CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM
GOVERNANCE INDICATORS FRAMEWORK
ASSESSMENT SUMMARY
FIJI

unite for children
## CONTENTS

**Summary of findings**            3
Results matrix

**Key strengths and weaknesses**   5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain 1.</td>
<td>Policy process</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain 2.</td>
<td>Public financial management</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain 3.</td>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain 4.</td>
<td>Information management</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain 5.</td>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain 6.</td>
<td>Public communications and influencing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### RESULTS MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy process</th>
<th>Predictive learning</th>
<th>Navigational leadership</th>
<th>Strategic anticipation</th>
<th>Agility</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Open Collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Clarity and consistency of CP priorities</td>
<td>1.2 Coherent specification of key CP concepts</td>
<td>1.3 Preparedness to volatile environment</td>
<td>1.4 Policy coordination structures</td>
<td>1.5 Policy monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>1.6 Synergies across sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public financial management</td>
<td>2.1 Multi-year budgeting based on realistic costing</td>
<td>2.2 Transparency and creditability of budget allocations</td>
<td>2.3 Spending flexibility</td>
<td>2.4 Neutrality of financial incentives</td>
<td>2.5 Value for money</td>
<td>2.6 Effective structures for decentralized funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>3.1 Standards for CP professionals</td>
<td>3.2 Personnel accounting and payroll control</td>
<td>3.3 Continuity across electoral cycles</td>
<td>3.4 Training to maintain up-to-date expertise</td>
<td>3.5 Performance evaluation</td>
<td>3.6 Attracting and retaining qualified staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information management</td>
<td>4.1 Use of evidence in policy process</td>
<td>4.2 Quality of CP databases</td>
<td>4.3 Responsiveness to changing policy demands</td>
<td>4.4 Data consolidation and exchange</td>
<td>4.5 Links between data users and producers</td>
<td>4.6 Links to national CP research agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
<td>5.1 Quality guidance and standards</td>
<td>5.2 Credibility and regularity of inspections</td>
<td>5.3 Encouragement of innovation</td>
<td>5.4 Effective gate-keeping and referrals</td>
<td>5.5 Enforcement and follow-up</td>
<td>5.6 Integration with communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comms and influencing</td>
<td>6.1 Clarity of CP Communication Strategy</td>
<td>6.2 Availability of evidence on values and attitudes</td>
<td>6.3 Alertness to changing risks</td>
<td>6.4 Interactive engagement with key audiences</td>
<td>6.5 Building on existing positive values</td>
<td>6.6 Involvement of opinion leaders into behaviour change agenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Four Criteria for each indicator

Assessment: “Was the benchmark achieved?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Benchmark 3</th>
<th>Benchmark 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>“Yes” = 1</td>
<td>“Yes, restricted” = 0.75</td>
<td>“No, extended” = 0.25</td>
<td>“No” = 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Total points received for each indicator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resulting Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[3 to 4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2 to 3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1 to 2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[0 to 1]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KEY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The system of Child Protection in Fiji is going through a period of adjustment to a growing volume of legislative policy commitments, gradual fiscal tightening, rapidly evolving political and governmental structures, and a strategic transition to political stability and social cohesion.

Strong dimensions:

- Open Collaboration. Robust communal traditions and cooperative values, combined with relatively small and lean institutional structures, helped Fiji to build foundations for a child protection system which is open and collaborative. The bulk of current programmes are closely integrated with communities, and most opinion leaders are involved in the Government’s awareness raising and behaviour change effort. Key Ministries maintain informal links with the academia and civil society. Co-operation within the Government, across the implementing agencies, is often hindered by lack of technical capacity (including, e.g., capacities for internal communications), but is still vigorous, especially at the local level and in times of emergencies.

- Strategic anticipation. Current regulations and institutional setup for child protection provide the Government with considerable room for manoeuvre in policy design and implementation. Budgeting rules are based on an “envelope approach”, providing administrative heads with high flexibility as to how they choose to allocate funds; regulations on data collection allow agencies to quickly change templates and request new evidence; and work is on-going to capture emerging and intermittent child protection risks such as natural disasters or negative externalities of technological progress, growing volumes of international tourism and climate change.

- Agility. Child Protection structures have considerable integrity to swiftly respond to the changing context. Financial allocation principles are neutral with regard to types of provided services; the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC) is well positioned to steer concerted inter-agency responses to changing context (provided that it receives some still needed strengthening); the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation is clearly defined as the core gate-keeper to address child protection alerts; and arrangements were set-up to ensure that professional skills of child protection staff are kept up-to-date.

Weaker dimensions:

- Navigational leadership. A range of features in the current organization of the child protection system makes it difficult for the stakeholders to share a collective sense of the current situation, which is critical for developing joint confidence in moving forward. Quality of child protection databases suffers from weak coordination: field officers across Ministries and Departments collect a vast amount of child protection data, but it is not standardized and not sufficiently disaggregated. In addition, surveys by Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS) do not provide statistical evidence on attitudes to child rights and upbringing, which voids awareness campaigns of a factual ground for planning and monitoring. Budget allocations on child protection are not sufficiently transparent and credible: actual spending of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation (MoSWWPA) differs very considerably from its approved budget; internal spending controls within key ministries were criticized by international assessments as not timely and accurate (new rules to improve commitment controls were introduced but their impact requires verification).

- Predictive learning. Although Fiji’s Government has set up clear objectives and priorities in Child Protection, it lacks capacity for evidence-based policy analysis to ensure that chosen goals are relevant and realistic. This includes lack of in-house expertise in diagnostic studies to design strategies for behaviour change. Objective-setting is also weak in the social work profession: standards and expectations to organizations and specialists working with children are not well defined, not mandatory and cover a small share of providers.
- Resilience. Few current tools equip Government to embrace and positively build on setbacks. Policy monitoring through the Strategic Framework for Change Coordinating Office (SFCCO) is highly numerical and contains no evaluation of policy impact, which could be incorporated into future programming. There is no established practice to monitor performance from the angle of increasing value for money: independent performance audits through the Auditor General (AG) are not utilized in child protection, programmes are not analysed in terms of their comparative costs and benefits, awareness of fiscal constraints (and, in particular, the mid-term prospect of fiscal consolidation) is weak. In the process of service provision, the Government uses a limited arsenal of reaction to poor performance: sanctions against standard-breaking organizations (beyond government grantees) essentially do not exist; malpractice by individual professionals is said to often go unregistered and unhandled.
Current progress

- Fiji is the absolute regional leader in legal recognition of international commitments related to child protection. It joined 18 of the 29 relevant treaties, including the two Hague Conventions protection children from the risks of abuse in international adoption (Together with only five other countries in the EAP (Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand). Remaining issues on which Fiji is still outside international agreements include protection of civil and political rights, human trafficking, and prevention of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

- Nine cross-cutting priorities in child protection are clearly incorporated into the Government’s key multi-annual strategic plan – the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (RDSSED) 2010-2014 “A Better Fiji for All.” The Government uses a coherent strategic planning system, which translates these strategic national objectives into strategic and annual corporate plans of implementing Ministries along with their quarterly cost implications. Defined priorities seem clear and familiar to the ministerial staff.

- The current arrangement for multi-layer public administration is complex, unique and constantly evolving, combining elements of highly decentralized traditional leadership hierarchies with centralised administrative structures led by national Government. At this moment, devolved functions overseen by elected local councils are limited and have little impact on child protection (most activities are implemented by local offices of national ministries); local by-laws rarely deal with these issues and risks of inconsistencies are low. However, provincial and municipal councils increasingly integrate child protection objectives into their strategic plans and begin to allocate funding to awareness raising. **RECOMMENDATION:** In the future, this trend is likely to bring out the need to significantly enhance capacities of local administrations for strategic planning, budgeting and coordination with central authorities.

Open challenges

Despite good progress, open issues remain in the following areas:

- Arrangements were established for inter-agency response to natural disasters via the National Disaster Management Council (DISMAC) and a high-level executive umbrella of key ministers in the Cabinet, as well as through the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC) and a newly formed government-donor protection cluster. However, apart from the National Disaster Management Act 1998 and the National Disaster Management Plan 1995 (which do not address-child specific risks), there is no specific policy or action plan on children in emergencies. Moreover, preventative multi-hazard risk mapping is usually project-based and ad-hoc and does not include regular assessment of child protection risks. **RECOMMENDATION:** The currently on-going review of the National Disaster Management Act 1998 and the National Disaster Management Plan 1995 present an opportunity to incorporate child-specific concerns into these documents. In addition, a separate policy may be developed by the NCCC within the Protection Cluster. The NCCC could more actively join DISMAC efforts on preventative risk mapping to incorporate child specific issues.

- The National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC) is a mixture of opportunities and problems. It meets regularly, helps to develop key regulations, and could be quickly mobilized in case of emergencies, and is well positioned to undertake supreme policy oversight in child protection. However, this is currently difficult. The key obstacle is almost complete lack of communication of NCCC decisions to the decision-makers in the member-Ministries. This hinders implementation, including the NCCC influencing powers over the field-level structures such as district level inter-agency committees. Moreover, excessive focus on operational issues and lack of pro-active communication of strategic messages from the NCCC keeps ministerial leaders complacent over child protection agenda. **RECOMMENDATION:** a practical mechanism must be developed to feed key action points to senior ministerial executives. Capacity building in strategic internal communications could be of significant help.
Policy monitoring processes organized through the Strategic Framework for Change Coordinating Office (SFCCO) is well organized, integrated into the planning cycle, and provides ministries with practical feedback. However, this reporting is highly numerical and contains no evaluation of policy impact. Moreover, in the absence of a separate child protection policy, there is no integrated monitoring mechanism which would be specific for child protection, led by a single agency and clearly outlining gaps and bottlenecks by individual contributing sectors. RECOMMENDATION: SFCCO could benefit from some awareness raising on child protection issues and encouraged to extend their analytical feedback.

Fiji’s health sector is advanced in data management and primary health care tradition, with significant coverage of remote areas with nursing stations. At the same time, child protection objectives are not incorporated in the Child Health Policy and Strategy 2012-2015 and the Ministry of Health (MoH) strategic and annual corporate plans (despite recommendation of the 2008 Baseline Report “Protect me with Love and Care”). Health workers lack practical skills to deal with child abuse (focusing on physical abuse rather than other types of maltreatment and referral guidelines). RECOMMENDATION: Current health sector reform is a window of opportunity for specific child protection up-skill. The reform is focused on large investment into capacity building at the primary level and public health strengthening. These programmes should include modules on child protection (including in the currently developed on-line training packages). Child welfare commitments should also be reflected in the Public Health Act which is currently under review led by the Health Policy Commission. The MoSWWPA (e.g. through the NCCC) could consider submitting a respective proposal to the review process.

A major weakness of the child protection policy process is lack of coherent specification of key concepts. The new Constitution has fundamentally expanded guarantees of child rights. However, there is no practical mechanism to reconcile controversial issues and colliding concepts across sectors prior to drafting bills. While there is no major disagreement on policy issues across the sectors so far, current cross-cutting legislation contains inconsistencies (e.g. definition of the child; age of criminal responsibility; marriage age). Critically, implementing regulations for the current laws also sometimes lacking or inconsistent. RECOMMENDATION: Activate support to whole-of-government policy development for child protection. Install cooperation with the new legislative structures that will be developed within the new Parliament so that child protection issues are integrated into parliamentary legislative scrutiny.
DOMA IN 2.
PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Current progress

In the last decades, Fiji implemented major budgeting reforms, which were analysed through two rounds of PEFA (Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability) Framework Assessments (2005 and 2013). These reports are not yet publically available, which limits the scope of sources for this study and may result in underestimation of progress achieved by the Government.

From the standpoint of child protection, Fiji’s public financial management system currently benefits from two major valuable features:

• Centralisation of child protection functions at the national level and small size of sub-national spending allows the Government to instil policies without the risks of any vertical imbalances between responsibilities and funding at the local level. Again, this may start to change soon as the role size of local spending is growing (creating needs for much stronger transparency in local financial reporting and new intergovernmental fiscal arrangements). Recommendation: NCCC needs to start monitoring the size of spending (total and child protection related) from provincial and municipal budgets.

• Budget allocation rules are highly flexible, providing line Ministries with significant opportunities for results-oriented financial management. Preparation of the national budget follows an envelope-based principle, with broad ceilings for administrative heads and minimum restrictions on their chosen inputs mix. Permanent Secretaries can also switch appropriations across budget lines in the process of implementation by making virements. In fact, in the past years, this flexibility exceeded capacities of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) to control the quality of such re-allocations, service delivery and financial planning, resulting in new regulations to streamline the virement process. One reason for the recent trend to limit the use of virements is poor compliance of the agencies with financial management rules. Recommendation: to counteract the shift of policy away from the currently flexible system, the line ministries...
should consider diligent financial reporting as their utmost priority. They should also focus
on demonstrating a clear link between their budget decisions and strategic objectives, as
a matter of advocacy in favour of retaining the current level of flexibility.

Open challenges

Financial management approaches could be strengthened in several key ways:

• Budget allocations on child protection are not sufficiently transparent and credible. Actual
spending by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation (MoSWWPA)
differs very considerably from its approved budget (unlike most other ministries) (variance in
the composition of expenditure outturns for the MoSWWPA compared to original budgets in
2012 was 26.2 per cent compared to the 7.6 per cent average for other key agencies – MoH,
MoSWWPA, MoYS and Fiji Police). Moreover, actual expenditures of the MoSWWPA are
not only further away from approved budgets but also differ in a negative way (decreased or
underspent) – unlike the budgets for MoE and MoH which were increased compared to plan.
RECOMMENDATION: the MoSWWPA should invest into mastering newly introduced tools
for cash flow and commitment management, such as the MoF Proforma Finance Manual
2011 which outlines new requirements for cash flow forecasting for all spending units. The
Audit Committee of the MoSWWPA could be strengthened and encouraged to look into
the high variation of spending with the view to help policy-makers achieve more stable
projections.

• Fiji has a rolling multi-year Macro-Fiscal Framework, which outlines how macroeconomic
assumptions for the upcoming three-year projections would affect fiscal totals and expenditure
envelopes by administrative heads. For example, the 2014 strategy was to continue gradual
consolidation of finances in the medium term, but aim to increase operating savings (to
prevent borrowing for recurrent expenses) and reallocate spending towards capital projects
and repayment of debt. But while each ministry projects its spending two years ahead, there
is no costed cross-sector child protection strategy. As a result, there is no pro-active bottom-
up communication of the expenditure requests which would serve an agreed Child Protection
policy – either generally or within individual inter-agency action plans. RECOMMENDATION:
MoSWWPA and other agencies would benefit from more pro-active communication
of their long-term costing at the stage of submitting their budget requests. A joint
expenditure prioritization and negotiation policy may be discussed under the
NCCC umbrella.

• The Government of Fiji has so far managed to keep its deficit under control despite sluggish
economic growth and yet invest into new infrastructure and social initiatives in education and
social protection. However, it admits that fiscal consolidation will be required in the medium
term, along with further redirection of spending away from operational activities towards
capital projects. Yet, strategies for such cuts are not widely discussed and elaborated (not
mentioned in any of the corporate plans); child protection professionals are generally uncertain
about trends in CP spending and oblivious to the prospect of consolidation in the next years.
RECOMMENDATION: Gradual preparation should start to take place. Ministries which
were traditionally resistant to engaging into performance audits offered by the Auditor
General office might consider starting such co-operation (e.g. based on the currently
specified benefit targets for all programmes). The NCCC may consider inviting partners
from agencies experienced in implementing cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to share their
lessons and design ways to implement this tool for child protection initiatives. Successful
cases of CBA in other sectors include Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change;
Health Sector and Education Sector reforms; and transfer to electronic payments of
Family Assistance grants. Importantly, the Government have just began receiving support
from the Pacific Cost-Benefit Analysis Initiative (P-CBA) including training in CBA for
natural resource management. It is a window of opportunity to request P-CBA to include
modules on child protection so that disaster preparedness initiatives could be assessed
from the perspective of ensuring safety for vulnerable children.
DOMAIN 3.
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Current progress

Fiji continues to improve its management of the public service force, which directly benefits child protection, as most current specialists are employed by the Government.

This helped to develop a range of strong elements in the current personnel management systems, although further enhancement is still warranted.

- Performance evaluation of public servants follows a clear cycle linked to job objectives and reward levels. All posts have approved duty statements along with the Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQRs), even though they are often generic and do not clearly specify child protection tasks. In reality, while field officers overwhelmingly agree that their core objective is awareness raising and better coordination, actual duties are often focused on administrative functions. Operational planning, financial management and administrative routine consumes most of the staff’s time, although preparation and participation in community-based training is also a significant priority. A clear Annual Performance Appraisal system led by the Public Service Commission (PSC) is based on confidential reporting and includes discussion of feedback with line managers. In principle, it is also linked to levels of compensation by affecting per centage rating salary increments or bonus payments, and an additional system of reward for outstanding performance was introduced in 2014. At the same time, professionals do not feel that their outstanding contributions are always acknowledged. Even more alarmingly, the system of disciplinary action described in the General Orders 2011 does not ensure that poor performance results in any sanctions. **RECOMMENDATION:** The use of a new reward system should be encouraged and concrete cases made visible to all staff; in the meantime, managers may intensify the use of non-financial rewards which are currently underutilized. The impact of lacking sanctions should be further investigated, to strengthen both formal and informal influencing tools.

- Fiji is an academic centre of the Pacific and offers a wide range of training opportunities to child protection professionals. This includes the new Degree programme in Social Work in the University of South Pacific and a formal system of continued professional development for the public servants. The latter includes training provided and funded by the line ministries, as well as a range of relevant courses offered through the Government’s Centre for Training and Development (CTD), including a specific Child Protection training programme. Nevertheless, 67 per cent of the surveyed professionals admitted that they had not attended any child-specific training in the last three years. The interest in training also seems weak and not encouraged: the majority of the respondents (83 per cent) said that situations where they lack knowledge and skills happen rarely or never, and in such situations they prefer to consult their peers or search for information on their own (48 per cent) rather than discuss their knowledge gaps with line managers and request training (38 per cent). **RECOMMENDATION:** Staff could be strongly encouraged to seek training through the CTD and to share their knowledge gaps.

- Although staff turnover is generally high for Fijian civil service, the out-flow of talent to the private sector is mostly in non-social welfare professions. Staff remuneration compares favourably to other jobs (59 per cent of respondents thought that their financial terms were relatively more attractive, and the other 41 per cent felt that it was about the same). Existing problems with turnover are often prompted by loose transfer policies leading to instances where the Permanent Secretaries or Heads of Departments only became aware of the transfer of staff upon receiving confirmation on offer of promotion to the Officers from other Agencies. Child protection posts are associated with poorer career opportunities, often because they are not defined as technically specialized (e.g. child abuse legal cases are perceived as low-key) and graded equally to low-skill health workers. **RECOMMENDATION:** Although upgrading social welfare posts to a higher rank would lead to extra costs, this should be strategically considered. Heads of Departments and Permanent Secretaries (PSs) should also promote stronger compliance with PSC transfer regulations and consider more active discussion of the transfer plans with the staff.
Open challenges

- One of the key weaknesses of the current human resource management (HRM) system is the vague definition of professional standards for officers working on child protection issues. Although all public servants, including social workers employed by the Government, are subject to Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQRs) approved by the PS, they do not seem to include specific social work and child protection qualifications. Among the mini-survey, 38 per cent of respondents admitted that they have not received any specialized education. Moreover, aside from the MQR, there are not standards applicable to social workers employed by non-state organizations. The Fiji Association of Social Workers (FASW) and the USP are working on developing such standards and a respective paper was submitted to the Cabinet, but this work is still on-going. **RECOMMENDATION:** support the current momentum for development of Standards, making sure that they clearly define the profession of social work, and set up a way to recognize not only academic qualifications and diplomas but also practical experiences of many social workers in Fiji.

- Few policy papers or similar documents have been developed in child protection so far to transport institutional memory to further generations of politicians and professional staff. This lack of documentation of previous experience is a significant barrier to reforms in child protection. In particular, current efforts to implement the Child Welfare Act 2010 could have benefited from the lessons of previous pilot projects which attempted to introduce integrated child protection services through setting up a child abuse centre under a joint responsibility of several relevant agencies. **RECOMMENDATION:** The NCCC could launch and maintain a database of brief summaries of key lessons, experiences, contacts and products generated from previous projects. Much of this information could be requested from the funding agencies as a matter of formal obligation, especially for the future initiatives. Individual ministries would also benefit from specific investment into better documentation of their on-going work. A library of annual reports and relevant documents could be created under the NCCC and, ideally, made open through a web-based resource.
DOMAIN 4.
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Current progress

The strongest elements of Fiji’s child protection data system are its flexibility and responsiveness to the changing policy demands. Currently, the flexible approach to development of templates in the key ministries is an opportunity for responsive collaboration in data collection. The Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS) is bound by the legislation to incorporate demands for data from the policy makers and data collection plans are subject to approval of the Ministerial Senior Management but are otherwise flexible (even though this opportunity is not yet fully utilized by child protection stakeholders).

Open challenges

Effective data management is one of the biggest challenges for child protection in Fiji. Three biggest areas which need improvement are related to quality of the databases, analytical capacities and communication between data users and data producers.

- Collection of data related to child abuse and maltreatment in Fiji is undertaken at the local level through several relevant Ministries and Departments and is limited to recorded cases.

- Headquarters of every such Ministry of Department develop their individual templates for data collection and aggregation, without coordination with other agencies. Although the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS), the MoSWWPA and NCCC brings some of this data together, this consolidation covers a small and variable range of indicators and is not regularly updated. As a result, evidence on child protection lacks consistent definitions and is not readily available for cross-cutting policy analysis or operational planning.

- No data is collected on incidence and prevalence of child abuse to identify risk groups for surveillance purposes.

- The timeliness of data collected through individual agencies is highly variable. While the Fiji Police Force has an advanced daily data collection system, other ministries may lag several years behind in aggregating their field reports.

RECOMMENDATION: (1). Streamline, simplify and standardize internal data sharing protocols. Useful lessons could be drawn from the previous work on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems. (2). Explore ways to speed up data consolidation by headquarters, either by enhancing respective posts or by strengthening data processing skills. (3) Develop a practical model for child protection surveillance including protocols for analysis and sharing of relevant administrative records. This should be a joint effort with (a) the Ministry of Health, so that surveillance indicators for child abuse are included into the currently reformed Health Information System, and (b) FIBOS, so that the system includes data collected through population surveys.

- Most Government agencies involved in child protection suffer from lack of analytical skills for evidence-based policy making. All key Ministries and Departments have minimum human capacities dedicated to data processing; and this personnel receives no training in statistical analysis. Relevant courses are offered by the CTD, although they are generic, and cover either very basic concepts or advanced skills, without a mid-range option. As a result, although policy makers have acute research questions, they are not able to address them properly.

RECOMMENDATION: (1). Data officers should be directed to relevant CTD courses. In the meantime, it would be useful to develop a practical toolkit, manual and interactive training in data analysis for child protection. This toolkit could be used regionally and could be incorporated into the regular CTD curriculum.
• FIBOS and child protection agencies operate almost without any practical interaction. Child protection issues do not feature in any of the current surveys, and the only relevant type of administrative data consolidated by the FIBOS is on child abuse reported to the Police. Although FIBOS is transparent, user-friendly and open institution, they do not reach out to line ministries. From their side, child protection stakeholders do not involve FIBOS into their joint activities (including NCCC) and have not attempted incorporating child protection questions into the household surveys, even though legislation provides FIBOS with a mandate and a flexible procedure to survey coverage. **RECOMMENDATION:** Consider inviting FIBOS to the NCCC (either as a member or as invitee); consider using their surveys; and consider using FIBOS as a hub for consolidating more information on child protection as is currently done with the data from Fiji Police – perhaps as a lead agency in developing the integrated surveillance system.

• Although Fiji has established a Protection Cluster to address child protection risks of natural disasters and relies on NCCC and the National Disaster Management Council (DISMAC) for orchestrating child-sensitive response efforts, less work was done on risk mapping and respective data management. FIBOS jointly with DISMAC began advanced projects for risk mapping and assessment, including Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for spatial risk analysis, but NCCC members do not seem involved in this initiative. **RECOMMENDATION:** Consider linking the CP agencies (individually or through the NCCC) with the geo-spatial planning champions (DISMAC and FIBOS) so that child protection issues are included into the risk assessment model.

• There are significant opportunities to engage academia and civil society into a joint research agenda and data collection, but they are not yet pro-actively utilized. Much of the current external research – including studies by international organizations – is driven by internal and poorly coordinated internal priorities. Apart from informal communication, there is no regular mechanism for the academia to supply evidence to policy makers in child protection. Notably, such a mechanism has already been established for the Health sector: The Fiji School of Medicine, within Fiji National University, runs a Centre for Health Information, Policy and Systems Research (CHIPSR) specifically to facilitate the use of evidence-based research in national policies (helping academic staff to liaise with the Government, donors and regional agencies, and driving student research towards topical policy areas). **RECOMMENDATION:** Consider partnering with the CHIPSR to either include a child protection module to its current operations or to replicate their experience to create a similar unit under the USP School of Social Sciences.
DOMAIN 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Current progress

Fiji has developed strong building blocks to secure quality in the provision of services to children.

- Child protection programmes across ministries capitalize on the tradition of community participation in addressing child risks (successful models for community integration include Community Policing; Child Labour Prevention, and the Positive Parenting Package “Children are a Gift from God”). The Family Law Act 2003 and the Juveniles Act 2003 specify requirements for using residential placements as an option of last resort and for non-custodial sentencing of young offenders. The MoSWWPA supports a community corrections programme for reintegration of children in conflict with the law.

- The MoSWWPA Corporate Plan contains a clear goal to encourage innovation in child welfare service provision (Sub-Output 5.1); and a lenient registration procedure along with flexible financing rules does not discourage creative solutions.

- The Department of Social Welfare (DoSW) is clearly defined as the core gatekeeper and receives continuous reinforcement to its capacity in exercising this function (including 23 additional officers on recommendation of a functional review in 2013). The Child Welfare Decree 2010 mandates all other agencies to report all instances and risks of child abuse to the DoSW. Compliance is not yet universal, but ideas are developed to address this by setting up integrated Child Protection Teams at the local level.
Open challenges

At the same time, significant barriers to quality still remain.

• Although Fiji has led regionally in developing Minimum Standards of Care for Children in Residential Placement, and clearly identified the role of the DoSW in supervision of the organizations working with the children, in reality the Standards (and respective certification) are not mandatory and their application is currently limited to several organizations (including residential homes) which receive funding from the Government’s budget. Although the DoSW conducts physical inspections of these organizations at least once a year and collects written performance reports, the oversight is limited to a small range of providers. This, in turn, is linked to the current arsenal of sanctions for violations of standards: the tools in the hands of the DoSW include removal of rule-breakers. **RECOMMENDATION:** The DoSW may consider ways to extend current Standards to the rest of the service providers. At the very minimum, the current set of Standards should become more transparent (openly published and promoted across all NGOs, rather than just the Government grantees and approved institutions). Ideally, the Standards should become law. In addition, a mandatory certification procedure based on these Standards, along with a feasible mechanism to sanction violations, would be an important next step. One possible option to consider as an enforcement tool could be a joint policy with the Chief Registrar1 whose office currently bears responsibility for legal incorporation of all NGOs in Fiji and has the power to cancel incorporation, although the current plausible reasons are limited to fraud and unlawful actions. At the very least, the Registrar should provide working-level access to the list of currently incorporated NGOs involved in social welfare activities to the DoSW for the purposes of designing a supervision system.

• The Government’s approach to child protection does not yet include a robust system of surveillance. Apart from dedication of extra staff and training to high-risk communities, identified based on case management data by the Fiji Police and the DoSW, there is no system or activities to analyse broader ranges of data, including epidemiological evidence, to establish abuse risk factors and provide targeted prevention and protection to the identified groups of vulnerable children and families. **RECOMMENDATION:** The current practice of risk analysis for identifying vulnerable communities could become a cornerstone for gradual development of a full-scale surveillance system. Key agencies to lead in this initiative (MoSWWP, in cooperation with the MoH, Fiji Police and FIBOS) would benefit from respective training and technical support.

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1 Operations of the civil society organizations in Fiji are regulated by the Charitable Trusts Act (Cap. 67) amended by two additional Decrees in 2011 and 2013. Under the Charitable Trusts Act (Cap. 67), incorporation of NGOs is the duty of the Registrar of Titles. It remains to be verified whether the Office of the Chief Registrar had taken over the functions of this authority.
DOMAIN 6.
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFLUENCING

Current progress

During 2000-2008, international organizations helped Fiji to undertake a range of in-depth
diagnostic studies of attitudes and values related to child rights and upbringing, including the
UNICEF Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey, a range of further qualitative surveys,
such as the 2008 Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) assessment, and, finally,
the 2008 UNICEF/AusAID Baseline Report “Protect Me with Love and Care.” Discoveries from
these studies enabled the Government jointly with the donors to formulate clear objectives for
influencing and behaviour change, which were used for strategic programming and reflected in
the Government’s community-based awareness raising programmes.

Resulting public communications approach has a range of particular strengths:

• All behaviour change efforts are permeated with attempts to build on existing positive values.
The 2008 Baseline Report had specifically highlighted positive, rather than negative attitudes
to children and their upbringing. The subsequent community-based awareness raising agenda
was structured around a positive parenting concept and titled “Children are a Gift from God,”
referring to one of the most fundamental positive widely shared values related to children. The
explicit tactics of positive parenting is to use existing positive attitudes to develop appreciation
of currently unfamiliar child protection concepts and objectives. This is done through constant
creative interaction with the audience (parents, teachers and children themselves).

• The current approach to communications actively involves key opinion shapers such as religious
authorities and community leaders. At the same time, there is no practice of engaging other
prominent figures, such as celebrities, although some authors in Celebrity Studies believe that
the dynamics of fame in small Pacific country contexts can provide celebrities and stars with a
very strong influencing power. **RECOMMENDATION:** Consider involving influential public
figures and celebrities into delivering value-changing messages for child protection.

• Existing awareness raising programmes cover a broad range of emerging and intermittent
child protection risks, such as adverse externalities of new digital technologies, thriving
tourism, transformation of family structures and growing peer pressure on children resulting
from monetization of the economy. The community policing initiative also explicitly includes
influencing measures to promote social cohesion and restore the delicate balance in the
attitudes within the multi-cultural society of Fiji (to prevent discrimination and minimize the
prospect of reoccurrence of political turbulence and social unrest which was shown to have
devastating child protection consequences).
Open challenges

• The biggest weakness of the Government’s current approach to communication is lack of a systemic investment in its own human and financial resources into diagnostic analysis of the cultural context to support communication policy design. Although the current communication agenda is explicit and linked to concrete awareness raising programmes, it remains externally driven and based on the studies led and funded by the donors. FIBOS surveys do not include any variables which would generate evidence on current attitudes or help to track their change in order to evaluate the impact of influencing effort and adjust communications policies.

RECOMMENDATION: Future internationally led attitudinal studies should clearly link to the Government’s own programmatic agendas (such as those formulated in the RDSSED and ministerial corporate plans) and, ideally, engage at least a symbolic co-funding from the national budget so that diagnostic attitudinal research is recognized as a practical investment. This should also help to extend communication objectives to cover a comprehensive range of child protection concerns rather than the currently selective areas such as positive parenting, child labour or school-based abuse. The government-owned Communication Strategy should also involve clear specification of audiences and methods, perhaps with a stronger involvement of media campaigns, social advertising, socially responsible investments by the private sector and other state-of-the-art techniques.

• The University of the South Pacific (USP) fosters a wide range of world-class research focusing on the culture, customs and traditions in the South Pacific. However, none of the publicly listed papers and research topics seem to address the links between cultural context and child protection. Given the visible interest of the social sciences academics in Fiji to research of cultural systems, attracting their attention to child protection concerns is an opportunity on which the Government could capitalize. RECOMMENDATION: Consider forging stronger working-level cooperation with the USP student and research communities to draw attention to child protection concerns, make Government’s attitudinal questions known to the academia, and request research on the issue. The Government could initiate specific joint events with the students to present key policy concerns and use teasers in the form of access to data, access to field-level experience and honorary recognition of any contributing work.