



High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands London

HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE & LIVING STANDARDS

Fiji generally has a good standard of health and compares well with other Pacific island nations. The country's health status meets or exceeds most of the World Health Organization's goals for the Year 2000. Such a status is due to improved health standards, sound comprehensive health care programs and the untiring effort of the Ministry of Health in promoting healthy living for people. The government's focus for health lies in preventative care. However, at the same time, there is recognition of curative health care needs that support the preventative focus. People are living longer with life expectancy at 61.4 years for males and 65.2 years for females. Infant mortality has fallen by 62 per cent in the past 20 years and is now at about 16.3 deaths per 1000 live births. Good obstetrical services contribute to the lower infant death rate with about 95 per cent of births being attended to by trained medical personnel. Fewer children are experiencing vaccine preventable deaths with no cases of polio, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus being reported in the past several years. This is due to an active immunization program where the coverage rate for 1996 was reported to be 96 per cent and greater for tuberculosis, polio, tetanus, diphtheria and measles. There are 409 village clinics, 100 nursing stations, 74 health centres, 3 area hospitals, 3 nursing homes, 16 subdivisional medical centres, 3 divisional hospitals and 3 specialty hospitals with TB, leprosy and medical rehabilitation units at Tamavua hospital and St. Giles mental hospital in the country. Many of the buildings date back to the old colonial days but a comprehensive program of upgrading rural subdivision health facilities has been a priority project of Government's short and medium term plans. The doctor population ratio as projected in 1992 is around 1:2448. For the nursing division, there is a total of 2472 registered nurses practicing in the country providing nursing services in hospitals, health centres and nursing stations. Using the 1996 population figure, the nurse:population ratio is about 1:312. The top five causes of death are related to circulatory conditions, endocrine, disorders like diabetes, cancers, respiratory problems and injuries. The main cause, circulatory diseases has increased by 14 per cent in the past 20 years and was responsible for about 4,696 hospital admissions in 1996. Motor vehicle accidents have become an increasingly important concern with road accidents costing the country about \$20 million per year. Over the 6 year period, 1991 - 1997, there has been a 21 per cent increase in the number of vehicle fleet and a 44 per cent increase in the total number of road accidents. Fatalities over the period experienced a 32 per cent decrease whilst severe casualties recorded a 25 per

cent increase. While infectious diseases used to claim a majority of lives, it no longer does so due to the vigorous immunization program and improved living conditions. Diabetes however continues to be a devastating disease. Estimates reveal that 1 in every 8 people are affected in some way by this disease. Health education and promotion efforts in schools, community groups and national campaigns are targeting children and adults to prevent the development of the disease and to reduce the number of complications that arise from poor disease management. Government continues to provide the bulk of the health services both in curative and public health through its National Health Service system. Increasing demand for services has led to an expansion in the number of private general practitioners and specialists practicing in Fiji under the Fiji Medical Council. Government is committed to providing a health system that is accessible, appropriate, affordable, responsive, equitable and of high quality. The working conditions of health professionals i.e. doctors, nurses, paramedical and allied health personnel and other health workers will be reviewed. The immediate priority of the government is aimed at reducing long queues, reducing long waiting and turn around times and to facilitate patient flow. This year the Ministry of Health is starting with the upgrading, rebuilding and construction of new health facilities: the Taveuni Community Health Project, the New Pediatric Unit at the CWM Hospital, Levuka Hospital, Nadi Hospital, Naitasiri Hospital, Baulevu Nursing Station, Fulaga and Moce Nursing Stations, a new Health Centre at Wainibokasi and a new Vector Control Unit and Virological Laboratory at Tamavua.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

\Primary health care involves the provision of primary medical treatment, preventative medicine and health education. About 95 per cent of primary medical care is provided by doctors in government hospitals, health centres and nursing stations throughout the country. They are complemented by general practitioners in private practice in most urban centres. The hospitals, health centres and nursing stations provide outpatient medical treatment, ante-natal and post - natal care, family planning and development and screening of children. Divisional hospitals provide screening for cancer of the breast and cervix, immunization, clinical laboratory facilities, health education and dental care. Psychiatric care is provided in a separate institution. All school children are medically examined at regular intervals by school health teams. Health education activities and training are important ongoing program for the sector. The public are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles to ensure their well being and to learn proper use of health services through media, publications, audio visuals and counseling. Nutrition, a major determinant of health, is being addressed by the Food and Nutrition Committee which was established by government to encourage the public to adopt better and healthier eating habits.

CURATIVE HEALTH SERVICES

The government continues to push for improved curative services. The focus has been on the quality of treatment provided, staffing, upgrading of existing facilities, the provision of equipment and technologies to meet current demands. There are around 307 doctors in the public service providing inpatient and ambulatory care.

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION

These services are offered mainly in the urban areas where most of the practitioners gain the family physician status. Private hospital system is also emerging as an alternative means of medical care provision in Fiji. Government continues to acknowledge and encourage the private sector which supplement the efforts of the Ministry of Health.

SOCIAL WELFARE

The Government continues to place emphasis on improving the quality of services provided to the most needy who have been hard hit by the changing nature of support networks in the local traditional extended families of the major ethnic communities. Efforts are being made to encourage the extended family to continue its role as the primary source of social support. Those assisted include the aged, the widows, the chronically ill, the disabled, the deserted wives and the dependents of prisoners. The allowance paid ranges from a minimum of \$12 to \$60 per month. Recipients also receive free education.

The government also offers protective and supportive services to orphans, abandoned and neglected children through foster care and adoption as well as providing residential care facilities for children in need of substitute care. The destitute allowance is available to those members of the community who are in dire need and have no alternative form of support. Assistance is also available to ensure that the special needs of the elderly and disabled are adequately met.

REHABILITATION SERVICES

Government policy is to rehabilitate and retrain offenders, developing preventative measures and emphasizing vocational and skills training for young persons to enhance ability to rejoin society as productive members of the society.

The community is being encouraged to become self-reliant and develop preventative measures to reduce juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior. The Government provides legal services to those who cannot afford legal representation by private solicitors in matters of civil nature.

POVERTY

The plight of the disadvantaged, the poor and those vulnerable to poverty, has always been a major concern and the government is working to eradicate poverty in Fiji through the provision of both immediate relief and long term sustainable measures. In order to improve the living standards of the poor, the government has set up a Poverty Fund. Creating jobs and self employment will continue to be the most viable way of dealing with the problem of poverty. However, Government will continue to make specific financial provisions in the Budget 2000, targeting vulnerable groups. Government has removed VAT from basic food items, medical charges, supplies and essential education materials so as to make the cost of basic items within the reach of the poor. Tax on interest on savings will also be removed, the rates of tax deductible allowances will be reviewed and proper welfare support will be given to the poor and elderly. On the provision of a Scheme for the elderly without an income, government will commission a study to consider practical ways of providing this assistance. The 1998 Budget allocated assistance. The 1998 Budget allocated \$800,000 to improve the standard of living for the squatter settlement along Howell Road, Suva. The money will be spent on subdivision, roading and basic infrastructure for the 144 lots in the area. This will improve the lives of 144 families and give them new hope for a better future. Government policies seek to strengthen traditional forms of family assistance. The main purpose of raising the income threshold is to assist those in the low income brackets. In 1993 the income tax threshold was \$4,500 and this was raised to \$5,000 in 1995. The Department of Social Welfare provides assistance to the disadvantaged through the Family Assistance Scheme (FAS). The Ministry of Education allows waivers of school fees for children whose family jointly earn less than \$5000 per year if they are on the FAS. NGO's provide the bulk of the welfare assistance in Fiji, generally through non -cash donations. Despite the fact that some 70 per cent of the total population live in the rural areas, Fiji enjoys a relatively high standard of living. Most of the rural areas are accessible by road, they have radio telephones, electricity and proper water supplies. Most urban homes have television and video sets. Some 70,000 sets are available in Fiji homes.

HOUSING

Housing is characterized by a diverse quality of houses in the rural and urban areas. It is mainly a private responsibility, but in recognition of the status of housing as a basic need, the government has tried to ensure that affordable housing of reasonable quality is widely available. The Housing Authority and the Public Rental Board are the two government housing institutions that play pivotal roles in the provision of low income housing. A housing needs assessment was undertaken in 1989 and it was estimated that for moderate population growth, the requirement for new housing would increase by approximately 60 per cent from 1991 to 2006, this is, from 4,360 units in 1991 to 6,960 units in 2006.

HOUSING AUTHORITY

Government through the Housing Authority (HA) caters for the needs of people earning between \$3,700 - \$16,500 per annum. Since 1993, there have been plans by HA to build a variety of homes with prices that are affordable to clients. The Housing Authority has introduced village housing loans through their existing system. A number of new initiatives has been approved by the HA in its new look approach geared at achieving maximum results. These include doing away with interest on charges, halving of mortgage protection premiums, halving of service levy and putting in place of soft loans for provident needs. The Government's aim in housing is to make home ownership affordable to as many people as possible, especially those in the low income group. Government's assistance will include: the resettlement of squatter on permanent sites at affordable price. The government has agreed to reduce interest rates on home loans to its clients as follows: for new housing loan to people with a total household income of up to \$6500 per annum, the interest rate on homes is to be reduced to 6% (b) for existing clients of the H.A, the authority is to look at reducing interest rates on current loans as it secures home finance for its capital finding requirements at cheaper rates. The Government will continue to give financial support to the Public Rentals Board (PRB) in the provision of shelter to people on very low incomes, the poor and destitute.

HOME FOR THE POOR

Government is also assisting Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART) to provide shelter for the poor, particularly those who are destitute or semi-destitute. A Capital grant is provided annually to HART. HART constructed 60 units in 1994, 28 units in 1995 and 24 units in 1996. To meet the increasing demand for HART homes, the organization will build houses at Nausori, Nadi, Rakiraki and Nasinu. To improve the standard of living for the squatter settlements, the government has embarked on a vigorous program to resettle on a vigorous program to resettle squatters. The 1998 budget provided \$800,000 to upgrade the Howell Road squatter settlements. Work has begun on the subdivision, roading and basic infrastructure for 144 families to be settled in the area. The government had allocated an additional \$500,000 for the development of subdivisions to resettle squatters. About 20 families along the Queen Elizabeth's Drive and 12 families living near the Vatuwaqa bridge area will be resettled at Howell Road and other resettlement areas. Another major resettlement program will involve 400 families living in Wailea Street and Nanuku Street, Vatuwaqa. A large population of that settlement will be resettled at Wanibuku, Nasinu. In fact, the resettlement program for the squatters had been an ongoing process over the past five years and the government has resettled around 1,000 families in Narere, Caubati North and South areas. More than 200 families in the Western Division and over 100 families in Labasa have also been resettled.

FOOD AND LABOUR FORCE

Food is good and plentiful. As a rural based society people largely depend on land and marine resources for their livelihood. Agriculture contributes about

24% of GDP and provides 50 per cent of total employment. The growth in paid employment has been achieved mainly through the private sector rather than public sector employment. This reflects government policies to encourage exports and promote private sector investment, particularly employment in intensive industries. The participation of women in economic activity beyond the household has grown significantly since the mid-1970s. The rising labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women and generally stable rates for males, as estimated by the Ministry of National Planning, have resulted in the net increase in the labour force between 1986 and 1996 is believed to have been greater for females (about 31,400) than for males (about 29,000). Government's policy is to enhance that contribution by further encouraging the participation of women in "mainstream" economic activities and by improving woman's access to services which will increase their productivity. In the private sector this will be facilitated by ensuring non-discriminatory access to finance for small business. Workers are unionized and most of the unions are affiliated to the Fiji Trades Union Congress. Wages and conditions of employment are subject to voluntary conciliation and if necessary by compulsory arbitration. By law, men and women have equal opportunities for employment. It is estimated that the total labour force grew at an average annual rate of 2.3 per cent over 1986- 1996. This is considerably greater than the population growth rate over the period of 0.8 per cent per annum and is due mainly to the increasing rate of labour force participation by women. The total net growth of the labour force over the five years is expected to be 40,500 (23,000 males, 17,500 females), increasing from an estimated 301,500 in 1996 to 342,000 in 2001. This will represent an average growth of 2.6 per cent per annum, up from the 2.3 per cent for the 1986-96 period. It is estimated that about 16,200 males and females will enter the labour each year between 1996 and 2001, of whom about 14,500 will be those seeking work immediately after leaving school or post- secondary institutions.

WATER

Water is one of the nation's most important resources and the availability of adequate water supplies is a prerequisite for most development activities. It has particular implications for the health of children. About 70 per cent of the total population have access to proper piped water supplies. Government funds the development of regional and urban water supplies, and also carries out the construction, operation and maintenance of these schemes through the Water and Sewerage Section of the Public Works Department. Cost recovery is low, and well under half of the annual expenditure (including capital expenditure) is recovered through water tariff. Government has allocated a total of \$26.3 million for water supplies in the Western Division, Suva/Nausori and its rural water supply program. The Western Division had been allocated \$18.7 million, \$5.6 million for the Suva/Nausori area and \$2 million for the supply of water for consumers outside metered supply schemes. From January last year, the government increased the current water and sewerage rates and charges by 40 per cent. But from October, consumers should expect a 10 per cent reduction in water rates. The reduction would be across the board and all consumers should benefit. The present government's policy on water is that all citizens of Fiji would be provided clean water at an

affordable cost. Government's policy is to keep strategic utilities such as water in public hands. A plan will be prepared to restructure the Water & Sewerage section from within. The reorganization charter will be amended to reflect the planned internal restructuring. Government also assists rural communities in developing water supplies through the rural self help scheme, where communities provide one third of the cost of materials and free labour, or where boreholes are sunk under the borehole subsidy scheme. Assistance has been provided in the development of over 1,400 rural water supply schemes since 1965. The Department of Mineral Resources undertakes hydrogeological investigations designed to identify potential groundwater sources, particularly in outer islands and rural areas of the main islands.

SEWERAGE AND WASTE DISPOSAL

It is estimated that 12 per cent of Fiji's population now have access to treated sewerage facilities, compared to only 6 per cent in 1980.

It is estimated that 57 per cent of all urban areas have sewage.

There are almost 13,000 sewerage connections to government schemes, just over 80 per cent of these being domestic connections.

Cost recovery is low, with only around 15 per cent of annual expenditure (including capital expenditure) being recovered through charges for sewerage services. Town and city councils were traditionally responsible for sewerage services within their boundaries, but these responsibilities have now been transferred to Government. Urban waste disposals including household rubbish and garden refuse remain the responsibility of town and city councils, which operate landfills for this purpose. The Ministry of Health administers some regulatory responsibilities in relation to waste management and pollution control. At present, the Ports Authority of Fiji is the sole industrial and urban pollution monitoring agency, and its responsibilities are confined to designated port areas.

TAXES

Income tax is deducted at source on a pay as you earn basis from all wage and salary earners. It has been reduced by an average of 20 per cent since Value Added Tax (VAT) was introduced by Government on July 1, 1992. The 10 percent sales tax was introduced as part of government's overall economic plan to boost the economy and raise standards of living. Since the tax was introduced several other indirect taxes have been abolished and these include hotel turnover tax, miscellaneous services turnover tax, customs duty, and excise taxes.

MONETARY SYSTEM

Fiji uses a decimal monetary system of dollars and cents. There are six commercial banks in Fiji - Westpac, ANZ Banking, Colonial National Bank , Bank of Hawaii, Bank of Baroda and Habib Bank. The Reserve Bank of Fiji at the head of the financial sector is responsible for implementing the government's monetary policy. RBF last year made a change in Fiji's currency structure and the change of designs on the notes. The structure has been changed by the addition of the \$50 note and the \$1 coin which replaces the \$1 note. Each new note depicts a new theme. They are People (\$2); Transport and Tourism (\$5); Agriculture and Natural Heritage (\$10); Buildings (\$20) and History (\$50).

ENVIRONMENT

Government has been active in the area of environmental management and protection in its effort to promote sustainable development. The Department of Environment (DoE) was established in 1991 from the Environmental Management Unit. The areas of responsibility of the DoE are focused on recognizing that conserving the environment and promoting development are mutually dependent. In April 1993, Cabinet endorsed Fiji's National Environment Strategy (NES). Fiji a party to a number of international environmental conventions is obligated to address global issues at the national level that is, to put in place relevant strategies, management, implementation and monitoring plans that ensure a safe and healthy environment. DoE is also involved in environment assessment and monitoring, national environment council formation, conservation protection and management of waste and pollution minimization. A mammoth task in which the Department of Environment had been involved since 1996 was putting together a new comprehensive and integrated legislation. In 1997, the then cabinet considered a draft Bill which contained 19 Parts and 22 schedules. The bill was redrafted and it now contains 7 parts and 2 scheduled. The bill provides for an administrative framework for sustainable development. Community awareness is important for the successful implementation of environmental programs. These are being implemented within the formal education system, by way of seminars and workshops in the various divisions through the DoE and line Ministries. Fiji has joined more than 40 million people in 120 countries in the 'Clean Up the World' campaign.