



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



**International
Labour
Organization**

Global research on governance and social protection

Case studies on Mauritius and Fiji

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Development Pathways for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Inclusive Social Development, within the framework of the project “Global research on the governance of social protection systems.” The project is jointly funded and overseen by UNDESA and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The lead author of the report is Shea McClanahan (Senior Social Policy Specialist, Development Pathways) with substantial contributions on the Fiji case study from David Hillson (Social Policy Specialist, Development Pathways). Richard Chirchir (Senior Management Information System (MIS) Specialist, Development Pathways) also provided valuable inputs into the Mauritius case study. The authors are grateful for constructive technical feedback from UNDESA and the ILO and overall guidance provided by Robert Venne (UNDESA), Oleg Serezhin (UNDESA) and Wenyan Yang (UNDESA).

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Acronyms (Mauritius)

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
BRP	Basic Retirement Pension
CSO	Civil Status Office
EPZ	Economic Processing Zones
MoH	Ministry of Health and Wellness
MoL	Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training
MSIEE	Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment
MoSS	Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions
MRA	Mauritius Revenue Authority
MUR	Mauritian Rupee
NAO	National Audit Office
NEF	National Empowerment Foundation

Acronyms (Fiji)

C&P	Care and Protection Allowance
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
DAS	Disability Allowance Scheme
FAP	Family Assistance Programme
FBFP	Free Bus Fare Programme
FNPF	Fiji National Provident Fund
FJD	Fijian Dollar
FVP	Food Voucher Programme
GOF	Government of Fiji
HIES	Household, Income and Expenditure Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFI	International Financial Institution
MWCPA	Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
MIS	Management Information Systems
PBS	Poverty Benefit Scheme
RBF	Reserve Bank of Fiji
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPI	Social Protection Indicator
SPS	Social Pension Scheme

1 Introduction

Small states in general, but especially small island states, face unique challenges owing to their small populations, limited domestic resource base, remote geographic location, colonial legacy and history of high economic dependence on single commodities or industries (e.g. sugar, tourism). Moreover, it has been suggested that welfare systems may be qualitatively different in small states as compared with larger states in view of these and other constraints. However, despite these common constraints, small island states have followed widely diverging paths in the design and development of their social protection systems.¹

This chapter briefly reviews the experience of two small island states, Mauritius and Fiji, which have taken very different decisions that have shaped the social protection systems they have today. Whereas Mauritius has long been considered a welfare leader among small states, taking early steps to implement broad-based, inclusive schemes — a model that Prasad et al. (2013) have qualified as “leaning toward universal social policy” — Fiji has been grouped among those relative small state laggards in which social policy has been “undermined or neglected” (ibid.).

However, in recent years both countries have taken steps that suggest that these initial paths may not be as dependent as welfare state scholarship has suggested. Mauritius provides a unique example of a country with a strong track record of success in achieving universal coverage for specific groups (especially the aged and people with disabilities), but which is also grappling with the best way to close gaps among children and people of working age. The emerging approach toward younger cohorts challenges the previous universalist framework and has implications for governance structures and mechanisms, which are becoming increasingly complex. Fiji, in contrast, has taken small but potentially meaningful steps away from a scheme-based, fragmented system characterised by low levels of coverage and investment, that suggest an emerging — though still very nascent — lifecycle approach, marked by the introduction of a new social pension and changes to child allowances.

This case study examines the role of governance decisions and structures in determining and managing these policy choices. Within the framework of the project, the two case studies in the report are based on a desk review of available documents and structured around core themes as laid out in the global overview report.² Each presents key messages and the context for social protection, before discussing governance at different levels of the social protection policy and delivery process, and, finally, offering a summary of key points followed by a conclusion.

¹ See Armstrong and Read (2003) and Bertram (2010b) cited in Prasad et al. (2013).

² See the global overview report in this report series.

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The social protection system in Mauritius is widely regarded as effective, and much of that success is owed to good governance decisions that have shaped its legal frameworks, institutional configurations, management information systems and delivery systems. However, it is facing a critical juncture in policy orientation that could jeopardize some of its achievements if not carefully managed. The following pages explore the recent social protection governance developments and decisions and their potential implications for the future of coverage extension and the achievement of universal social protection in Mauritius.

2.1 Key messages

Mauritius is known in Africa and around the world for its well-developed and institutionalised social protection system, especially its universal old-age pension. Mauritius invests nearly 3 per cent of GDP to ensure that everyone who reaches age 60 years can expect to receive an old-age pension financed by the state. Among low- and middle-income countries, Mauritius' level of investment is only surpassed by Georgia,³ and among high-income countries, only the Netherlands and Norway spend more on their tax-financed social pensions.⁴ Less emphasis in the global literature has been placed on the country's contributory system, but in fact, the social protection system in Mauritius combines tax-financed (both means-tested and universal) benefits with a relatively comprehensive social insurance system, all overseen and administered directly by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions. All told, including its contributory system, Mauritius spends around 4.5 per cent of GDP on social protection on older people alone.⁵

While Mauritius has followed an inclusive, lifecycle approach for certain categories (older people, persons with disabilities, widows), policies aimed at younger cohorts have historically been less inclusive. According to the ILO, Mauritius invests much less in social protection for younger age groups: around 0.3 per cent of GDP on children, 0.9 per cent of GDP on people in active age, and an additional 0.5 of GDP on general social assistance.⁶ As a reflection of these priorities, whereas 100 per cent of older people have access to social protection,⁷ only around one in 10 children do.⁸ This discrepancy presents a puzzle: Rather than lean into the universalist strategies that had shown such success (for example, by extending them to children or working age contingencies), recent policy choices have signalled a potential tilt in focus away from a universal, rights-based framework and toward a strategy aimed at poverty reduction and 'empowerment' for younger cohorts. This new approach is exemplified by the "Marshall Plan Social Contract" which emphasises poverty targeting and the application of conditionalities to benefits that had previously been unconditional. The global overview argued that these two models have very different implications for governance. Whereas the administration of benefits based on a proxy means test to determine eligibility and conditions rooted in a logic of 'deservingness'⁹ results in much more complex structures and reporting lines (and consequently higher costs, including in the form of exclusion errors), core lifecycle benefits

³ Notably, Georgia spends 4.8% of GDP on the tax-financed universal pension but does not have a contributory scheme. See HelpAge International (latest year)

⁴ HelpAge International (latest year)

⁵ See ILO (2017). This figure excludes expenditures on health.

⁶ ILO (2017). These figures exclude expenditures on health.

⁷ (HelpAge International, latest year; ILO, 2017a)

⁸ Estimates is approximate based on published administrative data from MoSS for social security child allowances and orphan's pensions (14,356 children), and from the Partnership for the SDGs update (Bor, n.d.) for SRM child allowance (12,000 children). The denominator is based on Statistics Mauritius population data for children aged 0-14. This may be an overestimate as some children may be double counted and would require official validation by GoM, which is outside the scope of this assignment.

⁹ See e.g. Global Innovation Exchange (2018, 2016)

generally require much simpler systems. The case study poses questions about the future implications of these co-existing models in Mauritius, the challenges this tension potentially poses to governance, as well as solutions the Government of Mauritius has so far sought to reconcile them.

To support the new policy orientation, the Government has created new administrative units with new functions, including enforcing compliance with conditions and managing the information requirements for poverty targeting. This process has increased the complexity of national institutional arrangements while also creating new veto players — including a new Ministry and agency devoted exclusively to poverty reduction ‘empowerment’ — and increasing the need for cross-sectoral coordination. At the same time, a social registry, the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM), has been presented as an administrative solution (‘harmonisation’) to resolve problems with duplication and inclusion errors, but it has also been undergirded by high-level policy changes. So far, the Social Register has been hailed as a success, and indeed it appears to complement (rather than supplant) the existing integrated registry for core lifecycle benefits that had already been recognised as a leading example of a single registry. However, little attention has been given to the drawbacks, including the high costs of maintaining the new system, and in particular the potential for the it to institutionalise and systematise exclusion errors.

Despite these shifting policy sands, the frontline governance structures have remained intact and strong. Users can still interact with the social security system through a ‘single window’ at Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (MoSS), which distinguishes Mauritius from many low- and middle-income countries. Moreover, the emphasis on the social contract between citizens and their Government is made explicit through a detailed “Customer Charter” issued by the Ministry that affirms both the commitments by the Ministry as well as all rights and entitlements to social security benefits – core lifecycle as well as other social assistance benefits – in Mauritius, and their corresponding obligations, where relevant. The Charter also lays out core administrative procedures for applying for and receiving benefits, as well as the process for making complaints and appeals. It is unclear – perhaps too early to tell — whether the SRM and the proxy means test that undergirds it will provoke additional complaints, but the analysis in the global overview suggests that this is far from unlikely. To confront this possibility, the Government appears to be taking a proactive stance: for example, the National Empowerment Foundation, which administers the SRM, has just launched an SMS Mobile system that enables all citizens registered under the “Marshall Plan” to receive updates and report feedback. Moreover, there is effective collaboration between the MoSS and the Mauritian Revenue Authority as regards the collection of contributions for contributory benefits.

The case study will draw on practical examples from three programme areas:

- **Pensions:** Early introduction of the social pension laid a foundation for a multi-tiered system, which has proved resilient in the face of fiscal pressures even if reform is necessary. The lifecycle approach exhibited in the pension system is in tension with the consolidation of poverty targeted programmes.
- **Unemployment:** Mauritius has a two-tiered unemployment benefit, consisting of a tax-financed means-tested benefit for low-income workers who are not enrolled in social insurance, and a higher rate benefit, with a longer duration, for those who have paid contributions. It also links up with the pension system through the National Savings Fund.
- **Social aid (and Marshall Plan):** The Ministry of Social Security in Mauritius also administers an income-tested benefit package known as ‘Social Aid Benefits’, which use a PMT and operate under a different policy logic to universal benefits. Some social aid benefits (SRM child allowance) comprise part of the Marshall Plan Social Contract, and a gradual phase out of social aid has been proposed.

Each of these policy areas presents different coordination, information management and enforcement/accountability challenges. While the pension system is widely viewed as a success, the performance of the unemployment and social aid packages is less clear as these programmes are still relatively recent. The case study will describe some of the governance challenges presented by the more complex administrative requirements of the latter two programmes and their potential implications, compared with the more streamlined pension system design and assess whether the governance solutions have helped or — potentially — complicated the overall process of continued extension.

2.2 Initial situation, successes and challenges

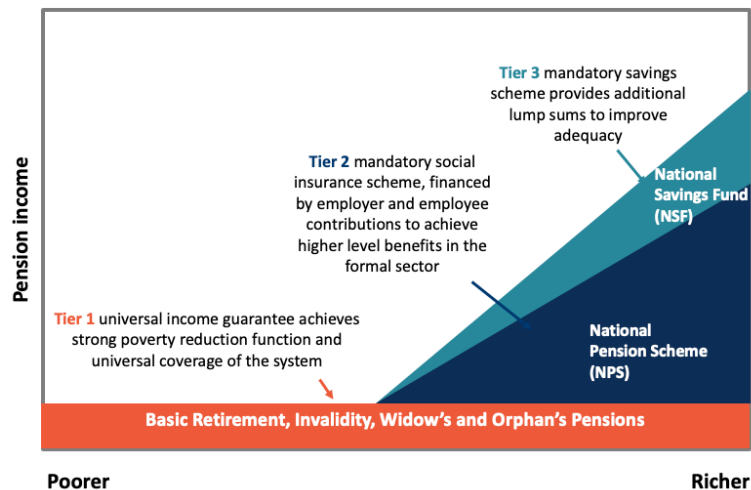
Pensions

The Mauritian welfare state, most notably the universal pension, has a long history and enjoys strong societal support. The Old Age Ordinance and the National Pension Act, both adopted in 1950, introduced the tax-financed universal pension (Basic Retirement Pension, or BRP) that formed the basis for the multi-tiered system that exists today. The pension is paid at three rates, according to the pensioner’s age, which range in value from 18.7 per cent of GDP per capita for those aged 60-89, to 64 per cent of GDP per capita for those aged 100 or older.¹⁰

A mandatory social insurance pension — the National Pension Scheme (NPS) — was implemented in 1976,¹¹ and the National Savings Fund Act of 1995 created a mandatory savings fund (NSF) providing lump sums.

The result is a multi-tiered system that provides universal coverage through three tiers, as depicted in Figure 2-1. Tier 1 guarantees basic income security (a ‘floor’) financed through taxes, reducing poverty and achieving universal coverage; Tier 2 provides higher levels of protection (so-called ‘vertical’ extension) for those who have paid social contributions through employment; and Tier 3 consists of a mandatory savings account financed through contributions and providing lump-sum benefits for old age, disability or survivorship. The combination of universal coverage (100 per cent of older people receive a pension) and the relative adequacy of the universal pension by international comparison make the Mauritian system among the most effective pension systems in the world.¹² Indeed, absolute poverty among people over age 60 in Mauritius is almost negligible, at around 0.7 per cent in 2017, compared with 7.2 per cent for children up to age 16.¹³ Similarly,

Figure 2-1: Mauritius’ multi-tiered pension system



¹⁰ The pension is paid as follows: Age 60-89: MUR 6,210 per month (18.7 per cent of GDP per capita); Age 90-99: MUR 16,210 per month (49 per cent of GDP per capita); Age 100 or older: MUR 21,210 per month (64 per cent of GDP per capita)

¹¹ The NPS is an early example of a notional defined contribution scheme in which pensions are awarded based on contributions that are converted to pension points. See e.g. Cichon (1999); Willmore (2003)

¹² Tran and Kidd (forthcoming)

¹³ Statistics Mauritius (2020)

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relative poverty (the percentage of the population living below 50 per cent of median income) was highest among children (17.8 per cent) and lowest among the elderly (4.3 per cent).¹⁴

Willmore noted in his 2003 analysis for UNDESA that the Government had always intended to eventually replace the universal pension with a contributory one, but the universal pension proved politically resilient and, in fact, the design of the contributory system actually created fiscal space for its expansion.¹⁵ The two components of the system complement each other: According to Willmore (2003), the introduction of compulsory social insurance “remarkably...strengthened the non-contributory regime without affecting its universality”. The universal pension has also proved resilient against attempts to introduce means-testing, largely thanks to public resistance, suggesting a high degree of reliance on and satisfaction with the pension in the general population.¹⁶ While fiscal and demographic pressures suggest that parametric reforms may be needed to preserve the financial sustainability of the NPS,¹⁷ the overall the system is widely regarded as smoothly functioning — a policy and administrative success story.

Unemployment insurance

The system’s multi-tiered design extends beyond old age and disability pensions. Mauritius stands out as one of the only countries in Africa with an unemployment benefit systems, and the system is unusual in consisting of two tiers, a tax-financed means-tested benefit for low-income workers who are not enrolled in social insurance, and an higher rate benefit, with a longer duration, for those who have paid contributions.

Like most low- and middle-income countries, Mauritius suffers from high rates of informality, where around 53 per cent of the labour force is working informally. Mauritius introduced the Unemployment Hardship Allowance in 1983 under the Unemployment Hardship Relief Act (No. 3 of 1983) for persons who had been registered as unemployed for at least 30 days. The benefit is still paid today but the transfer value is minimal: up to MUR 468 a month is paid with no additional allowances, but even with a dependent spouse and two small children, the amount (around MUR 1,300)¹⁸ is only a fraction of the minimum wage, which currently stands at MUR 9,000 for workers in Economic Processing Zones (EPZ) or 9,700 for other workers.¹⁹

In 2009, the Government introduced a more generous, second-tier Transition Unemployment Benefit (TUB). Although the TUB is financed from contributions (1 per cent of earnings for employees and 2.5 per cent of payroll from employers), receipt of the benefit is not conditioned on having paid contributions and is therefore technically open to employees working informally, though take-up among this group has been low.²⁰ Unemployed workers must meet four conditions: they must have been employed for at least 180 uninterrupted days in their previous job; have been working full time; have been laid off rather than resigned; and must register with the “Workfare Programme” and participate in an active labour market policy (ALMP) (they can choose job placement, start-up support or training). The TUB and Workfare Programme introduced the notion of ‘flexicurity’ into national discourse in Mauritius and has been the subject of debate.²¹

¹⁴ Youth poverty rates stood at 4.2% (absolute) and 12.5% (relative), working age at 2.9% (absolute) and 9.0% (relative).

¹⁵ Willmore (2003)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See e.g. Soto et al. (2015).

¹⁸ ISSA/SSA (multiple years)

¹⁹ Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (2020)

²⁰ According to Liepmann and Pignatti (2019), just 13 per cent of previously informal workers were eligible for the programme, and just 3 per cent took up the benefit, compared with 24 per cent of previously formal workers who were eligible and 31 per cent participated.

²¹ For example, the TUB introduced the notion of ‘flexicurity’ into national debates in Mauritius (see Deerpalsing, 2008).

Social Aid Benefits

In the same year the Unemployment Hardship Allowance was introduced, the Social Aid Act was introduced providing a collection of means-tested benefits. Social Aid Benefits are paid to people with disabilities, widows, abandoned women, and certain other persons considered ‘vulnerable’ if their incomes fall below a defined level. Traditionally, the package also contained additional support according to the family’s situation: a dependent spouse allowance, a child allowance, rent support, rice and flour allowance, a funeral grant and a compassionate allowance (for persons with serious illnesses).

The different components are all administered by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (MoSS). According to the Ministry, however, there was a need to consolidate and harmonise eligibility criteria across multiple programmes in Mauritius (not just within the MoSS): “The eligibility threshold differs across programmes, and its definition is heavily based on ad hoc welfare assessments to identify the beneficiary”.²² The Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) was introduced to manage all means-tested programmes, therefore, as a technological and administrative solution to the problem of coordination, one that aimed to “improve the targeting efficiency of social programs so that limited program resources primarily reach those who deserve them most”.²³

In addition, shortly after the introduction of the SRM in 2012, as part of moves toward introducing initiatives aimed at ‘empowerment’ of vulnerable populations, the Government began to condition receipt of child allowances on school attendance (90 per cent attendance for most students; 75 per cent if disabled) for household scoring under a certain threshold in the SRM. Ostensibly, this was in response to the Government’s observation that beneficiaries of the child allowance “were not attending school”.²⁴ This reflected a simultaneous shift in policy orientation under the heading “Marshall Plan Social Contract,” which emphasised empowerment of social welfare beneficiaries and required households to sign a social contract with the Government specifying their new obligations. The embrace of conditionalities stands in contrast to the approach historically taken by the Mauritian Government toward social welfare and signals at the very least a divergence with the rights-based approach taken to income security for older populations but could also indicate potential for future changes in the Government’s policy orientation. So far, of the existing social protection income transfers, this shift only applies to the Social Aid child allowances (now called SRM child allowances), but the new orientation is manifest in the creation of a new Ministry and new agency tasked with poverty reduction and empowerment. It bears noting that these two objectives also happen to be among the traditional and largely undisputed functions of social security.

2.3 Governance in the Mauritian social protection system

Each of these policy areas presents unique challenges to the good governance of Mauritius’s social protection system. This section draws on these policy areas, as well as the overall structure of the national system, to illustrate the responses and approaches to governing the social protection system at high-level (with a focus on coordination), mid-level (with a focus on management

²² Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (n.d.)

²³ Global Innovation Exchange (2016)

²⁴ Quote from Ministry official explaining the rationale when accepting the ISSA Best Practice Award in 2014 (Global Innovation Exchange, 2018)

information systems, or MISs) and street level (with a focus on enforcement, accountability) in Mauritius.²⁵

2.3.1 High level

Overview of the social protection policy and legislative framework in Mauritius

Mauritius provides a relatively comprehensive set of statutory social security benefits, including both core lifecycle schemes and other supplementary social protection schemes.²⁶

The lifecycle system is built on a “floor” of tax-financed benefits, including a combination of means-tested and universal individual entitlements paid for defined contingencies that align quite closely with those outlined in ILO Convention No. 102.²⁷ For example, provided they fulfil certain residency requirements, everyone in Mauritius can receive free essential health care and a basic pension in old age or in case of disability or survivorship. Children can benefit from social protection as survivors, if they are disabled, or if they live in households designated as poor according to a proxy means test (PMT) as recorded in the SRM, while child allowances are also paid to persons receiving basic or contributory old age, disability or survivors pension if they are caring for children younger than age 15. In working age, the tax-financed, income-tested Unemployment Hardship Relief is available to those who meet the eligibility criteria. In addition, Mauritius has a well-developed multi-tiered social security system in which those who make mandatory contributions over their working lives can enjoy higher rate benefits through the National Pension Scheme, as well as lump-sum benefits through the National Savings Fund. This includes protection in case of disability, survivorship, unemployment and old age. Employer-liability schemes also provide protection for income loss due to sickness or maternity.

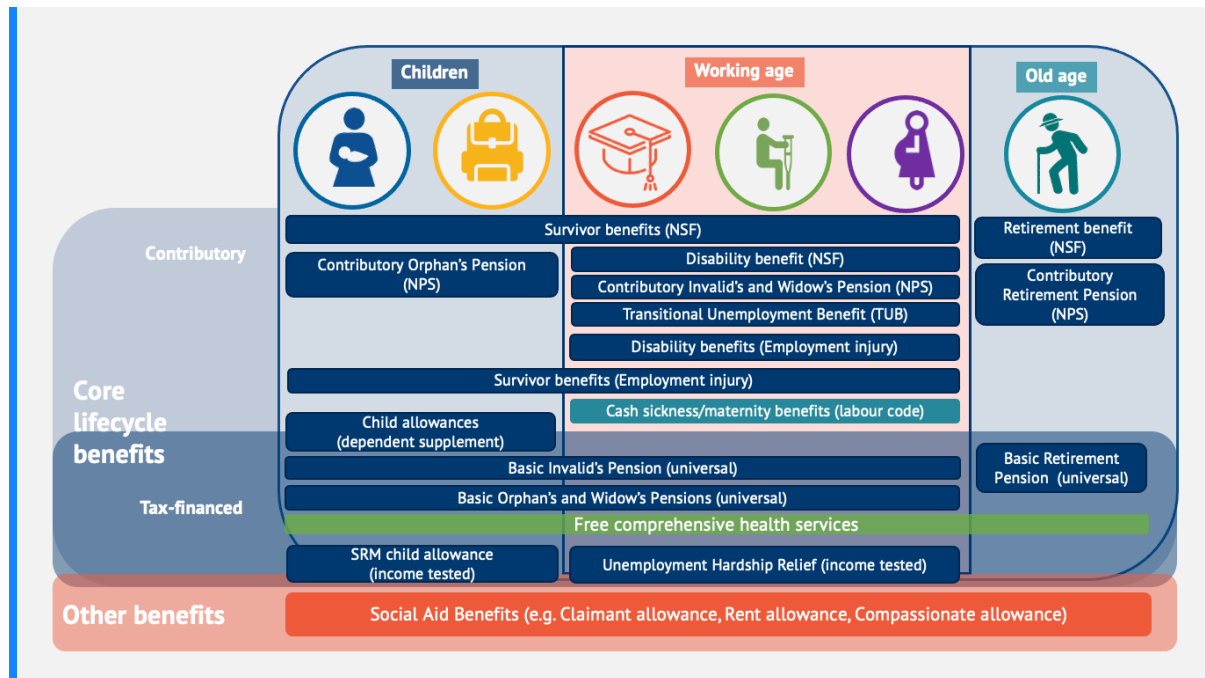
These core lifecycle benefits are complemented by additional benefits consisting primarily of means-tested “Social Aid” benefits paid to certain categories of people living in households classified as poor, now identified according to the PMT formula as recorded in the SRM (see 2.3.2). The core lifecycle and other programmes and benefits are shown in Figure 2-2.

²⁵ See the global overview in this report series for a detailed discussion of the analytical framework.

²⁶ See Box 2-1 in the global overview report for a detailed discussion of the difference between core lifecycle schemes and other supplementary social protection benefits.

²⁷ ILO (1952)

Figure 2-2: Core lifecycle and other social protection schemes and benefits in Mauritius

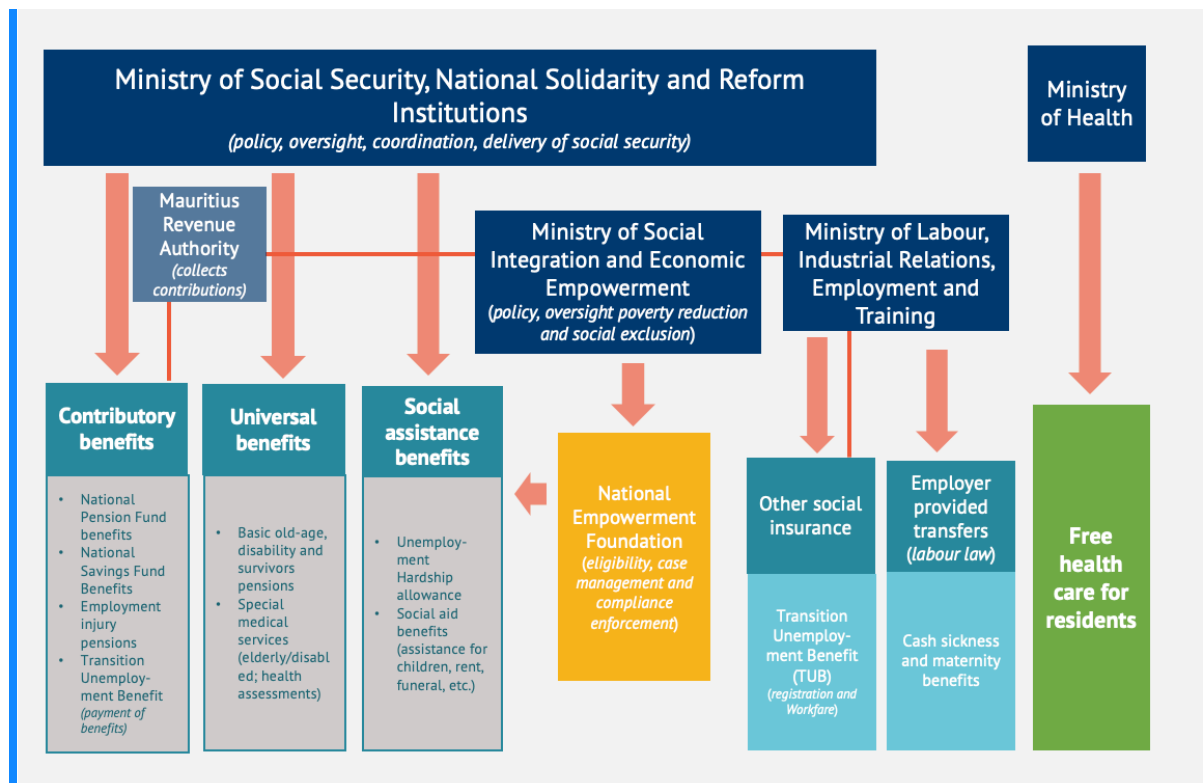


Source: Based on ISSA/SSA (latest year) and official Government websites.

Institutional framework

Moreover, Mauritius has historically benefitted from a centralised institutional structure that concentrates both policy oversight and administration of benefits within the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, leaving no doubt as to which Ministry is responsible for core social security programmes. (Separately, the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoH) is responsible for the free provision of health services for all Mauritian residents, an essential component of the social protection floor.)

Figure 2-3: High-level institutional configuration of the social security system in Mauritius



Source: Development Pathways' depiction based on ISSA/SSA (multiple years) and additional Government sources.

Even if the MoSS is at the central institution in high-level social security governance in Mauritius, a number of functions are spread across different Ministries and agencies and require close coordination, and this is increasingly the case as the system has introduced greater complexity in recent years. For example, for contributory schemes, MoSS coordinates closely with the Mauritian Revenue Authority (MRA), which is responsible for collecting contributions and transferring the funds to the MoSS. In addition, the two unemployment benefits are split between two ministries: the social assistance benefit is administered by MoSS, while the contributory benefit is administered by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training (MoL) in partnership with MoSS. MoL oversees the Workfare Programme, including registration, and administers its ALMP components, while MoSS pays the TUB for those who qualify. In turn, contributions for the Workfare Programme and TUB are collected by MRA on behalf of MoL and MoSS, as with other contributory benefits. Responsibility for other working age contributory benefits, including cash sickness and maternity benefits, also lies with MoL.²⁸

Notably, close collaboration is also now required between MoSS and the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, which oversees the activities of the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF). The NEF was established in 2008 under the Ministry of Finance as a non-profit government-owned company charged with implementing the "Empowerment Programme."²⁹ The NEF later moved to the newly established MIESS, set up in 2010/11 to oversee anti-poverty programmes, including "social protection for social inclusion" comprising "non-

²⁸ This likely reflects the fact that these were historically financed by employers and are 'employer-liability' arrangements whereby employers are mandated to pay benefits directly to employees.

²⁹ The Empowerment Programme grouped together programmes targeting job placement and training, assistance for unemployed women, social integration, and support for entrepreneurs, among other initiatives (NEF, 2020).

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contributory transfers and programmes targeted at the poor.”³⁰ External actors – notably the UNDP – have been heavily involved in advising the Government on the new strategy and have contributed to financing core operational components, including the development of the SRM.³¹ The establishment of the new institutions reflected a view that had taken hold among key actors that existing social aid benefits, together with other small programmes, were ineffective, poorly targeted and poorly coordinated.³² Indeed, the UNDP’s 2016 Action Plan for implementing the “Marshall Plan Social Contract”, prepared for the Government, notes:

“Their sheer magnitude, fragmentation as well as little coordination and coherence among them are key reasons behind their inefficiencies, such as overlaps, inclusion and exclusions errors, diseconomies of scale and considerable leakage to non-poor” (UNDP, 2016, p.9).

Among the proposals in the UNDP assessment were 1) the creation of a Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) to register applicants for means-tested programmes, determine eligibility and calculate the level of assistance payable to the households; 2) responsibility given to the NEF for monitoring and enforcement of compliance with conditions; 3) monitoring and evaluation of household interventions; and 4) communication strategies for beneficiaries and the general public. In addition, they recommended “the phasing out of the Social Aid program and the transitioning of beneficiaries to the conditional cash transfer mechanism proposed” (ibid., p. 11).

This review has found that these recommendations have essentially been followed, as indicated in the latest MSIEE Annual Reports.³³ Currently, while many of the Empowerment Programmes under the charge of the MSIEE fall outside the scope of social security (specifically income transfers), the MoSS and MSIEE must coordinate to requires MSIEE/NEF to determine eligibility both initially and over the course of benefit receipt to ensure compliance with conditions and continued eligibility. Moreover, the NEF is given significant authority to coordinate and “bear[s] overall supervisory and reporting responsibility of services to participants of the SRM.”³⁴

The creation of the MIESS as a separate Ministry tasked with poverty reduction reflects a growing tension in the national definition of social protection and social security and empowers new actors in both policymaking and coordination of key social protection interventions. The move signifies an emerging, much narrower understanding of the function of social protection as primarily aimed at reducing poverty, indicating that this function is increasingly viewed as fundamentally separate from (rather than deriving from) the provision of broad-based (core) lifecycle social security transfers. Indeed, it is puzzling that Mauritius, which by all accounts owes its low poverty rates – especially among the elderly – to the high coverage and redistributive nature of the (lifecycle) social security system, would not embrace the fundamentals of a model that has proven so effective. Moreover, it introduces new and potentially power actors into the social protection policymaking space, which could lead to increased contestation over the definition and core functions of social security. This process, if not carefully managed, could put lifecycle programmes and the previous achievements in universalism at risk.

³⁰ “Duval Promises” (2011)

³¹ See e.g. Bundhoo (n.d.); Global Innovation Exchange (2018); UN Mauritius (2017); UNDP (2016, 2011).

³² For example, a study found that Social Aid benefits only marginally reduced poverty – that “in the absence of the scheme, poverty would have been 9.8 percent rather than 9.4 percent with the provision of social aid” (UNDP, 2016).

³³ Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (2019, 2018)

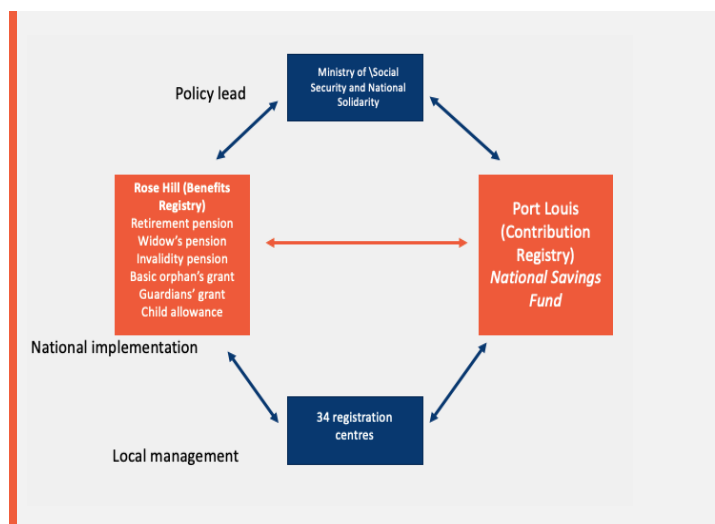
³⁴ UNDP (2016), p. 15.

2.3.2 Mid-level

Early MIS integration based on strong governance frameworks

The global overview argued that good governance of national social protection systems increasingly depends on developing integrated management information systems and applying ICT-based solutions to service provision. Nearly twenty years into the Government’s attempts to position the country as a high-tech hub in Africa,³⁵ it is perhaps little surprise that Mauritius has taken significant steps to leverage ICT-based solutions for social protection. A decade ago, Mauritius was already considered a global leader in developing an integrated management information system for lifecycle programmes. Kidd and Chirchir (2011) presented the Mauritian system as an example of good national practice, boasting a “relatively comprehensive MIS” that covered both contributory and non-contributory lifecycle schemes, at national and local levels.

Figure 2-4: Mauritius’ integrated social protection MIS in 2011 (pre-SRM)



Source: Chirchir and Kidd (2011a).

The main system consists of a “centralised, twin-database” approach whereby data is stored on two complementary servers — one located in the capital of Port Louis manages contribution collection, and the other houses benefits administration and is located not far away in Rose Hill. The two servers are managed by the MoSS, as policy lead, and communicate via high-speed cable. The database can be accessed for benefits application processing by all local MoSS social security offices around the country (34 offices in 2011, but now totalling 46 including head offices). The basic features of the integrated system, prior to the introduction of the SRM in 2012, are depicted in Figure 2-4.³⁶

The system is also connected to databases used by the Medical Unit in the MoSS, which carries out disability assessments among other functions, as well as the MIS used for employment injury claims. In this way, the central Mauritian system for lifecycle benefits operates as a single registry (see global overview) where essential information on beneficiaries and claims can be managed in a centralised way across the core lifecycle programmes and benefits.

Key decisions early on – dating back to the 1990s — laid the groundwork for a system that could be easily adapted and improved along with new technological developments and investment. For example, the Government implemented a National Identification Number (NID) in 1986, allowing the Ministry to embark on an ambitious electronic MIS development project soon thereafter. Second, the Government chose to use Oracle as the database upon which application interfaces were built, which provided a scalable platform with a graphical user interface.³⁷ The first component of the

³⁵ Schuetze (2016)

³⁶ Chirchir and Kidd (2011a)

³⁷ Oracle is among the leading technological solutions for managing large data, allowing for management of continued growth in data. Graphic user interfaces are also a staple among current technologies, but some countries (e.g. the SOCPEN database used by South Africa’s SASSA) still use legacy technologies that do not allow for a graphical user interface.

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system to be computerised was the electronic register of citizens, which migrated from where it originated in MoSS to the Civil Status Office (CSO). MoSS then developed the MIS for the contributory system in Port Louis using the civil registry and then extended this to include a non-contributory benefits database at Rose Hill. CSO and MoSS collaborate closely, including sharing information on newly registered citizens, where MoSS is able to issue temporary ID numbers.³⁸ Importantly, the information collected for the lifecycle schemes MIS is quite minimal – for example, for most programmes, all that is required is the recipient’s name, national ID, dates of birth, addresses and level of benefit, although additional information is required to administer certain benefits, such as disability benefits or the carer’s allowance.

There is little doubt that the success of Mauritius’s earlier integrated MIS was owed largely to the broader enabling environment in Government and good governance decisions. MoSS was a key player in driving these processes forward, including developing the first electronic civil register for national identification. MoSS also identified key individuals responsible in different departments to assist developers in designing and implementing the MIS, while also utilizing an “iterative prototyping” approach to enable iterative feedback on MIS models before settling on the features of the final system. However, importantly, this was a nationally driven process which involved a broad set of actors under a national ICT-based policy agenda. The other key institutions included: a National Computer Board responsible for policy oversight; a Central Database Processing Division tasked with training and capacity building; a Central Informatics Bureau to assess and cost application and software needs; and State Informatics Limited (SIL) company established by the Government to develop computerised MIS.³⁹

The addition of the Social Register of Mauritius

Notably, the early integrated single registry in Mauritius did not manage information on the Social Aid Benefits or other means-tested services and programmes (for example, Empowerment Programme schemes) managed by other Ministries, including the MSIEE. Financed with support from donors, the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) was presented as a solution to these coordination challenges, offering an opportunity to harmonise eligibility across multiple means-tested programmes. In this sense, the SRM is a social registry that complements rather than replaces the existing single registry already in operation in Mauritius which is managed by MoSS. As discussed in the global overview, social registries and single registries perform different functions and can exist as part of the same integrated national MIS but have different implications for administration. The addition of the SRM essentially consolidates the registration and eligibility process for Social Aid benefits (some of which may be phased out) as well as for other programmes, with the main user being the MSIEE. The new system is depicted in Figure 2-5. Importantly, the single window concept is maintained, where registration for all benefits, including lifecycle benefits and “SRM” or “Marshall Plan” benefits, continues to take place at local Social Security Offices under MoSS (see Section 2.3.3).⁴⁰

In practice, the SRM — like any database — is only as good as the data that feeds it. Households registered in the SRM include both potential and current beneficiaries, which are subject to a complex PMT to determine eligibility. However, because people’s incomes and circumstances are

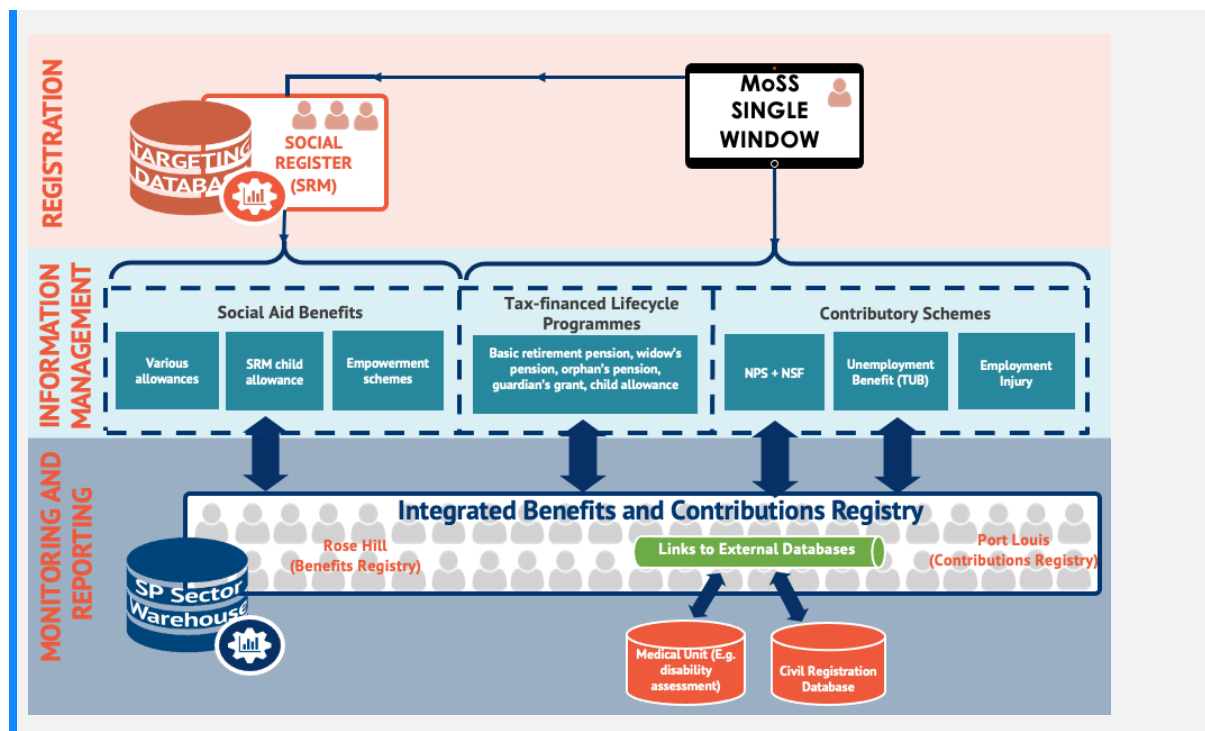
³⁸ Chirchir and Kidd (2011b). Collaboration with civil registries also enables identification of beneficiaries, including children, and validation for accuracy where legislation allows recipients to receive multiple benefits (as in Mauritius, where child allowances are attached to other benefits).

³⁹ Chirchir and Kidd (2011b). The SIL was a strategic decision that allowed the Government to cut development costs, although it is not without risks. For example, the MoSS does not hold the source code on its premises.

⁴⁰ Bundhoo (n.d.)

constantly changing, even the best PMT could not keep up with the changes.⁴¹ Indeed, reports suggest that the numbers of SRM households are constantly changing.⁴² In principle, this fluctuation in the SRM qualified households could reflect the system’s responsiveness to changing circumstances, as there does appear to be a recertification process if a household is deemed ineligible. However, it is unclear what happens when a household formally “exits the system”. Because the system uses a combination of self-selection and a PMT, the onus is on individual households to apply or re-apply according to need (and subject to awareness and access). While the Government frequently cites the number of households registered as an indicator of the power and success of the SRM, only around 11,000 households (44,000 beneficiaries) — representing just 3.5 per cent of the population — were deemed eligible for Marshall Plan benefits as of November 2018.⁴³ Meanwhile, in 2017, some 12 per cent of the population was living in poverty based on the international poverty line of US\$5.50 (PPP) per day for upper-middle income countries,⁴⁴ suggesting that the need for protection far exceeds what is currently on offer. Over time, focusing assistance only on those deemed ‘most vulnerable’ translates into continual rejection of applicants with genuine need, which can erode trust in the system, particularly when people do not understand the reasons for their exclusion. Furthermore, there is a risk with all integrated eligibility systems that exclusion errors built into the PMT will be systematised across all programmes that utilise the SRM.⁴⁵ In other words, erroneous exclusion from one programme would mean exclusion from all Marshall Plan programmes, regardless of the particular needs or characteristics of a given household or its members.

Figure 2-5: The SRM as one component of the broader social protection MIS system in Mauritius



Source: Development Pathways’ depiction.

⁴¹ Kidd et al. (2017); Kidd and Athias (2020)

⁴² Government Information Service (2019)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Statistics Mauritius (2020)

⁴⁵ Chirchir and Barca (2020)

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In addition, the SRM conditionality attached to many of the Empowerment Programmes, including the SRM Child Allowance, places additional administrative requirements on the social protection MIS in the form of case management. NEF must not only use the SRM to determine eligibility of households based on a complex PMT formula but must also coordinate with other actors (the education system in the case of the SRM child allowance) in order to maintain data on compliance. This will require a new Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) at the NEF to “implement, monitor & evaluate NEF / other stakeholder’s activities & interventions to address the needs of members of family and also support the various functions/units across NEF.”⁴⁶ The MSIEE has hired a consultancy firm to develop the new IMIS, which is expected to be fully operational by September 2020. A module for the SRM Child Allowance has already been implemented as part of the existing MIS system at MSIEE which allows MSIEE to “push” SRM children to schools, which then in turn provide the required information on each child’s attendance.⁴⁷

Finally, the new programme will require recruitment and training of a new cadre of social workers to manage the cases and programme obligations, with UNDP suggesting a reduction from the current 1:500 ratio of social workers to households to 1:150/200, at an annual cost of MUR 50 million.⁴⁸ According to the UNDP, “the NEF social workers will assume responsibility for instituting, coordinating and monitoring the social contract between programme participants and the ministries providing the services (e.g., Ministries of Education, Ministry of Labour, MSIEE).”⁴⁹ While additional social workers are always welcome, if their primary role is to enforce compliance and impose sanctions (in the form of benefit withdrawal), then the gains for coverage extension are questionable. This is especially true considering the higher value for money for alternative social protection interventions – for example, extending rights-based principles embedded in the old-age pension system to include universal child benefits would reach a majority of households and would utilise the administrative structures already in place.

Therefore, while the jury is still out as to the overall performance of the SRM, the risks are apparent from international experiences with PMTs and the social registries that utilise them for beneficiary selection, while the administrative costs are likely to continue to be significant.

2.3.3 Street level

How well the social protection system ‘interfaces’ with key stakeholders and rights holders can determine the overall trust citizens have in the ability of the Government to fulfil its duty to provide social protection. The front line is therefore a key arena where good governance can make a difference. In Mauritius, the review has suggested that frontline structures remain robust and are continually improving.

Single MoSS window gives access to a menu of benefits and services

International best practice suggests that having a ‘single window’ for citizens to access the social protection system streamlines the application and registration process, making it easier for citizens to claim their entitlements as well as to complain if these are not fulfilled.⁵⁰ The MoSS has 46 Social Security Offices in Mauritius (including on Rodrigues) where citizens can interact with frontline workers, submit applications for benefits and communicate questions and complaints.⁵¹ Once a

⁴⁶ Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, (2019), p. 24.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (2019)

⁴⁸ UNDP (2016)

⁴⁹ UNDP (2016), p. 15.

⁵⁰ See global overview.

⁵¹ MoSS (2020)

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potential beneficiary applies, the Ministry determines eligibility in accordance with legislation and regulations and payments are issued, mainly via bank transfer, where beneficiaries provide bank account numbers and details upon application.⁵²

For social assistance benefits, the eligibility determination is increasingly carried out in collaboration with the SRM and may involve a visit to a household by welfare officers. Once processed, citizens receive a written notice informing them of the Ministry's decision.⁵³ In addition, since October 2018, SRM registration is also carried out at local MoSS offices. Once registered and eligibility is determined, MoSS sends the information to MSIEE, which proceeds to sign Marshall Plan Social Contracts with eligible households.⁵⁴ Currently, SRM Child Allowance are the only SRM benefits that are paid by MoSS, but this may change in line with the potential phase-out (conversion) of remaining Social Aid benefits to the Marshall Plan.

Facilitating accountability by Government

While the efficient processing of claims and payment of benefits is a priority for the Government, errors can occur, and it is important to have appropriate systems in place to hold the system to account. This can take the form of complaints and appeals mechanisms within the Ministry's own structures, but it also involves formal auditing by external actors and/or alternative mechanisms, such as a Public Defender's office, for expressing dissatisfaction or addressing unresolved complaints.

In Mauritius, every line ministry issues a Customer Charter that makes explicit the specific 'social contract' governing rights, entitlements and service delivery in a particular sector. Within the social protection system, the MoSS Customer Charter is quite comprehensive, listing all benefits and their associated eligibility requirements and required documentation for application and registration.⁵⁵ Moreover, it clearly spells out the mechanisms for making a complaint or appealing a decision by the Ministry. Citizens can submit complaints or suggestions by five means: 1) submitting a complaint to a Suggestion Box in Port Louis; by phone or fax; by visiting a regional office or Information Centre at Port Louis or Rose Hill; in writing; by email; or through a dedicated hot line. Detailed complementary information is also available on the website. In accordance with the National Pensions Act, appeals are possible if made within one month of the notification.⁵⁶ In addition, the Customer Charter spells out the corresponding principles and guidelines for the Ministry to respond to complaints, for example committing to respond to written complaints or suggestions within five days and to attending to people who have appointments within 15 minutes of arrival.⁵⁷

For 'empowerment' programmes under the MSIEE, the Customer Charter is still quite minimal and consists mainly of broad principles. This could reflect the fact that the Ministry is still 'young'.⁵⁸ However, the Marshall Plan Social Contracts are explicit about the rights and obligations (with an emphasis on the latter) of households that are deemed eligible for SRM benefits. And, the Government appears to be taking a proactive stance toward receiving feedback and complaints, recognising the programme is still in its early days: for example, the NEF has just launched an SMS Mobile system that enables all citizens registered under the "Marshall Plan" to receive updates and

⁵² See e.g. <http://socialsecurity.govmu.org/English/Department/National%20Pensions%20Scheme/Pages/National-Pensions-Scheme.aspx>.

⁵³ Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (n.d.)

⁵⁴ According to the MoSS Customer Charter

⁵⁵ Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (n.d.)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (n.d.)

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report feedback.⁵⁹ The system was developed with support from UNDP and recently became fully operational, but no information was available on its performance.

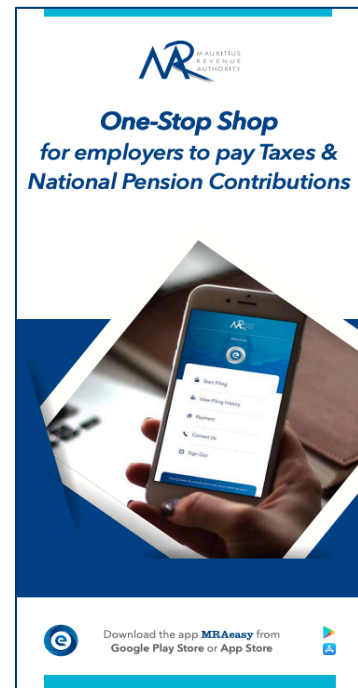
Additional accountability structures exist within the Government to hold line ministries to account. For example, the National Audit Office (NAO) has the constitutional authority to give account to the National Assembly of the prudent use of public resources to promote transparency in administration. The NAO's most recent (2020) report on FY 2018/19 found that MoSS overpaid pensions and recommended improvements to the system to detect death, emigration, remarriage or other triggers of ineligibility.⁶⁰ Some of these it recognised were outside the Ministry's control. In addition, Mauritius has an active Ombudsman's office responsible for investigating complaints against Government agencies. The most recent report by the Office of the Ombudsman refers to 33 complaints received corresponding to the Social Security Division of the Ministry, of which 9 were still pending resolution.⁶¹

Governance of contributory schemes and contribution collection and compliance

The contributory system in Mauritius is governed directly by the MoSS but is advised by a tripartite board made up of representatives of workers, employers and Government. Mauritius has a strong history of active involvement by social partners in governance, not just in social security but across all sectors. As Fashoyin et al. (2010) notes, "Tripartite consultation is an embedded institutional framework for labour market governance in Mauritius."⁶² The National Pensions Act of 1976 specified that the Board be comprised of an appointed chair, representatives from the Ministries of Finance, Health, Labour, and Social Security, as well as employers and employees from the sugar industry and outside the sugar industry. The Board can advise the Minister but has no independent authority.

In contributory systems, how best to enforce compliance with contribution obligations is among the biggest challenges, especially in the context of high informality and a changing labour market. The global overview suggested that one of the best ways to enforce compliance with contributions is to develop mechanisms that proactively facilitate the process, and the Mauritian Revenue Authority is taking concrete steps to do so. Employers are required to submit a monthly statement to the MRA detailing all employees on payroll in the previous month, which can be done through electronic submission of both payments and returns. Clear guidance as to the obligations, exemptions and procedures is easily accessible for employers on the MRA website.⁶³ Moreover, since January 2018, the MRA offers a "One-Stop Shop" (Figure 2-6) for employers to file Pay As You Earn (PAYE) as well as all social security contributions, including for the NPF, NSF, and a special training levy (HDRC Training Levy). Employers – including employers of domestic employees – are now able to submit a new joint PAYE/NPS return online through the MRA website using a unique ID and password. In addition, the

Figure 2-6: Facilitating tax and contribution compliance among employers



Source: MRA (2018).

⁵⁹ Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (2019); UNDP (2019)

⁶⁰ NAO (2020)

⁶¹ Office of the Ombudsman (2018)

⁶² Fashoyin et al. (2010)

⁶³ See MRA (n.d.)

MRA has developed a mobile app called “MRAeasy” designed to facilitate payment of contributions among small businesses (less than 10 employees) and employers of household employees.⁶⁴ This initiative demonstrates the Government’s willingness to continually improve existing processes by leveraging mobile and digital technologies, which is critical to improving compliance.

2.4 Summary

Mauritius has strong institutions and a history of good governance of its social protection system. Many of its greatest achievements have come as a result of nationally-led processes that favoured inclusive social protection policies that promoted national unity, reduced poverty and provided the social footing to support economic growth and transformation.⁶⁵ The Mauritian model includes a foundation of core tax-financed lifecycle benefits, complemented by contributory benefits for employees, housed in a central, lead Ministry – the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions – that has broad policymaking, coordination and administrative authority.

While the traditional lifecycle model was successful, it was also tilted toward ensuring rights for certain categories of citizens, notably including older people and people with disabilities. It was decidedly less broad in its consideration of the rights of younger cohorts, especially children, which are the age group with the highest poverty rates. Mauritius, like many countries, has found itself facing new social risks and changing labour markets, and could be said to be at a “critical juncture” in the development of its social protection system, where choices about how best to cover children and people of working age through social protection are at the forefront of national policymaking. While a full political economy analysis is beyond the scope of this assignment, key governance decisions – including the decision to create a new Ministry (MSIEE) and agency (NEF) dedicated exclusively to poverty reduction and empowerment – potentially present an identity crisis for the inclusive social protection system that has served Mauritians so well. Whether alternatives to conditionalities and poverty targeting were considered and rejected is unclear, but the new policy orientation has implications for governance that put longer term universalism, and the extension of its principles to younger cohorts, at risk.

At the same time, Mauritius has also been offered promising new technologies that are presented as solutions that would allow it to laser focus resources on the deserving few who need it. While Mauritius, given its high state capacity and long experience as a leader in digital and integrated MIS systems, is well-poised to take advantage and maximise the potential of these technologies, the solutions are not without risks and may in fact be addressing the wrong problem. We are reminded of the note of caution that “administrative efficiency is only as good as the policies it supports.”⁶⁶

The social protection system in Mauritius still rests on strong governance foundations – the rights that are outlined in legislation (which includes nearly all programmes) are generally respected through relatively effective administrative systems that encourage feedback. Moreover, mobile and digital technologies are continually being leveraged to facilitate these processes at the frontlines, regardless of the high-level direction the system takes.

The next section turns to governance of social protection Fiji, which appears to be facing a critical juncture of its own.

⁶⁴ MRA (2018)

⁶⁵ Ulriksen (2012)

⁶⁶ McKinnon et al. (2014)

3 Fiji

Unlike Mauritius, which invested heavily in an inclusive social protection system early on, Fiji has been a historically ‘laggard’ among small island states in social development outcomes.⁶⁷ Prasad et al. (2013) attribute the “failure of strategies to achieve a desirable level of social development” that “should characterize an upper middle-income country like Fiji” primarily to political instability (p. 19). Its social, economic and political culture has been greatly influenced by three intertwined factors: inter-ethnic divides between the two major ethnic groups—iTaukeis and Indo-Fijians (and intra-ethnic divisions within these groups themselves); land-tenure arrangements that have been created along ethnic lines; and the benefits from the cultivation of sugarcane.⁶⁸

Economic growth has been slow over the past decade due in part to low investment rates resulting from bouts of political instability and periods of negative growth, which predominantly impacts low income families and persons living in rural areas. Extreme poverty remains low and food poverty remains among the lowest in the Pacific islands, with 2 per cent living in extreme poverty as of 2018.⁶⁹ However more widespread relative poverty is instead reflected in the lack of access to a nutrition diet and insufficient water, shelter, education, health care and productive resources.⁷⁰

Fiji finds itself at an important crossroads where decisions about the policies and governance structures that support the social protection system could determine the extent to which it is able to extend coverage. Recent steps toward expansion – including expansion of social pensions and the introduction of limited child allowances – indicate a potential turning point in the Government’s approach, toward the establishment of a lifecycle framework that is more conducive to achieving universal coverage.

3.1 Key messages

By far the cover story of Fiji’s progress has been the introduction and expansion of the Social Pension Scheme (SPS) nationwide in 2013. Prior to the SPS, older Fijians who were not enrolled in the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) could only expect to receive minimal assistance under the Old Age and Disability Allowance (OADA) — which formed part of the Family Assistance Programme (FAP) — after age 65 years if they were assessed as poor.⁷¹ As a result of the minimal assistance, the poverty incidence among households with elderly people was high, as many had been reliant on informal, family or local support systems for a means of subsistence.⁷² It was estimated before this that 70 per cent of the elderly (60 years old and above) were not covered by FAP or any form of pension.⁷³

The SPS, in contrast, was introduced in 2013 and implemented in 2015 under a regulatory change that broadened eligibility to cover not just the poor, but all those who were not receiving pensions from other sources, though the age of eligibility was originally raised to age 70.⁷⁴ The GOF suggested, at the launch of the scheme, that it was targeted with those in mind who have lived in

⁶⁷ Prasad et al. (2013)

⁶⁸ Asian Development Bank (2015)

⁶⁹ ISSA/SSA (multiple years)

⁷⁰ Asian Development Bank (2015)

⁷¹ The Old Age and Disability Allowance was also paid to those assessed as poor who were chronically ill or permanently and severely disabled.

⁷² Some households also received minimal assistance through the Family Assistance Programme and/or Food Voucher Programme.

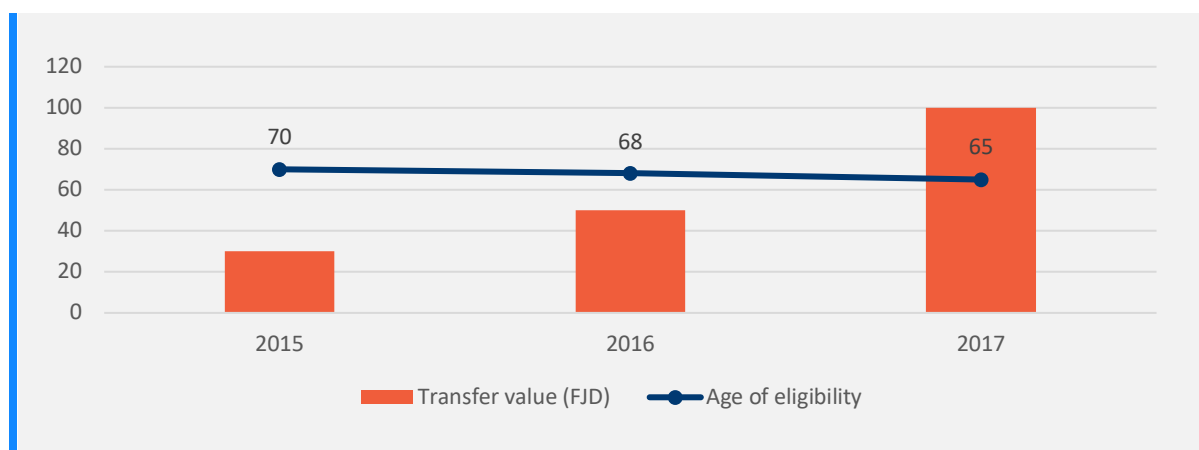
⁷³ Asian Development Bank (2015)

⁷⁴ The OADA was phased out to ensure that those who were receiving it and were younger than age 70 would not lose their benefits.

rural areas “as farmers, fisherman, and village dwellers and have no cash income or formal employment”.⁷⁵

Indeed, recent eligibility changes have opened the door for major coverage extension in recent years. In 2015, its eligibility was reduced from 70 to 68 years old and the benefit amount was increased from FJD30 per household member to FJD50. It was then followed by another lowering of eligibility in 2017 to its current level of 65 years old with a monthly amount of FJD100 per person which is around 9 per cent of GDP per capita.⁷⁶ This expansion is depicted in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Expansion of eligibility and growth in transfer values under Fiji’s SPS



As the scheme continues to evolve, the MWCPA website states that it targets those older Fijians who “do not have access to any superannuation or have no source of income to be assisted.”⁷⁷ For all practical purposes, however, the scheme is pension-tested and therefore the whole (multi-tiered) system—including the FPNP contributory pensions—has the potential to achieve universal coverage. Indeed, unofficial evidence⁷⁸ suggests that the changes in eligibility have brought a rapid expansion in coverage, with various sources suggesting that coverage went from around 9,000 people in 2014,⁷⁹ to 34,000 people in 2017,⁸⁰ and by May this year (2020), some 46,000 Fijians over age 65 were receiving the SPS, or around 88 per cent of the older population.⁸¹ Together with those receiving FPNP or civil service pensions,⁸² this would suggest that Fiji is approaching universal coverage for old-age pensions if it has not already achieved it.

A second emerging story is the Care and Protection (C&P) Allowance, which introduces child benefits into Fiji’s social protection mix. The C&P Allowance started in 2008 but was limited to children in institutional care. Since 2013, as part of the Government’s broader reforms to the sector, a number of families were moved from the FAP to the C&P Allowance and began to receive per-child benefits, representing a shift in orientation from a household benefit to an individual benefit. However, the benefit is still only paid to narrowly defined groups, as follows: children of single

⁷⁵ Naidu et al. (2016)

⁷⁶ This is less than the value of tax-financed social pensions in countries like Brazil (35% of GDP per capita), South Africa (23% of GDP per capita), or Kenya (13%), but is more than Vietnam (6%), Mexico (5%) or China (2%).

⁷⁷ Government of Fiji (2020)

⁷⁸ No official administrative data was publicly available for this review, which has relied on grey literature and news articles to gather evidence of coverage.

⁷⁹ HelpageAsia (2014)

⁸⁰ International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), (2019)

⁸¹ Fijivillage (2020)

⁸² The ILO estimated that the effective coverage of the older population to be around 10 per cent. While it is not entirely clear what this figure includes, we assume that it includes only FPNP figures. See ILO (2017b).

mothers, deserted spouses, widows and prisoners' dependents living in or on verge of destitution and with no source of income, children under the care of the State; children in foster care or cared by a guardian. Moreover, the benefit is conditioned on school enrolment and attendance. Recipients are re-assessed annually, and the value of the transfer varies depending on the child's age or disability status, ranging from a minimum of FJD25 per child per month (2.2 per cent of GDP per capita) to FJD60 per month (5.3 per cent of GDP per capita), with a ceiling of FJD110 per family per month.⁸³ In addition, families receive a monthly food voucher worth FJD50. The programme guidelines do also specify a maximum duration of five years, though in practice many beneficiaries suggest they receive payments as long as they are eligible.⁸⁴

While coverage of the programme stagnated over a number of years, it has almost doubled since 2017: 4,608 (2014); 3,398 (2016); and 4,696 (2017), rising to 8,183 children in 2020,⁸⁵ though it remains low overall at just over 3 per cent of children aged 0-14 years.⁸⁶ Given that some 35 per cent of Fijian children are poor, many children are not able to access the benefit despite their clear need.⁸⁷ Overall, the Government of Fiji spends only around only 0.08 per cent of GDP on the C&P allowance, which is very low by international comparison,⁸⁸ and there was evidence a few years ago that the budget for the programme had gone largely unspent.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the shifting policy orientation towards individual child benefits indicates a recognition of childhood as a particularly vulnerable stage of the lifecycle and sets a foundation for further expansion within a lifecycle framework.

Social protection is still not seen as a 'sector' or 'system' in Fiji, but significant reforms, notably the SPS, have resulted from national consultative processes. Overall, on a day-to-day basis, the social protection system in Fiji still lacks an identity as such and operates on a scheme-based logic, with little coordination. There is no central authority charged with policymaking for the 'sector.' The process that led to the development of the National Policy on Ageing 2011-2015 was exceptional in convening a wide variety of government and civil society actors to formulate a plan. While there were flaws to the process, broad-based consultation between diverse actors led to widespread embrace of the policy and subsequent policy change, including the expansion of the SPS that continues today.

Beyond the SPS, progress toward universal social protection is likely to continue to be slow. The nearly 40-year-old Family Assistance Programme (FAP), which targeted poor elderly, chronically ill or permanently disabled people, was phased out and replaced by a number of related but individual schemes.⁹⁰ The replacement PBS uses a PMT to identify households in the poorest 10 per cent of the welfare distribution. Moreover, the Government has imposed time limit of three years for households to access to the PBS. After this time, able-bodied beneficiaries of PBS are expected to enter into the 'Graduation' programme for skills training. Under the scheme, each household member was entitled to FJD30 up to and capped at payment to four household members in 2013.⁹¹

⁸³ FJD25 to children not in school; FJD30 to children in primary school; FJD40 to children in secondary school; FJD60 to children with disabilities (Ibid, 2019).

⁸⁴ UNICEF and Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (2015)

⁸⁵ International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019)

⁸⁶ Based on Statistics Fiji (2017). 0-14 year olds = 259,788.

⁸⁷ UNICEF and Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (2015:8)

⁸⁸ For example, Nepal, which is much poorer, spends 0.10% of GDP, Kenya spends around 0.13%, while Argentina spends 0.56 per cent and South Africa, 1.2%.

⁸⁹ UNICEF and Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (2015)

⁹⁰ For example, in 2011, The Bus Fare and Taxi Subsidy was created; in 2012, the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) was launched, as a de facto replacement of the FAP in 2012; and the C&P Allowance, that only served 422 children across the country in 2010 (Asian Development Bank, 2015), was expanded; and in 2014, the Food Voucher for Rural Pregnant Women. And, the landmark Social Pension Scheme (SPS) was introduced in 2013 to provide coverage for old persons previously without any assistance other the FVP that had existed previously.

⁹¹ Depending on the household, assistance could thus range from FJD30 to FJD120 per month as a maximum.

In addition to the PBS each beneficiary household can also receive monthly vouchers under the Food Voucher Programme worth FJD30.⁹² Although coverage and spending have risen in recent years,⁹³ the objectives (to graduate) and nature (only the poorest) of the scheme indicate that it is unlikely to contribute to coverage extension in any meaningful way.

3.2 Governance in the Fijian social protection system

3.2.1 High level

Good Governance ranks among the strategic priorities of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation – a pivotal actor in Fiji’s social protection system.⁹⁴ At the highest level, the system still lacks an ‘identity’, which impedes sector-wide planning that would enable expansion. Expansion of the SPS has occurred in spite of this, however, due in part to flexibility in the legislative framework but mostly to a concerted national consultation process that created a policy framework with clear strategic priorities.

Overview the social protection legislative and policy framework

A cohesive and comprehensive legislative policy framework is essential for good governance. It establishes the basis for the ‘rules’ within a system but also affirms the State’s responsibility to its citizens as an expression of the social contract. Fiji’s new constitution, passed in 2013 contained a Bill of Rights that enshrines rights pertaining to social protection, including: the right to social security,⁹⁵ the right to health, the rights of persons with disabilities and the right to education.⁹⁶ This redefinition of the country’s political and legal architecture laid the foundations for subsequent reforms but also formalised the GOF’s broader commitment to human rights evident in its prioritisation of social protection reforms since 2010.

Fiji’s social protection system is still largely a reflection of the inherited legacy from the 1920s, which consisted of a dual system, with a ‘destitute allowance’ for the elderly, and a National Provident Fund providing old-age, disability and survivors benefits for those in the formal sector. Formal-sector workers, who make up less than half the workforce in Fiji,⁹⁷ have access to a range of benefits through the NFPF and employer-liability protections enshrined in national legislation. The Fiji National Provident Fund Act 2011 specifies entitlements under the FNPF, including the provision of old-age, disability and survivors benefits available under the “Preserved Account”, as well as additional provisions for withdrawing funds from the “General Account” to cover expenses related to education, medical procedures, unemployment and housing, among other approved

⁹² Government of Fiji (2020). See <http://www.mwcpa.gov.fj/index.php/social-welfare/poverty-benefit-scheme-pbs.html>. Although this is from the GOF’s own website the IPC-IG and UNICEF (2019) suggest this has been increased to FJD50 per month after a study conducted in 2016. The MWCPA does have other out-of-date aspects on its website.

⁹³ International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2019)

⁹⁴ In recent years, in their *National Strategic Plan 2018-2022* the GOF highlighted ‘Strategic Priorities’ of ‘Good Governance, Social Inclusion, Reducing Re-offending, Engaging Community, Delivering Public Value, Empowering Women so that they reach their full developmental potential’, amongst others. ‘Good Governance’ entails the following goals: “Ensure efficient and effective financial resources; Ensure transparency of public records; Support informed decision making by improved data collection & analysis; and, Improve Ministry’s performance through effective monitoring and evaluation”. Overall, the document was wide-ranging and marked a shift in the strategy of trying to be more socially inclusive and transparent within a medium term, 5-year plan (MWCPA, 2018a).

⁹⁵ 37.—(1) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to social security schemes, whether private or public, for their support in times of need, including the right to such support from public resources if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents. (2) In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available (Fiji Constitution, 2013).

⁹⁶ See Annex 2.

⁹⁷ Naidu et al. (2016)

circumstances.⁹⁸ Formal-sector workers also have access to employer-liability benefits for sickness and maternity, which are directly paid by the employer, as well as employment injury benefits, which are directly provided by the employer for temporary disability or by insurance for long-term disability.⁹⁹

For those not enrolled in the FNPF, the Social Justice Act of 2001 provides enabling legislation for a number of social assistance benefits, the purpose of which is “to implement the social justice provisions (Chapter 5) of the Constitution by establishing programs of affirmative action and for related matters”.¹⁰⁰ The law lists a schedule of wide-ranging social welfare programmes, including the Family Assistance Scheme and Poverty Alleviation Project, and gives the relevant Minister wide authority to seek Cabinet approval to add programmes to the schedule; to amend or end a programme; to change the administrative unit responsible for the programme; to amend the eligibility, goals or performance criteria; or to extend the programme’s timeline beyond what was envisaged.¹⁰¹

In addition, Fiji’s *National Policy on Ageing* (developed between 2011-2015) defined clear plans and objectives, with a vision of creating a “an inclusive society that instils dignity, respect for human rights and meets basic needs through empowerment of older persons” through better social assistance initiatives that would enable and support older persons.¹⁰² The Government opted for a two-step strategy that saw a review of existing pension arrangements in 2011, followed by a review of all assistance schemes that was available to older persons. This policy, together with the flexibility provided for in the Social Justice Act of 2001, paved the way for the introduction of the SPS through regulatory means.¹⁰³

Box 3-1: Emphasis on vulnerable groups in MWCPA’s orientation

As the name suggests, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has traditionally been oriented toward schemes for specific vulnerable groups with a view to reducing poverty. The Ministry summarises eligibility for Social Assistance Welfare Schemes, as follow:

- Citizens of Fiji,
- Households who total income is less than US\$6,000 per annum
- ‘factors considered for the poor and needy’
- Number of children under applicant’s care
- Health conditions of head of family
- Senior citizens (65 years old and above) without ‘any means of support’
- Disabled persons who do not have ‘any support whatsoever’
- Home conditions and basic needs

However, a 2015 study found that the Fiji National Poverty Fund, despite covering so few people, actually reduced poverty more than the Family Assistance Programme, a scheme dedicated for this purpose. The authors suggest that this is due to the higher value of the transfers, since poverty-targeted transfers often have very low values.

Source: Government of Fiji (2020) and UNICEF and MWCPA (2015).

While Fiji has taken early steps toward establishing a lifecycle framework for benefits provision, with the exception of the SPS, the national social protection system is still predominantly comprised of poverty-targeted schemes for vulnerable groups (Box 3-1), notably including the Poverty Benefit Scheme, and subsidies for food. While the *National Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022* commits to an operational five-year gradual increase on welfare spending,¹⁰⁴ the ‘Ministry Goals’ for social welfare

⁹⁸ ISSA/SSA (multiple years)

⁹⁹ Government of Fiji (2011); ISSA/SSA (multiple years). Note: The first FNPF law was in 1966 (Government of Fiji, 1966)

¹⁰⁰ Government of Fiji (2001)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Cited in Naidu et al. (2016)

¹⁰³ While the introduction of the SPS on regulatory grounds is an indicator of the system’s flexibility and in this case opened the door for substantial policy change, enabling legislation like the Social Justice Act are generally considered to be weak provisions from a rights-based perspective since Ministers can add and remove policies according to political and fiscal changes.

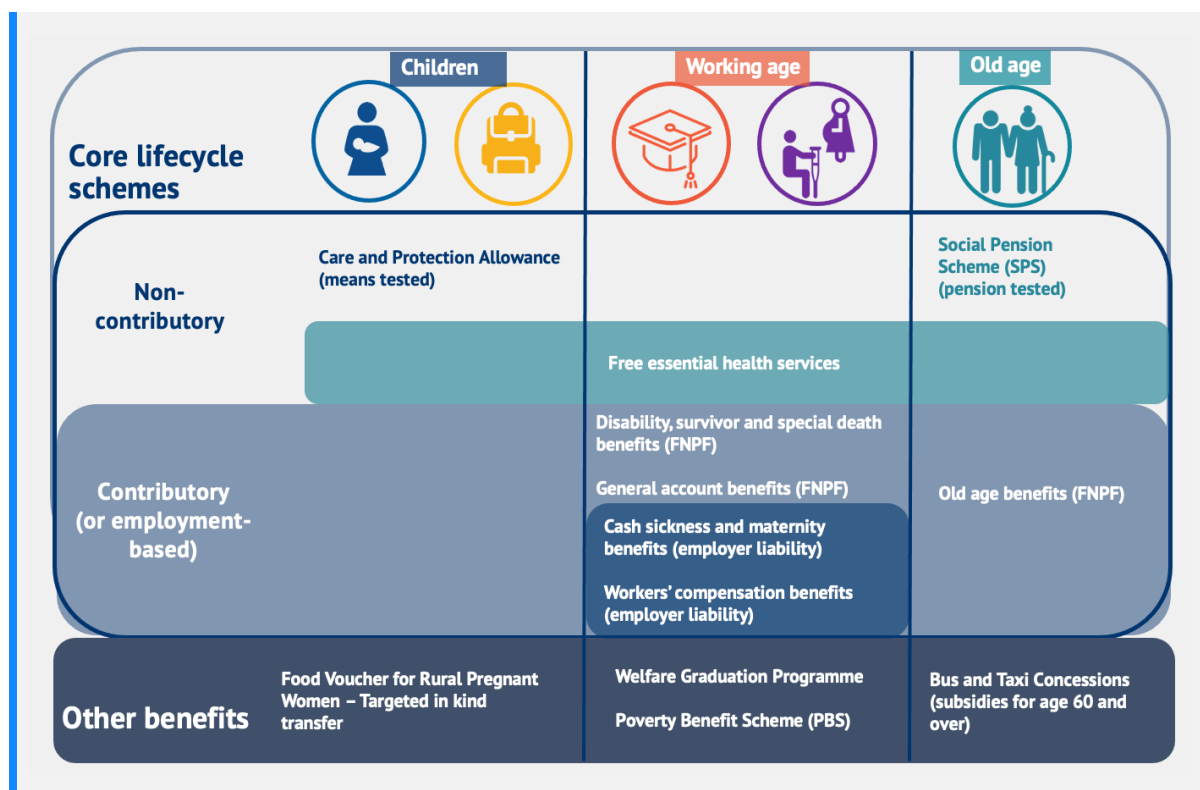
¹⁰⁴ The plan projects an increase from FJD133,000,000 in 2018–2019 to FJD167,000,000 in 2022–2023 (MWCPA, 2018).

however include to “ensure that programs and services for the protection and empowerment of the most vulnerable groups (women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons) in Fiji attain sustainable livelihoods” and “have a synergy not to create dependency and focuses efforts and energy on graduating Fijian families and individuals”. Therefore, the language around social protection is narrow and still heavily framed around poverty reduction strategies with eventual goal of individuals graduating from social protection.

The C&P Allowance is emerging as a potential space for further lifecycle social protection expansion, and the SPS is a clear statement of commitment to provide universal social protection for Fiji’s older population. In addition, Fiji provides free universal health care for its population financed from general revenues and has been found to be equitable.¹⁰⁵

The key lifecycle and other supplementary social protection schemes operating in Fiji are depicted in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2: Fiji’s main social protection schemes and benefits



Source: Based on ISSA/SSA (latest year) and official Government websites.

Institutional framework

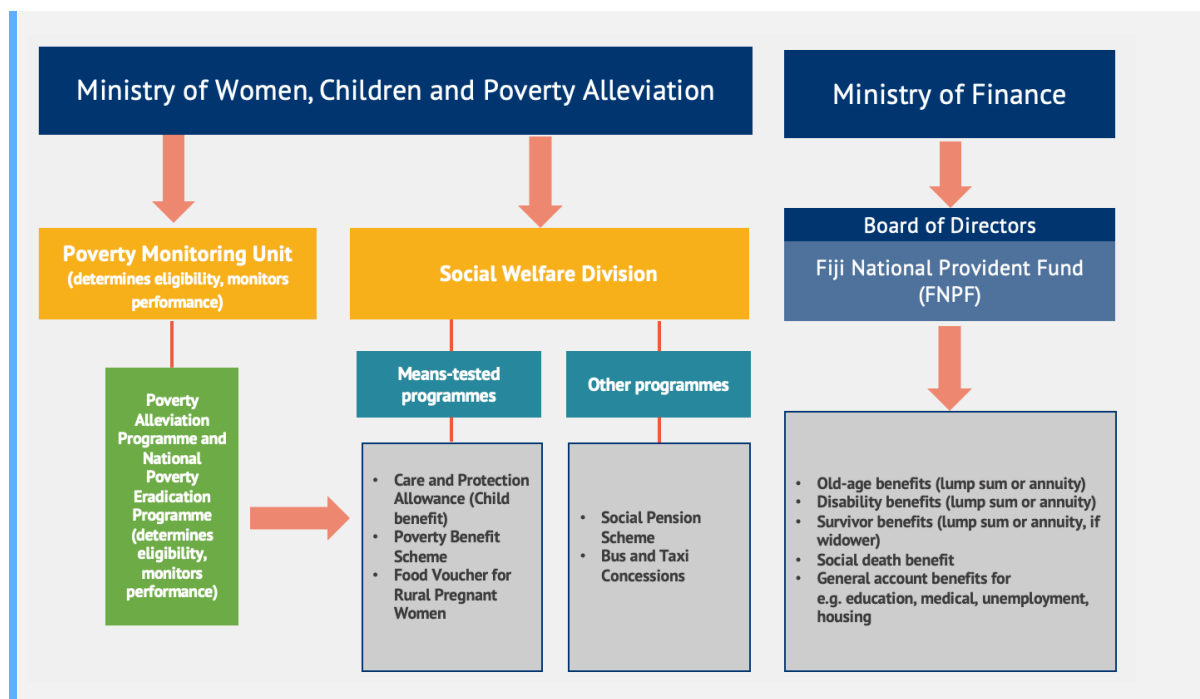
Fiji’s institutional framework is still largely a reflection of the inherited dual system of contributory benefits for the few in formal employment (FNPF), and very small programmes for the poorest and most vulnerable (‘social welfare’). In practice, these two spheres operate as separate systems, although the SPS, which is pension tested, provides an opportunity for increased alignment.

¹⁰⁵ Asante et al. (2017)

The FNPF is managed by Board of Directors which, because it operates primarily as a financial institution, reports to the Ministry of Finance – specifically the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF).¹⁰⁶ In addition, whereas the pre-2011 FNPF Act prescribed that the Board be tripartite in nature, the 2011 FNPF Act makes membership on the Board “wholly based on skills and expertise with fit and proper tests conducted by RBF.” While the reform made improvements to the financial sustainability of the Fund,¹⁰⁷ the re-structuring reinforces the Provident Fund’s identity as a financial institution oriented toward maximising members’ returns on investment, which is in line with its savings-based structure but arguably downplays its social security functions and objectives and limits the voice of social partners. The Provident Fund has wide-ranging authority to implement the provisions under law. The basic institutional setup for the FNPF has remained largely unchanged since its inception.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA), on the other hand, has historically been associated with ‘social welfare’ schemes primarily aimed at so-called vulnerable groups. There are three sub departments that administer its main schemes, including: the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) (DSW is sometimes referred to as the Social Welfare Department and has the programmatically important Social Welfare Division under its jurisdiction); the Department for Women (which administers programmes that would not fit a conventional definition of core social protection); and the Poverty Monitoring Unit. The DSW in Fiji has a long history of running social protection programmes and has reportedly developed “good practices and put staff in a good place.”¹⁰⁸

Figure 3-3: Institutional arrangements in Fiji’s national social protection system



Source: *Development Pathways’ depiction based on ISSA/SSA (multiple years) and additional Government sources.*

Overall, on a day-to-day basis, the social protection system in Fiji still lacks an identity as such – indeed, the MWCPA’s National Strategic Plan 2018-2022 does not even mention “social

¹⁰⁶ Asian Development Bank (2019); FNPF (2019); Government of Fiji (2011)

¹⁰⁷ The FNPF won an ISSA award in 2012 for the reform, including for promoting financial literacy.

¹⁰⁸ World Bank (2011)

protection.”¹⁰⁹ instead, it continues to operate around a largely scheme-based and institution-based logic, with very little cross-sectoral coordination. There is no central authority, or even a national coordinating body, charged with policymaking for the ‘sector,’ leaving each Ministry or institution (in the case of FNPF) to find their own way as regards coverage extension.

There are, however, cross-sectoral coordination groups for thematic areas that overlap with social protection, such as the Integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme (INPEP) Framework, which is coordinated by the Poverty Monitoring Unit. The PMU is tasked with coordinating monitoring and evaluation of all Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) bringing together the work of seven line ministries.

The consultative process behind the development of the National Policy on Ageing 2011-2015 was another exception to this general rule and included a national consultation on a planned multi-sectoral approach. The consultation benefitted from technical assistance from UNFPA and the WHO and included government agencies,¹¹⁰ NGOs, faith-based and civil society organizations.¹¹¹ While the policy expired in 2015 and is no longer available online, Sharma and Koroivueta (2019) in an independent review noted that, while the policy included clear deliverables with specific reporting objectives and schedules, no midterm review was conducted and no agency reports were ever produced on the implementation of the policy, among other gaps.¹¹² Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the consultative process that supported the policy still led to effective policy change, and specifically to the expansion of the SPS that continues today.

3.2.2 Mid-level

Social protection system governance increasingly relies on digital management information systems. This section focuses on the mid-level governance processes related to the administration of schemes under the MWCPA/DSW, concentrating on information management. Many of the issues raised in this section are also relevant for frontline or street-level processes but are included here given their close links with the MIS structures.

MWCPA schemes

The MIS for the DSW’s cash transfer schemes comprises of three systems: the E-Welfare system, the E-Gov system and an Access database. As of 2015, these three databases were not linked. There have been ongoing issues regarding all three relating to their effectiveness, ability to provide the correct data and connectivity issues within the country.

In the National Strategic Plan 2018-2020, leveraging ICT-based solutions is among MWCPA’s strategic priorities.¹¹³ Specific goals for the Ministry include: Encourage the widespread use of ICT in the Ministry to improve work processes, productivity, and service delivery; Encourage on the use of ICT to store, process and access case records in a centralise database; Prioritize the use of ICT based planning and monitoring tool in the public sector; Increase access to appropriate technologies; and Support the widespread use of ICT to provide more efficient communication. Targets for

¹⁰⁹ MWCPA (2018)

¹¹⁰ We have no information on which agencies were involved.

¹¹¹ Sharma and Koroivueta (2019)

¹¹² Sharma and Koroivueta (2019), p. 5. Indeed, in 2019, Mereseini Vuniwaqa, the Minister for WCPA, suggested at a public speech that it is important that her Ministry and the National Council of Older Persons work together bring the National Policy on Ageing ‘up to date’ as Fijians are now not only living longer but also living with disability. She suggested the number of old persons in Fiji is increasing by 3,000 people per year and that whilst 69 per cent of the population is under the age of 40, 30 years from now Fiji will have an aged population where there are more older persons that young.

¹¹³ Government of Fiji (2020). See <http://www.mwcpa.gov.fj/index.php/resources/acp.html>.

development included, among other things, establishing centralized databases for the four main social protection programmes (PBS, C&P, SPS and DAS) by 2019, installing and using appropriate ICT tools and databases, and providing notification of Social Protection programs using ICT.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Ministry sets out a number of “Good Governance” goals, many of which relate to better data collection to improve transparency, financial management, informed decision making and monitoring and evaluation.¹¹⁵ This desk review has not been able to verify to what extent these goals and targets have been met.

In addition, the PMU, as part of its functions for INPEP, has a dedicated Poverty Information Centre (PIC) that collects quarterly reports from all poverty alleviation programmes in order to monitor performance.¹¹⁶ The quarterly reports were not available for public consultation at the time of drafting.

This review found no studies undertaken to date on the SPS, either on its administration or effectiveness.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the registration form on the WMCPA website provides some insights into the process of registration and verification involved in the pension-tested scheme.¹¹⁸ For example, the form asks for the applicant’s affirmation that she does not receive any of the following:

- FNPF Pension or Lump Sum payment
- After Care or Ex-Servicemen Grants (military)
- Government Pension
- Social Welfare Assistance (Poverty Benefit Scheme)
- Allowance for Persons with Disability

A note at the bottom of the form informs the application that “Information above will be verified with Organizations such as FNPF, Ministry of Finance, etc. to ensure that it is correct.” It is unclear how the Ministry exchanges data with the other institutions, or whether it is done electronically or through a paper-based system,¹¹⁹ but since it requires a simple verification against their beneficiary databases, the process is not likely to be cumbersome. Moreover, DSW would already have the information on the other schemes it manages (PBS and Allowance for Persons with Disability). As an additional check, the form must also be signed by a recognised Community Figure or Civil Servant.

On the other hand, the registration process and eligibility determination process for

Box 3-2: Registration for C&P through the E-Gov MIS

The registration process for the C&P is primarily electronic through the E-Gov MIS and involves the following steps:

1. On-demand registration means the applicant must visit the DSW office to register.
2. Welfare Officer reviews the documentation and creates a record in the E-Gov system.
3. Welfare Officer visits the household to verify the information in E-Gov.
4. Senior Welfare Officer receives and email notification of the application status and verified the application in E-Gov.
5. The Principal Welfare Officer or Assistant Director approves or declines the application.
6. Welfare officer consults E-Gov to learn of the decision and informs the applicant accordingly, including informing the applicant of the appeals process.

A number of challenges were identified, including: different interpretations of programme criteria by Welfare Officers; a lack of a standardised format to capture information during registration; E-gov systems unable to capture all necessary information; lack of standard operations manual for registration; and delays in registration.

Source: UNICEF and MWCPA (2015).

¹¹⁴ MWCPA (2018), p. 18.

¹¹⁵ MWCPA (2018a)

¹¹⁶ MWCPA (2018b)

¹¹⁷ Naidu et al. (2016)

¹¹⁸ See Annex 1.

¹¹⁹ We suspect it is the latter, since we have found nothing to suggest that Fiji has progressed toward an integrated social protection MIS.

means-tested benefits under the MWCPA involves multiple steps, which are summarised in Box 3-2. While the process is initially demand-driven, where applicants must visit the DSW office to register,¹²⁰ Welfare Officers ultimately visit every household that applies, generating a case file for each applicant in E-Gov, which is then followed throughout the process. UNICEF found that the E-Gov system can be slow due to low connectivity, and that because the system does not automatically notify users when a step is complete, Welfare Officers have to constantly check the system, which is time consuming.¹²¹

In addition, during the welfare assessment, the process for determining eligibility based on the PMT is complex and costly. The Ministry's website describes the process as follows:

"A new Form has been developed whereby every application will be assessed through it... the Form captures a family's household items and assets including type of land ownership, giving a score at the end of the assessment as to whether the family is really poor and should be assisted through the Poverty Benefit Scheme. This means that anyone can apply for the PBS, however, their receiving of the assistance will be determined by the score given after their application has been assessed. The process will require that every application will have to be home visited by the Welfare officers. If an application is approved, the case will be recorded under the head of household or another family member (spouse) as determined by the household members. This particular family member will be required to obtain his/her TIN Registration for the opening of a Bank Account with Westpac Banking Cooperation, (it they have no opened an account) since payments will done [sic] through Bank mode" (Government of Fiji, 2020).

While the registry contains information on other households that have applied, as in Mauritius, the system is 'blind' to those who may be otherwise poor or vulnerable, or may become so, but have not submitted an application for benefits. Currently, there are regional databases containing information on all PBS beneficiaries but as of 2017, there was no centralised database with information on all households.

Moreover, in 2015, a number of challenges related to or affecting the C&P Allowance MIS were identified in a report by UNICEF.¹²² First, the MIS for the C&P did not allow for disaggregated reports on the ages, ethnicity, geographic location and gender of recipients to enable proper monitoring and evaluation on these dimensions. Second, the exit criteria for leaving the programme were not clear, and regular reviews of the eligibility criteria were not taking place, a process which could have been facilitated through an effective MIS system. For example, the MIS failed to send automatic notifications to the DSA when a child aged out of the programme, which meant that some children continued to receive the allowance beyond age 18 years. Furthermore, well-functioning MIS requires that staff be well-trained and have sufficient equipment. DSW staff are committed and dedicated, but they face capacity constraints and must deal with the expanding workload and lack of training (see Section 3.2.3).

In addition, Fiji's experience with the C&P suggests that rules that create additional administrative requirements may find themselves not being enforced. Both the C&P and the PBS, for example, have maximum time limits for receipt of a benefit – in the case of the PBS, households are initially enrolled for three years. For the C&P, the time limit is five years per child. The UNICEF and Fiji MWCPA review of the C&P noted that Welfare Officers often do not respect the time limits in practice, likely because the need for continued assistance is clear. Some households do get removed

¹²⁰ The 'Forms' for application can be accessed on the MWCPA website but application is made in person.

¹²¹ UNICEF and MWCPA (2015)

¹²² Ibid.

from the scheme, however, even if there is no sustainable improvement in their circumstances or income security, and as such, can find themselves in a worse economic position.¹²³ Back in 2011, the World Bank was already warning against putting excessive focus on graduation, which could result in “kick out” rather than graduation. Either way, whether it is rules being ignored to preserve the welfare of recipients or causing harm by prematurely forcing people out of assistance, the outcome is poor from a scheme governance perspective.

Likewise, the requirement that Welfare Officers monitor school attendance (children should attend 75-80 per cent of the time) is not strictly enforced, likely due to administrative constraints. In practice, enrolment monitoring is only carried out once a year and instead, caregivers are essentially expected to self-certify that their children are enrolled. Moreover, there is no coordinated information system linking schools to the DSW.¹²⁴ While good governance requires that all actors follow the rules, sometimes a degree of flexibility may be embedded within the rule structure when the letter of the law is excessively rigid, or even flawed. For example, [Kidd et al. \(2017\)](#) actually pointed to the discretionary powers of local Welfare Officers in Fiji to override PMT decisions about eligibility, when they were clearly wrong, as an example of good practice.

Additional research would be required into the progress and effectiveness of the Ministry’s plans for further operational improvements, including the development of an integrated MIS covering all schemes. In terms of cross-sectoral coordination and data exchange, Fiji is still in the early stages of experimentation. However, even if the MWCPA manages to centralise its programme-based MISs and processes, the transformation of the SPS to a pension-tested benefit raises the stakes to find solutions managing and sharing information across functionally separate entities. The FNPF is a key player in this and is taken up in the next section.

FNPF

The Fiji National Provident Fund has invested heavily in improving its ICT infrastructure. The Fund manages large amounts of information related to contributions, fund management (since 2011, two separate funds), and payment of benefits, including calculation of annuities. The FNPF has a dedicated Information Technology Officer charged with overseeing IT projects and systems development, and the Board also has a Board Information Technology (BIT) committee to provide strategic leadership on MIS, including, for example, selecting vendors.¹²⁵

To manage these processes and streamline operations, in 2014, the Fund implemented a new MIS called ProMIS, significantly reducing the need for manual processes and face-to-face interactions.¹²⁶ Together with the server and storage infrastructure, ProMIS consolidated all of the Fund’s functions into a single platform.¹²⁷ The new system was developed because “the legacy system – Matai – [] could not incorporate critical components of the FNPF Decree 2011, the FNPF Amendment Decree and the FNPD Regulations.”¹²⁸ In particular, the new legislation separated the FNPF into two separate accounts: the Preserved Account (for long-term risks), to which 70 per cent of the fund was allocated, and the General Account (for immediate or emergency expenses), which holds 30 per cent of the fund.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ [UNICEF and MWCPA \(2015\)](#)

¹²⁵ FNPF (2015, 2014)

¹²⁶ FNPF (2019)

¹²⁷ FNPF (2014)

¹²⁸ FNPF (2015)

In the absence of sector-wide strategic planning, it is likely that the FNPF will continue to develop its own systems, de-linked from other processes across the sector.

3.2.3 Street level

Ensuring that the right to social security is fulfilled for all Fijians requires building robust delivery systems while also offering pathways for accountability and quick resolution of complaints and disputes when they inevitably arise.

MWCPA

There is no doubt that the emerging social protection system in Fiji – even if limited – is making a difference in people’s lives. The C&P Allowance, PBS, DAS and the PBS provide assistance to the most vulnerable groups in Fijian society: the young (and the caregivers of the young), the disabled and the elderly. Therefore, their ability to have access to benefits, without impediments or issues, is vital for confidence in the social protection system at street level. Those who are fortunate enough to receive benefits in Fiji are happy with the benefits they receive. Beneficiaries suggested that their lives were enhanced and they had an increased ability to purchase food, invest in their children and improve their overall quality of life more generally in many ways.¹²⁹ The more positive experiences people have with the system, the higher their trust will be and, over the long run, the more they will be willing to invest – in the form of higher taxes – in the system’s expansion.

The MWCPA has a long track record of delivering benefits through local offices, but there have been a number of operational challenges. According to a World Bank report, these have included: long processing times for approving an application (up to two years for some); inadequate communication on application and appeal process; lack of re-certification; high workload and lack of specialization of case management by the authorities and welfare officers.¹³⁰ UNICEF also reported that recipients can face significant delays, with wait times between application and receipt of the C&P frequently amounting to a minimum of three months, with some waiting over a year. The wait times varied by location, suggesting that applicants in urban areas likely found it easier to follow up with the DSW.¹³¹

MWCPA has been taking concrete steps to improve recipients’ experiences with the system. For example, when the FAP system reformed to the PBS, it simultaneously introduced electronic payments in 2010 to modernize the system. UNICEF found that the electronic payment system was effective, and recommended that the food vouchers also be replaced with cash given the additional administrative challenges they present.¹³² In addition, part of the MWCPA’s strategic planning includes improving internal and external communications through ICT-based solutions and developing better notification systems for social protection beneficiaries. And, the Ministry laid out plans to establish a Call Center by 2022 to better monitor and receive complaints.

The key street level social protection officers in the MWCPA in Fiji are Welfare Officers (social workers) who work in the communities and provide an array of functions regarding social work and access to the benefits system. Their work is supported, in large part, informally by the traditional community-based forms of support from family, friends and the wider community. With increasing urbanisation and fragmentation of these social networks these traditional systems of social

¹²⁹ UNICEF and MWCPA, (2015)

¹³⁰ World Bank (2011)

¹³¹ UNICEF and MWCPA (2015)

¹³² Ibid.

protection are coming under increased stress.¹³³ These frontline workers are the ‘face’ of governance, and citizens’ positive interactions with the system depend on them being adequately trained and resourced, and not being overburdened.

The Welfare Officers have to perform a wide range of, often, complex tasks and administrative processes. Administration of the C&P as well as other DSW income transfers is devolved to Divisional Offices in the South, East, Central, Northern and Western regions. At the district level, however, ‘coordination’ can translate into a few staff undertaking multi-tasking. DSW provides income transfers as well as care and protection services for children, and DSW Welfare Officers are expected to perform both the role of social worker and administer the cash transfer. This includes mastering multiple tasks including assessment, referral and provide social service support to those in need of assistance and accessing benefits. The heavy workload involved with administering the cash benefit left them with little time to dedicate to the actual social work aspects of their role. It was recommended that the DSW should create two different distinct sections within its Department in order to specialize in the delivery of its services and allow better, quality care.¹³⁴ This deficit in staffing was said to be one of the critical issues after a round of reviews performed in 2015 which was increased by the inefficiencies of the country’s MIS.¹³⁵

Accountability is fundamental for the success of a social security scheme and for ensuring the fulfilment of rights. Citizens must be able to complain about services and appeal against decisions or their exclusion from certain processes and/or schemes. Grievance and complaints mechanisms should ideally comprise three levels or ‘tiers’: first, a simple procedure with the payment provider to report non-payment, errors or fraud; a second tier granting access to programme administrators; and a third tier that enables complaints to pass to an independent authority, such as an Ombudsman, as a last resort.¹³⁶ The DSW Grievance and Complaint’s Mechanism complies with most international standards of good practice. However, there are still elements that could be improved for the overall experience of claimants. Challenges in recent years have centred around access to information for claimants (low awareness of the process), the long waiting times and repeat visits required for application of benefits, slow grievance process, and lack of ‘third-tier’ grievance mechanism (the only recourse currently is to take the complaint to the Prime Minister’s office, but it ends up back at DSW).¹³⁷

Addressing complaints is time consuming and therefore costly. The Director at DSW is reported to spend “half his time addressing complaints, mainly due to the challenges of the Poverty Benefit re-certification process” – that is, complaints are generally about exclusion. According to the UNICEF analysis, simplifying systems and in particular, “a key issue will be whether to address the challenges with the PMT targeting mechanism, which has significantly increased the workload of staff and led to a significant increase in grievances.”¹³⁸

FNPF on the frontlines

The Fiji National Provident Fund is a well-resourced institution offering a range of services to facilitate members’ experience with the system. For example, a free mobile app (myFNPF Mobile App) allows fund members to access information about their account balance and eligibility for various types of withdrawal, records of transactions and contribution and employment history.¹³⁹

¹³³ Asian Development Bank (2015)

¹³⁴ UNICEF and MWCPA (2015)

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ UNICEF and MWCPA (2015), p. 91.

¹³⁹ FNPF (2020)

Likewise, employers can now submit monthly contribution schedules online, with detailed instructions provided on the website. And, the Fund collaborated with the Revenue and Customs Authority to develop a Joint ID Card for members and taxpayers that, as of 2014, includes the FNPF number as well as the Tax Identification Number.

The FNPF allows voluntary membership for people from as young as age 6 who are not covered under the mandatory system. As of 2017, however, only around 6 per cent of Fijians employed informally were enrolled in the voluntary system. To encourage participation, and with support from the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) under UNDP, the FNPF introduced a new digital payments platform — Vodaphone M-PAiSA — for voluntary members to make contributions of any size at any time. The scheme is still very new, and no data were available on the scheme’s success to date.¹⁴⁰

Finally, the scheme encourages transparency and accountability in a number of ways. For example, a special page on the website is devoted specifically to encouraging whistleblowing: “Become a Whistleblower” encourages citizens to report fraud, misuse of funds or information (e.g. insider trading), disclosure of confidential information, etc. and provides a dedicated online form for reporting any illegal acts.¹⁴¹ A separate page is dedicated to the complaints management process, which specifies four ways to submit complaints, as well as the step-by-step procedure for complaint resolution, including a detailed procedure and rationale for review.¹⁴² If complaints are not resolved in a satisfactory way, complainants can elevate their complaint to the RBF online through the FNPF or RBF websites.

3.3 Summary

Fiji’s levels of investment in social security as a percentage of its GDP is still low compared to other countries of similar income levels. This will obviously be impacted by the international repercussions and ongoing fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Further investment in a more comprehensive social security system could be transformative, long-lasting and crucial to Fiji’s continued socio-economic development. It will also help it move towards its international human rights commitments and SDGs as part of the Agenda 2030.

The use of proxy-means testing in the majority of Fiji’s social protection schemes undermines attempts to invest in better governance mechanisms because exclusion, especially when it is perceived as arbitrary, is demoralising. Expansion relies on a critical mass appreciating the system enough to support it with their taxes. With the expansion of the Social Pension Scheme, Fiji has taken a big step toward universalism. Now, every Fijian can expect to benefit from the social protection system in old age. Children in Fiji are less fortunate, but the C&P Allowance is a good start.

One of the key obstacles to further expansion in Fiji is the lack of a high-level framework or strategy guiding social protection expansion. The SPS was forged out of a collaborative national process that both reflected and precipitated good governance decisions, but it was still carried out within a relatively narrow policy space on a specific issue area (ageing). A similar process could be followed for child benefits, which, if extended, would alleviate many of the challenges this review has underlined with respect to governance processes and mechanisms at mid-level and street level.

¹⁴⁰ One PNG News Online (2017)

¹⁴¹ FNPF (2020). See: <https://myfnpf.com.fi/index.php/about-fnfp/become-a-whistleblower>

¹⁴² FNPF (2020). See: https://myfnpf.com.fi/images/REVIEW_OF_DECISIONS_SCHEME.pdf

4 Conclusion

These case studies of the small island states of Mauritius and Fiji have demonstrated that progress is possible, even in unlikely places (Fiji), and that previous advances may be more precarious than once thought (Mauritius). Both countries display features of good governance and particular challenges at different levels and stages of the social protection policy process.

In Mauritius, recent developments suggest that the longstanding achievements of the pension system are not likely to extend to include younger cohorts, at least not in the short term. Whereas Mauritius has shown itself to be a leader in developing slick administrative structures, including integrated MISs and robust delivery systems, recent changes to the institutional arrangements reflect a policy re-orientation that is likely to reverberate over the coming years. New actors have been empowered to develop and implement policies and systems, sometimes with coordinating authority that rivals the position traditionally (and still, though with a weaker grip) held by the Ministry of Social Security. New policies aimed at ‘empowerment’ are associated with a higher administrative burden and greater likelihood of errors in selection and delivery and are therefore less likely to foster long-term trust in the system. Moreover, they rely on tools (PMT, social registry) that, as the ILO committee of experts has warned,¹⁴³ come with significant risks if not carefully managed.

In Fiji, on the other hand, the significant expansion of the social pension was made possible by high-level national consultative processes, serendipitously helped along by a relatively weak legislative framework that allowed for a seemingly small regulatory tweak to provoke big change. While ideally, specific legislation will be required to confirm the (new) right to income security in old age, the SPS is backed by the protections provided for in the 2013 Constitution. Unlike Mauritius, however, Fiji lacks a lead Ministry with sector-wide clout to lead a national strategy to extend the lessons of the SPS to include other lifecycle benefits.

The cases also highlight the role of external actors, which, in Mauritius, were instrumental in advising the Government on the new Marshall Plan strategy and its associated implementation mechanisms, while in Fiji, they supported cross-sectoral planning processes that helped firmly place the SPS on the agenda.

Both countries, however, have placed a lot of hope in small benefits whose explicit purpose is to reduce poverty, but which artificially reduce eligibility for benefits according to pre-defined thresholds. Administrative improvements with these schemes are always possible, but the difference they will make to coverage extension is marginal and the challenges they pose to governance at lower levels will persist. The cases of these two very different small island states reinforce the broader global case that good governance of social protection systems and inclusive lifecycle social protection are mutually reinforcing.

¹⁴³ ILO (2019)

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Annex 1 Registration Form for the Social Pension Scheme (Fiji)

	MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN & POVERTY ALLEVIATION	
<p>Office of the Minister and Permanent Secretary 5th Floor, Civic Towers- P O Box 14068 Suva Phone: (679) 3312 199 Fax : (679) 3309 829</p>	<p>Department of Social Welfare 72 Suva Street, Toonuk P O Box 2327, Govt Bldgs, Suva, Fiji Phone: (679) 3315 585 / 3315 931 Fax: (679) 3305 110</p>	<p>Department of Women: 5th Floor, Civic Towers P O Box 14068 Suva Phone: (679) 3312 199 Fax : (679) 3309 829</p>

SOCIAL PENSION SCHEME APPLICATION FORM

This is the Official Application Form to be filled by anyone applying for the Social Pension Scheme (SPS). This is for Elderly persons over the age of 65 years who have no source of income or are not beneficiaries of any other superannuation scheme such as FNPF, After Care, Government Pension or Insurance or Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS). This Form remains the Property of the Ministry and should be sent to the nearest District/Divisional Welfare Office with a certified copy of the Birth Certificate and 2 passport size photos for assessment. This Form cannot be used for any other purpose.

Case No: (To be filled by the Welfare Officer)

Section A. Personal Information

1. Name of Applicant: 2. Age
3. Date of Birth: 4. BC No:
5. Postal & Residential Address:
.....
.....
6. Phone Contact: 7. Sex: Male/Female.....
8. District Office:

Section B. Declaration

9. I do solemnly affirm that I am not a recipient of the following Pension Schemes or Social Welfare Payments:-
 - a. FNPF Pension or Lump Sum payment
 - b. After Care or Ex-Servicemen Grants
 - c. Government Pension
 - d. Social Welfare Assistance (Poverty Benefit Scheme)
 - e. Allowance for Persons with Disability
10. I declare that the information furnished in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.
11. Signature/Thumbprint: 12. Date:

Note: Information above will be verified with Organizations such as FNPF, Ministry of Finance etc. to ensure that it is correct. Any falsification of information will be seen as an attempt to defraud the System and therefore will not be tolerated and will be liable for prosecution.

Section C. Community Assessment- To be endorsed by a recognized Community Figure/Civil Servant

13. I hereby declare that I have known the above person for the last _____ years and that the information provided in this application is correct.

14. Name: 15. Signature:

16. Date: 17. Address: 18. Phone Contact:

Section D. Official Use – to be completed by officials of the Department of Social Welfare

15. Recommendation:
.....
.....
.....
.....

16. Welfare Officer: 17. Signature:

18. Date:

19. Decision: 20. Approving Authority:

21. Name: 22. Signature:

23. Date: 24. Stamp:

Section E. Payment Details

25. Benefit Amount: 26. TIN No.:

27. Bank: 28. Account No.:

Annex 2 Key provisions of the Fiji Constitution, 2013

Right to social security

37.—(1) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to social security schemes, whether private or public, for their support in times of need, including the right to such support from public resources if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents. (2) In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available.

Right to health

38.—(1) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to health, and to the conditions and facilities necessary to good health, and to health care services, including reproductive health care. (2) A person must not be denied emergency medical treatment. (3) In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available.

Rights of persons with disabilities

42.—(1) A person with any disability has the right— (a) to reasonable access to all places, public transport and information; (b) to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication; and (c) to reasonable access to necessary materials, substances and devices relating to the person's disability. (2) A person with any disability has the right to reasonable adaptation of buildings, infrastructure, vehicles, working arrangements, rules, practices or procedures, to enable their full participation in society and the effective realisation of their rights. (3) To the extent that it is necessary, a law or an administrative action taken under a law may limit, or may authorise the limitation of, the rights set out in this section.

Right to education

31.—(1) Every person has the right to— (a) early childhood education; (b) primary and secondary education; and (c) further education. (2) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right— (a) to free early childhood, primary, secondary and further education; and (b) to education for persons who were unable to complete their primary and secondary education.