

MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2015

The Speaker, Mr Ajilon Nasiu took the Chair at 9:53am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Ministers for Health & Medical Services; Public Service; Environment, Conservation, Disaster Management, Climate Change & Meteorology; Women & Children's Affairs and the Members for North West Guadalcanal; Ulawa/Ugi and West New Georgia/Vonavona.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, on the closure of nominations for the election of the office of the Deputy Speaker at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday 1st November 2015, there was only one candidate received by my office. He is Hon. Andrew Manepora'a, MP for East Are Are.

I have received Hon Manepora'a's resignation letter as a party leader in compliance with section 64(d)(iv) of the Constitution and a copy of the party's acceptance of his resignation as party leader. As such, Hon Andrew Manepora'a stands unopposed for the position of Deputy Speaker. On behalf of the House and its Members, I wish to congratulate and welcome our new Deputy Speaker.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Progress under the 2015 Budget

13. **Mr CONNELLY SANDAKABATU** (*North West Choiseul*) to the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Development: What has the Ministry done under the 2015 Budget to improve private sector investment access credit to farmers, reduction in poverty incidences and the issue of declining work force in the agriculture sector?

Hon DUDDLEY KOPU (*Minister for Agriculture & Livestock*): The question is categorized into four parts. First, private sector investment in agriculture requires having in place an environment that is conducive and creating an environment that is conducive consists of:

- (1) Strategic Policy Planning. In this area, two subsector policies were developed and completed this year. These include the Rural Land Use Policy and the Livestock Department Policies including cattle and small livestock.
- (2) Land Security. Private sector investment requires security of resources such as land reform to register customary land for investment as the way forward. An oil palm development customary land registration had been done in Malaita and is currently ongoing in East Choiseul. While on a smaller scale, land lease agreement for agriculture

development is done by the Ministry on behalf of development partners and resource owners.

- (3) Innovative Research. In the cocoa industry, it is very encouraging where the research team has been involved in capacity training of farmers in the provinces in the art of integrated pest and disease management as well as cloning rehabilitation of cocoa trees. Under the cocoa genetic planting material program, this is ongoing. New investment in the sector can adopt these technologies.

In regards to access to credit to farmers, the Ministry supports the formation of farmer associations, credit unions and cooperatives which can be able to provide micro credit services to farmers. These are supported through the fixed services grants, specific for associations who would be to assist their members as subsidies. In seven of the development programs implemented in 2015, fixed service grant is also part of the assistance provided to farmers, processors and traders, which in most cases include working capital for labour and trading.

Most of the ministry's development programs are social protection in nature, meaning these provide assistance for food security and livelihoods in order to alleviate poverty, food insecurity and create employment. Not only that, but in collaborating with other donor funded programs such as the Taiwan Technical Mission, UNDP/ **SWoCK** project and RDP II Disaster Recovery, poverty incidences can be reduced.

The issue of declining workforce in the agriculture sector is a global phenomenon, meaning not only Solomon Islands is experiencing this. As industries provide more job opportunities, urban drift will continue. The young population tends to move to the urban centres for formal paid employment. Free handouts also encourage a dependency syndrome and a lazy society. Therefore, massive education of the rural population on rural development is needed to reverse the trend and to get young people interested in agriculture and rural development. In this regard, our rural training centres with their agriculture curriculum are contributing to reversing the trend of the declining workforce.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is continuing to work closely with the likes of Don Bosco, Tetere, the SINU School of Natural Resources and Applied Science and other institutions that provide training in agriculture for young people. The ministry is recruiting additional staff in order to be more responsive to the sector in general. The establishment of Constituency Development Offices may help reverse the trend as constituents go there for resources rather than coming to Honiara. My ministry will work closely with these offices as the issue of a declining workforce in the agriculture sector is everybody's business.

I hope I have answered the Honourable Member's question to his satisfaction. Thank you.

Mr CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringel/Kokota*): A supplementary question in relation to the Farmers Association. The Farmers' Association concept is a very good idea where a substantial amount of grant is placed in the care of associations. For instance, there should be a farmers' association for Ysabel, whether it be for coconut or cocoa. I just want to know how the funds can be accessed. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, who does the monitoring and

evaluation of projects to ensure the projects are fully implemented, is it the Association or the ministry? That is my question.

Hon Dudley Kopu: The Ministry assists the farmers' association through fixed services grant and they have to apply for the funds.

Mr DEREK SIKUA (*North East Guadalcanal*): Can the Minister inform the House of the private investor who is doing farming at the old Selwyn Colleague site, and what is the effect of this investment on local farmers in North and North East Guadalcanal constituencies?

Hon Dudley Kopu: The private investor that is doing farming there is Solfish which is a subsidiary of the Lee Kwok Kuen Company. The name of the company is Solfish.

Hon Derek Sikua: The Minister did not answer the second part of my question. I want the Minister to inform the House what is the effect of this investment on our local farmers in North and North East Guadalcanal. Is the Minister aware of any effects, is what I would like the Minister to inform the House?

Hon Dudley Kopu: The main thinking of this company is to assist farmers in those areas.

Hon JEREMIAH MANENE (*Leader of the Opposition*): Further supplementary question to the Minister. I did not clearly hear the Minister's first answer but if the Minister could inform the House of the total number of farmers whether through associations or individuals that have already received assistance for their small projects? I want the total number or figure.

Hon Dudley Kopu: The fixed service grants the Ministry has already given out to various associations are 3 for Isabel, 4 for Malaita, 3 for Makira, 1 for Choiseul, 1 for Temotu, 2 for Renbell, 2 for Honiara, 3 for Western, 1 for Central and 3 for Guadalcanal province which totalled up to 23. That is for the food security enhancement program.

On livelihood improvement, there are 4 for Malaita, 2 for Makira, 2 for Choiseul, 1 for Temotu, 1 for Renbell, 2 for Honiara, 2 for Isabel, 3 for Western province, 1 for Central province and 3 for Guadalcanal, which totalled up to 21.

Mr Culwick Togamana: I think the Minister did not address one of my questions in relation to the Farmers Association. My understanding is that the Farmers Associations are associations of local farmers. I was asking the question about monitoring and evaluation. If funds are given to these farmers' associations, individual farmers would have to apply to the associations for the funds. To fully implement these projects, there needs to be some monitoring and evaluation of these projects. My question was, who actually does the monitoring and evaluation, is it the Farmers Association or the Ministry to ensure funds are best utilised for the sake of food security.

Hon Dudley Kopu: Monitoring and evaluation is done by the Ministry and that particular association.

Mr Connelly Sandakabatu: I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for his answers to my questions.

National Food Security Enhancement Programme

14 **Mr CONNELLY SANDAKABATU** (*North West Choiseul*) to the Minister for Agriculture & Livestock: In the summary implementation status of the Development Programs in September 2015, more than half a million dollars have already been spent under the National Food Security Enhancement Programme. Can the Minister inform the House on the followings:

- a. How many fruit tree farmers have been supported?
- b. How many vegetable farmers have been supported?
- c. How many rice farmers have been supported?
- d. What traditional foods have been promoted?

Hon DUDLEY KOPU (*Minister for Agriculture & Livestock*): Under the National Food Security Enhancement Program, five fruit tree farmers have been funded. These farmers are from Choiseul, Isabel, Western, Guadalcanal and Temotu provinces. Similarly, the number of vegetable farmers that have been assisted are 19 for exotic vegetable production and nine for indigenous vegetables. Again, the spread is for all provinces. The number of rice farmers approved under the 2015 Development Program includes the potential commercial rice farm in Isabel, Gozoruru which has already been scoped. There are five smallholder rice farmers from Guadalcanal and Isabel provinces who are also being assisted.

Under the 2015 National Food Security Program, 18 applications for traditional crops and foods were approved. This includes bananas, taros, yams, pana, sweet potato, breadfruit and indigenous vegetables. Promotion of local kaikai is an important mission for the Ministry as spelled out in its Local Kaikai framework.

Let me encourage all of us in this honourable House and our people out there to grow and eat more local foods. I hope I have answered the honourable Member's question to his satisfaction.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*): My question is in regards to part (a) and (c) of the question. Of the list of tree farmers, I did not hear anything for Malaita province. Also with rice farmers, I did not hear anything the Minister mentioned about rice farmers on Malaita. I would like to know whether there is nothing happening at all for Malaita or is the Government assisting farmers on Malaita too.

Hon Dudley Kopu: This year's program on rice, the only commercial farming is in Isabel and Guadalcanal. For smallholder rice farmers, there are four on Isabel, five in Western province and six on Guadalcanal and there is nothing for Malaita.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: I just want to follow up on my question. I think the Minister is correct on what has happened this year in terms of the 2015 Budget. My question is, over the years and up to last year, was there nothing at all for Malaita in those two areas - rice farming and fruit tree farming. The Minister maybe refers to 2015 but I would like to know what the Ministry is doing on fruit tree crops and rice farming for Malaita Province from previous years until this year.

Hon Dudley Kopu: For Malaita, there are two fruit tree farmers for this year, and with rice farming there is an ongoing one in Are Are.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE (*East Honiara*): I will only talk about commercial rice farming today. We import rice into this country worth around half a billion dollars. When I was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee last year, it was made known to the Committee that this country in terms of balance of payment had a deficit of around \$703,400,000 for rice itself, and it is like we are just playing with it. You have \$5million for Gozoruru and Metapona according to Policy 4.2.2.1 but I have not seen any rice at all in Metapona. I am asking the hardworking Minister, under the PPP approach, do you have in mind any foreign investor to come and invest money in here.

Secondly, are you going to increase this \$5million because this amount is just peanuts? Your budget of \$5million per annum for those two areas cannot trigger anything. How is the Government going to try and tackle this problem of deficit in the balance of trade, each year running for the last 20years? .

Hon Dudley Kopu: With regards to Metapona, the government used to hold the title to that area but recently without anyone's knowledge the title was transferred to another person. Therefore, the investor wanted to invest in that area but finds it difficult to do so because of land problem. That is the problem with Metapona.

For Isabel, scoping work has been done already but the only problem is that the population of Isabel is very small and therefore when they wanted to do a trial, nobody there wanted to go and work in the farm.

Hon DANNY PHILIP (*Minister for Development Planning and Aid Coordination*): Questions will be coming but since the implication of the questions hinges on the 2015 Development Budget, I want to make some comments.

The catchwords on those two questions are the 2015 Budget credit to farmers, reduction on poverty, decline in workforce, food enhancement and security enhancement programs are all enticing policy statements, and rightly so.

I just want to get into the policy of the DCC Government in terms of the structural arrangements there are already. Out of the \$1.1billion, \$335million goes to the hands of the 50 of us sitting down in here right now where roughly about \$4million or \$5million each is for livelihood. Credit to farmers is also inside our hands, and so we really need planning for the use of those moneys. That is a lot of money going into rural livelihood activities. About one

third of the budget is earmarked for fruit farming, smallholder rice farming, smallholder fisheries projects, market gardens, honey projects and so forth. The macro part of the policy has been well catered for in the 2015 Budget and some more to come next year if the other side supports the Budget.

Credit to farmers in terms of micro financing - the government has a policy as well for the revival of the DBSI. We have established a committee to look into the re-establishment of the DBSI or the farmers' bank if you like.

Reduction in poverty is a big thing that is in food security, in the creation of more jobs in industries and so on. It is an ongoing policy of the government and so is the reduction in workforce. We are trying to enhance programs that will encourage the engagement of our own people to go into employment by promoting micro projects.

Food security enhancement program is also a crosscutting thing and comes in at the national level. In the late 60s and early 70s we have had a big rice farm at the Metapona area and we are still looking at the possibility of reviving a mixed agriculture kind of approach on that land. Again, as the Minister rightly pointed out, the land title is no longer in the hands of the Government and so there needs to be some ground work negotiation, explaining and helping those people to decide whether they want to go into full scale commercial farming or they would like to sub divide this land into mix agriculture like piggery, poultry, vegetable garden and so on. The questions are very good and I am sure Government programs also cater for the things we are questioning.

In terms of food security enhancement program, it does enhance, educate and tries to teach our people to do the right thing. In terms of structural policy arrangement, we are trying to encourage the establishment of Constituency Development Centres (CDCs). Those CDCs will become the hub of enhancing food security, markets and easier for evaluation and monitoring. The little bit of money coming out now is to start our CDCs. I know that all the Members in here are geared up to construct those centres so that those centres become closer to the people and make transportation to connect those centers. We hope that the next shipping grant will be called the National Transportation Initiative. We would like to make our centers connected to major market centers. I think that area is lacking at the moment. We are still buying big hull steel boats from overseas but at the same time the Government would like to encourage our people to fully complete the boats at Langalanga so that those boats can serve our centers as well.

There are constituencies too that are landlocked like Central Guadalcanal, North East Guadalcanal and may not need boats, and that is why it can become a misdeed. Such constituencies might need graders, dump truck and other equipment to keep repairing their roads.

In terms of policy and structural arrangement, we are trying to promote these to our donor bodies so that they can understand the online programs so that donors can come in to support. But agriculture is the mainstay of our economy and so from time to time in the budget, we have to put more emphasis, more money and resources into the agriculture sector. I am sure when the centres are built according to your own choices, I hope to see us organize ourselves in a more efficient way around to coordinate livelihood activities such as the Integrated Development Framework Associations (IDFs), Fisheries Association, Vegetable

Farmer Association, Rice Farm Association, Apiari and Honey Production Associations and Kava Associations. These are the things that will grow around the Constituencies Development Centres. We avoid the word growth centers because we begin to think that the bigger we talk about these things, the ownership questions starts to come in.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: *Point of order!* Can the Minister come back to the question; we would like to ask questions on the original question. The Minister was talking about constituency development programs, which are good things, but that is spending time on things outside of the main question. I just want the Minister to help us understand the specific question.

Hon Danny Philip: I am just putting the picture out so that when everybody wants to question the ministry, they know which areas they question the ministry in terms of the rural programs because your questions also relate to micro projects and that is what I am trying to explain in regards to the policies so that you know the framework when you ask questions. In terms of food security, it comes down to two levels – the local or rural level and the national level. I am trying to explain the policies so that when questions are asked, you know which area your question comes under. Nobody is stopping them to ask questions, the minister is ever ready, I will make my answers very brief but it does put you in a framework of policy direction.

Mr DERRICK MANU'ARI (*West Makira*): A further supplementary question with regards to farmers' associations and smallholder initiatives, especially in the rural areas.

Mr Speaker, allow me to set the background of my question first before asking the question because it is just as important as the detailed answers given by the other side of the House.

The rice farming initiatives started a long time ago and for us in Makira we have also had these initiatives mainly initiated by local farmers. One thing that is missing in all these years has been the ongoing support from the Government, not only in terms of finances but also in terms of technical assistance in trainings and so forth and so it really brings to question the sustainability of such initiatives as well as the seriousness or the commitment of successive governments in ensuring that such initiatives that are very useful for the improvement of livelihood of farmers have positive impacts in the lives of our people. If these initiatives are encouraged and become sustainable, they can also help to address the urban drift that is causing a lot of problems to us, not only to the government but also in rural establishments, the communities.

The question I have is on policy in terms of rice farming, rice growers, what specific policy is there at the ministry that looks at the weaknesses, the shortfalls of this rice growing initiative over the years. There is no doubt there are loopholes in the policy. What specific areas is the ministry looking at to identify the weaknesses and what it is doing about it to improve the loopholes? That is the first question.

Secondly, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, the Minister has indicated that the Ministry in consultation or in collaboration with farmers associations will together do monitoring and evaluation. Of all the existing farmers, what is the general view in terms of the monitoring and evaluations being done so far? Can the Minister also inform the House about

that because it is important for those of us who are thinking of making initiatives like that in our constituencies?

Hon Duddley Kopu: The ministry has a policy on that. There are loopholes to this program which I have mentioned earlier on today which are land and workforce. I have already given an example of this in terms of Isabel. In Isabel, land is there but people to do the work is not there. They wanted to do a trial there but people are not willing to work. That is the experience with rice farming at this time. The ministry has to overcome these two things. In regards to monitoring, as I have stated today, the ministry will be doing that, and any outcomes on what the ministry has been doing so far will be put in your pigeonholes.

Hon Derek Sikua: A supplementary question with regards to fruit trees and vegetables. Is there any research carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture to determine any top five fruit trees that we should encourage our farmers to plant, and in which areas in our country? Likewise, on vegetables, what are the top five vegetables identified by any research in your ministry to be the number one for us to plant in Solomon Islands and in which places in Solomon Islands?

With regards to rice, my supplementary question is, does the ministry know why our people are not willing to plant rice? Has the ministry done any research to find out why our people are not willing to plant rice?

Hon Duddley Kopu: The five fruit trees which the Ministry has identified are pawpaw, mango, guava, banana and these can be grown in all our provinces. In terms of vegetables, all vegetables are all good for all our provinces.

Mr Connelly Sandakabatu: Before I thank the Minister I would like to ask a simple question but a very important one, and this is to do with our low lying atolls, in particular, Ontong Java and Sikaiana, and on Malaita maybe Kwai and Ngongosila and even the low lying artificial islands where they have to provide for themselves in regards to food.

Has research been done in terms of allowing these people to continue plant on areas they used to plant food, root crops, mainly to buffer against soil salinity, especially in Sikaiana and Ontong Java?

Hon Duddley Kopu: The crops that can be planted in the low lying atolls are those that can survive soil salinity. The best root crop to plant in such places is taro.

Mr Connelly Sandakabatu: I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and livestock for answering all our questions, especially for clarification for our people throughout our nation. I am sad that other colleagues are not able to ask question but I thank the Minister.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION OF SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*Prime Minister*): I move that at the adjournment of Parliament on Monday 2nd 2015, the meeting shall be adjourned to Monday 9th November 2015.

The reason for this short break is to allow the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to look into the 2015 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2015. A number of Members are in this Committee and they need to sit to look into the Supplementary Appropriation. A number of very important commitments are taken up in that Bill. One is the payment to teachers for their allowances, leave pay and so forth which is taken up in the Supplementary Bill. Also, the commitment of the Government to former police officers engaged at the border, their second payment is due and we would like to get that through this Supplementary Bill.

The break is to allow for that process and maybe the PAC as well to set its plans to look into the 2016 Appropriation Bill 2015, which we intend to pass in good time before the Christmas period. Those are the two very important bills that will come before Parliament during this sitting. I move that Parliament adjourn today until 9th November 2015.

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (*Leader of Opposition*): I thank the Prime Minister for moving the Motion of Special Adjournment for us to meet again on Monday 9th November. I think the reasons outlined by the Prime Minister are straightforward and very important reasons in terms of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill and the other reasons he mentioned and so we have no difficulties with those reasons. We fully understand the reasons and for that matter this side of the House supports the Motion of Special Adjournment. Thank you.

Question agreed to.

Motion is passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon Manasseh Sogavare (*Prime Minister*): I move that this House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 10.49am