

**NATIONAL REPORT  
ON THE  
IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE  
BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

**MINISTRY FOR WOMEN AND CULTURE  
FIJI ISLANDS  
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## FOREWORD

This national report documents the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BD & PoA) formulated at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. It covers amongst other areas, the resources and institutional arrangements made available by government towards implementation of actions contained in the BD & PoA, the progress made to date, obstacles that are encountered and emerging issues affecting women and gender development nationally.

Fiji had announced that following the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women it will focus on mainstreaming of women and gender concerns in public sector policies, programmes etc; law; micro-enterprise development for women; gender balanced partnership in decision-making and violence against women and children. A *Women's Plan of Action: 1999 - 2008* on these areas was launched in October 1998. This report, however, is not confined to only these areas. Other areas such as poverty, the economy and the girl-child are also addressed.

Amongst the many challenges before us is that the Plan is implemented system-wide and in the community. Linkages and cooperation between government Ministries / Departments, women's NGOs, educational and training institutions, advocates and international donor community is vital as these are all key stakeholders in implementation activities. The allocation of additional resources and technical assistance in all sectors is an integral part also. An additional critical component is the recognition that the consideration of women and gender concerns are integral to sustainable development.

The report further provides an initial benchmark of the status women and gender development in Fiji. This will be useful in the future when further review exercises are carried out.

I wish to record my deepest gratitude to UNIFEM Pacific Area for their support. They had been the major funder in the staging of a national women's consultation from 10 - 12 August 1999 in Suva and the production of this report. Women's NGOs through this consultation identified further changes to the report. My appreciation is further extended to Ms. Mere Pulea for the writing of the initial draft and the finalisation of the report. I am also grateful to women's NGOs and representatives of Ministries / Departments for their tireless advocacy work, energy and contribution.

Vivaka Vakalevu and Dhan baad.

**Honourable Lavinia Wainiqolo Padarath**  
**Minister for Women, Culture and Social Welfare.**

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## PREFACE

This report covers the period 1995 to 1999 on the implementation of the *Beijing Platform for Action* by the Government of the Fiji Islands. Many of the steps taken as part of general government policy to improve the status of women in the Fiji Islands have been an on-going process prior to the Beijing Conference. Since then, the formulation and adoption by Government of the *Women's Plan of Action 1998 - 2008*, to serve as a blue print to integrate women and gender concerns and promote gender equity in the development process and, amongst others, to improve the legal status of women, is a significant step forward.

Improvements have been made in a number of areas. The Ministry of Women and Culture established in 1987 has been further mandated to undertake a wide range of responsibilities to ensure women's equal and active participation in the economic, social and political sectors. There are also designated sectoral government gender focal points with specific responsibilities to integrate women's concerns in sector plans. There has been improvements made in legislation and in 1999 Cabinet approved the Family Law reforms, which amongst others, give recognition to women's equal rights in family matters. There is an on-going process by the Fiji Law Reform Commission to improve legislation in other sectors such as those relating to women's employment, compensation and those offences which are consistently committed against women. This process is also consistent with the Fiji Islands' obligations to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Women's Convention) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Although the Government has listed several achievements to protect women's interests and to ensure their participation in development, it is also conscious that more needs to be done and additional resources should be allocated to implement the strategic objectives in the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the *Women's Plan of Action*. A systematic monitoring and evaluation system of all programmes to enhance the position of women in all sectors also needs to be installed to measure compliance. Government has established 5 Task Forces composed of both Government and Non Government Organisations (NGO) and other stakeholders to implement the *Women's Plan of Action* and they have proposed strategies in those areas that require immediate action. These are set out in some detail in Part 3 of this report.

Any action taken cannot be sustained without Government commitment, appropriate financial support, skilled personnel and support from the NGO community. To date, performance and implementation of action plans in all sectors vary. Some planned activities to implement the strategic objectives in the *Beijing Platform for Action* may be premature and experience slow implementation. Other reforms are sometimes incomplete, partial and inconsistent within the targeted time-frame. Despite these obstacles, there continues to be some progress made. A strong partnership has been forged by Government with the NGO sectors, which is essential to promote gender equity and to respond to other gender issues. If women's concerns are to be fully addressed in a comprehensive manner, it is critical that the cooperation of all stakeholders continue to remain firm and that their efforts are coordinated to bring about the planned changes. The Government is committed to continue to pursue its initiatives and objectives on gender issues in partnership with NGOs, to attain equity and a respect for women's human rights.



# NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

This report is set out in 3 Parts:

**Part 1** provides an overview of the major achievements that have been accomplished through the implementation of policies, institutional strengthening and programmes; the predominant problems faced in certain sectors to achieve gender equality and the general trends towards achieving gender equality and the advancement of women.

**Part 2** sets out the Financial and Institutional Measures to implement the Fiji Islands on-going programmes to improve the status of women and the actions outlined in the *Women's Plan of Action 1998 - 2008* which are generally consistent with the *Beijing Platform for Action*.

**Part 3** outlines the implementation of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern of the *Beijing Platform for Action*. It sets out innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices; the obstacles encountered and commitments made for further action and the initiatives to be taken.

## PART 1

### OVERVIEW OF TRENDS IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

1.0 The legacy of inequalities faced by women has been reinforced over the years by perceptions, attitudes, custom, tradition and structures in society. Over the last two decades, the potential of women and the strength they bring to the life of a country has been seen as one of the major survival factors of a nation. With Fiji's ethnic, racial and cultural diversity, women have different experiences and different needs and there is no single standard upon which women's issues can be assessed. It is also recognised that the needs of rural and urban women differ as well as the needs of women with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Although these differences are acknowledged, all women however, are commonly portrayed as inferior and their role is largely confined to the domestic and family sphere. This is not only true of Fiji Islands but is a world wide assumption.

1.1 As the substantial work to improve the status of women in the Fiji Islands has been an on-going process prior to the Fourth World Conference for Women, this report documents the major actions taken in a number of areas as well as the actions taken so far to implement the activities set out in the *Women's Plan of Action 1998-2008*. The progress made through the actions taken, and those planned to be taken in the future, clearly represents a consistency with the strategic objectives as outlined in the *Beijing Platform for Action* and in effect, would contribute significantly to the implementation of some of those objectives.

1.2 Part 1 of this paper provides an overview and draws together the major achievements and best practices in specific areas that have made a substantial impact on the advancement of women; and outlines some of the obstacles and barriers encountered by them as a result of restrictive policies and the prevailing attitudes towards women as well as policies to restructure and to privatise key industries.

#### A. Major achievements in specific areas

1.3 There are a number of major achievements to promote the advancement of women and these have been secured in a number of priority areas through such measures as new and enhanced institutional mechanisms, and through specific policy decisions adopted and programmes implemented to improve the status of women. Major progress has been made in the following areas:

##### (i) *Institutional strengthening*

1.4 The upgrading of the Department of Women and Culture to a full Ministry in 1997 (although it was a full Ministry in 1987 but restructured in the general reorganisation of Departments) indicates the changes that were put in place and work expected from the Ministry to implement policies to enhance the participation of women. Institutional strengthening was amongst the high priority areas listed for donor support by NZODA and AUSAID in 1998.

1.5 Government's Gender Focal Points at Deputy Permanent Secretary level were established in 17 Ministries and Departments in 1998 to ensure the implementation of the *Women's Plan of Action* by facilitating and integrating the identified priority actions into their Ministry's policies and programmes. In addition, the Gender Focal Points are required to promote the development of gender sensitive policies, programmes and practices in their respective Ministries. They are also required to provide advice to the Ministry for Women and to respective Ministries of the overall needs in the area of gender and development.

1.6 The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women was also established in 1998 to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the *Women's Plan of Action*.

1.7 Microfinancing is the new culture in the system as women begin to emerge as the new commercial competitors. The major challenges in these reforms require extreme alterations of expectations. Microfinancing, whilst not a perfect solution, will open opportunities and revamp a conservative system thereby making a successful transition whereby the opportunities for both men and women will be the same and equal as far as lending policies and employment opportunities are concerned. A Micro-Finance Coordinating Unit has been established by Government in 1999 through which advice and funding can be accessed for micro enterprises.

1.8 Some significant attempts have been made to invest in human development, where women are given employment and training opportunities. These opportunities are by no means wholly given on the basis of equality although there appears to be a trend in this direction.

*(ii) Strengthening women's networking*

1.10 The Ministry has a range of responsibilities but its primary mission is that of advisor on public policy issues which affect women and gender. The cooperation between the Ministry and the NGO sectors has been strengthened through involvement in the mobilisation of resources to deal with specific issues such as the integration of gender concerns in the law reform process and other specific issues such as maternity benefits, day care centres in the work place, domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment. In the economic sectors, work has been carried out on a cooperative basis with other Ministries and NGOs in such areas as skills enhancement, income generation and credit programmes and in the social sectors in women's health issues, education, housing and the strengthening of support services to women. In the political sector, affirmative action has been taken by relevant NGOs with the assistance from international organisations, to increase women's participation at the decision making levels.

1.11 Restructuring ingrained policies and practices and changing perceptions, assumptions and attitudes about women and the role they play in the home and in society at large required much attention from the Ministry and women's groups. Women, not only in the Fiji Islands but in the Pacific took the responsibility upon themselves to change the current environment to enhance and develop their potential. In the early 1990s and prior to the Beijing Conference, both Government and the NGO community in the Pacific were involved in a series of meetings at community, national and regional levels, engaging many women in the process of formulating policies that involved them as women and as active and equal participants in the economic, political and social processes of change. The results of this process was shared at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing, where a major policy document and Platform for Action was developed and agreed upon, and calling upon governments to take action in 12 critical areas of concern.

1.12 In essence, the Government and the NGO partnership has strengthened over the years and they have combined their efforts in a number of sectors to bring about concrete results to improve the status of women in Fiji Islands. The trends indicate positive movements forward and that it is a definite improvement upon the last decade.

*(iii) Adoption of standards through international agreements*

1.13 Government has initiated a number of measures to provide a framework to pursue the goal of full equality for women in a number of areas. Firstly, at the international level, the Fiji Islands became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Women's Convention) in 1995 and to

the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1993. A number of United Nations Conventions which were extended to Fiji Islands by Britain before independence were ratified by Fiji Islands after independence and these include, amongst others, the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children, 1921; the Convention on Women's Political Rights, 1955; the Convention on the Nationality of Women, 1959; the Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935; and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957.

(iv) *National initiatives*

1.14. Secondly, significant strides have been made at the national level. The active and equal participation of women has not been merely as a result of the *Beijing Platform for Action* but as a natural development of good governance, in that Government has been more conscious of the need to address women and gender issues and concerns and the necessity for more transparency and accountability in all its actions. The initial follow-up activities from the *Beijing Platform for Action* are grounded in Government's policies on Women-In-Development (WID) which are set out in the document "Opportunities for Growth" 1993. Government's efforts are concentrated in involving women as equal partners at the national levels; upgrading skills and training to improve their employment opportunities; collection of data for analysis on gender bias and for the formulation of new policies; strengthen the coordination of women's activities; and examine legislation with a view to safe guarding women's human rights. This was further streamlined in the 1997 "Development Strategies" that states that Government's policies and strategies will include:

- ensuring a gender-balanced partnership at all levels of decision-making;
- striving for equal partnership in political, economic and social development;
- promoting equal opportunity in employment;
- assisting disadvantaged women and young women in their economic activities;
- promoting safe domestic and workplace environments for women and children;
- examining legislation with the view to safeguarding the human rights of women; and
- integrating women's concerns into all planning and policy areas.

(v) *Women's Plan of Action 1998 - 2008*

1.15 A National Women's Congress organised by the Ministry of Women and Culture in October 1998 approved the *Women's Plan of Action 1998-2008* which is set out in 2 volumes. The first volume contains the directions for actions required to achieve the broad strategic objectives of women and gender concerns/issues whilst the second volume contains the situational analysis of the 5 commitment areas. The implementation of the *Women's Plan of Action* will be carried out on a cooperative basis with the NGO community and with other relevant organisations and institutions. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism is being established through an Inter-

Ministerial Committee on Women to ensure that there is a sector wide coordinated implementation of the defined priority areas.

(vi) *Greater gender perspective in legislation*

1.16 The vision of more equity, non discrimination and respect for human rights is found not only in national development plans and Government policies but is grounded in the 1997 Fiji Islands Constitution which provides in its Human Rights provisions for non discrimination on the grounds of gender. In addition, in 1999, a Human Rights Commission was established under the Human Rights Act (10/99) which will uphold the right of any person including women to take cases of discrimination to the Human Rights Commission. Although the independence constitution of 1970 provided that every person irrespective of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex were entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex has been specifically included in the 1990 constitution. Whilst it is the cornerstone by which discriminatory practices can be challenged, little use has been made of this constitutional provision. The current policy of the Government is to eliminate all those legal provisions in the laws of the Fiji Islands that discriminate against women.

1.17 To implement the obligations contained in international agreements to which Fiji Islands is a contracting party such as the Women's Convention, the gender issues in the law, particularly the criminal law relating to rape, domestic violence and other forms of sexual abuse, have received much attention in the last 5 years. The trend has been to impose higher penalties for various forms of sexual assaults and recommendations for the law to specifically address domestic violence under separate legislation have been under consideration. The Ministry of Women and Culture has made submissions to the Fiji Law Reform Commission with recommendations for the reform of the criminal law where women's issues are taken into account. The Fiji Law Reform Commission in 1997 commissioned the review of laws relating to the family which includes the law on marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, affiliation and a revamped institutional mechanism through which family grievances are dealt with by a specialised court to be known as the Family Court. The introduction of a no fault regime will change the fault based system for divorce. The review completed in 1999 has been approved by Cabinet in July 1999 for implementation.

1.18 Legal transformations in other sectors are also occurring such as the review of the Penal Code, particularly the sexual offences provisions which has been rewritten in gender neutral language and old and obsolete provisions have been replaced to meet current norms and practices and internationally accepted standards. A comprehensive review of laws relating to children and their families is currently taking place and introduces family conferences, pre-trial diversions, child care planning, counselling and a specialised youth court. It should be noted that the new laws being adopted in the Fiji Islands are not adopted "off the rack" from western models but incorporate principles which have been gradually developed in the system. These revisions are yet to be submitted to Government for approval.

1.19 The Ministry for Women and Culture has been advocating for the use of gender inclusive language in legislation. Submissions have been made to the Fiji Law Reform Commission and to other Ministries to adopt this approach. There is indication that conscious efforts will be made to draft legislation accordingly.

### B. Policies to enhance women's participation

1.20 The Fiji Islands also has policies aimed to strengthen the position of women and deliberate efforts have been made by Government and the NGO community to accelerate women's development. Further improvements in national policies were adopted in 1993 by the Fiji Islands Cabinet to increase the participation of women on all public boards, committees and councils by 30% to 50% in the next five years. Since then, changes are evident and concerted efforts have been made by Government to identify women to serve on boards, committees and councils. By 1998, women made up 16% of the total membership of such decision making bodies. There are obvious problems in implementing such policies but the trend has been towards concerted efforts to bring about more gender responsiveness.

1.21 Fiji Island women have made some progress in gaining positions of power and decision-making in the political arena. In the recent elections (May 1999) 8 women have been elected to the House of Representatives with 5 women holding Ministerial positions, one of which holds one of the two positions of Deputy Prime Minister. In the Senate (Upper House) there are a total of 5 women appointed by the Boselevu Vaka Turaga and the Government whilst the Leader of the Opposition is yet to make a formal announcement of the Opposition appointments to the Senate.

1.22 There are no discriminatory policies in the Fiji Islands preventing girls from taking advantage of primary and secondary education and most have achieved universal primary education. Girls access to secondary education has also improved over the past decades although the pattern of equal access to and participation by males and females in secondary education does not translate into equal participation in higher education due to economic and cultural factors. In Fiji Islands, fewer girls proceed to Form 7. More recently aid donors have addressed this gender imbalance by requiring governments and other organisations to award more scholarships to girls. The female share of overseas scholarships in Fiji Islands rose from 26% in 1987 to 51% in 1996 (Helu:1998). Although gender inequality in access to education has been redressed to a great extent, there are some schools and vocational programmes that are gender specific (see Critical Concern B). The Government has a number of strategies to ensure quality education for all and in the next five years will provide free education up to the completion of secondary schooling and will ensure that the number of scholarships are distributed equitably.

1.23 Current government policies to ensure safe and adequate water supplies, particularly in rural areas, will ease the burden on women who often walk long distances to fetch water and to do the household washing. Parasite contaminated drinking water during the drought period in 1998 has focused Government's attention upon increasing resources to provide safe and adequate water supplies. Government

will also make concerted efforts in assessing the impact of development on women and involve women in development decision making.

1.24 Fiji Island's policies on trade, foreign market investments, global competitiveness and foreign exchange are expected to provide greater investment and create new employment opportunities for both men and women. There are both gains and negative effects, particularly for women in some manufacturing industries where wages are low and where there is a lack of adequate washroom and child care facilities. Although this year a child care facility has been established with the assistance of NZODA at a garment facility in Kalabu, Nasinu which will reduce absenteeism amongst female workers who generally suffer pay reduction and possibly job losses during such periods. This is a major step forward and it is likely that a trend in this direction may be seen in the future.

1.25 Government has this year put in place a Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (EEO). It was initiated by the Public Service Commission and currently being piloted in 5 Ministries. The current policy provides a general guideline and sets the standard from which different Ministries and departments can formulate their own EEO policies. The Police Department has however formulated an EEO policy in 1994 applying to the Police Force.

### C. Obstacles and barriers to women's equal and active participation

1.26 However, much remains to be done as there continues to be a low level of consciousness in almost all sectors, of women and gender issues and needs, which is compounded by the lack of sex disaggregated data in some sectors of Government.

1.27 In the field of employment, women represent 35% of the workforce, 50% of the population but only 3% of the decision makers at the national level. Women have always been relegated to low paying jobs with little or no security to obtain loans from banks or other financial institutions. There is a growing trend in Government policy for human resource development to focus on women with more opportunities for them to be trained and to work in fields reserved in the past entirely for men such as engineering, law and medicine. However, there is still less flexibility with bank policies on loans to women despite their educational qualifications and entrepreneurial skills.

1.28 There continues to be a high female unemployment rate in the informal sector, as for women who quit their jobs there are many more who will take their place. Some women, particularly in the urban areas, earn a living as domestic helpers but they are generally unprotected and unorganised. Unskilled workers will continue to end up in the informal sectors of employment. The devaluation of the Fiji Islands dollar in 1998, has increased the cost of living and consequently extra pressure is exerted on housewives to cope with family financial crisis.

1.29 It is general knowledge that business corporations move their businesses to low wage countries and in this respect, the proposal by the present Government that some consideration should be given to a minimum wage policy (although the level of

minimum wage has not been discussed as yet) has caused concern in the garment industry sector as the minimum wage could be set at a level which may effect the viability of the industry.

1.30 Structural adjustments in key industries, privatisation and the selling off of national assets for debt servicing may bring about general growth to the economy but has at the same time placed many more into the unemployed category, causing misery to some families. Employed women also tend to suffer most from retrenchments and business closures. Although it is the long term vision of Government to be less dependent on foreign aid, and to provide a self sufficient economy, it also recognises the need to protect the vulnerable groups in the community such as the small farmers and women workers.

1.31 There is generally a division of labour in some industries, mainly based on wage differences between men and women, with women drawing the lower wage. There are also differences in the occupation of both men and women as women are generally found in more "feminine" types of industries, (i.e. industries which employs mostly women) whilst men are found in those industries which require hard physical labour such as in under-ground mining, ship building or in such professions as medicine, law and accountancy. Some affirmative action has been taken by Government to improve gender parity in the award of scholarships for women and girls to enter certain professions reserved in the past for males and to this end there appears to be some minor improvement made. Awards provided under Aid programmes are based on gender parity to accelerate the progress of women. Some vocational training programmes are gender specific (see Critical Concern B) which influences the way women and girls are employed in the market place.

1.32 The influx into the legal system of new laws such as the Fair Trading Decree 1992 and its amendments, the Tax Free Zone Decree (51/98) and its amendments; and an Act to promote the Competition in Markets in the Fiji Islands (50/98) and major reviews conducted, such as the review of the Banking System in the Fiji Islands in 1999, there appears to be little impact made on improving the status of women nor on the lending policies of the commercial banks in Fiji Islands. The services provided by the banks continue to be unfavourable to women in that loans for women are difficult to obtain as there continues to be a prevailing attitude and culture that individual accomplishment, business activities or entrepreneurship do not fall into the women's domain. The banks still require husbands to act as guarantors for any loan applications made by their partner. The influence of international lending institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund often conditions loans upon gender reforms.

1.33 The new reforms requiring women to be equal participants are based on constitutionalism and the rule of law. The constraints of attitude and history and economic reality continue to serve as the boundaries. No matter how well new laws are written giving women an equal place, implementation and consistency will continue to plague these reforms and new developments. The on-going processes of reform require constant revision and testing.

1.34 The health facilities have been improved over the years and there is recognition that more needs to be done. Statistics indicate that 33% of women are anaemic and 20% of infants suffer from malnutrition and this contributes significantly to high maternal and child mortality. The Government has focused attention recently on providing an affordable, comprehensive national health service and will ensure that life saving drugs are brought within the means of the poor. The proposal to remove Value Added Tax (VAT) from basic food items and medical supplies has been under discussion by Government.

1.35 Continuous and encroaching development has implications for the environment and biodiversity. Some study has been made in the Fiji Islands on assessing the impact of development upon women but more in-depth studies are required in all sectors of the environment. With women's close contact with the environment through gardening, food gathering and gleaning on the foreshores, women are more susceptible to environmental changes and development. Environmental degradation leads to contamination of fresh water supplies and food sources upon which people depend. Environmental degradation is also closely linked to poverty.

1.36 The increasing squatter settlements and lack of affordable housing and deteriorating standards of living are major influences on the health of women and families. It is estimated that more than 15% of the population in the capital Suva live in squatter settlements and single room lean-to housing. These houses are not only occupied by families on low income and by women as single heads of households, but also by the extended families adding more pressure on the already limited living space and on the family's financial resources. The Housing Authority which was established to provide housing for those within the \$3,500 - \$15,600 per annum income bracket has come under heavy criticism from the Government and families who are not able to service the Housing Authority loans which are currently running at 11%. The Housing Authority is reviewing policy in this area and the trend is to bring down the housing loan interest rates to a maximum of 6% in order to provide decent and affordable housing to those within this income category, the majority being women.

1.37 Poverty is a growing concern in Fiji Islands as the poor often remain poor because of the lack of saleable skills. This is usually more true of poor women. In 1991 the poverty line in Fiji Islands was defined by the Government appointed National Poverty Task Force as \$58.11 a week for a family, though an informal line set by those who work with the poor is somewhere between \$58 to \$74 per week per family's total income. The need to address poverty has been recognised by successive governments for a long time. Over the years it has become increasingly apparent that there was a growing number of women heading households and that poverty amongst women generally worsens because they are concentrated in lowly paid jobs and for those who were solo parents, divorced or separated there was little or no support to maintain children. The Government established the Poverty Alleviation Fund in 1994 with the sum of \$F500,000. The trend however is towards a decrease in this amount in the last 2 years with the sum of \$469,500 being allocated for 1998 and 1999 for disbursement.

## PART 2

### FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

2.0 The government department mandated to look after the interests and concerns of women is the Ministry of Women and Culture in the Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare. In 1994 to (August) 1997, the Department was in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. In 1997 it was part of the Ministry of Information. By April 1998, the Department of Women and Culture was changed into a Ministry. In June 1999, it was changed into the Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare.

### THE NATIONAL BUDGET

2.1 In order to determine Government's commitments in relation to promoting women's equality and advancement at all levels, it is important to determine the relationship between the commitments made and the resources allocated to accomplish the range of objectives to eliminate barriers and abolish restrictions adopted for this area. One of the most important resource is the national budget which will be examined from the year 1996.

#### Financial allocations to the Ministry of Women and Culture

##### 1996

#### 2.2 (i) Funds allocated by Government

In 1996, the sum allocated to the Ministry was \$1,149,300. This figure represented a *total operating budget* of \$783,700, and a *capital budget* of \$250,000 including the sum of \$115,600 for *value added tax (VAT)*.

2.3 In addition, the sum of \$28,100 was allocated by Government for grants to women's organisations. In 1996, there were 14 women's organisations who received grants for projects and programmes totaling \$28,000. The grants approved for individual organisations ranged between \$1,000 and \$5,000.

#### 2.4 (ii) Funds allocated through bilateral aid

The sum of \$225,000 was allocated for development projects to women's organisations (available on request) under bilateral agreements with the New Zealand (through NZODA) and the Australia Governments (through AUSAID). The NZODA provided \$125,000, whilst AusAID allocated \$100,000 of the total figure. Some 12 organisations benefited under AusAID's contribution of \$79,070.33. The projects carried out by the women's organisations under funding allocated by AusAID, included the following: consultation on empowerment to influence the Post Beijing Plan of Action; income-generating skills training; tailoring projects; sewing projects; training/day care centre; pre-school/women's activity centre; work on disability;

young women's sexuality/sexual health, training of trainers for rural women and environment based project.

2.5 The funding by NZODA for 1996 was \$176,226. This fund was utilised by the Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji National Council of Women, for its Women in Politics Project (WIP), and the Ministry for Women on Fiji's Initial Report to CEDAW, the Women's Social and Economic Development Programme (WOSED) Expansion programme, Micro Enterprise training in Vanuatu and the post-Beijing National Action Plan.

## 1997

### *2.6 (i) Funds allocated by Government*

The total allocation made by Government for 1997, was \$1,066,500. This figure represented \$783,700 for operation costs, the sum of \$225,100 for capital expenditure and \$57,700 for VAT.

2.7 In 1997, the sum of \$28,100 was allocated by Government as a grant for women's organisations. In that year, 8 organisations were given grants for projects and programmes ranging from \$2,000 to \$7,000.

### *2.8 (ii) Funds allocated through bilateral aid*

For development projects, the sum of \$225,097 was available to the Women's organisations, upon request. NZODA allocated \$175,097, while AusAID allocated \$50,000, for women's development projects. The eventual contribution provided by AusAID was \$59,584.07. There were 8 women's organisations who benefited from this funding and they carried out various projects, which included village health sample kitchens, water seal latrines, sewing projects, advocacy skill training, outdoor activities facilities and village footpaths.

2.9 Out of the sum of \$175,097 provided by NZODA, the sum of \$88,426 was utilised. This was largely used by the Ministry for Women and Culture for its work in WOSED, to undertake the review on the Worker's Compensation Bill and the Employment Act.

## 1998

### *2.10 (i) Funds allocated by Government*

The Ministry for Women and Culture was allocated the sum of \$1,199,800 This figure represented operating costs of \$797,900, capital expenditure of \$333,600 and \$68,300 for VAT.

2.11 As in 1996 and 1997, the sum of \$28,100 was allocated by Government for grants to women's organisations. In 1998, 4 women's organisations were given grants totaling \$21,100. The grants allocated were between \$3,100 and \$7,000.

## 2.12 (ii) Funds allocated through bilateral aid

The sum of \$333,623 was allocated for women's organisations for development projects and this was available upon request. NZODA contributed the sum of \$233,623; and AusAID provided \$100,000. The sum of \$185,639 was utilised under the NZODA funding for the review of laws; the drafting of legislation; projects under the WOSED programme; work associated with the Women's Convention; and the purchase of books and materials for the Ministry's library.

### Analysis

2.13 Over the three years (1996-1998), the sum allocated by Government as grants to women's organisations has not increased. It has remained stagnant at \$28,100. With the increasing number of women's organisations, together with the range of work and new initiatives undertaken, the allocation of this grant is in need of a review.

2.14 Whilst various organisations have been making use of the funds available under the AusAID and NZODA grants, it appears that in some cases, the funds have been under-utilised. For instance in 1997, NZODA allocated the sum of \$175,097 for development projects, of which only \$88,426 was utilised. The timing and the way the information on funding is disseminated to women's organisations will be reviewed.

2.15 It can also be seen that the Ministry for Women and Culture is largely reliant on the grants given by AusAID and NZODA for its work on the report to CEDAW Committee on the Women's Convention, the WOSED programme and the activities to be undertaken on the *Women's Plan of Action*. The national budget needs to have allocations covering these plans, projects and programmes. If the national budget allocates separate funding for the implementation the *Women's Plan of Action*, more of the bilateral donor funds could be utilised by women's organisations for development projects and programs.

2.16 *Funds allocated by the by the Ministry for Women and Culture towards the formulation of the Women's Plan of Action: 1999-2008 and planning to influence the post Beijing National Plan of Action by various Women's NGO's.*

### 1996

Women's Consultation on "Empowerment to influence post Beijing Plan of Action" (AusAID) (Rotuma Women's Association) -	\$5,090
Empowerment to influence the Post Beijing Fiji Plan of Action (AUSAID) - (Ba Province Women's Society)	\$2,420

* Beijing National Implementation Action Plan (NZODA)-	\$21,920
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(Department of Women and Culture)

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\$29,430

**1997**

Nil

**1998**

*National Plan of Action (NZODA) (Ministry for Women and Culture)	\$35,000
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\* The amounts listed above are funds spent by the Ministry for Women and Culture towards its post Beijing activities. If one examines the national budget for the past three years, there has been no separate sum allocated to implement the *Women's Plan of Action*. The above-mentioned amounts are part of Aid provided by Donors (NZODA and AUSAID).

#### **NATIONAL MECHANISMS// INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES**

2.17 Government had established various national mechanisms specifically for the purpose of implementing its own *Women's Plan of Action*. They were not established as a direct result of the *Beijing Platform for Action* but rather on the five areas of commitments made by Fiji to the *Beijing Platform for Action* namely the mainstreaming of women in the development process; micro enterprise development, the review of the laws that are disadvantageous to women; the actions to be taken to promote a gender balance partnership at all levels of decision-making; and the work to be undertaken to eliminate violence against women;

2.18 Government established these mechanisms in November 1998: the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women (IMCW) and the 5 Task Forces.

2.19 The IMCW is comprised of Deputy Secretaries from the Ministry of National Planning, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Social Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Co-operatives and Public Enterprises, Ministry of Communications, Works and Energy, Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment, Ministry of Home Affairs [especially Police Dept.], Ministry of Youth and Sports, Public Service Commission, Solicitor-General - Fiji Law Reform Commission and Bureau of Statistics.

2.20 Five Task Forces have been established in the areas of Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns, Women and the Law, Micro-Enterprise Development, Shared Decision-Making and Violence Against Women and Children. All Task Forces are comprised of Government Ministries/Departments and selected NGOs and

their main task is to look into the detailed implementation of the *Women's Plan of Action*.

2.21 The Task Force on Mainstreaming is made up of Ministry of National Planning (Chairperson), Ministry of Finance, Public Service Commission, Ministry of Regional Development, Bureau of Statistics, Soqosoqo Vakamarama, National Council of Women, University of the South Pacific and UNIFEM.

2.22 The Task Force on Women and the Law is comprised of the Fiji Law Reform Commission (Chairperson), the Ministry of Justice, Legal Aid Commission, Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations, Fiji women's Rights Movement, Regional Rights Resource Team, Institute of Justice and Applied Legal Studies and the Fiji Law Society.

2.23 The Task Force on Micro-Enterprise Development is made of Ministry of Finance (Chairperson), Ministry of Commerce, Local Government Association, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fiji Development Bank, Soqosoqo Vakamarama and Women in Business.

2.24 The Task Force on Shared Decision-Making is made of Public Service Commission (Chairperson), Ministry of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Fijian Affairs, Department of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Ministry of Local government, National Council of Women, Fiji Trade Union Congress and Fiji Employers Federation.

2.25 The Task Force on Violence Against Women and Children is comprised of Department of Social Welfare (Chairperson), Ministry of National Planning, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Fiji Law Reform Commission, Ministry of Home Affairs-Fiji Police Department, Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji National Council of Women, Fiji Council of Social Services and the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons.

2.26 The Secretariat of all the above-mentioned mechanisms is the Ministry for Women and Culture.

2.27 Similar mechanisms have been established towards the follow-up of other global United Nations Conferences. In Fiji Islands case, there have been definitive steps in the setting up of mechanisms following the UN World Summit for Children in September 1990. A National Children's Policy Committee was established in April 1991 within the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The committee comprised representatives from the Ministries of Health, Education, Youth and Sports, Women and Social Welfare, Finance and Economic Planning, the Attorney-General's Office, the National Food and Nutrition Committee and the Ombudsman's Office. This committee with the assistance of UNICEF Consultants produced a Situation Analysis Report on Children in the Fiji Islands and the *National Policy, Strategy and Plan of Action for Children*.

2.28 The National Children's Policy Committee was later called the Co-ordinating Committee on Children. It was established in 1993, the same year Fiji Islands ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The task of the Committee is to recommend ways in which the Fiji Islands can incorporate the provisions of the Convention into Fiji Islands Laws, programmes and practices. Membership of this Committee now comprise representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry for Women and Culture, Ministry of Justice (Attorney General's and Director of Public Prosecution Office), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, Ministry of National Planning, Ombudsman's Office, Public Service Commission, Save the Children, Fiji Council of Churches, Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji National Council of Women (joined in 1998).

2.29 Four Sub-Committees have been set up: the Legal, Education, Health and Family Welfare Sub-Committee. The National Planning Office acts as Secretariat to the Committee and UNICEF provides technical assistance when required.

2.30 The Ministry for Women and Culture also works in close collaboration with other ministries through membership of the following inter-sectoral committees :

- Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Fiji National Food & Nutrition Committee
- Fiji Police Training and Education Advisory Group
- Breast Feeding Committee
- Human Resource Planning Committee
- Ministry of Education - Values Education
- Inter-agency Committee on the Family Law Reform
- Poverty Alleviation Committee
- Clothing and Textile Training Board

### **Future Government Initiatives**

#### **2.31 (a) Gender Budget Initiative**

The Commonwealth Secretariat in January 1999, approached the Fiji Islands to pilot a project on analysing government expenditure in a gender disaggregated manner and that findings and considerations raised from this exercise be integrated in the formulation of the national budget. On 30 March 1999 Cabinet approved the establishment of the project. Initial discussions had highlighted the need that this is to be piloted in five sectors; Education, Agriculture, Health, Commerce and Public Service Commission. It was also envisaged that the Year 2000 budget be targeted. By undertaking this pilot project, the Fiji Islands Government will be implementing one of the major strategic objectives of the *Women's Plan of Action* (ref: Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns).

2.32 It is planned that the Ministry of Finance will be responsible for implementing the pilot project in collaboration with a Steering Committee comprising of team leaders from the five line ministries, representatives from the Ministry of National Planning, the Ministry for Women and Culture and the Bureau of Statistics. In is

proposed that the Task Force on Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns comprising of government and NGOs will play the advisory role of monitoring the project.

### 2.33 National Women's Advisory Council

The establishment of the first *National Women's Advisory Council* was announced by Government on 13 August 1999. The 12 member Advisory Council, appointed for a period of two years, will be chaired by the Minister for Women and the Ministry for Women and Culture will act as the Advisory Council's secretariat. The purpose of the Council is to provide a forum where the Minister for Women and Culture meets with women, representatives of women's NGO's, and gender specialists within the community. The Council's main task is to advise the Minister on public sector policies, programs, projects, legislation, regulations, and other issues that impact on women and gender. It will also act as a national consultative mechanism for NGOs on the review of the *Women's Plan of Action: 1999-2008* and on other emerging issues affecting women.

## PART 3

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

3.0 Gender inequality, unequal access to resources and to the decision making process infiltrates all aspects of life. The task of integrating women's concerns in all critical areas identified by the *Beijing Platform for Action* requires a many sided approach and a range of strategies including strong support from Government, the non government sectors, regional and international agencies together with resources being made available to specifically implement commitments made. Women's participation at all levels requires constant monitoring and evaluation.

3.1 Part 3 describes the activities of the Government, NGOs and other development players that addresses the 12 critical areas identified in the *Beijing Platform for Action*. Government's initiative and follow-up activities before and since the Beijing Conference are concentrated in the following 5 main areas as highlighted by the Fiji Islands delegation to the Beijing Conference as its main area of focus:

- (a) Mainstreaming of women and gender concerns in the planning process and in all policy areas.
- (b) Review of laws that are disadvantageous to women.
- (c) Allocation of additional resources to develop women's micro-enterprises; financial institutions to be encouraged to review lending policies to disadvantaged women and young women who lack traditional sources of collateral.
- (d) Gender balance partnership at all levels of decision-making and assigning fifty per cent of representation, participation, training, appointments and

promotions at all levels of Government to women on merit and as appropriate and encourage the same in the private sector.

- (e) Campaign to promote a sound and stable environment that is free of violence especially domestic violence, sexual harassment and child abuse.

The policies and activities that challenge male dominance, inequitable procedures in order to bring about changes to improve women's status and their active participation in all sectors are not limited to the above five areas of commitment. The strategic objectives in all twelve critical areas of concern as set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action* will be addressed in order to measure the degree and the difficulties of compliance with them.

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES ON FIJI'S COMMITMENTS TO THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

3.2 This Part describes the main actions carried out by Government and the Non Government Organisations in implementing policy decisions taken to improve women's equal access and opportunities as well as to implement the actions set out in the *Women's Plan of Action 1998-2008*. The strategic objectives as contained in the *Beijing Platform for Action* will be used as the basis for analysis although it is recognised that at this stage of development in the Fiji Islands, the measures taken in some sectors to accelerate women's advancement are significant, particularly in the five areas of commitment, whilst in others, data and information indicate varying degrees of progressive development. There are however some strategic objectives prescribed in the *Beijing Platform for Action* such as the "*the development of gender based methodologies to address the feminization of poverty (Strategic Objective A.4)*" where actions or reforms are at its early stages of implementation or are not as yet in place.

### **CRITICAL CONCERN A: WOMEN AND POVERTY**

3.3 The four strategic objectives as outlined in the *Beijing Platform for Action* are as follows:

- *Strategic Objective A.1:* Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty;
- *Strategic Objective A.2:* Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources;
- *Strategic Objective A.3:* Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions; and
- *Strategic Objective A.4:* Develop gender based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.

**(a) Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.4 In Fiji Islands, the implementation of some of these objectives has been closely linked to the work undertaken by Government through the **Micro-Enterprise Development and Improving Women's Access To Micro-Credit programmes**. Although some of these programmes were initiated in the early 1990s, they are considered as meeting the goals of *Strategic Objective A3* of the *Beijing Platform for Action*. There has been some development that can be considered as consistent with *Strategic Objective A.1*, and this is mainly set out in Parliamentary Paper No.20 titled *A Strategic Plan for the New Century: Policies and Strategies for Sustainable Development of Fiji* (pub.Feb.1999) which sets out policies and strategies to ensure fair and equitable opportunities for an improved quality of life for every citizen. This policy document expands on the 1993 document titled "*Opportunities for Growth*" and the 1997 document titled "*Development Strategies for Fiji*".

3.5 These three successive policy documents, each improving upon the last, identifies key performance and accountability indicators over a given period within the framework of sectoral policy objectives in order to ensure that scarce government resources are directed to priority areas to bring about greater economic and social benefits to all sectors of the population. The *1999 Strategic Plan for the New Century* highlights the many challenges to sustainable economic and social progress particularly in the private sector. The macro economic framework is targeted to achieve general macro economic growth and financial stability, increased levels of competitiveness and appropriate cost structures although concerns have been expressed that structural adjustment policies - economic rationalism, privatisation and contracting out could have negative consequences in some sectors with resulting unemployment, fewer opportunities and the demise of some services. The *1999 Strategic Plan* takes into account the present realities of the country's economic and social development and puts in place the policies and strategies that are expected to promote improved productivity, create new employment opportunities for both men and women in urban and rural areas and thus result in alleviating poverty.

3.6 The Government's vision of a future that protects people's right to basic food and a decent life and that promotes peace and social justice requires the types of economic development that expands export and improves foreign exchange but at the same time provides protection to the vulnerable groups in society such as women and small farmers. Other initiatives that Government will address as set out in the *1999 Strategic Plan* include amongst others: mainstreaming women in development; poverty alleviation, rural and urban development and sustainable natural resource utilisation.

3.7 The Fiji Poverty Report 1997 estimates that 25% of the population live below the poverty line and this may increase further when the full impact of the 1998 drought and floods are felt. Poverty not only poses a threat to families but a greater threat to women's well-being. As poverty means different things to different people, in the Fiji Island context *absolute poverty* is where an individual or a family are unable to meet basic needs of food, water, clothing, shelter, health care and education. *Destitution* categorises those who are the "poorest of the poor". To reach those who

are at these level of poverty, *A Strategic Plan for the New Century* (p.43) sets out the following policy objectives to alleviate poverty:

- to break the cycle of poverty through employment and the creation of income and subsistence generating opportunities.
- To utilise micro enterprise and informal enterprise development supported by micro finance, as a key anti poverty strategy.
- To create conditions to ensure that the offspring of the poor do not enter into a life of poverty once they reach working age.
- To encourage the utilisation of traditional support mechanisms for the disadvantaged.
- To provide Government financial support as seed capital to those poor who are unable to provide their basic needs due to age, disability, or family responsibility.
- To encourage the use of civil societies in poverty alleviation programmes.

The key performance and accountability indicators include:

- an increased and better distribution (geographical, urban/rural) of self employment;
- increased employment opportunities for women;
- number of micro-enterprises having 1-4 employees to increase to 70% of registered businesses with paid employment;
- reduced levels of school drop-outs below Form 6 by 10 per cent annually;
- provide access to basic health services for all (2002);
- promotion and encouragement of savings at all levels.

3.8 The development of women's micro-enterprises in all sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, trade, industry and tourism and to mainstream women into these sectors of development will enable them to participate more fully and to share equally in the benefits of development. In the absence of national social security benefits such as old age pensions and unemployment benefits, micro-enterprise development is seen as one key strategy that would directly or indirectly impact on poverty. The training of women to acquire skills in small business enterprises, capacity building, financial assistance or self employment seeks to encourage people to be responsible for their own welfare and to meet their own basic needs. Institutionalising and mainstreaming women in the economic, social and industrial sectors, allocating resources for gender responsive programmes and providing women with training opportunities will expand the livelihood of women and their families. The *Women's Plan of Action 1998-2008* provides a description of the sectors that could promote micro-enterprise development and those which provide access to credit facilities.

3.9 Although this response may have the potential to eradicate poverty in some families, the availability of small business training, capacity building and opportunities for employment is geographically uneven and it appears to make little impact on rural poverty and on women who live in scattered island communities.

3.10 The Government has identified unemployment and poverty as critical areas of concern. The disadvantage for women stems from a number of factors such as low levels of education, the obstacles to obtain credit facilities from the banking sectors and financial houses because of their reluctance to work with the poor and those without tradable collateral; social attitudes and expectations about the role of women; and existing institutional barriers to their equal employment. Important sectoral strategies, described below, have been implemented to enhance women's skills and to mainstream them into the development process.

### 3.11 *Sectoral programme and project developments*

Since 1993, sectoral developments undertaken by Government and NGOs to reach people and to train them in skills to develop small enterprises have taken place both at the institution and programme/project levels. These are contained in the *Women's Plan of Action (Vol.2)* and are summarised as follows:

#### *(a) WOSSED*

In 1993, the Ministry for Women and Culture established the Women's Social and Economic Development Programme (WOSSED) as a response to numerous requests by women to support their income generation activities. As a micro-enterprise development programme, WOSSED's objectives are to

*support women's income earning activities, promote savings, improve the participants' standards of living, create self-employment or support those wishing to be self-employed and prepare women for integration into the commercial sector.*

The Plan of Action includes the building and strengthening of these structures to provide women with wider access to enterprise development and resources.

The programme components for WOSSED includes: *an economic component* - where training is carried out in income generating activities and *a social development component* which addresses family and household issues such as safe water supply, sanitation, proper housing, family nutrition and developing self-esteem.

3.12 WOSSED targets low-income households through the country. Loans for projects are part of the WOSSED scheme. About 70% of the loan requests are for agricultural based activities. The maximum given for first loans is \$F200 and \$F250 for second loans and not more than \$500 for third loans. Loans are repaid over a period of 6 months with an interest rate of 15% over this period. WOSSED has received assistance from a number of sources such as the Pacific Community, the New Zealand Government and the US Peace Corp. Between 1993 - 1998 about 416 women and their households have been assisted under the scheme. The long term plan for WOSSED is its establishment as an NGO between the years 2000-2003.

### *(b) Micro-Finance Coordinating Unit*

3.13 This Unit was established by the Ministry of Finance in 1999 following the National Micro-finance Workshop and consultation organised by the Ministry and the United Nations Development Programme. The Unit is currently receiving inquiries and applications from organisations and individuals to set up micro-finance programmes.

### *3.14 Training and Support Agencies*

There are a number of training and support agencies in other sectors such as:

(a) The Small Business Advisory Unit of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Co-operatives. This Unit was established in 1991 and provides training for trainers in such topics as "start your business and improve your business".

(b) The Small Enterprise Development Programme is a Pacific Regional programme funded by UNDP, UNIDO and ILO. This programme provides technical advice and training to develop national support systems for small entrepreneurs.

© The Hans Seidel Foundation works collaboratively with the Fiji Credit Union League to provide training to Credit Unions which typically serve middle and low income earners. There is no gender discrimination in the programmes offered.

(d) The Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) provides training to NGOs and in particular to school managers and community leaders.

(e) The Vocational Programmes offered in some secondary and junior secondary schools provide training to school students in micro-enterprise development, including business finance, costing, pricing, marketing and community responsibilities.

### *3.15 Other programmes/projects*

There are a number of other programmes which address the need for self-reliance and women's integration into the mainstream of society. These include:

#### *(a) the Poverty Alleviation Fund*

(i) The Fiji Islands Government began addressing poverty as a special area of concern for the last two decades. A Poverty Task Force appointed in May 1991 updated a poverty line that had been estimated in 1977 and provided a set of recommendations designed to take a more developmental approach to deal with problems of the poor. The recommendation to establish a Poverty Alleviation Fund would provide seed money to establish small businesses or improve housing.

(ii) Another study, the Fiji Poverty Study was undertaken jointly by the Government of Fiji Islands and the United Nations Development Programme in 1996. The Report, published in 1997 describes in detail the situation of the poor in the Fiji Islands and the need to improve their welfare. The Department of Social Welfare has the prime responsibility to assist those in extreme need. Access to the Poverty Alleviation Fund are confined to those who are beneficiaries under the Family Assistance Scheme. Whilst there have been difficulties, there have been a few successes such as the training of staff to administer the fund; the building of over 1000 new houses for poor families and the development of small business enterprises.

*(b) Youth Employment Options Centre*

The Ministry of Youth, Employment Opportunities and Sports conduct a one week business training course at the Options Centre and also assists in other youth centres such as at Tutu, Sote, Sigatoka and Davuilevu.

*(c) Financial assistance from the Department of Co-operatives*

Limited finance is provided by the Department of Co-operatives as working capital to registered Co-operatives. About 4% of registered Co-operatives are operated by women.

*(d) Small Business Equity Scheme*

This scheme, operated by the Ministry of Fijian Affairs provides interest free loans to Fijians to help them develop small-scale enterprises.

*(e) Anundpur Micro-credit Project*

This is a self-help community group project consisting of 53 poor households in a squatter settlement outside Ba. The project is supported by the Ministry of Women and Culture, the Ministry of National Planning, UNDP and the Ba Rotary Club. It is modelled on the Grameen Bank and therefore requires women to work together and attend regular meetings and training programmes. The project aims to increase micro-enterprise initiatives and household income by 10%. The scheme aims to build the capacity of women to generate savings, part of which may be used for loans for personal or social purposes.

*(f) Fiji Development Bank - NZODA Scheme*

Through a bilateral aid programme, the New Zealand Government provided an initial grant of \$528,000 in 1989 to the Fiji Development Bank (FDB). The purpose of this grant is to provide soft loans to develop small income generating activities for women. Since 1989, 212 loans (the borrower is entitled to borrow up to a maximum of \$10,000) have been disbursed.

## **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.16 The main obstacles encountered in administering the Poverty Alleviation Fund is the influx of applications and the magnitude of the task involved. Assessing housing needs and providing advice on the development of small businesses required Social Welfare Officers to have technical knowledge on micro-enterprise initiatives, and house building. Too few staff members working in the field to assess the applications and the insufficiency of the funds are obstacles encountered in implementing this programme.

3.17 General lack of finance and the inability of a majority of women to secure collateral to start enterprises are major obstacles. The specific obstacles encountered under the WOSD programme include:

- insufficient resources to manage the expansion of the scheme;
- members located at great distances from each other, making meetings difficult;
- the WOSD goals to assist disadvantaged women have not been met as a significant number of the poorest section of the community remain poor as they have no knowledge of how to access the scheme.

3.18 The specific obstacles under the FDB - NZODA Scheme include:

- limited access this lending facility due to lack of information about the scheme; and
- insufficient monitoring of the loans.

3.19 The general obstacles in this critical area of concern are:

- very few women have access to financial institutions because they are either not eligible or they lack information on how to access services.
- lack of adequate seasonal credit and marketing outlets;
- lack of advice to small borrowers who are unfamiliar with the cultures of banks; and
- lack of proficiency in the English language and unfamiliarity with written procedures which are written in English to effectively negotiate with banking and other officials.

## **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

3.20 The Task Force on Micro-Enterprise Development has outlined a number of strategic objectives to implement the Strategic Objectives in the *Women's Plan of Action* during the planned period and these include:

- improving women's access to formal credit through affirmative action; and
- expanding access to micro-credit.

3.21 The review of appropriate legislation, regulations and administrative practices as required by *Strategic Objective A.2* is of special concern to the Ministry of Women and Culture. The Ministry has taken steps and made submissions on the review of the Employment Act and the law on compensation to ensure that the special circumstances of women are taken into account. Concerted efforts are being made to make submissions on other laws and procedures and in particular to assist women when trying to secure credit. Although none of the formal banking institutions impose different requirements for men and women, there is evidence that women are disadvantaged in a number of ways and especially when they are unfamiliar with the culture of banks and the ways banks require business to be done.

3.22 The effects of policies to alleviate poverty passed in the last 2 or 3 years and the series of processes and policy interventions within the broad framework of macro and micro-economic reforms that have been underway to revitalise the economy and to alleviate poverty will not be known until 2 to 3 years from now. Clearly, these will have substantial and significant implications for women.

## CRITICAL CONCERN B: EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

3.23 There are 6 Strategic Objectives outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action namely:

- Strategic Objective B1: Ensure equal access to education;*
- Strategic Objective B2: Eradicate illiteracy amongst women;*
- Strategic Objective B3: Improve Women's Access to Vocational Training, Science and Technology and Continuing Education;*
- Strategic Objective B4: Develop non-discriminatory education and Training;*
- Strategic Objective B5: Allocate sufficient resources for and Monitor Implementation of Educational reforms;*
- Strategic Objective B 6: Promote Lifelong education and training for girls and women.*

### A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices

3.24 The Fiji Islands has put in place innovative and non-discriminatory provisions on education in its Constitution (Amendment) Act 1997 which states in section 39 that:

- "(1) Every person has the right to basic education and to equal access to educational institutions.*
- (2) Every religious community or denomination and every cultural or social community has the right to establish and maintain places of education and to manage them, whether or not it receives financial assistance from the State.*
- (3) The admission policy of a place of education referred to in subsection (2) may be administered on the basis of the need to maintain its special character but, subject to that, those concerned in its management must ensure that it is open*

*to all qualified students without discrimination on any ground prohibited by this Constitution”*

3.25 Empowerment through education and to improve the quality of life is a basic goal. Although education is accessible to both males and females at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, women’s access to education continues to be hindered by family economic, social and cultural factors. In Fiji Islands, there are mainstream educational facilities, special schools, vocational and technical schools. In addition, there are 4 teacher training institutions as well as the University of the South Pacific where training is conducted at the under-graduate and post graduate levels.

3.26 Education provided by Government, private and religious organisations can be accessed in the urban and rural areas. Statistics in the 1995 Ministry of Education Annual Report indicate that there are 698 primary schools, 148 secondary schools, 34 technical and vocational institutions and 16 special schools. Through this partnership, primary school education is accessible to almost all children in Fiji Islands. There are however, a small number of schools that are gender specific. There is a high level of school attendance but there is a tendency for figures to drop in the secondary and tertiary levels due to a number of factors such as financial hardship. Education at government primary school level ( i.e. year 1 to year 8) is fee free whilst fees are paid for secondary and tertiary levels of education. Government however provides assistance by way of grants to non government schools in the form of salary grants, building grants and remission of school fees.

3.27 Teacher training is provided by the Lautoka Teachers College, Corpus Christi, Fiji College of Advanced Education and Fulton College. The Fiji Institute of Technology and the Fiji National Training Council offer certificate and diploma courses in a variety of technical and vocational fields. Vocational programmes are also offered in 29 secondary schools. The Fiji School of Medicine, the School of Nursing and the School of Agriculture are also open to both males and females. The University of the South Pacific is a regional University serving 12 member countries in the Pacific region and offers courses at under graduate and post graduate levels to both males and females.

#### *Special Schools*

3.28 There are 16 special schools which provide education to those with disabilities. Special education programmes are provided for the physically handicapped, the intellectually handicapped, and to those with vision and hearing impairment. All registered special schools benefit from a fee free grant paid to them by government.

3.29 Male and female children have equal access to the same curricula and to the same teaching staff as all primary and tertiary institutions are co-educational. Some secondary and vocational institutions are gender specific and therefore there is a lower rate of female students enrolling in vocational training programmes particularly in the technical trade areas. These institutional barriers that impede women’s progress are

expected to come under review with the proposed establishment of an independent Education Commission.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.30 (i) Equal opportunities and access to education by females may be hindered by cultural factors, where males are favoured over females when there is a shortage of funds. Overall enrolments tend to decline from Form 3 upwards and it is estimated that around 13,000 students leave the school system each year. Those most affected would be female children as any opportunities for further education or employment would be limited.

(ii) Although female teachers are found in the middle level of management, there is less access by female teachers to the upper management levels of schools and other educational institutions. Single female and male teachers also face a number of difficulties with regard to housing allocation outside their home base as married teachers generally take precedence.

(iii) There has been a natural reluctance for women to enter certain professions such as in science and technology due to prevailing attitudes. Women were generally streamlined into teaching, nursing and secretarial studies. In the last few years there appears to be concerted efforts made by tertiary institutions to encourage interested women to enter such fields as medicine, science, law, architecture and engineering. More and more women are undertaking technical trade courses at the Fiji Institute of Technology.

(iv) The lack of hostel facilities for female students coming from the outer islands and rural areas is a serious problem. Students are generally placed with relatives who often do not have the space to accommodate them comfortably. The lack of such facilities have significant effects on the educational standards and achievements of female students. The capacity to respond to this problem rests with the educational authorities.

### **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

3.31 The Task Force on Women and the Law has identified a number of areas to improve women's access and opportunities to education. Equal access to education, although less serious today, women continue to face difficulties as improved educational status does not always mean an improved opportunities in the development and decision making process. Although there are focal agencies for both formal and non-formal education, the Task Force on Women and the Law has identified a number of obstacles to women's education and have suggested the following strategies to deal with them :

*(a) teenage and unwanted pregnancies and early marriage of women*

(i) Improvement in the educational status of women and ensuring that women also benefit equally from education, and a number of programmes would need to be implemented such as formalised sex education in schools. The recent problems associated with abandoned babies and teenage pregnancies have called for the need to increase the level of awareness through sex education amongst school children and in teacher education programmes. Education on human sexuality is to be provided to both male and female students at all levels.

(ii) Early marriage for women provides for a longer reproductive life-span and the greater likelihood of larger families through both first and / or subsequent marriages. The prescribed minimum legal age for marriage for women in Fiji Islands is 16 years and for men 18 years which is coupled with consent requirements before the marriage can take place. One of the recommendations in the Family Law Reform which has been recently approved by Cabinet is to increase the minimum legal age of marriage for women from 16 years to 18 years.

*(b) gender awareness*

(i) A continuing problem limiting women's participation is the cultural role assigned to them. Technical and vocational courses continue to be male dominated and changes to tertiary institutions curriculum to incorporate gender and women's studies could eliminate bias and accelerate women's entry into the various technical areas of education. Gender bias can also be eliminated through publicity media campaigns to raise the general public's consciousness of women's capabilities.

*© innovative measures or steps to be taken to broaden women's choices at all levels of education*

(i) Career guidance and the dissemination of appropriate information as well as the adoption of a quota system to encourage women to train and to pursue studies in technical fields would redress the gender imbalance in certain fields. This applies to both able bodied and disabled women.

## **Future Directions**

3.32 The future directions in the field of education is outlined in the President's speech to Parliament on the 15 June 1999. The priority initiatives include:

- (a) the establishment of an independent Education Commission to review the current system of education in consultation with all stakeholders. The Commission will advise Government on policies and measures for the

development of education to meet the needs of people in the medium to long term.

(b) Children in rural areas will be given improved access to pre-school. More resources will be given by Government to schools for children with special needs. Tuition free education will be extended to Forms 3 and 4 by the year 2001 and later to Forms 5 and 6. For students faced with financial difficulties to access tertiary education, the Government will set up a fund that will pay the costs of their tuition, which students can repay later. Whilst tuition free education is a major step forward, expenses relating to books, uniforms, building funds and transport often hinder access to education.

© The Government will continue to upgrade and improve teacher training and working conditions. A Board of Teacher Registration will be set up to monitor teacher quality and professionalism.

(d) In the interests of equity, special attention will be given to improving services and facilities in Fijian schools. Empowering indigenous Fijians through improved performances in education will increase their participation in commerce and the professions.

(c) The National Substance Abuse Advisory Council will focus on raising educational awareness on the effects of the misuse and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and other substances.

3.33 The first teachers undergoing "special education" training at the Lautoka Teachers Training College will graduate in 1999 and it is expected that more teachers will be trained in this field.

3.34 There are 53 secondary school counsellor positions created in recent years to conduct counselling in schools throughout Fiji. School counsellors cover a range of issues including drug and substance abuse, teen-age pregnancy and child abuse. It is envisaged that school counsellors will be appointed to primary schools in the near future.

### **CRITICAL CONCERN C: WOMEN AND HEALTH**

3.35 The strategic objectives identified in the Beijing Platform for Action include:

*Strategic Objective C1: Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services.*

*Strategic Objective C2: Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health.*

*Strategic Objective C3: Undertake gender sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.*

*Strategic Objective C4:* Promote research and disseminate information on women's health.

*Strategic Objective C5:* Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.

#### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.36 Health is a basic human right and meeting the health needs of women must be taken into account at all stages of their life cycle and not confined to maternal health. The right to freely decide on the spacing, timing and the number of children one should have is also a basic reproductive and human right of both men and women.

3.37 Health care facilities such as hospitals, health centres and nursing stations are provided by Government throughout Fiji Islands. Private medical, dental and eye clinics are also available throughout the main centres. All health centres in rural areas provide general health and medical services, dental and eye services, family planning, ante-natal and post-natal care. Family planning services have been widely available in Fiji Islands for over 30 years and the service is provided free of charge in all Government medical facilities. Divisional hospitals also provide screening for cancer of the breast and the cervix.

3.38 Public awareness and health education programmes on a range of health issues are being provided by Government as well as Non Government Organisations. The Family Planning Association, the Reproductive and Family Health Association and the Sogosoqo Vakamarama, amongst others, promote family planning, nutrition, child health care and family health. In this regard, financial and technical assistance is received from international organisations such as the World Health Organisation, International Labour Organisation, International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

3.39 Family planning counselling and contraceptives are provided free of charge in all medical centres and nursing stations throughout Fiji Islands. Campaigns to promote pap smears are conducted by the Fiji Family Planning Association and the Fiji Cancer Society. Screening for breast cancer by mammography is available at two divisional hospitals (Lautoka & Suva). These can be accessed through referrals by medical personnel. Women are also being taught on how to undertake their own self-examination. Screening for cervical cancer has been available at the main hospitals since 1976 and it has been gradually extended to other centres.

3.40 The general health situation shows a marked improvement in the last decade. Women have relatively high life expectancy of 65.4 years as compared to the male life expectancy rate of 61.4 years. Although men and women are equally susceptible to diseases, there are some categories of diseases where women suffer disproportionately to men and these are in the reproductive system. The Maternal Child Health and Family Planning programmes introduced in the early 1960s and integrated with primary health care services has played a major role in the slowing down of the population growth rate and the reduction of infant mortality which in 1998 stood at 16.8/1000 live births and the maternal mortality rate of 38.3/100,000 live births. For

the past three decades, the Ministry of Health has focused mainly on adult women and contraception and has not adequately addressed the needs of younger women and men nor the cultural, sexual and social context of family planning services.

3.41 Steady progress has been made towards the control of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and measles but on the other hand, diseases of the heart and the vascular system, diabetes and cancer have been on the increase for both sexes. Human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV) infection/acquired immuno deficiency syndrome (AIDS) are on the rise with 49 reported cases in Fiji Islands from 1989 to June 1999 of which 14 are females (Ministry of Health).

3.42 Although medical services can be accessed from most parts of Fiji Islands, poor levels of women's health can be attributed to a number of factors and high upon the list is women's disregard for their own health in order to meet their family needs. Lack of rest, inadequate nutrition and delays caused by a number of factors to seek medical attention or advice for injuries, domestic violence or pregnancy related matters are factors that affect women's health in terms of morbidity, mortality, life expectancy, nutrition status and others.

3.43 The capacity to deliver health services in rural areas has had a number of difficulties over the years as some rural health centres cover large geographical areas. Medical staff at such centres are required to travel to villages and settlements and during these times, there is little or no service at the health centres. Lack of equipment and medicine in some health centres, particularly in the outlying islands and lack of transport to main centres also seriously affects access to medical services. In large centres and hospitals, congestion and overburdened staff have raised serious concern in all sectors of the community as well as Government. These matters are being addressed by Government through administrative reforms. The number of doctors, dentists and other health professionals graduating from the Fiji School of Medicine and from other Universities and the nurses graduating from the Nursing School each year is expected to improve the staffing and medical and health services in the future.

3.44 The Fiji Islands implementation of the Strategic Objectives outlined in the *Beijing Platform for Action* has been met to some extent but Government is conscious of the fact that more needs to be done. Although men and women experience different health problems they have equal access to health and medical care. Some of the areas that require further improvement include:

(a) women's access to screening for breast cancer and obtaining information and assistance during their life cycle including menopause.

(b) Pap smear tests are available in hospitals and through private medical clinics. As many women do not avail themselves of this service despite the figures indicating the high incidence of cervical cancer in Fiji Islands, aggressive forms of campaign would need to be undertaken in this area.

© Public awareness programmes on women's health issues should be vigorously promoted. The allocation of more resources and more trained personnel to work on women and family related health issues would make a significant difference to women's health.

(d) Abortion is illegal in Fiji Islands, except where it is necessary to protect the health of the mother. This is termed "therapeutic" abortion. Those women who have not been able to obtain counselling and professional advice for a variety of reasons resort to what is termed "back-street" abortion which is unsafe and could lead to the death of the mother and/or child. More public awareness campaigns should be conducted in schools and in the general public. The issue of abortion is on the agenda of the Task Force on Women and the Law.

(c) Some Non Government Organisations are also involved in health related programmes and provide information and counselling on such health related issues as diabetes, strokes and cancer. More resources should be provided to such organisations for their out-reach programmes.

#### *Yanuca Island Declaration on Health in the Pacific in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century*

3.45 In March 1995, Fiji hosted the first meeting of the Pacific Islands Ministers for Health which resulted in the *Yanuca Declaration*, thus setting the stage for the "Healthy Islands" initiative. The concept being that "Healthy Islands" should be places where:

- children are nurtured in body and mind;
- environments invite learning and leisure;
- people work and age with dignity;
- ecological balance is a source of pride.

3.46 Since 1995, a number of activities have been implemented to achieve this end. The National Health Promotion Council, comprising both government and non-government members was established with the aim of increasing the reach and effectiveness of health promotion as a fundamental strategy for the attainment of "Healthy Islands Vision in Fiji". The activities of the Council cover the following major areas:

- development of policy, legislation and regulations;
- social marketing;
- community and organisation development;
- capacity building; and
- research.

3.47 The links between cancer and tobacco smoking and inhalation has received world wide attention. In November 1998, the Parliament of the Fiji Islands passed the Tobacco Control Act which is designed to:

- restrict advertising and promotion of cigarettes and other tobacco products;

- regulate the labelling of tobacco product containers;
- restrict the nicotine and tar content of cigarettes;
- ban the sale of tobacco products to young people;
- restrict smoking in public places and on public transport.

### *Community health workers*

3.48 Community leaders and voluntary health workers have been trained to provide the first line of health care to their own communities and are paid in either cash or kind. These workers are trained by the local health staff of the Ministry of Health. Rural community health centres have been refurbished and equipped through bilateral donors from Australia, Japan and New Zealand. The training of community health workers has been implemented by the Ministry of Health since the 1980s.

### *Other current programmes implemented by the Ministry of Health*

3.49 The following on-going activities focusing on adolescent health and sexually transmitted diseases have been implemented in the following areas:

- production of policy guidelines on reproductive and adolescent health for the health sector;
- training of health care staff in skills necessary to implement these policy guidelines;
- development of research component aiming at evaluating and orientating health activities and services in this area;
- training of peer educators to disseminate information to prevent teen-age and unwanted pregnancies, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and promotion of safe sexual practices;
- establish Adolescent Health Clinic in the city of Suva with plans to expand this service to other centres;
- training of Community Based Distributors of Contraceptives in collaboration with the Reproductive and Family Health Association with funding from UNFPA has occurred. This training is the first of its kind in the region.
- implementation of Syndromic Management of Sexually Transmitted Infections.

### B Obstacles encountered

3.50 Much of the reproductive health programme are donor funded. Government needs to allocate more resources in this area to ensure sustainability. The level of knowledge about reproductive health and contraceptives amongst adolescence is poor, but it is expected to improve with the recent focus on adolescent health by the Ministry of Health.

3.51 Limited resources in the form of skilled personnel, facilities, equipment, supplies and transportation although improvement is envisaged with the training provided by the Fiji School of Medicine in the form of medical and health professionals.

3.52 The urban influence on our life-styles, lack of exercise and obesity has contributed to the high prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancers. Anaemia has been identified as a major problem affecting women and has led to low productivity on the part of some women in the workforce.

### C. Commitment to further action and initiatives

3.53 The Task Force on Women and the Law have identified a number of priority areas for action and these include:

*(a) the promotion of breastfeeding, natural family spacing and improved maternal and child health services*

(i) In this outlined objective, the enactment of a Family Violence Act and a Code for the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes to promote breastfeeding are means to enhancing the health of women and children. The review of law and policy on tubal ligation is also to be conducted in the planned period. The strengthening of the existing Family Planning Services and to expand the counselling services on issues such as abortion, infanticide, HIV/AIDS and various forms of disability will be implemented in all communities in Fiji Islands.

*(b) establish initiatives that will positively enhance women's health*

(i) These initiatives include the establishment of crèches, nurses spaces and facilities in or near work places; the expansion of counselling centres and crisis centres in both rural and urban areas; and the allocation of funds for pre-school facilities.

*(c) to promote the family well-being*

(i) An integrated health care service for maternal and child health and for the care of the disabled and the elderly is a core strategy to improving the family health status where family members are more self reliant in looking after their own family health needs.

### **Future Directions**

3.54 The Government aims to provide for better health care through a comprehensive and affordable national health service. The President's speech to the opening of Parliament on the 24 June 1999, outlined that immediate emphasis will be given to improving the delivery and quality of medical and health care service; that

essential drugs and medicine will be made available at hospitals and health centres at an affordable price; and support will be given to the training of health workers.

More awareness to be raised on adolescent health; and the health of women and men throughout their life span is in the Ministry of Health's Plan of Action.

## **CRITICAL CONCERN D: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

3.55 The Beijing Platform for Action lists the following strategic objectives in the Platform of Act:

*Strategic Objective D.1:* Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

*Strategic Objective D.2:* Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures.

*Strategic Objective D.3:* Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.

### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.56 Violence against women was viewed by authorities in Fiji Islands as a domestic issue and that it should be resolved by the family. This is still the view held in many quarters despite strong advocacy from the NGO sectors, especially the Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to have domestic violence recognised as a criminal offence. The *Fiji Women's Plan of Action* identifies Violence Against Women and Children as a critical area of concern and seeks Government action to seriously tackle this problem. For women who encounter regular acts of violence, there is little community support by way of shelters, refuges and financial assistance. The fear and injuries sustained through domestic violence often exclude women from participating actively in the development process. The perpetrators of violence against women are generally males, whether partners, relatives, acquaintances or strangers.

3.57 In the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), violence against women was seen as an obstacle to the achievement of gender equality, development and peace. It was further noted that it "violates the rights and principles of women with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity which should be universally applied to all human beings." The Beijing Platform for Action further identifies violence against women as a critical area of concern.

3.58 The causes and consequences of violence against women have been examined from women's own experiences. The roles played by men and women in society, traditional beliefs and cultural practices perpetuates the dominant position of men over women. In most families these are rigid norms surrounding the roles of men and women which are strengthened by customary practices. Women also often defer to men for a variety of reasons. Despite these cultural conditionings, advocacy to

eliminate violence against women is an issue of high priority for action by the Government and the NGO community.

### *No Drop Policy*

3.59 A significant step forward was made in September 1995 when the Fiji Police adopted a "No Drop Policy" on all reported cases of domestic violence. The result of this policy has meant that all reported cases of violence against women will now be investigated and charges laid. It appears from general media reports that there are some gaps in the implementation of this policy which calls for training of law enforcement officials on the policies as well as the dynamic associated with this problem.

### *Sexual Offences Unit*

3.60 In May 1995, a Sexual Offences Unit was established in the Southern Division of the Police Department. This Unit is also responsible for cases from the Northern Division. The Unit handles specific cases of sexual assaults and abuse and also makes referrals to the Department of Social Welfare and the Women's Crisis Centre for counselling. The staff are trained to deal with offences of this nature and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Regional Rights Resources Team (RRRT) of British ODA and Fiji Women's Crisis Centre act as resource persons to the Unit on a regular basis. It is envisaged that Units will be established in the Western and Eastern Divisions in the near future.

### *UNFPA - SPC/PWRB Regional Study on Violence*

3.61 In January this year, UNFPA and the Pacific Community's Women's Resource Bureau began a regional study on violence in 7 countries, including Fiji Islands. The study is aimed at identifying the extent of violence in the country, the services provided to victims through Government and the NGO sectors and to recommend ways to strengthen programmes and actions to deal with this problem.

### *Government Support to Services*

3.62 Since 1996, the New Zealand Government has provided through its bilateral assistance programmes, grants to the Women's Crisis Centre in Suva, and Ba and grants have also been provided for research on domestic violence in the country. The Fiji Law Reform Commission is currently researching and reviewing the laws in the Penal Code relating to sexual offences. This work is expected to be completed at the end of 1999.

3.63 The New Zealand Government in 1997 had also assisted Fiji Islands through its bilateral assistance programme to provide a half-way house for young women less than 17 years. The house provides a place of transition between institutional care at the Girls' Home (Mahaffey Girls' Home) and being more self-sufficient and independent. Besides the house, NZODA has provided funds for the employment of a

house mother for 2 years. Presently, 5 young women can be accommodated at the half-way house at any one time.

### *NGO Activities*

3.64 The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), which began in the early 1980s provides counselling for the increasing number of abused and battered women and children. FWCC has done a great deal of work in bringing domestic violence into the public arena through their education and public awareness programmes. It has consistently run campaigns at the grass root, rural and urban levels to publicise the growing problem of violence against women and children. Through their own resources and network they assist victims of domestic violence and have over the years advocated for changes in legislation, procedures and practices. FWCC has also been working with women's organisations in other Pacific countries, to run similar programmes.

3.65 Religious organisations have also been providers of refuge for women and children escaping situations of domestic violence. They are also involved in providing counselling to women and their families.

3.66 The Salvation Army; and the Anglican Church through St. Christopher's Home, also provides emergency shelter and counselling for victims of domestic violence.

3.67 The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been active in providing legal literacy programmes for women and lobbying for legal reforms on laws that are disadvantageous to women.

### **R. Obstacles encountered**

3.68 There are a number of obstacles faced by women in this sector and these include:

- lack of appropriate legislation to deal specifically with domestic violence and the ineffective application of existing legislation;
- lack of specialised in-country expertise on counselling where victims of sexual abuse and violence can be referred;
- lack of additional resources for the Sexual Abuse Unit of the Police Department for the purchase of materials;
- data collection on the sexual abuse and domestic violence is sketchy;
- Government's research capability and ability to deal with such matters is under resourced;
- the difficulties associated with access, language and understanding procedures in applying for the issuing of non-molestation orders by the Court;
- limited resources and lack of cheaper alternative accommodation for victims and their children;

- the use of cultural and traditional practices of apology and forgiveness (*bulubutu*) which tends to disallow appropriate punishment to be meted out to the perpetrator of the offence;
- lack of gender and rights awareness by the victims, their families and their communities;
- lack of information and counselling services for the victims and perpetrators of the offence; and
- lack of knowledge by both men and women to link all aspects of violence with women's health and well-being.

### C. Commitments to future actions and initiatives

3.69 The Task Force on Violence Against Women have drawn up an implementation plan for the year 1999 as follows:

*(a) Strategic objective 1: To establish and support crisis intervention centres and shelters for victims of violence in rural and urban areas.*

In order to achieve this objective, the following actions have been planned:

- Establish a register for service providers and resources to be made available to them. This responsibility is to be carried out by the Ministry of Women and Culture.
- Technical, financial, and resource materials to be provided to NGOs by the Ministry of Women and Culture.
- A systematic referral system to be established for victims of violence to appropriate agencies for proper counselling on legal, social, and health matters.
- The examination of training needs for the providers of counselling service is to be investigated and assessed for the purpose of organising training in the year 2000.
- Consultations between Government and NGOs on the provision of shelters for victims of violence is to take place during the planned period.

*(b) Strategic Objective 2:*

- the institution of moral and civic education to be included in the school curricula.

There are a number of planned actions for this particular area and these include the examination of education curricula and especially the family life education programmes. Curriculum content should include conflict resolution and anger management and the curriculum should be reviewed for gender sensitivity

education on a regular basis. The In-Service and Pre-Service training for teachers should include gender awareness programmes and the dynamics associated with violence against women.

*(c) Strategic Objective 3:*

- to empower women to understand and use the law.

Legal literacy education for women should be carried out in a collaborative way with other agencies and to assist the work of those agencies who are already working in this area.

*(d) Strategic Objective 4:*

- The need to encourage the media to portray positive images of women in the print, audio and visual media. This objective can be achieved through close collaboration and gender training with media personnel in the Ministry of Information, in Radio and in Television. Campaigns for changes to be carried out through the media, the public education system and the schools on defined strategies can ultimately bring about significant changes to the assumptions made about women and their role in society.

## **CRITICAL CONCERN E: WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

3.70 National security and peace keeping are two distinct areas where Fiji's Military Forces are actively involved. The Fiji Military has been actively involved in World Wars I and II, the Malayan Campaign, the Fiji Military Coups and as a Pacific Peace Keeping Force in Bougainville. By the end of March 1996, the Fiji Islands had some 993 peacekeepers deployed in Lebanon, Sinai and Kuwait. There were Police officers also serving in Angola and in Eastern Slavonia. The *Beijing Platform for Action* lists the following strategic objectives:

*Strategic Objective E.1.* Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at the decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.

*Strategic Objective E.2.* Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.

*Strategic Objective E.3.* Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.

*Strategic Objective E.4.* Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.

*Strategic Objective E.5.* Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.

*Strategic Objective E.6.* Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self governing territories.

## A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices

3.71 Fiji's experiences in armed conflict has been mainly external through direct involvement in armed conflict in the past but since the Malayan Campaign, its main task abroad is in peace keeping duties. The people in Fiji live in relative peace, compared to those parts of the world which are subject to civil war or external invasions. The Fiji Military made up of the Armed Forces and the Navy has been a male domain since its inception. It is recognised that although the review of this sector will not be consistent with the strategic objectives as outlined in the *Beijing Platform for Action*, it will however provide some indication of what women have been able to accomplish to date.

3.72 Over the last 15 years, the Armed Forces have come under increasing pressure to enlist service women. There was great reluctance at first as more resources such as uniforms for females and separate accommodation were required to cater for them. Leave arrangements had to be considered as marriages of service women and their maternity leave had to be taken into account. In 1988, women were recruited on a trial basis and 40 were enlisted with 7 successfully undertaking officer training. Generally, service women were deployed to such tasks as administration and stores whilst men were released for more field and operational duties which required more physical work and training.

### *Peace keeping*

3.73 It was not until 1995 that service women were sent to peacekeeping duties overseas. This decision was not taken lightly as experience had shown that added pressures such as sexual harassment and assaults were likely to result in a male dominated environment. In 1995, the first two female commissioned officers were posted to the Sinai for a 6 months tour of duty to be replaced by successive female officers. A female dental officer was also posted to that region. Male officers on the other hand were sent to both Sinai and Lebanon and they served a term of 12 months. The current practice now is that at any given time, a female officer and two senior non-commissioned officers may be sent to Sinai. There are restrictive policies in employing women in the military and the Military has recommended the recruitment of women only if:

- there is sufficient living accommodation for them;
- that service women should not be employed in combat type postings such as the infantry battalions and the anti-terrorist units, nor employed as crew in patrol vessels because of the lack of separate facilities on board, nor appointed to engineer units which require long hours of manual labour.
- that the number employed in Fiji must be kept to a moderate level.

3.74 Duties carried out by females are generally confined to administrative work, communication or being part of the medical team as a doctor, dentist or nurse. Some of the commissioned female officers have served as company commanders - having overall charge of discipline and administrative matters for about 70 men. Others have served as adjutants and operation officers. Some female officers have served two

terms in Sinai. This year four female officers have been earmarked for Sinai. There are some changes occurring in the Military as recently there was an advertisement calling for female officers to serve in Sinai.

3.75 The distribution of female officers in 1999 have been between the George Mate Clinic employing 13 female officers as nurses (6), dental officers (2), physiotherapists (2), laboratory technician (1) administration (1) and doctor (1); the Infantry Battalion (1); and Army Headquarters (6). In Sinai there are also 2 officers in the Army Training Group and 2 in the Military Police.

#### *Fiji Police Force*

3.76 There are 1909 persons employed in the Fiji Police Force of which there are 164 women officers which is the equivalent of 8.6% of the total personnel. Women officers are deployed in all sectors of the Police Force. From 1995 to 1997, 4 women officers were part of the Fiji Police contingent to the United Nations Mission in Croatia.

#### *Self determination of non self-governing territories*

3.77 The Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC) based in Suva was established in 1975 and is the secretariat for the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement in the Pacific. PCRC lobbies within the United Nations and the South Pacific Forum on the Rights for self determination of non-governing territories. It also disseminates information and runs public awareness programmes on the situation of women in non self governing territories e.g. West Papua, Kanaky, East Timor, Tahiti in regional and international meetings. PCRC also supports advocates of self-determination especially from the region. The work of PCRC is consistent with *Strategic Objective E.6. of the Beijing Platform for Action.*

#### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.78 The most difficult problem faced by women connected with the Armed Forces are those where husbands or wives are on peace-keeping duties overseas. Women are left with families, often with young children to support on their own and family break-up sometimes occur as a result of difficulties and frustration women often face as sole caregivers.

3.79 There is recognition that support and counselling services to assist women to fulfill their demanding roles need to be provided as the health costs and the social and economic costs of families in dysfunctional circumstances are quite high. There are counselling services available in the community who can assist women such as those provided by the Department of Social Welfare, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, the Women's Crisis Centre and other NGOs. Some women have taken advantage of these services.

### *Reduction in the military budget*

3.80 As the Military Forces in the Fiji Islands is viewed as a source of employment, the public consultation on this issue brought mixed reactions. The uppermost concern appears to be that any reduction in the military budget would place more people in the unemployment sector and as a consequence will diminish the family well-being and place family members at risk.

### **CRITICAL CONCERN F: WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY**

3.81 There are a number of Strategic Objectives set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action* for this sector namely:

*Strategic Objective F.1.* Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.

*Strategic Objective F.2.* Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.

*Strategic Objective F.3.* Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low income women.

*Strategic Objective F.4.* Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.

*Strategic Objective F.5.* Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.

*Strategic Objective F.6.* Promote harmonisation of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

#### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.82 The size of Fiji Island's labour force is determined by the size of its population in the 15 years and over age bracket and the extent to which people in this age bracket are seeking employment. The Census Report 1996 shows that there were 97,718 women in the labour force out of a total of 248,191 in the 15 and over age bracket which indicates an increase from the last Census Report of 1986 which recorded 84,607 women in the labour force in a total population of 219,596 in the same age bracket.

3.83 Out of the 97,718 women in the labour force in 1996, there were 53,015 women in paid employment, while 7,663 were unemployed and 37,040 were in the subsistence sector principally engaged as domestic workers, small-scale self-employed workers, piece workers or market gardeners.

### The Labour Force Participation for 1996

	Female	Male	Total
Population	381,146	393,931	775,077
Labour Force	97,718	200,052	297,770
Employed	53,015	166,299	219,314
Unemployed	7,663	9,602	17,265

\* The figures in the Table represent those in the 15 years and up-wards age bracket.

Source: Census Report 1996, Bureau of Statistics

3.84 There are a number of concerns facing women in this sector and although the goals and strategies have been set by Government to address these concerns, there continues to be gaps that need to be addressed.

3.85 Unemployment is a problem for both women and men alike. Based on the assumptions that gender divisions of roles placing men in the head of the household and breadwinner role whilst the reproductive and homemaker role falls into the women's domain, women tend to participate less in the labour markets. Some changes are beginning to occur where more and more women for a variety of reasons are becoming heads of households and dominant breadwinners.

3.86 Employment is a major Government development strategy and women's equal opportunities for employment is spelt out in the *Women's Plans of Action* and in other Government documentation such as *Opportunities for Growth* and various sector policies.

3.87 Women make up 46% of those employed in the public service. Of the 46% there are 14% of women at the senior executive level, with 13% at the Deputy Secretary level. There are only 2 female Permanent Secretaries within the public service. Currently, the Public Service Commission through the assistance of the Australian Government is developing a policy on equal employment opportunities (EEO) for the State as an employer. The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) /Equity Advisor has been engaged and one of the responsibilities of the Advisor is to incorporate gender perspective into the civil service reform (CSR) programme. The Constitution of the Fiji Islands embodies in its Bill of Rights and Social Justice provisions (Chapters 4 and 5) that fairness and equality are basic values. These principles are adhered to by State Services as outlined in chapter 10 of the State Services provision of the Constitution.

3.88 The EEO policy has been developed within this mandate. The EEO provides that all eligible persons must have equal opportunity for recruitment, promotion, transfer and training on the basis of merit. There must be no discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or national origin, disability or age. It also sets out a set of actions and programmes that identify and eliminate all forms of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. The EEO policy is being implemented in stages commencing with "ethnicity" and "gender equality."

3.89 The structural adjustments and privatisation programmes in the industrial and commercial sectors of Government (e.g. Fiji Post and Telecommunications, Government Ship Yard) would need to be analysed with a view to its long term effects on women workers. The displacement of workers from any employment sector requires alternative employment consideration and the upgrading of skills to enhance productivity. The expansion of micro-enterprises and the availability of credit facilities would provide options for those affected through privatisation and the structural adjustment programmes of Government.

3.90 Other barriers to women's full and equal participation in economic activities is the human development and training policies that exist in certain sectors. There are some gender specific vocational training institutions which are male dominated and not open to women. Providing women with opportunities to train in such institutions would increase women's options for employment and thus their earning capacity. The training of women in technical fields should be strongly promoted.

#### *Protection of Women's rights in the Workplace*

3.91 Women are generally not aware of their legal rights in the workplace nor are they aware of labour standards and safety measures there. Women also have little general knowledge of the new Health and Safety in the Work Place Act (No.4/1996). The long term concern of female workers for child care facilities to be established close to work places is beginning to be addressed. The first child care centre funded by the New Zealand Government has been established in the Kalabu Tax Free Zone. It is expected that more child care facilities will be established near work places in the future.

3.92 Gender based discrimination in some work places include unequal entitlements to pay, training and promotions. Sometimes there is reluctance to hire married women because of maternity benefit entitlements. The problem of sexual harassment in the workplace has been a long term concern of women and there have been calls by women's groups to put laws and procedures in place to make sexual harassment an offence. Sexual harassment can also be dealt with through company guidelines, with heavy penalties imposed and through gender awareness programmes. The Employment Act is currently under review by Government. General policy pronouncements by Government to introduce a minimum wage have not been determined.

3.93 On the 16 July 1999, Government organised a national tripartite seminar on ILO Conventions that address the fundamental rights of human beings. The meeting concluded that the seven ILO conventions that must be ratified by the Government of the Fiji Islands are:

- The Forced Labour Convention of 1930 No. 29;
- The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise 1948 No. 87;
- The Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949 No. 98;

- Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 No.100;
- The Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957 No.105;
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 No.111;
- The Minimum Age Convention 1973 No. 138.

3.94 To attain equality and protection for women, a number of strategic objectives and planned actions have been outlined by the Task Force. Fiji Islands focus on a market economy has wide implications for human resource development. Men as well as women need to play their roles to keep the economy active and viable. The *Women's Convention* requires all appropriate actions to be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in economic life.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.95 There are a number of obstacles faced by women in the economic sector and these include:

- the lack of knowledge by women of their rights (e.g. maternity leave, sick leave and annual leave conditions) in the workplace;
- no specific legislation dealing with sexual harassment;
- the lack of transport for shift workers, particularly during night employment;
- lack of training opportunities.

### **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

3.96 In order to redress the barriers women face in the employment sector, a number of strategic objectives selected by the Task Force are as follows:

#### *(i) Ratification of ILO Conventions 100 and 111*

The ratification of these two conventions is necessary in order to ensure equal remuneration for work of equal value and that women are not discriminated against in employment. This will remove the disparities associated with gender as it is common practice that women in some sectors of the economy are paid lower wages and receive fewer benefits to men occupying the same position. The ratification of the ILO conventions will require changes in the law in order to be in harmony with the principles in the Conventions. These 2 Conventions are part of a total of 7 Conventions identified by the ILO Governing Body as being fundamental to the rights of human beings.

#### *(ii) Review of the Employment and Industrial Relations Law*

Expanding the definition of "worker" in the Industrial Relations Bill to include domestic workers and workers with disability will bring women in these categories within the scope of the law as labour laws have provided little protection for them in the past. A new Wage Order

is suggested to set minimum conditions for employees engaged in professional undertakings. Community awareness and education programmes and mass media campaigns to be undertaken on labour and industrial relations law especially on the rights of workers and the effect of breaches of these laws. The review of the Employment law has been undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and the Fiji Law Reform Commission has conducted research on child labour to improve the provisions relating to the employment of children.

*(iii) Facilitate Innovative Measures or Steps to Broaden Women's Choices*

Women's choices can be increased in a number of ways through flexible hours of employment, split employment system and providing child care facilities in the workplace which will reduce women's absenteeism at work. Other actions could include a quota system to enable women to enter male dominated professions such as technical trades ( e.g. ship building, civil engineering and sciences); the health and safety policies in the workplace to address all the concerns of women; the establishment of a mechanism to hear complaints and grievances in the workplace; and the establishment of a Code of Conduct to deal with issues of sexual harassment and unfair treatment.

*(iv) Increase Gender Issues in the Workplace*

Policy guidelines on gender issues should be formulated and training modules for both employer and employee should be developed on gender issues and the enforcement of rights through the courts.

*(v) Data Collection and the Formulation and Implementation of a Human Resources Development Plan*

Survey, analysis and data collection are crucial tools to formulating Human Resources Development Plans. Appropriate training programmes to enhance women's capabilities and their equal participation in Trade Unions are included for the planned period.

## **CRITICAL CONCERN G: WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING**

3.97 Fiji Islands first went to the polls in 1963 for election of members to the then Legislative Council. Men and women of all ethnic groups had equal rights to vote and successive constitutions since then have guaranteed women's right to vote, stand for and be elected into public office. In spite of these guarantees, women's representation in public office and participation in national affairs have been limited.

3.98 The *Beijing Platform for Action* lists the following strategic objectives:

*Strategic Objective G.1.* Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

*Strategic Objective G.2.* Increase women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership.

#### A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices

##### *Boards and Committees*

3.99 The prevailing bias that favours males is reflected in the low participation of women at the decision making levels of public and statutory bodies. Figures from the Public Service Commission in 1995 indicate that out of a total of 209 boards and committees with a total membership of 2,120 only 291 members were women. By 1998, women's membership of Boards stood at 16%. The highest level of women's participation is noted in areas that are consistent with women as caregivers e.g. Boards of Old People's Homes, Hospitals and Health Centres.

3.100 In 1993, the Fiji Islands Cabinet took more affirmative action and decided that women's participation at all levels of decision making should be increased from 30% to 50%. This is a significant step forward as some boards, committees, councils and some positions in the civil service and the private sector which are composed entirely of males would now need to take steps to involve women at management and executive levels. As a result of this policy decision, the Ministry of Women and Culture was charged with the responsibility to maintain a Nomination Register containing the names of women nominated to serve on Boards, Committees and Councils.

##### *Municipal Councils, Provincial Councils and the Great Council of Chiefs or Bose Levu Vaka Turaga*

3.101 In 1997, there were only 7 women out of a total membership of 115 serving on 11 municipal councils. A separate government administration with jurisdiction applicable to Fijians only divides Fiji Islands into 14 provinces. The affairs of each province is run by a Provincial Council appointed by the Minister of Fijian Affairs. In 1997, there were only 31 women out of a total membership of 483 members of the 14 provinces serving on the Council. At the apex of the Fijian administration is the Great Council of Chiefs also known as the Bose Levu Vaka Turaga.

##### *Management and Executive Levels- Civil Service*

3.102 In terms of senior or managerial positions in Government, there are 22 women out of a total of 160 officers who are in the management cadre. This represents about 14%. To-date, there are 2 female Permanent Secretaries and three Deputy Secretaries.

## *Parliament*

3.103 Changes in the perception of women and stereotyped assumptions made of women as well as legal and other changes have become necessary to increase women's participation in public life. In the 1999 general elections, 27 women contested the elections out of a total of 251 candidates. Of the 27 women candidates, 8 were elected. Three women have been appointed Cabinet Ministers, one also holding the title of Deputy Prime Minister and 2 as Assistant Ministers. In the Upper House, where the Senate is comprised of 38 senators, there are currently 5 women appointed, one of whom is the Vice President of Senate. This number could increase as the nomination of senators from the Leader of the Opposition is yet to be finalised. Although this is an improvement over the last elections where there were only 2 Cabinet Ministers, the participation of women in public life remains one of under representation.

3.104 In addition to Government's initiative to involve women in the decision making levels, the Fiji National Council of Women and UNIFEM had made significant contributions. The Women-In-Politics project of the Fiji National Council of Women was launched in 1994 to promote and prepare women for local and national government elections. The preparation of the women included, amongst others, voter education, assertive public speaking and campaign skills. This programme ended in June 1999. A Women's Caucus, assisted by UNIFEM was established at a Fiji National Council of Women's Workshop in December 1998. UNIFEM provides training for the Women's Caucus on procedures for national elections, campaign strategies, public speaking, issue awareness and speech writing.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.105 The major obstacles encountered by women to the decision making levels is the lack of support from appointing authorities. It is mandatory for appointing authorities to consult with the Minister for Women and Culture in the appointment of suitably qualified women to Boards, Committees, Commissions and Tribunals, but in practice consultation is not carried out in every case.

### **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

3.106 The Task Forces on Women and the Law and Balancing Gender in Decision Making outlines a number of strategic objectives and action plans to enable women to share equally in political and decision making powers and these include:

*(i) training in communication, presentation and writing skills and in political education*

The development and delivery of appropriate training modules to improve the skills of women. Legal literacy is also considered as an important tool to teach women the constitution, local and national laws. (Ref. Strategic Objective 3.0 in the Plan of Action for Women and the Law, *Women's Plan of Action : 1999 - 2008*)

*(ii) developing support mechanisms and to influence the political process*

Influencing the political process through the dissemination of information on a range of issues including law and policies are designed to change entrenched attitudes and conservative political cultures. Gender equality policies and non discrimination as prescribed in law may go along way to changing voter attitude. Strengthening and establishing women's committees in key organisations and providing funds to support women candidates standing for political office and appropriate affirmative actions would give women greater opportunities to secure their proper place in the political arena. (Ref. Strategic Objective 3.0 in Plan of Action for Women and the Law in *Women's Plan of Action : 1999 - 2008*)

*(iii) influencing the court processes in shaping the court's and the laws gender consciousness*

The planned action by the Task Force on Women and the Law is to improve the gender component of judicial education and through gender sensitised training for members of the judiciary.

*(iv) Supportive/Enabling Legal Environment*

Incorporate legal provisions stating women's equal participation in Boards, Councils and Committees in relevant Acts and regulations e.g the Public Enterprise Act, General Orders etc. (Ref. Strategic Objective 1.0 in Plan of Action for Balancing Gender Decision-Making in *Women's Action Plan: 1999- 2008*).

*(v) Update and Publish the Nomination Register*

This is to be done on a regular basis by the Ministry for Women and Culture (Ref. Strategic Objective 1.0.- Plan of Action for Balancing Gender in Decision Making: and in *Women's Plan of Action 1999 - 2008*)

## **CRITICAL CONCERN H: INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

3.107 A national machinery for the promotion and advancement of women is necessary to ensure that women's concerns can be effectively dealt with in a systematic and comprehensive way. The integration of women into the mainstream of development has been pursued by Government at various levels. A number of strategies have been adopted to meet the commitments made in Beijing and the Fiji *Women's Plan of Action 1998 - 2008*. The strategies are expected to reform the

current systems, which has challenged politicians, policy makers, and planners at all levels to consciously include women and gender concerns when making decisions. The *Beijing Platform for Action* prescribes 3 strategic objectives to be adopted by participating countries as follows:

*Strategic Objective H.1. Create or strengthen national machineries and other government bodies.*

*Strategic Objective H.2. Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.*

*Strategic Objective H.3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.*

#### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.108 There are a number of mechanisms that have been instituted to ensure equal and active participation of women in national development. The single most significant development is the establishment by Government of the Ministry of Women and Culture to implement Government policies on women and to serve as the focal point between Government and the NGO community on issues affecting women. The general intergovernmental scheme to address women's concerns are channelled through other mechanisms such as:

- the Women-In-Development programme of the Ministry for Women and Culture which ensures that women are equal partners in the national political, economic and social development of Fiji;
- the National Women's Advisory Council established by Government in August 1999 acts as an advisory forum to the Minister for Women and Culture;
- the gender Focal Points appointed at Deputy Secretary level in the 17 Ministries and Departments of Government;
- the Development Sub-Committee made up of Permanent Secretaries of Government Ministries;
- the Development Committee of Cabinet made up of Ministers of Government; and
- the Fiji Parliament.

3.109 These mechanisms form a single hierarchy for decisions to be taken to mainstream women in all sectors. Women are represented in each of these decision making levels and although in the minority, they play a key role to ensure women's issues are taken into account.

*Integration of gender perspective in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.*

3.110 In December 1995, during the Australia/Fiji High Level Consultation, the institutional strengthening of the Ministry for Women and Culture was amongst the high priority areas for assistance under Australia's bilateral aid programme to Fiji. A "Concept Document" was prepared in August 1996. The project commenced in October 1998 with the recruitment of the Organisation Development Adviser who

will assist the Ministry through to the year 2001. The project will directly assist the implementation of the Strategic Objective 5.0 in the *Women's Plan of Action: 1998-2008* which states that: "Strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry for Women and Culture, for gender policy, advocacy and monitoring."

3.111 In the *Women's Plan of Action: 1999 - 2008*, seven strategic objectives are contained in the section on mainstreaming women and gender concerns and these are:

- (a) strengthen the enabling environment for women and gender mainstreaming;
- (b) develop and strengthen Government processes to be gender responsive;
- (c) enhance sectoral and system wide commitment to mainstreaming women and gender;
- (d) engendering micro-economic policies, national budgetary policies and procedures;
- (e) strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Women and Culture for women and gender policy advocacy and monitoring;
- (f) promote effective consultations of government bodies with key CSOs; and
- (g) integrate gender training in educational and national training institutions.

3.111 In addition, there are other national machineries for women which are supported by Government through core funding support such as the Fiji National Council for Women; the Women's Crisis Centre ( support towards the Ba Centre, research and data gathering); and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (support for the review of laws)

#### *Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women*

3.112 A Cabinet decision on 3 November 1998 approved the establishment of an *Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women* (see Appendix I) to oversee and co-ordinate the implementation of the *Women's Plan of Action* in the Public Service and other Government sectors, and to liaise and co-operate closely with Non Government organisations to achieve the planned goals. Cabinet also agreed that Deputy Secretaries in 17 Ministries and Departments be the focal points for the implementation of the WPA, and be the representatives of their Ministries to the *Inter-Ministerial Committee*. Cabinet further endorsed gender awareness training to be conducted in the Public Service.

3.113 The roles and functions the *Inter-Ministerial Committee* are to:

- 1. set the broad directions and priorities for the implementation of the WPA;
- 2. co-ordinate the implementation of the WPA;
- 3. assess the progress of the implementation and recommend future actions to further the objectives of the WPA; and
- 4. facilitate the production of annual reports and document the achievements, the progress made and report on continuing work on the WPA to the Minister for Women.

3.114 As gender focal points for the 17 Ministries and Departments of Government, the Deputy Secretaries have been further directed by Government:

1. to ensure the implementation of the WPA by facilitating the integration of the identified priority actions into their Ministry's policies and programmes;
2. assist in monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the WPA;
3. advise the Ministry for Women and Culture and the respective Ministries of the overall needs in the area of gender and development; and
4. promote the development of gender sensitive policies, programmes and practices in their respective Ministries.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.115 Although a range of institutional mechanisms have been put in place by Government, the major obstacles encountered include the lack of resources (funding and personnel with special skills) to undertake the tasks assigned e.g. gender training, gender audit studies, gender budget analysis: policy and sector analysis; the compilation of data desegregated by sex for analytical purposes. To overcome the lack of special skills, suggestions have been made in the past for scholarships to be made available for training in these "critical scarce skills areas."

### **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

#### *Task Forces*

3.116 In addition to the mechanisms described above, five Task Forces have been established by Government to work specifically on the five areas of commitment namely:

- Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns
- Women and the Law
- Micro-enterprise Development
- Shared Decision-Making
- Violence Against Women and Children

3.117 The membership of these Task Forces (see Appendix II) include all stakeholders such as representatives of the Ministry for Women and Culture, other relevant Government Ministries and Departments, non government organisations, civil society organisations and experts in specific areas. The Task Forces may co-opt other members as the need arises.

#### *Priority Actions for Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns*

3.118 The Inter-Ministerial Committee has approved the following priority areas for the Task Force responsible for Mainstreaming of Women and Gender Concerns:

- gender audit in the Ministries for Health and Agriculture
- development for framework for gender analysis

- development of sectoral indicators for Ministries for Health and Agriculture;
- gender awareness training in the following selected Ministries and for senior officials in the Public Service:-

Ministry for Agriculture

Ministry for Health

Ministries for Education

Ministry for National Planning - sectoral planners

Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department;

Gender Focal Points (i.e. Deputy Permanent Secretary)

The integration of gender awareness training in selected Government training courses which will progressively be extended to other programmes.

Other actions to be undertaken during the year include:

- the review of sectoral data collection and compilation to include sex desegregated data;
- the implementation of Institutional Strengthening Project in the Ministry for Women and Culture;
- the strengthening of partnership between government and women's non-government organisations by increasing their membership into government consultative committees and task forces;
- the training of women NGOs in government decision-making and planning processes.

3.119 Through these mechanisms, policies and actions, it is expected that significant improvements to balance gender concerns and to include gender perspectives in development projects will be made. Mainstreaming gender concerns at the village, settlement, rural or urban levels are promoted through well established structures. Concerns at village, local and settlement levels are channelled through the Provincial, District and Divisional Offices to the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and other relevant Ministries to the Ministry of National Planning which services the Development Sub-Committee and recommendations are then forwarded to the Development Committee of Cabinet.

3.120 Women's concerns in the urban areas are channelled through various decision making machineries such as the Ministries for Women and Culture and Social Welfare; Health; Education and other relevant Ministries or referred to appropriate Agencies or individuals. These concerns, where appropriate, are then channelled through the Development Sub-Committee to the Development Committee of Cabinet.

3.121 The Ministry of Women and Culture is the key Ministry within Government with terms of reference to ensure women's equality by working for the elimination of gender bias and to ensure that the rights of women are respected. With the mix of racial and ethnic diversity in Fiji, women have different experiences and different

needs and these could cut across different sectors as no single sector can encompass or meet all the needs of women. On the other hand, there are many common needs of women and also particular needs such as for those women with disabilities, or for those who are single parents or for women who live in rural areas. It is acknowledged that irrespective of ethnicity, culture and backgrounds, the rights of all women must be protected. As women also exist alongside the assumptions made about men, women's inequality can only be addressed, if the attitudes and the assumptions made of women are questioned, and their work and contribution receives equal value to those of men under the same circumstances.

### **CRITICAL CONCERN 1 : HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

3.122 The *Beijing Platform for Action* identifies 3 strategic objectives as follows:

*Strategic Objective 1.1.* Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

*Strategic Objective 1.2.* Insure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice.

*Strategic Objective 1.3.* Achieve legal literacy.

#### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.123 Equality in law is a fundamental human right. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1997 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender. Section 38 provides:

- (1) *'Every person has the right to equality before the law.*
  - (2) *A person must not be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, on the ground of his or her:*
    - (a) *actual or supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including race, ethnic origin, colour, place of origin, gender, sexual orientation, birth, primary language, economic status, age or disability; or*
    - (b) *opinions or beliefs, except to the extent that those opinions or beliefs involve harm to others or the diminution of the rights or freedoms of others;*
- or any other ground prohibited by this Constitution.'*

3.124 Although Fiji Islands first Independence Constitution of 1970 guaranteed to every person in Fiji Islands fundamental rights and freedoms irrespective of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex (s.3) protection from discrimination on the grounds of sex was not specifically included (s.15). The 1990 Constitution included protection against discrimination on the basis of sex for the first time and further widened the definition in the 1997 Constitution (Amendment) Act to prohibit grounds for discrimination against gender, birth, sexual orientation, primary

language, economic status, age or disability. Persons are guaranteed the freedom to practice religion and politics except where considered harmful to others.

3.125 The Government, through the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (*Women's Convention*) and other International Conventions, and in view of the Human Rights Declaration is obligated to observe them and is committed to removing discriminatory provisions. Article 43(2) of the 1997 Constitution (Amendment) Act gives leeway to the courts to pay regard to public international law in interpreting the Bill of Rights provisions. The *Women's Convention* defines discrimination against women and establishes a framework of principles whereby women can achieve full equality. Fiji Islands reservations to Articles 5(a) and 9 made during the time of ratification were removed in May 1999 to bring about consistency with the Constitution and Fiji Islands commitments to the *Beijing Platform for Action*.

3.126 The Government's commitment outlined in the Minister for Women and Culture's maiden speech to the opening of Parliament on 24 June 1999 endorses Government's position to implement the obligations under the *Women's Convention* and the *Women's Plan of Action*. The commitment includes the removal of discriminatory provisions in a range of laws including laws relating to the family, employment, the criminal law, and the law on evidence. Other laws will be progressively reviewed to meet obligations under other international agreements such as the ILO Conventions.

3.127 The priorities for action approved by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the year 1999 include the following:

- adoption of policies to engender the law-making process
- legal literacy programmes for women
- gender training for law enforcement officers and court officials
- ratification of ILO Convention 100 & 111 which deals with equal remuneration and non discrimination respectively
- review of labour laws (ongoing work programme with the Ministry of Labour)
- review of family law (ongoing work programme with the Fiji Law Reform Commission)

3.128 The development of the plans of action and implementation of the priorities identified by the Inter-Ministerial Committee is the responsibility of the Women and the Law Task Force. There are 7 areas identified by the Task Force to review and update legislation, to remove gender discrimination, to make the law more accessible to all in the community, but in particular to widen women's access to the justice system through measures such as legal literacy programmes. Part of the Task Force's plan of action is recorded here whilst other actions are recorded under other critical areas of concern.

## **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.129 The major obstacles encountered is the lack of legal literacy and the awareness by women of their legal rights. There is lack of access to the legal system by women who have no financial resources and no knowledge of appropriate procedures to obtain redress. The limited budget in the Legal Aid Commission poses a danger that legal aid to women and children who seek assistance on family matters may decrease over time.

## **C. Commitments to further actions and initiatives**

3.130 The Task Force on Women and the Law programme of action includes the following:

### *(i) The Law Making process*

The procedure for law making is well defined. The drafting of new laws or the amendments to existing laws is done by the Ministry promoting the new law or the change in the law. The strategic objectives outlined by the Task Force are to:

### *(ii) ensure equality before the law*

To implement this objective, a number of planned actions have been agreed upon such as the formulation of policies which reflect gender parity and the equal role of women in society. The Plan highlights the importance of clear drafting guidelines which should include simple, gender neutral language and any laws subject to reform should be reviewed for gender bias and general social impact. Enhancing the role of the Fiji Law Reform Commission to extend its functions to follow up on its reports and any draft legislation and to raise awareness on the implementation of its reports is on the Task Force's agenda. Similarly, the ratification of other children's and women's related conventions and ILO Conventions 100 and 111 would make further significant impacts on the way women are treated. Improvements in legislation will provide guidance to the courts to avoid discrimination and gender bias in the exercise of discretion in applying and interpreting the law.

### *(iii) to facilitate and improve scrutiny of legislation*

The vetting of legislation for gender bias is a long term objective. This scrutiny can be undertaken by the Ministry proposing and vetting new law or amendments to existing legislation as well as by the Justice, Law and Order Sector Committee and the Cabinet Legal Sub-Committee. This process should monitor the gender and social impact of any law or change to the law.

### *(iv) to facilitate and improve physical access to legislation*

The Ministry of Women and Culture, the line Ministries, the NGO community and the Fiji Law Reform Commission have been tasked to enhance public

awareness through the publication and dissemination of laws to the wider community. One of the strategic objectives of the Task Force is to have all laws reviewed on a rotating 10 year cycle or shorter.

*(v) access to Justice*

There are a number of barriers that impede people's access to justice and it especially applies to women. These barriers include the lack of capacity to seek legal advice due to their economic and social situation, legal costs, the difficulties and complexities associated with court procedures, lack of information and lack of knowledge on how to access the justice system to redress a grievance; and physical inaccessibility to legal services and resources. The strategic objectives outlined by the Task Force to improve access to the justice system include:

- *facilitate and improve equality of access to legal services*

Legal literacy programmes and community legal education are crucial to understanding the avenues of access to the justice system. The education on legal rights and the remedies that can be obtained; and how to identify and deal with persons in authority and government agencies are all part of the process of understanding how to access the justice system. Legal literacy programmes are currently being conducted by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, the Fiji Young Lawyer's Association, the Regional Rights Resource Team of the British ODA and the Women's Crisis Centre. The Institute of Justice and Applied Legal Studies of the University of the South Pacific has engaged in 1999 a Fellow in Community Legal Literacy to review courses and prepare training modules as part of the University's work in legal literacy. Community legal information in all vernacular languages and the development and dissemination of legal pamphlets on the law and procedures can also be done through the Ministry of Women and Culture, the Fiji Law Reform Commission and other NGOs such as the Fiji Council of Social Services.

- *to develop legal aid*

Fiji's current legal aid programme gives priority to matters that concern most women such as family matters of custody or maintenance or where women are subjected to domestic violence. The next area of priority where legal aid is made available concern criminal cases where the crime is considered to be serious e.g murder, manslaughter. The Task Force's plan of action is to advocate for increases in the national allocation of resources for legal aid in family matters; to develop a more accessible legal aid system for all; and to find ways and means to facilitate pro bono work. Equal gender representation on the Legal Aid Commission and the publication of

legal aid beneficiaries annually is part of the plan of action for this sector.

- *to facilitate and improve sensitised training of law enforcement and court officials in handling women victims and complaints*

Women's access to justice is also affected by the way women are treated by law enforcement agencies and court officials. The planned actions include the continuation of gender sensitisation training as a formal component of police training curriculum for all prosecutors. The Task Force recommends that the Police Force Recruitment Policy includes a gender component in order to increase the number of women police prosecutors. There is an increased number of women currently serving in the magistracy and this year the first woman was appointed to the High Court Bench. The 1993 Cabinet decision to increase women representation on Boards and Committees by 30% to 50% by the year 1998 has not been met but assurance has been given by the Minister for Women in her maiden speech on the 24 June 1999 that more work will be done by her Ministry to meet this goal. The *Women's Convention* gives equal participation of women in public life high priority to incorporate women's diverse experiences into the political arena and thereby change the nature and face of politics.

#### *(vi) family Law*

Gender bias in family law practice and policy and in the courts affect women and men in various ways. Women's groups, individual women and men believe that family law and the courts discriminate against them in one way or another when dealing with family disputes over matrimonial property, maintenance, custody, marital rape, domestic violence and other types of family related matter. Decisions in family cases reflect stereotypes about the nature and roles of both sexes. Family law is particularly plagued with gender bias because of the experiences and prejudices all participants bring to the process from their own family and customary experiences. On the whole, gender bias in the judicial system tends to affect women more adversely than men.

The Task Force on Women and the Law has identified a number of strategic objectives to implement reforms in this area. These include:

- *to preserve the institution and promote the well being of the family*

Partners in a relationship ideally would have equal responsibilities, rights and freedoms. Legislative reforms, legal education and a specialised family court dealing only with

family matters are the planned actions to eradicate inequalities in order to promote the well being of the family. A number of critical reforms have been planned for the year 1999 and these include the review and the reform of the existing law relating to the family and domestic relationships. This planned action has been completed by the Fiji Law Reform Commission and has been approved by Cabinet in 1999. The Office of the Attorney General has been directed by Cabinet to institute the drafting of a new family law for Fiji Islands which is now in progress.

Public awareness programmes on the reforms through seminars, lectures and meetings will be an ongoing action. In addition, parenting and family life skills training as well as counselling services in both rural and urban areas are to be expanded to include the care of the disabled and the aged. These programmes will be ongoing throughout the year.

- *establishment of a family court*

The recommendation to establish a specialised Family Court is part of the family law reforms which has been approved by Cabinet this year.

*(vii) gender neutral language*

As it is imperative that gender neutral language is used in law, the Ministry of Women and Culture and the Fiji Law Reform Commission monitor the language used in Bills and Acts of Parliament. The Ministry has been involved in the discussions on the family law reforms, the reforms of the law relating to children and the criminal law. The Ministry has also made specific recommendations on the reforms of the Law of Evidence and have made recommendations to remove the need for the victim's sexual history to be introduced in the court; the removal of corroboration; and the removal of the requirement by the court to warn on uncorroborated evidence by vulnerable witnesses.

## **CRITICAL CONCERN J: WOMEN AND THE MEDIA**

3.131 The Beijing Platform for Action prescribes the following strategic objective:

*Strategic Objective J.1.* Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.

*Strategic Objective J.2.* Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

## **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.132 The media is a very powerful medium that shapes attitudes and promotes sex-role stereotyping in the minds of the public. Fiji Islands has the three forms of media, the print, audio and visual media. Most families in Fiji Islands have access to one form of medium or another with TV having the most limited coverage. Radio programmes are aired and newspapers are printed in the 3 main languages and are therefore able to influence the public more significantly. Although no national survey has been run on programmes on what people hear, read or watch most on Television and the other mediums, it appears that news, entertainment, soap operas, and sports tend to head the list. It is difficult to say without proper surveys as to whether programmes that typecast women and men in a variety of roles have a significant effect on members of the public and the way they behave.

### *Media Watch*

3.133 Media Watch is a non Government organisation which was established in 1993 with the main purpose of educating the public about the mass media. Membership extends to both individuals and organisations. Since its inception, Media Watch has implemented a number of activities such as media awareness workshops in Ba, Tavua, Nadi, Bau and Tailevu. They have also visited schools in these areas to raise awareness on media related issues such as media literacy in order to analyse and to make informed choices over programmes and the medium through which these programmes are presented.

3.134 Funding for activities is drawn from membership fees (\$5 for individuals and \$10 for organisations) and from international agencies such as the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC); NZODA, Bread for the World ( a German church based NGO) and the Canada Fund. A Coordinator has been hired recently to implement more media literacy training programmes and public awareness raising.

### *The Fiji Media Council*

3.135 The Fiji Media Council (formerly the Fiji News Council) is an initiative of the industry with membership drawn from the industry and the public. Its main purpose is to receive complaints about the media but it does not have a "moderating" role. The impact of the media, not just the mainstream media, but also new forms of global communication would need to be addressed as access to the internet brings many new images and issues of different dimensions which may be subject to complaints.

## **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.136 It is expected that Media Watch and the Fiji Media Council with more support and funding will play key roles in the future. There are however a number of concerns that have been raised by women and these include:

### *Advertisements*

3.137 Women can be portrayed as glamorous objects to sell cars, boats, or any other type of machinery, wine, food and toiletries whilst men are cast in roles of selling chain-saws, beer, men's clothing and boots amongst other things. At this stage, there appears to be no concerted efforts made to change some of the more offensive ways in which women are portrayed in advertisements.

### *Sexual abuse and sensational reporting*

3.138 The sensational and sometimes inaccurate coverage of rape and sexual assault cases involving women as victims; police raids of hotels/motels involving female prostitutes, including the graphic descriptions of the circumstances in which the victim is found and the circumstances of the victims experiences are areas of concern. Women are sometimes portrayed as being ultimately to be blamed for their actions. The way the headlines are given and descriptions of the harrowing experiences of female victims continue to display popular misconceptions about women and that they are ultimately to be blamed for the crimes committed against them.

### *Use of language*

3.139 The use of language can significantly affect the way viewers, listeners and readers perceive women. This is a concern raised from time to time and it points to the fact that training in this area should be expanded.

## **C. Commitment to further action and initiatives**

3.140 Networking and concerted efforts should be made to improve the image of women in the media and to assist the media to be more responsive to women's issues and development needs. There is low participation of women in the executive levels of the media but this could change in the future as more women undertake the journalism programme with the University of the South Pacific and in other institutions.

3.141 There does not appear to be data available documenting the levels of women's participation in the media, their working conditions, training initiatives, work related problems and the types of work women are expected to cover. Media monitoring groups such as *Media Watch* and the *Fiji Media Council* are important vehicles to provide feed back on the types of publications and programmes and advertisements that adversely affect women. The dissemination of Government information is carried out by the Ministry of Information which can ensure that women's perspectives is taken into account on such issues as Government economic and social development policies and that women's views are not simply confined to issues of health, education, nutrition and family welfare.

3.142 As there is a low level of awareness in the media of women's concerns, there is a need for advocacy to utilise the media to advance the interests of women and that women's point of views are given greater visibility. A number of strategies could be considered and these include:

- a) encouraging women to participate in formulating and implementing media policies that will reduce discrimination against women and gender bias;
- b) encouraging *Media Watch*, the *Fiji Media Council* and the *Ministry of Information* to actively advocate for the media to present a more balanced image of women and to accurately portray her abilities in the wide variety of roles she plays;
- c) working toward eliminating harmful stereotyped images of women from advertisements;
- d) reviewing and revising media related legislation and policies to eliminate discriminatory provisions and gender bias;
- e) reviewing to up-grade the media curricular in the University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme to include gender responsive components;
- f) strictly enforcing the prohibitions against pornography;
- g) conducting training at all levels of the media on gender sensitivity, the use of language, and report writing;
- h) instituting training programmes, workshops, seminars and other forms of training including advertising and management training to maximise skills in the use of the media to deal with and advance the concerns of women. This should be carried out by the Ministry for Women and Culture, the Ministry of Information, the Fiji Media Council and *Media Watch*. The training should be sensitive to the culture of the communities and programme and commercial producers should be trained to monitor adverse impacts of programmes and advertising on women.
- i) conducting regular surveys and obtain feed back from media users especially women users on women and family related concerns raised in the media;
- j) establishing a Task Force with the primary objectives of developing gender perspective and gender sensitive guidelines and to enable women to better achieve the objectives set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action*.

The media industry has played a key role in their own self regulation and this needs to be continually reinforced. As media is an evolving industry, both media organs and their audience (listeners/viewers/readers) need to be proactive together to achieve the aims and objectives as set out in critical concern J.

### **CRITICAL CONCERN K: WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

3.143 The 3 strategic objectives set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action* are as follows:

*Strategic Objective K.1.* Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.

*Strategic Objective K.2.* Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

*Strategic Objective K.3. Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.*

#### **A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.144 The Department of the Environment in the Ministry of National Planning, Local Government, Housing and the Environment is responsible for the overseeing of the conservation and sustainable development and use of natural resources and the proper management of the Environment. The principle of sustainable development is grounded in the Departments strategies as the use of natural resources must be compatible with economic growth and the needs of the present generation without prejudicing the needs of future generations.

##### *The legal framework*

3.145 There are at least 54 Acts administered by about 14 different Ministries and other statutory bodies which have some role in environmental/resource management. Most laws are old and ineffective in a modern day environment and enforcement lags from lack of funding and/or inadequate staffing. There are at least twenty three regional and international conventions, treaties and agreements listed in the National Environment Strategy as having being ratified by Fiji Islands and in most instances require national legislation for the implementation of the treaty obligations. Examples of some of the treaties listed below indicates the direction taken by Government to protect the environment -

- the Law of the Sea Convention;
- the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21;
- the Biodiversity Convention;
- the Climate Change Convention;
- the Agreement on Forest Principles;
- the Convention on the Conservation of Nature (Apia Convention);
- the Convention for the Protection of Natural Resources and Environment in the South Pacific Region and related Protocols (SPREP Convention);
- the Waigani Convention; and
- the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty

3.146 On 31 January 1995, Cabinet approved the drafting of a new comprehensive and integrated environmental legislation as an urgent priority. In 1996, the Department of the Environment undertook and completed the legal drafting of a new "Sustainable Development Bill" which incorporates the treaty obligations to which Fiji Islands is a contracting party and the recommendations generated through a lengthy public consultation process. This new Bill is currently under consideration by Government.

3.147 The Department of the Environment is assisted by environmental focal points in each Ministry who are responsible for environment management issues and consult regularly with the Department. In addition, much support is given to the Department

in the form of technical assistance by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); The University of the South Pacific (USP); GreenPeace, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature; Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC); and other international agencies. The priority issues for the Department of the Environment include the negotiation to conclude the *Fiji Sustainable Bill*, enforcing Environmental Impact Assessments as a prerequisite to development; Waste Minimisation and Pollution Control; Environment Education and Awareness, conservation and meeting obligations under those Treaties Fiji has already ratified.

*The South Pacific Action Committee for Human Ecology and Environment (SPACHEE)*

3.148 SPACHEE was established in 1982 and is registered as an NGO. SPACHEE's main objectives are to raise awareness about environmental concerns and to encourage action to promote environmentally sustainable development. Under the framework of SPACHEE, two major programmes were designed and developed, and these are:

*(a) Ecowoman*

3.149 Ecowoman started in March 1995 with funding provided by the Canada Fund. Ecowoman is a collective of woman scientists and technologists whose main purpose is to assist women to be made more aware of ways to protect their environment for food, water, fuel, medicine and housing and to identify appropriate technology to lighten the workload of rural women.

3.150 Ecowoman has been active in raising awareness over the lack of participation by rural women in decision making relating to community resources such as logging, mining, and ocean resource management matters. Ecowoman is also dedicated to the task of carrying forward the recommendations made at international conferences such as the UN World Conference on Environment and Development (1992) and the *Beijing Platform for Action* as it relates to Women and the Environment (critical concern area K). Ecowoman assumes advocacy of environmental and natural resource management issues of concern to women and provides information to contribute to resource mobilisation for environment protection and conservation. Ecowoman also facilitates the access of women agriculturists, fishers and pastoralists to knowledge, skills, marketing services and environmentally sound technologies to support and strengthen their crucial roles and their expertise in resource management and the conservation of biological diversity.

3.151 Ecowoman organised a Science and Technology Fair in July 1997 at the Pacific Science Inter-Congress at the University of the South Pacific. At the Fair there were hands-on activities, fixed pictorial displays, hand-outs, drama, videos, a gender seminar, networking amongst women scientists and technologists, exchange of information and interaction between students and professional women scientists and grass roots practitioners through which girls were encouraged to take science as a career. Ecowoman has a number of research projects some of which have been completed whilst others are still in progress:

- (a) research into water hyacinth as a weaving material (completed);
- (b) the development of watercress which grows together with the water hyacinth as a vegetable;
- (c) coconut oil expelling at the Women-In-Business project in Samoa;
- (d) the preparation of a data base of women experts in the region;
- (e) participatory research in communities; and
- (f) information gathering and making submissions to influence policy makers, scientists, technologists, other practitioners and the general public on ways in which women's full participation in science and technology can make a positive difference for present and future generations;
- (g) research into the availability and management of mangrove plant dye for tapa cloth (masi) making on the island of Vatulele.

*(b) Wainimate (Women's Association for Natural Medicinal Therapy)*

3.152 Wainimate is a registered NGO. Its focus is to educate not only women but other professionals and the general public about traditional medicines that are safe and effective for treating common ailments. Its publication of a traditional medicine handbook seeks to preserve and protect indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants. Wainimate also has a number of other goals and these include:

- the protection of plants that saves lives;
- the compilation of a directory of traditional healers in Fiji Islands;
- the establishment of traditional medicine plant gardens and forest resource areas;
- the application of customary knowledge of the use and practices to support sustainable use and protection of community forests;
- the establishment of the Wainimate Research and Training Institute to carry out research on herbal remedies;
- exchange of information at the initial stage with the Ministry of Health to incorporate effective traditional medicine practices into the national health delivery system.

*Women in Fisheries Network (WIFN)*

3.153. The WIFN is a registered non-government organisation established in 1992 following concerns at the lack of any attempt to seriously consider women's dominant role in the fisheries sector. The WIFN has as its focus the following:

- the proper recognition of women fishers at the community level;
- the empowerment of women fishers at the community level;
- the recognition of the special health needs of women fishers;
- the training and education of women fishers in activities relating to fishing;
- the support for women fishers at the pre-harvest, harvest and post harvest sectors;
- up-skilling through seminars and workshops that could mobilise women fishers;
- research into women fishers activities.

3.154. Since its inception, WIFN have successfully implemented the following activities:

- the publication of a book and bi-annual newsletter;
- village based training workshops on marine management;
- research on the involvement of women in fisheries;
- training of trainers;
- involvement and networking with other environment related NGOs such as SPACHEE, WWF and the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific and other national agencies.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.155 Women in village communities have taken active part in the maintenance of the surrounding environment and the ecosystems of which they are a part. On the other hand lack of proper management of the environment would adversely affect the basic needs of a family through exposure to health hazards caused by pollution, contaminated fresh water supplies and poor situations. Similarly, women's actions on the environment such as the cutting and gathering of wood for fuel may degrade the environment and the management of waste and the disposal of such products as plastic bags, styrofoams and other non-degradable materials also causes serious problems to the environment.

3.156 There are a number of obstacles faced by women which could contribute to their poor living conditions.

1. lack of involvement and participation in development of the local environment. Any development would affect the way women are expected to cope with meeting their families' basic needs eg. coastal zones development, mining and quarrying and forestry development for foresting products.
2. Development plans are designed without due regard to gender dimensions c.g land subdivisions without EIAs resulting in the loss of resource supply for food and other traditional uses.
3. Low participation of women in "natural resource" related occupations such as forestry mining, technicians, engineers, land-use planners, agriculturalists, marine scientists and environmental lawyers.
4. Lack of involvement of women in decision making relating to environmental management.

### **C. Commitments to further action and initiatives**

3.157 To ensure women's participation in promoting sustainable development and to equally enjoy the benefits of development a number of strategies would need to be pursued:

- a) the mainstreaming of gender concerns in all phases of natural resource development;
- b) the review of policies and laws to eliminate prejudicial provisions that adversely affect women;
- c) promoting the participation of indigenous communities in the evaluation, planning and development of natural resources within their geographical areas as any development could increase the burden on women who may have to travel longer distances to collect food and fetch water. Enhance avenues for women's effective involvement in decision relating to resource management in indigenous communities;
- d) encouraging and assisting women in traditional fisheries communities to actively manage their 'qoliqoli' and to establish or reinforce protected areas, through appropriate traditional conservation measures;
- e) assisting women's groups to promote community awareness of the destructive influences on marine biodiversity on land-based activities and unsustainable coral harvesting;
- f) encouraging and supporting women's community based initiatives to restore degraded ecosystems especially those which are important for subsistence requirement;
- g) mandating that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) be carried out for all natural resource related development, taking into account women's traditional resource use needs;
- h) establishing a data base of invasive species present in Fiji, review biological effects of species and prioritise species control and eradication e.g. moongoose threat in Taveuni, Ovalau, Gau, Koro and Kadavu.
- i) reviewing current published traditional knowledge of biodiversity and undertake a coordinated programme of collection of oral knowledge recognised and protected by legislation as intellectual property rights;
- j) documenting "tabu" and other conservation and protected measures of marine resources to assist women in planning long-term resource needs;
- k) promoting awareness raising and educational programmes on gender issues to encourage women participation and reduce the stereotyping of sex-roles in natural resources related employment;
- l) encouraging and supporting community based natural forest restoration initiatives;

- m) promoting stronger links between government (Department of the Environment) and non-government, regional and international organisations in promoting sustainable development and women's active participation in natural resources related development;
- n) ensuring that women are well represented on the National Council for Sustainable Development.

## CRITICAL CONCERN 1: THE GIRL CHILD

3.158 Children constitute a vulnerable group who bear the consequences of family dysfunction. The growing number of street children, the rise in juvenile crime, juvenile delinquency, sexual abuse offences against women and children, gender inequalities prevailing in families have prompted calls from members of the community and NGO groups for more comprehensive policies, programmes and resources to deal with these issues. The girl child as well as other members of the family suffer in one way or another from family financial difficulties and other family traumas. Women as well as female children disproportionately bear most of the stresses in the family. The loss of a mother or the departure from the family home of a parent places extra burdens on female children in the family to care for younger members and to attend to all the household chores. The pressure on female children could mean the premature termination of education, the decrease in leisure activities and the entry into the workforce before maturity. Sometimes female children are forced into prostitution and street begging. The problems faced by the girl child in Fiji Islands and the violation of their rights are under reported.

3.159 The multiple responsibilities assumed by female children could have serious health consequences. The *Beijing Platform for Action* sets out 9 strategic objectives as follows:

*Strategic Objective 1.1.* Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child.

*Strategic Objective 1.2.* Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.

*Strategic Objective 1.3.* Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.

*Strategic Objective 1.4.* Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training.

*Strategic Objective 1.5.* Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition.

*Strategic Objective 1.6.* Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work.

*Strategic Objective 1.7.* Eradicate violence against the girl child.

*Strategic Objective 1.8.* Promote the girl-child's awareness and participation in social, economic and political life.

*Strategic Objective L.9. Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.*

**A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices**

3.160 There continues to be low levels of awareness in the public consciousness of the pressures that are exerted on families as matters pertaining to families are considered to be in the private domain. Thus the effects of social, economic or other development factors and policies could bring about pressures and challenges that seriously pose difficulties for families. There is also little appreciation of the burdens that fall on female children during family hardship.

3.161 The Fiji Poverty Report 1997 (p.38) indicates that 33% of the 44,800 households lived in relative poverty which is a cause for concern not only for economic and social results but because of the threats posed to the stability and well-being of the family. Financial hardship, and poor living conditions are major causes of family conflict and although there are severe stresses on families, one of the most pervasive forms of gender inequalities arise from the unequal responsibilities taken on by family members. Women and girls, though they have the primary responsibility of housework and family care, they are also engaged in some form of income earning activity.

3.162 There is also increasing concern in the rise of single parent families and particularly women headed households consisting of widowed, divorced or young unmarried or abandoned women and girls. Although there is some financial assistance available from the Department of Social Welfare, this is insufficient to maintain a family and points to the need to initiate measures to ensure their well being.

3.163 The abuse of female children has become a major cause for concern as indicated by the figures below:

**Child Abuse Cases (Sexual Abuse) 1995/1996/1997**

<u>Offences</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
Attempted rape and rape	9	17	26
Indecent assault	16	18	35
Defilement of a girl under 13 years	18	15	6
Defilement of a girl between 13&16	51	59	66
Unnatural offence	6	10	14
Indecent exposure	2	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>150</b>

\* Source: Fiji Police

3.164 Although legislation exists to deal with child sexual abuse, the sexual offences provisions in the Penal Code is currently under review by the Fiji Law Reform Commission to increase the penalties for such crimes and to improve on the system of reporting child abuse. Inter-agency Protocols for mandatory reporting of child abuse exists between the Fiji Police Force, the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education.

3.165 The Protocol between the Ministry of Health and the Police Force is to ensure cooperation through the provision of medical services in the investigation of sexual offences cases. Under the Protocol, the Health authorities are required to report the circumstances of any child displaying the following conditions:

- injuries not fully explained;
- multiple injuries or bruises on different parts of the body;
- injuries caused by an adult;
- any injuries to genitalia or anus, any unusual vaginal or anus discharge;
- neglected appearance, with or without injuries or bruises

The first special clinic for adolescent health was established in August 1999 in Suva and the Ministry of Health expects to open clinics in other centres in the future.

3.166 The Protocol between the Department of Social Welfare and the Police Force, is to direct the Social Welfare Department to report all allegations of sexual abuse and harm resulting from physical injury and the Police Force will likewise reciprocate where there are similar concerns for children regarding any abuse. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Police and the Ministry of Education is to ensure that child abuse in the schools or the family is reported to the appropriate authorities. Although this is a major improvement on the current system, there is nothing to compel these Departments to carry out the terms of the Protocols which is the reason why mandatory reporting of child abuse is being considered in the review of the laws relating to children by the Fiji Law Reform Commission.

3.167 There are a number of mechanisms established to deal with child abuse, the majority of whom are girls. These are:

(a) The Department of Social Welfare which implements the Juveniles Act is responsible for a range of services offered to children and their families. These include: foster care, adoption, counselling and many other family welfare related matters. The Department provides support for the institutional care of children and provides a counselling service for those children placed in care and their families. It also sponsors NGOs to care for abandoned children and expectant unmarried mothers who want their babies placed for adoption. They also provide a small refuge for battered women and children through the assistance of NZODA.

(b) The membership of the Children's Coordinating Committee (originally called the National Children's Policy Committee in 1993 when it was first established as a result of the decision of the Cabinet) is made up of Government and Non Government

Organisations. The Committee has the task of overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through its sub-committees on health, education, law and family welfare.

The FLRC is currently reviewing the juveniles laws in order for Fiji Islands to meet its obligations under the Convention.

### **B. Obstacles encountered**

3.168 Although the problems of the girl child is enmeshed with the problems experienced by families, there are specific problems that are associated with female children and these include:-

- a) the unequal distribution of family tasks and responsibilities as female children are expected to perform all household chores of washing, cooking and cleaning as well as caring for younger members of the family;
- b) the termination of her education in favour of male family members during family hardship;
- c) the threat of violence and abuse from other family members or acquaintances;
- d) the low priority given to her particular needs such as health education and leisure in times of family hardship;
- e) lack of realistic sex education for children;
- f) lack of information and research on the magnitude and extent of the problems of child prostitution and child sexual exploitation;
- g) lack of socio-economic support for the girl child;
- h) lack of proper reporting mechanisms in rural areas for women;
- i) increasing incidence of violence against women which also affects the girl-child.

### **C. Commitments to further actions and initiatives**

3.169 Policies and strategies to address the specific needs of the girl child must be considered and these could include:-

- a) public awareness programmes on family issues and to create an understanding of the role of the girl child within the family;
- b) expand existing counselling services to include the particular needs of the girl child;

- c) encourage and improve the reporting of incidents of violence and abuse of female children;
- d) strengthen the services of the Department of Social Welfare, Women's Crisis Centres and other Non Government Organisations to provide immediate assistance to female children;
- e) develop community services and provide information on how to upgrade skills of female children who for one reason or other had her education terminated at an early age;
- f) as Fiji is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the review of laws relating to children undertaken by the Law Reform Commission has been in progress in such areas as adoptions; sexual offences against children; drugs and children; and child labour.

### Concluding Comments

3.170. The long list of policies, measures and programmes put in place to improve the position of women in Fiji Islands demonstrates that the transition from old forms of human resource planning to new forms where women's equality of rights and opportunities are specifically taken into account will be a long and complex process. In some areas, so far only the policies have been laid down but where policies have been implemented, commitments tend to vary. The range of policies and programmes already in place shows that Fiji Islands is ready to make changes in a number of sectors that will substantially improve the status of women. Progressive changes are expected to take place as an on-going process.

3.171. Experience has shown that macro-economic policies and economic restructuring have not taken into account the circumstances of women which make up half of Fiji's population as the value of individuals is seen as being determined by their contribution to the economy. In order to eliminate the problems associated with economic reconstruction, programmes such as poverty alleviation and micro-enterprise development specifically focuses on those who are or have become unemployed and on vulnerable groups such as women in order to improve opportunities for individuals and families to provide for their own basic needs.

3.172. Fiji's commitment to the *Women's Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Women's Plan of Action 1998-2008* and the current range of programmes dealing with women's issues and concerns under the direction of the Ministry for Women and Culture and the NGO community, more opportunities for women have become available in the economic, social and political sectors. All these measures, although do not provide the ultimate remedies for women, they are an improvement and movement in the right direction which should bring about benefits in the short and the long term and more respect for women's human rights.

## APPENDIX I

### Re: Terms of Reference (TOR) for Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women

At the Cabinet meeting of 3 November 1998, it was agreed that the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women be set up and whose major role is to oversee and co-ordinate the implementation of the Women's Plan of Action (WPA).

#### Membership

- Ministry of National Planning
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Regional Development
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Justice and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests
- Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations
- Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Co-operatives and Public Enterprises
- Ministry of Communications, Works and Energy
- Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Public Service Commission
- Solicitor General - Fiji Law Reform Commission
- Bureau of Statistics

The role and functions are to:

1. *set the broad directions and priorities for the implementation of the Women's Plan of Action;*
2. *co-ordinate the implementation of the Women's Plan of Action;*
3. *assess the progress of the implementation and recommend future actions to further the objectives of the WPA;*
4. *facilitate the production of annual reports of achievements and progress report of continuing work on the WPA to the Minister for Women.*

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Re: Task Force & Membership**

Five Task Forces are being set up in these areas:

- Mainstreaming of Women & Gender Concerns
- Women & the Law
- Micro-enterprise Development
- Shared Decision-Making
- Violence against Women & Children

Membership will include all stakeholders including the relevant ministry-department, representative from the MWC, non-government and civil society organisations and experts in the specific area. The Task Forces may co-opt other members depending on the need that arises.

### **Membership**

#### **Mainstreaming of Women's and Gender Concerns**

1. Ministry of National Planning : Chair
2. Ministry of Finance
3. Public Service Commission
4. Ministry of Regional Development
5. Bureau of Statistics
6. Soqosoqo Vakamarua
7. National Council of Women
8. USP
9. UNIFEM
10. Ministry of Agriculture
11. Ministry of Health

#### **Women & the Law**

1. Fiji Law Reform Commission : Chair
2. Ministry of Justice
3. Legal Aid Commission
4. Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations
5. Fiji Women's Rights Movement
6. Regional Rights Resource Team
7. Institute of Justice and Applied Legal Studies
8. Fiji Law Society

### **Micro-Enterprise Development**

1. Ministry of Commerce : Chair
2. Ministry of Finance
3. Local Government Association
4. Ministry of Education
5. Ministry of Youth and Sports
6. Fiji Development Bank
7. Soqosoqo Vakarama
8. Women in Business

### **Shared Decision-Making**

1. Public Service Commission : Chair
2. Ministry of Public Enterprises
3. Ministry of Fijian Affairs
4. Department of Multi-Ethnic Affairs
5. Ministry of Local Government
6. National Council of Women
7. Fiji Trade Union Congress
8. Fiji Employers Federation

### **Violence Against Women and Children**

1. Department of Social Welfare : Chair
2. Ministry of National Planning
3. Ministry of Health
4. Ministry of Education
5. Fiji Law Reform Commission
6. Ministry of Home Affairs – Fiji Police Department
7. Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
8. Fiji National Council of Women
9. Fiji Council of Social Services
10. Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons

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