of a new department resourced internally, has further stretched existing staff capacity.

While teamwork and cross-support across offices help manage workloads, gaps remain—especially in specialized technical roles. The Ministry currently relies on development partners to support these areas but is actively working towards establishing these capacities in-house, such as recruiting programmers for the MIS, to ensure long-term sustainability.

Overall, while efforts are ongoing to strengthen capacity, staffing constraints continue to impact service delivery efficiency.

3. What is the impact of training programmes, given only 55% attendance rate?

Response: The Ministry notes the percentage on attendance. The Departments within the Ministry also have their trainings programmes for their own department staff.

4. How does the Ministry address capacity constraints in rural and remote areas?

Response: Addressed via virtual, decentralization and outreach.

The Ministry has tried to address geographical gaps by placing officers in rural/remote areas. The office that was recently opened is in Keiyasi Government Station and we also intend to open Wainikoro. Due to the shortage of staffing quarters it is challenging for the Ministry to place staff in the remote areas. However, we are in the process of requesting Ministry of Finance in phases via the budget process funding to build staff quarters in these remote areas. An incentive for the Civil Service is the rural and maritime allowance paid to Officers who serve in remote areas.

5. What measures are in place to improve staff retention and performance?

Response: In retaining staff, the Ministry has developed career paths through the creation of more positions for Officers within the Ministry. The salary increases for in 2024 -2025 was also a measure to retain staff.

Includes training, career pathways, succession planning and improved working conditions, though more is needed.

H. Service Delivery and Accessibility

1. How accessible are services to rural, maritime, and vulnerable populations?

Response: The REACH Programme, administered by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation through the Poverty Monitoring Unit, has had a transformative impact on rural, maritime, and other vulnerable populations by bringing essential services directly to communities that are otherwise underserved. By coordinating multiple government

departments and partner organizations, the programme provides a comprehensive package of services—ranging from social protection, health, education, to livelihood support—in a single, accessible location. This reduces barriers such as long travel distances, high transport costs, and limited awareness of available services, ensuring that even remote communities can access critical support.

For vulnerable populations, including women, children, and people living with disability in isolated areas, the REACH Programme improves livelihoods through targeted interventions, strengthens social protection networks, and fosters community resilience by addressing both immediate needs and long-term development challenges. The integrated approach also promotes awareness, empowerment, and participation among community members, enabling them to engage actively in development initiatives, access entitlements, and improve their overall quality of life. By delivering services locally and inclusively, REACH not only enhances access but also strengthens the linkages between government programmes and communities, ensuring more sustainable and equitable outcome

Mobile outreach programs (REACH), planned visit, networking and working with other partner organization to reach all. Office locations in 21 district offices is helpful.

2. What complaints or feedback mechanisms exist, and how are they used to improve services?

Response: Mechanisms exist (complaints desks, community engagement) but require systematic tracking and response integration.

3. Are there disparities in service delivery across divisions (Central, Western, Northern, Eastern)?

Response: Yes, there are some disparities in service delivery across divisions (Central, Western, Northern, and Eastern), primarily due to differences in infrastructure, resource availability, tools of trade, and staffing capacity.

However, the Ministry ensures consistency and equity in service delivery through the use of standardized operating procedures (SOPs) and harmonized processes applied across all divisions.

Ongoing reforms, including digitization and MIS implementation, are also expected to further reduce these disparities by improving coordination, access, and efficiency nationwide.

4. How does the Ministry ensure inclusivity for persons with disabilities and older persons?

Response: The Ministry ensures inclusivity for persons with disabilities and older persons through dedicated social protection programs tailored to their specific needs, as well as targeted interventions and support services.

Program design is informed through consultations with stakeholders and beneficiaries, ensuring that activities and services are responsive and appropriate.

However, the Ministry acknowledges that accessibility gaps remain, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, service reach, and specialized support. Ongoing reforms and partnerships aim to address these gaps and strengthen inclusive service delivery.

I. Partnerships and Grants Management

1. How are NGOs selected and monitored for grants (e.g., over \$700,000 allocated in 2021–2022)?

Response: Selection Criteria of NGO Grants

NGO Grants recipient was selected by meeting the following criteria:

- Organization should be registered under the Charitable Trust Act 1945 and have a clearly identifiable organization structure.
- The organization should provide an implementation plan that includes activities, budget, timeline and measures of success
- Expert knowledge and specialized service to the community.
- Organization should provide services to the most disadvantage, marginalized and vulnerable group in the community.
- The organization should have the capacity to provide the services with less Government intervention in the provision of resources
- The organization must submit audited financial report and on receipt of grant, providing acquittals which are in line with terms and conditions outlined in the contract of the grant.
- The organization should be able to incorporate strong approaches that ensure services reach communities regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status, disability, location and age.
- Acquired experience in implementing grants, managing donor funds and accounting for such funding's
- The organization should have strong financial system that are documented in a financial manual and policy.
- Able to work collaboratively with the Ministry by reporting through Ministry systems and processes, sharing data and clear joint decision making.

2. What accountability mechanisms ensure proper utilisation of grant funding?

Response:

- Grantees must submit bi-annual progress reports and acquittals and a final report detailing of program implementation
- Grantees must submit through the Program Implementation Template Report
- The Department of Women Monitoring & Evaluation Unit will conduct biannual monitoring visits to assess program progress
- A standardize reporting template which entails information that will produce valuable information from grants recipient aligning to the requirement from the Department of Women.

3.How effective are partnerships with development partners (e.g., World Bank, Australia) in achieving outcomes?

Response: Development partners provide technical and financial support to implement the frameworks. E.g. Implementation of the Social Assistance Policy framework and Adaptive social protection strategy. Highly valuable support.

J. Risks, Challenges and Forward Planning**1.What are the key risks facing the Ministry (financial, operational, social)?**

Response: Key risks include programme delays caused by natural disasters and management directives; data inconsistencies and weak data-sharing due to fragmented systems and limited capacity; outdated ICT systems and hardware failures; skills gaps in data analysis and reporting; and non-compliance with work policies requiring disciplinary action. Corporate risks include incomplete SOPs, pending finance manual revisions, and high staff turnover.

2.How prepared is the Ministry to respond to economic shocks or natural disasters affecting vulnerable groups?

Response: The Ministry is strongly positioned to respond to shocks through Fiji's first Adaptive Social Protection Strategy (2024–2029), pilot anticipatory cash transfers for 15,000 beneficiaries, parametric insurance for 4,100 recipients, and an established shock-responsive platform enabling horizontal and vertical programme expansion during crises, including cyclone and COVID-related top-ups.

3.What lessons have been learned from the reporting periods, and how are they being integrated into future planning?

Response: Need for integrated system, institution strengthening, coordinated and collaborative approach to ensure protecting the most vulnerable. Building resilience and identify referral pathways.

4. What are the Ministry's top priorities for the next financial year, and how will success be measured?

Response:

Women's Department: Priorities include expanding market access, strengthening women-led businesses, enhancing financial inclusion, and improving digital literacy and cross-government coordination under the WEE NAP. Success will be measured by increased women's market participation, improved access to finance, strengthened market linkages, expanded literacy outreach, and better data coordination.

Social Protection: Priorities include rollout of the MIS, implementation of the Adaptive Social Protection Strategy, and improved referral and graduation pathways. Success will be tracked through system functionality, faster processing times, improved crisis responsiveness, and increased beneficiary transitions to training, employment, and reduced re-entry.

Children's Department: Operationalise key pieces of legislation – Adoption, CCPA, CJA. Improve and standardise residential homes.

Corporate: Drafting and finalisation of all Policies, Manuals, SOPs to ensure better management and streamlining of our processes to make it more efficient.

Poverty Monitory Unit: Drafting, development and Verification of Poverty Alleviation Framework

Measurement: PMU to monitor impacts across programmes, including higher household incomes, improved food security, expanded business activity, better market access, safer mobility through footbridges and roads, and stronger child protection outcomes through the Child Helpline. Women's programmes to show increased business formalisation, significant growth in women accessing finance (12,000+ enterprises in three years), stronger MSME contributions, and expanded financial inclusion through stronger partnerships—demonstrating measurable improvements in economic participation and wellbeing.

5. Can the Ministry provide evidence of impact (not activities) for its major programmes?

Response:

Aquaculture Development Programme under the Ministry of Fisheries

The Programme enables beneficiaries to access potential markets, increase household income to support family needs such as education, improve their standard of living, create and expand businesses, generate employment, secure alternative sources of food, and enhance access to nutritious fish protein, thereby contributing to both economic empowerment and improved food security

Bus fare Subsidy for Old and Disabled Persons by Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

Beneficiaries in particular our Older Persons and Persons living with Disability have gained improved access to essential services and opportunities, including healthcare facilities for medication, markets and banking services for daily needs, and financial support that enables

savings and reduces transportation costs. This assistance has also allowed those living with extended families to support their grandchildren's school trip and provided freedom to visit relatives and engage in social activities, enhancing both their economic well-being and social participation.

© Child Help Line administered by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

It also plays a key role in shaping, strengthening and filling in the gaps within existing national child protection systems. Medical Services Pacific has been the implementing partner for the National Child Helpline on behalf of Ministry of Children and Social Protection for the last 8 years and is given a budget of \$200,000.00 for its administration.

The CHL service has been effective since its inception, serving as a vital platform for children in Fiji and Rotuma, with reported cases reaching the police and progressing through the courts, and any operational risks from network issues are mitigated through a team of four full-time counsellors and trained volunteer backup.

Additionally, MSP has submitted 16 high-quality reports containing disaggregated data, detailed comparative analyses, and Most Significant Changes (MSC) stories that highlight the impact and importance of the CHL service.

Community Access Road Footpath Footbridges Programme under the Ministry of Rural Maritime Development and Disaster Management

The assistance has enabled community members to move freely, maintain village cleanliness, and reduce the risk of disease, while infrastructure projects like the Rewa Footbridge have eased access, improved safety, and lowered transportation costs for residents.

Similarly, Community Access Roads have supported farmers in transporting their produce to markets and facilitated easier movement between nearby villages, enhancing both economic activity and overall community connectivity.

Dairy Industry Support administered by the Ministry of Agriculture

The programme has contributed to a significant increase in household income and an overall improvement in the standard of living for beneficiaries by enhancing their access to markets.

It has also facilitated economic growth through the creation of employment, the expansion of existing businesses, and the establishment of new business ventures, thereby promoting sustainable livelihoods and financial stability.

Export Promotion Programme

Beneficiaries have experienced a significant increase in household income, which has improved their standard of living, enabled the creation or expansion of businesses, and allowed them to access new markets for their harvested commodities.

This growth has also generated employment during harvest periods, benefiting the livelihoods of workers’ families, and ensured consistent food security, with households able to provide three meals a day throughout the past year without experiencing shortages

Food Security Programme under the Ministry of Agriculture

The assistance provided through the Food Security Programme has enabled beneficiaries to improve household food security by producing fresh vegetables for personal consumption, increasing crops and livestock yields, access markets to earn additional income, and supporting their families’ basic needs and children’s education.

It has also contributed to an improved standard of living, reduced financial burdens through lower transportation costs, and promoted economic growth by allowing beneficiaries to expand existing projects, create new businesses, and generate employment during planting and harvesting seasons.

Pearly Gates administered by the Child Services Unit

The Pearly Gates Home is an institution operated by Global Compassion, a faith-based organization that is responsible for the operation and care of the girls who are victims and survivors of abuse and are in need of care and protection.

- Implemented 7 Pillar Transformational Strategies.



- Significant improvements have been observed in the girls’ appearance, making them more presentable, which is reflected in their behavior and mannerisms. More importantly, the programme has helped them develop a sense of self-worth and identity, as they gain a clearer understanding of who they are, what they believe, and the reasons behind their action
- **Success stories:** (a) A 12-year-old non-reader went through Jolly Phonics program for almost 2 years before re-integration with her family. She jumped class twice in a school year because she was a competent reader. (b) A hardworking girl that was at home for almost 4 years. She was the first girl to seek permission for remedial classes outside of the Home. A risk taker and never gave up easily. She finally graduated with a law degree from USP in 2021. Considering the above impact, the home has been able to provide to these girls, there is still a need for additional support to achieve the strategies of the organization. As such, it is important to consider

accessibility to families, which is limited by law. Accessing the residents' families will provide an opportunity to share with them the care plans of their children and how best they can support them during re-integration.

- a range of enrichment and rehabilitation programs for girls who are victims of abuse or in conflict with the law, focusing on holistic development to support their recovery and reintegration. Key areas include Pep Talks, which offer positive affirmations to strengthen self-worth; Mannerism, which teaches basic etiquette as part of character-building; Education, providing essential support to ensure access to proper learning; and Spiritual Support, which includes prayer and biblical literacy to guide moral and ethical development. These programs are designed to nurture personal growth, rebuild confidence, and equip the girls with the skills and values needed for a positive and productive future.

Rural Outer Island Development Programme (ROID) administered by Ministry of Agriculture

The Rural Outer Island Development Programme has had a significant impact on beneficiaries by increasing household income, which has directly contributed to an improved standard of living and enhanced economic stability.

It has also expanded access to markets, enabling participants to sell their produce and goods more effectively, while supporting the creation of new businesses, the expansion of existing enterprises, and the generation of employment opportunities, thereby fostering sustainable livelihoods and broader community development.

Seaweed Development Programme under the Ministry of Fisheries

The Seaweed Development Programme has significantly impacted beneficiaries by increasing household income, which has improved their overall standard of living and financial stability.

In addition, the programme has facilitated the creation of new businesses and provided greater access to markets for selling seaweed products, enabling participants to generate sustainable livelihoods. This economic empowerment has also allowed beneficiaries to contribute to community obligations and support village development initiatives, strengthening both individual well-being and broader social cohesion. **Self Help Programme**

Income-generating projects have improved beneficiaries' standard of living by increasing household income, enabling them to meet family needs, access markets, create employment, and expand or establish new businesses, thereby contributing to broader community development.

Social projects have enhanced quality of life by providing access to clean water through tanks and boreholes, offering housing assistance through the construction of new homes, and supporting evacuation centers to ensure community safety during natural disasters

Impact of the Commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) 17th October 2022

Achievement of IDEP - 2022: Community Participation

One of the key achievements of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) event in 2022 was the strong level of community participation. A total of 308 members of the public registered and accessed the services provided during the twoday event at Nadogo Central College. The demographic breakdown showed that 34.4% of participants were female and 65.6% were male, reflecting a broad community engagement across gender lines.

Schools Participation

A total of 13 schools from the Tikina of Nadogo actively participated in the IDEP event, demonstrating strong engagement from the educational sector. These included 3 Early Childhood Education centers, 9 Primary Schools, and 1 Secondary School.

The student activities were designed to be both educational and creative, involving oratory speeches, poetry, drama performances, traditional meke (dance), and poster competitions. All these activities were centered around the IDEP theme, allowing students to express their understanding and commitment to issues of poverty eradication, social justice, and community well-being.

Stakeholder Participation

The event attracted 36 stakeholders representing a diverse range of organizations and sectors. These stakeholders included government agencies, private sector companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), financial institutions, and educational institutions.

Services Accessed by the General Public – Major Highlights

During the two-day event, the **36 stakeholders** provided numerous services to the public, with over 300 clients accessing critical support. The most utilized services were related to civil documentation, including birth, death, and marriage registrations provided by the Ministry of Justice, as well as the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB) services offered through the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, which are essential for identity and land rights verification.

6.What programmes have been discontinued or redesigned due to poor performance?

Response:

- Food Voucher program – from voucher redeemed at one selected vendor, it has been converted to cash top up to existing allowance for Family Assistance Scheme and Care & Protection programs
- Transport Assistance Scheme (TAS) – renamed from Bus fare Assistance Scheme to Transport Allowance Scheme to enable beneficiaries to access preferred mode of transport. Converted to cash TAS top up to existing allowance for all Disability Allowance Scheme and Pensioners aged 70 years and above.
- Revive Welfare Graduation Program that would provide employment and income generating opportunities to Social Protection Beneficiaries.

7. How does the Ministry ensure transparency and public accountability in its reporting?

Response:

The Ministry ensures transparency and public accountability through:

- Annual Reports that provide detailed information on program performance, financial utilization, and key outcomes.
- Internal and external audits, including oversight by relevant authorities, to ensure compliance with financial regulations and proper use of public funds; and
- Parliamentary oversight, where programs and expenditures are subject to scrutiny and review.

In addition, ongoing Social Protection Reforms are strengthening transparency through improved data systems, digitization (MIS), and enhanced reporting mechanisms, enabling more timely, accurate, and accessible information for decision-making and public accountability.

Additional Information

Re: [EXTERNAL]Request for Clarifications



Veremo Muria <veremo.muria@mwscsp.gov.fj>

To: Katie Batikawai

Cc: Tirisiane Logavatu; Elesi Waiwalu

Reply Reply all Forward

Fri 4/24/2026 12:07 PM

Bula vinaka Madam.

Thank you for your feedback.

For Rural Pregnant Mothers, it is targeting pregnant women who attend pre-and post-natal visits at health clinics and reside in rural areas, or for high-risk mothers in urban areas for up to 10 months. No income criteria are to be applied to the eligible recipients.

Social Welfare recipients and civil servants are not eligible for this assistance.

Director.

From: Katie Batikawai <katie.batikawai@legislature.gov.fj>

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 11:41 AM

To: Veremo Muria <veremo.muria@mwscsp.gov.fj>

Cc: Tirisiane Logavatu <tirisiane.logavatu@legislature.gov.fj>; Elesi Waiwalu <eles.waiwalu@legislature.gov.fj>

Subject: [EXTERNAL]Request for Clarifications

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Dear Director,

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Défense, we wish to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to you and your team for the cooperation and facilitation provided during the Committee site visits to the Ministry's offices and facilities at the Western and Northern Divisions. We particularly acknowledge your leadership and support in coordinating the logistical arrangements, which contributed significantly to the smooth conduct of these visitations.

We would also appreciate your clarification on the **Rural Pregnant Mothers Assistance Programme**. Specifically, we seek confirmation on whether this assistance is limited to **single and vulnerable rural pregnant mothers**, or whether it is **available to all rural pregnant mothers**, regardless of marital or socio-economic status.

We thank you in advance for your guidance on this matter and look forward to your response.

Vinaka



Kind Regards,
Katie Batikawai
Committees Unit
Legislature Division

Site Visitation –
[30 March-April 17
2026]

Images Taken During the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Site Visitation to the Ministry of Women Children & Social Protection on Monday 30 March to Friday 17 April 2026.

The Parliamentary Committee undertook a site visit to the Ministry of Women, Children & Social Protection’s Western and Northern Offices and associated facilities as part of its review of outstanding Ministry annual reports, with a focus on regional service delivery. The visit provided direct insight into frontline operations, staff working conditions, infrastructure and housing limitations, safety concerns, and challenges affecting service delivery in rural and maritime communities.

Central Division Offices and Facilities



Western Division Offices and Facilities



Northern Division Offices and Facilities

