

**FIJI ISLANDS  
COUNTRY STATEMENT**

## **Role of National Focal Point**

The National Planning Office, part of the Ministry of Finance and National Planning is Fiji Government's Focal Point on monitoring progress in the implementation of Agenda 21.

The Ministry's core function is to provide policy advice through the formulation of National Development Plans and implement these policies through annual budgetary allocations. In addition, the Ministry undertakes macro-economic aggregates forecasting, public policy analysis, co-ordinates the implementation of capital projects, acts as secretariat to numerous Government committees, and provides support services to line ministries.

As national focal point, the office is responsible for co-ordinating the compilation of Fiji's national report and country profile update, in preparation for the Rio + 10 Summit. This refers specifically to the following undertakings:

- Regular liaisons with ministries, non-government organizations, private sector, regional and international institutions;
- Co-ordinating meetings with stakeholders;
- Assigning tasks to various agencies, in accordance to their areas of responsibility and;
- Verifying submissions from ministries to ensure consistency with reporting requirements and ensuring that the information contained in the report are factual.

## **Co-ordination in Preparing National Reports**

The broad scope and nature of Agenda 21 requires the involvement of a large number of stakeholders. Co-ordination is therefore vital, to be able to effectively assess the status in the implementation of Agenda 21 across the various sectors of the economy.

As a starting point, a steering committee comprising of key stakeholders was established to form the basis for dialogue and liaisons. The stakeholders represented government, the private sector and civil society. Their participation was crucial as they implement programmes aimed at achieving the goals and objectives of Agenda 21.

Stakeholders provided reports on the status of implementation of Agenda 21 in their areas of responsibilities. They also played an instrumental role in identifying national and global critical issues, identifying weaknesses and problems, proposing course corrections to address these issues, capacity building requirements and in suggesting the way ahead for the country.

Government had also undertaken extensive consultations during the formulation of our National Strategic Development Plan (2002-2004). This consultative process greatly facilitated the identification of other critical issues and the vision for our country's future.

All these inputs formed the basis of our national report. It is proposed that a consultant would be employed to synthesise all inputs and finalise our report. Funding for this purpose will be sought from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## **How your country has reconciled reporting requirements from different UN system bodies including mandatory reporting for conventions**

Our Government is of the view that national reporting is a useful exercise in taking stock, preparing for the next planning cycle, strengthening team building of experts, and enhancing consultation and co-operation amongst different stakeholders, both government and non-governmental.

There was however some confusion regarding the different requirements sent out by different UN system bodies, showing different guidelines and due dates. In such instances, we have had to abide by that guideline which we could easily comprehend.

Further, we are of the view that reporting formats should be simplified with enough flexibility to allow country specific submissions.

## **What capacity and resource issues do you have in preparing your national report?**

The assessment process was undertaken with whatever resources and capacity our Government had at its disposal.

Availability of finance was a major factor of consideration in the preparation of our report. The limited financial resources hindered our efforts to undertake more consultative meetings, workshops and forums as proposed in the assessment timetable. We are requesting that for future reporting purposes, some financial assistance is offered by UN institutions, preferably in the initial stages of the reporting process.

The capacity available to undertake the assessment process was limited, particularly in regards to the knowledge of the assessment process itself, and the reporting requirements. We were fortunate that international NGOs like the World Wide Fund for Nature provided assistance in this regard. In future, it would be of great help if focal points get sufficient training on reporting requirements and other technical issues as required by the various UN bodies. It will be useful therefore to have some sort of a workshop for co-ordinators preparing for all scheduled reporting, where all these details are to be sorted out.

Information is currently stored with many agencies. It is important that these are stored in a central system, so that it is easily accessed when the need arises. This is particularly useful when preparing national reports. Our Department of Environment is in the process of setting up a National Biodiversity Database to store all such related data. The Department is also proposing to set up a database for waste and pollution. We would appreciate any assistance that can be rendered towards this project, to improve our internal capacity and assist us in meeting international requirements.

## **Other issues including difficulties/obstacles encountered in national reporting**

### *Institutional capacity*

Inter-institutional co-operation was a major problem we had to contend with, particularly in the compilation of country profiles. Stronger co-operation would ensure that due dates and reporting

requirements are adhered to. The lack of commitment by some stakeholders can be attributed to many factors, including the lack of capacity in terms of know-how, manpower, technical and financial resources.

One of the major problems encountered was the lack of understanding by stakeholders of the requirements, particularly for country profile reporting. The last update had been done for the Rio + 5 process in 1997, and since then, the staff turnover and inadequate record keeping attributed to higher uncertainty on special issues among ministry staff. Further, the country profile update guidelines provided by the UN National Information Analysis Unit was brief and insufficient to clearly describe reporting requirements under each sub-category.

To complement in-country efforts, it is important that technical assistance be offered to help complete both country profile and national reporting needs of the UN more effectively and comprehensively. In addition to these, the use of Information Technology, in particular web based technology, if more accessible, could help in improving understanding of the issues by all stakeholders. This will provide a platform for illustrating worked examples, which will not only improve the clarity of issues at hand but also reporting requirements.

### *Organisational System*

While the information is readily available with ministries, information at times was not readily released. The issue of information ownership was a factor that affected the timely dissemination of information. The proposal to set up a central database would help alleviate this problem.

### *Resource Availability*

Limited financial resources were available to enable us to organise national forums and workshops for national reporting purposes. Human resource capacity was also limited in terms of the technical expertise to effectively prepare and meet required consultation and reporting standards.

### *Feedback Mechanism*

It would indeed be useful if some mechanism were established that would enable countries to receive feedback on reports that have been submitted. This will help us to not only find out whether we are meeting the reporting requirements, but also help realize the significance of our sovereign efforts in relation to the international fora.

### *Sustainable Development Indicators*

To enable effective assessment of the progress taken towards sustainable development, it would be useful if indicators were updated in a systematic and frequent manner.

## **Conclusion**

National reports provide vital information and is a useful means of taking stock of our progress. It also sets a platform from which countries can determine their way forward. However, there are many constraints to national reporting as highlighted earlier. These constraints need to be addressed if national reports are to be effective in meeting the requirements of the UN agencies. Moreover it should be purposeful towards the development of national policies.

To eliminate these constraints, institutional and human resource capacity needs to be strengthened and more resources need to be made available. To enable us to determine the usefulness, appropriateness, and relevance of our reports, a feedback mechanism will need to be established. And for all these issues to be addressed, the assistance of the United Nations institutions is required.