

FIJI



A SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & WOMEN

GOVERNMENT OF FIJI
with the assistance of UNICEF

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ACRONYMS

ADB	ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
AIDS	ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME
AIDA	ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ON DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES
ALTA	AGRICULTURAL LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT
ANC	ANTENATAL CARE
ART	ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT
AusAID	AUSTRALIAN AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BCG	BACILLUS CALMETTE-GUERIN (ANTI-TUBERCULOSIS VACCINE)
CBR	CRUDE BIRTH RATE
CEDAW	CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
CFCs	CHLORO-FLUOROCARBON
CPR	CONTRACEPTIVE PREVALENCE RATE
CRC	CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
CSEC	COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN
CSOs	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
DPT/Hib3	DIPHTHERIA, PERTUSSIS AND TETANUS/HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE TYPE B
DPT-HEPB+HIB	DIPHTHERIA, PERTUSSIS AND TETANUS/HEPATITIS B
ECE	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
ECREA	ECUMENICAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY
EPI	EXPANDED PROGRAMME ON IMMUNISATION
FCA	FIJI COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
FCOSS	FIJI COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES
FEYE	FIJI EIGHT YEAR (SECONDARY SCHOOL) ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
FIT	FIJI INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
FNCDP	FIJI NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR DIASABLED PERSONS
FRCS	FIJI RED CROSS SOCIETY
FRIEND	FOUNDATION FOR RURAL INTEGRATED ENTERPRISE 'N' DEVELOPMENT
FSEG	FAMILY SUPPORT AND EDUCATION GROUP
FSM	FIJI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
FTUC	FIJI TRADES UNION COUNCIL
FWCC	FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE
FWRM	FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
GDP	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
GOAL	GRASSROOTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION AND LEADERSHIP
HART	HOUSING ASSISTANCE RELIEF TRUST
HBW	HIGH BIRTH WEIGHT
HDI	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX
HIES	HOUSING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SURVEY
HIV	HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

IDA	IODINE DEFICIENCY ANAEMIA
IDD	IODINE DEFICIENCY DISEASE
ILO	INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE
IMCI	INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF CHILDHOOD ILLNESSES
IUCD	INTRA-UTERINE CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICE
JICA	JAPAN INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION AGENCY
LBW	LOW BIRTH WEIGHT
MDGs	MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
MLGHSSE	MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING, SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS AND ENVIRONMENT
MOH	MINISTRY OF HEALTH
MOE	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
NCCC	NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
NCD	NON COMMUNICABLE DISEASE
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION
NNC	NATIONAL NUTRITION CENTRE
NNS	NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEY
NZAID	NEW ZEALAND AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ODA	OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
PAFCO	PACIFIC FISHING COMPANY
PMTCT	PREVENTION OF MOTHER TO CHILD TRANSMISSION
SCF	SAVE THE CHILDREN FIJI
SDA	SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST
SDL	SOQOSOQO NI DUAVATA NI LEWENIVANUA (POLITICAL PARTY)
SHSM	ORDER OF SISTERS OF SACRED HEART
SOPAC	SOUTH PACIFIC APPLIED GEO-SCIENCE COMMISSION
SPC	SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY
STI	SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNAIDS	UNITED NATIONS AIDS (AGENCY)
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
UNESCAP	UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
UNESCO	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION
UNFPA	UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES
UNICEF	UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
UNIFEM	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN
USP	UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC
VCT	VOLUNTARY COUNSELLING AND TESTING
WHO	WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its country programmes, UNICEF assists governments to produce and update a report on development trends within each country that describes how these changes affect the well-being of children, youth and women. These reports help to direct UNICEF's programmes and they also provide a useful reference for national bodies, the public and other development partners. This report presents an overview of the situation of children and women in Fiji in the first decade of the 21st century. It was drafted with help from many people in Fiji and draws upon both published and unpublished information and reports.

Political instability and associated economic difficulties over the past twenty years have put the Fiji Government's commitment to equitable development under increased pressure. The current development plan focuses on opportunities for economic growth, in the expectation that this is the precursor to social development. But government's budget has grown faster than the national economy, its debt has grown rapidly, and civil service salaries take up a large part of government spending, despite a recent pay cut. There is little left over for capital costs, and social services are under growing strain to maintain their quality in the face of this declining investment. Progress in sectors such as health, education and social services, which has taken so much to achieve, is in jeopardy.

Since the late 1990s, Fiji's progress has stalled on basic development indicators, including the Human Development Index (HDI). Infant, child and maternal mortality rates have halved since the 1960s and are now low, and life expectancy at birth is high at 70.7 years for women and 66.5 years for men. In the early 1990s Fiji's child mortality rate was the second lowest among Pacific island countries. Since then, child mortality has dropped in every other country in the region – particularly in countries with higher rates – but Fiji remained static. There is a high level of adult literacy, almost universal primary school enrolment, and around 40 per cent of adolescents remain at school to the age of 18 years, up from a much smaller number a generation ago. Partly because these education indicators were already good, Fiji has made less recent improvement on them than most other Pacific island countries.

The last national population census was held 11 years ago in 1996. Population projections compensate for the lack of recent figures but much is uncertain about the present situation. Because there are no firm population counts, important questions that cannot be properly answered include the proportions of children in or out of school, vocational skills in the working population, the extent of unemployment, the growth of towns, and the number of families living in squatter-like housing. It is nonetheless evident that there is now: a very high rate of emigration from Fiji, particularly of skilled and professional people; an outflow of rural residents to the towns and more generally people from Vanua Levu to Viti Levu, because of the expiration of agricultural land leases; an upsurge in informal settlements where people

must live with poor living conditions and insecure tenure; and generally a growing breadth and depth of poverty.

Health concerns include problems of access to good quality care, especially for people in remote rural areas; the expense of health care for low-income people, despite the low user fees at government facilities; deteriorating national nutrition standards; the increased prevalence of chronic diseases, reproductive health problems, especially for young people; and the risks posed by HIV and AIDS. Progress has stalled on lowering the infant mortality rate, to the point where it appears to have recently increased. Possible causes for this include a decline in the quality of health services, a decline in their use, or the worsening health of women of child-bearing age. To contain this problem will require both persistence with traditional strategies – immunisation, nutrition education, and so on – and the adoption of new ones, particularly the identification of sub-national patterns of child illness and death, and targeting children with special health risks and families living in poverty.

School enrolments in Fiji are high, with a Net Enrolment Ratio of around 100%. Entry to primary education is almost universal, equally so for boys and girls. This significant national achievement has come about through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education and the many NGOs, local communities, churches and private organisations that operate schools, or programmes to assist under-privileged children. Since the early 1990s, the Ministry of Education has worked towards making basic education compulsory – although not entirely free – for children aged 6-15 years by extending tuition fee-free grants to schools, increasing the number of civil servant teacher posts, helping to extend early childhood education, establishing more rural schools and providing transport assistance to children in remote rural areas, improving the quality of teaching staff and school management through training programmes, promoting community support for education, and increasing education opportunities for children with disabilities. Nonetheless, the survival ratio from primary school classes 1 to 5 appears to have fallen since the early 1990s, possibly indicating the difficulty faced by low-income families in keeping their children at school – but the full extent of this will only be evident after the forthcoming census is completed.

Post-secondary education is available through several Government-run or private institutions, but all forms of adult and vocational education are limited and entry is competitive, advantaging the best qualified students or those who can afford the often high fees. Females constitute only 30% of enrolments in technical and vocational education, indicating their continuing disadvantage. Non-formal education remains poorly organised and little supported by government.

The youth population is the fastest growing segment of Fiji's population. A lot of attention has been given to the problems faced by young people, and to improving their prospects

through training in life skills and employment generation, provision of youth-friendly reproductive health services, and projects to address issues such as substance abuse. A National Youth Policy was developed in 2004 with the assistance of the National Youth Council and other youth organisations, and incorporated into the national development planning process.

People with special needs include disabled children and adults, people living in poverty, and children and women at risk of abuse. The terms 'poverty', 'hardship' and 'disadvantage' now occur frequently in government planning and policy documents. Many NGOs working in this area nevertheless believe that there is insufficient political will to fully address these problems. There is a close connection between disability and poverty. The Fiji Government allocates a very small proportion of its budget to social welfare. The main official welfare programme, the Family Assistance Scheme, provides small payments to the most destitute households, but even these payments were severely cut in the last budget.

Domestic violence is an issue that is now receiving more of its due attention, and the past decade has seen a real change in official attitudes. Other areas of discrimination against women remain, partly because legislative changes have yet to be made in, for example, legal provisions for various sexual offences, or sufficient action yet taken to counter *de facto* discrimination against females in the education system and workforce.

Physical abuse of children remains a problem even in the schools, and their sexual abuse and exploitation may be on the increase, aided by new electronic media, more extensive tourism, and poverty. Work is underway to educate the community, including children, about child rights and children's development. The commitment of the Fiji Government to child protection is demonstrated through the policies of various ministries, particularly the Police. The National Coordinating Committee on Children coordinates and facilitates advocacy about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and monitors and reports on related activities of the government.

In its Strategic Plan 2007-2010, the Fiji Government reaffirmed its responsibility to put in place policies that will achieve prosperity, especially for the poorest, disadvantaged and most vulnerable citizens. However, pro-poor planning is not strong in Fiji. National plans emphasize the need to address poverty and hardship, yet the major upheavals of recent years – the termination of thousands of agricultural leases, the periods of economic malaise that have followed periods of political unrest, the loss of factory employment for thousands of workers, particularly women, the large out-flow of people from Vanua Levu, stagnation of the low-income urban housing market, and the visible growth of poverty – have not been sufficiently mitigated by well designed or implemented programmes.

Introduction

As part of its country programmes, UNICEF assists governments to produce and update a report on development trends within each country that describes how these changes affect the well-being of children, youth and women. These reports help to direct UNICEF's programmes and they also provide a useful reference for national bodies, the public and other development partners. This report presents an overview of the situation of children and women in Fiji in the first decade of the 21st century. It was drafted with help from many people in Fiji and draws upon both published and unpublished information and reports.

In 1993, the Fiji Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in 1995, produced their first CRC Implementation Report. The CRC is central to the work of UNICEF and forms an important backdrop to this report. The second guiding document for this report is UNICEF's Medium Term Strategic Plan 2006-2011, which sets out the organisation's priorities for the next four years. The goal of UNICEF's Pacific Programme is, together with regional and country partners, to ensure a better outcome for Pacific island children as reflected in more accurate data for planning and monitoring, improved policies and legislation, and greater access to quality services. The results sought are:

1. Increased country ownership of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
2. Improved infant and child health and development and education of children under 12 years of age;
3. Greater resiliency of adolescents;
4. Greater participation of children in society and their protection from abuse and discrimination.

A third, more general background is the Millennium Development Goals, which inform the work of all United Nations agencies and which are very pertinent to the status and conditions of children, youth and women.

The Definition of a Child

Under Fiji's Constitution, all people irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity or religion have equal rights. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Fiji recognises that people under the age of 18 years are entitled to particular rights and protection as children, but the laws are not consistent about this. Most provisions in the Fiji Constitution suggest that a person reaches adult status at the age of 21 years, when, for example, they become eligible to vote. But in other respects, the age of legal responsibility is younger:

- Under the Juveniles Act, no child under the age of 10 years can be guilty of any offence. All other children up to the age of 17 years are dealt with in juvenile courts. A child between ten and twelve can be found guilty only if the child knows the crime he or she committed was wrong. Children under 14 can be placed in prison if they are considered hardened juvenile criminals. Under the Penal Code (Section 25), a sentence of death cannot be pronounced on a person under the age of 18 years.
- There is no prescribed age at which a child can give testimony in Court or at which parental consent does or does not apply. Under the Juveniles Act, a child can give sworn evidence if he or she understands the nature of an oath. If they do not understand the oath but understand the duty of speaking the truth (described as "any child of tender years") their evidence is admissible but must be corroborated.
- Under the Juveniles Act, it is an offence to assault, ill-treat, neglect, abandon, or expose a juvenile to suffering or injury to health. The Penal Code includes other measures to safeguard and protect children from the offences of abduction, defilement, and infanticide, again up to the age of 17 years.
- The Marriage Act provides a minimum age for marriage of 16 years for women and 18 years for men, but parental consent is needed from the father for persons under the age of 21. If he has died, the mother or a magistrate can give consent.
- In regard to property, the Wills Act provides that a person can make a will once they reach the age of 18 years. There is no specific legislation as to the minimum age at which people can contract or acquire and transfer land but the English Minors Act is followed, which again is 18 years.
- Under the Liquor Act, it is illegal to sell or supply alcohol to people under the age of 18 years.
- The Employment Act defines children as people under the age of 15. It prohibits employment of children under the age of 12 and protects older children from long hours, night work and hard or heavy work. A child can only be employed on a daily basis for six hours or less, and must return home each night.
- A young person must be at least 18 to be recruited into the army.
- The health services have no clear legal definition of the age at which children need parental consent for outpatient care or contraceptive use¹.
- Under the Family Law Act, if parents have separated, the parent having the care of any children of the marriage can apply to the Court for maintenance for the children.

¹Government of Fiji, 1995. Fiji CRC Implementation Report.

This Act applies to children up to the age of 18 years, or older if special circumstances apply.

Cabinet established the National Coordinating Committee on Children in 1993, the year in which Fiji ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee consists of representatives from various government ministries and non-government organisations whose work relates to children. The Committee considers ways to incorporate the provisions of the Convention into Fiji's laws and practices and coordinates national efforts in matters relating to children.



PART 1

THE NATIONAL SITUATION