

Fiji Country Statement

Global Environment Facility United Nation Development Fund South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme

The International Waters Project Implementing the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Pacific Small Island Developing State

Third Multipartite Review (MPR-3) 8-9 July 2004 [Apia, Samoa]

Country Statement Fiji Islands

Introduction

The paper is two fold:

- i. briefly discuss the socio-economic characteristics of Fiji; and
- ii. inform members of the Third Multipartite Meeting of Fiji's overall commitment towards International Waters Programme (IWP) at national policy level.

Demographic

Fiji's population in 1996 was 775,077. The total population in Fiji in 2001 was estimated at 842,000, with the natural growth rate between 1986 and 1996 of 1.8% per annum.

The migration levels has been steady over the 1990s, political instability in 1987 and 2000 witness a increase in migration, primarily of educated, skilled citizens, and particularly of the Indian population, although it is estimated that between 1987 and 1998, 30,000 people took up residence in Fiji.

People aged over 65 years comprised 3.2% of the population in 1996, compared to 2.4% in 1976. Over the same period, the number of people aged less than 15 years had declined from 41% to 35%.

Over 60% of the population is rural dwelling, but urban drift is significant and increasing.

Natural Resources

Fiji is a vast archipelago islands with various landscapes and climate. More than 300 islands are scattered over 1.3 million square kilometers of the South Pacific Ocean, lying between latitudes of 12 degrees and 22 degrees South and between longitude 175 degrees

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East and 178 degrees West. The two largest islands are Viti Levu, where most of the population resides, and Vanua Levu to the North. The islands are characterized by various ecosystems including large areas of natural forest. Wide ranges of coastal and marine ecosystems exist, ranging from extensive areas of mangroves to diverse coral formations.

Fiji has a mild tropical climate with plentiful rain under prevailing conditions. It is, however, subject to potentially catastrophic climate events such as cyclones, flooding and multiple landslips that can have a major impact on the economy and infrastructure. The predicted climate change and sea level rise could have profound impact on the coastal communities.

Economic Development

The household production relics vital for numerous rural households, the majority of the population relies on some form of cash income to sustain living standards. Approximately 40% of the workforces are in wage and salary employment, while the remainder earns income from informal employment and sale of primary products.

The most notable change in the economy during the last decade has been the resilient of the tourism industry as a major employer. The combination of low exchange rates, special tax exemptions, and special access to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, USA and European markets provided the motivation for quick growth in the industry. Fish, agricultural products and garment have developed into major export industries as well. Despite the diversification, the sugar industry remains very important.

Fiji's economy experienced some of the worst socio-economic development as a result of the political crises, firstly in 1987, when two military coups were staged within four months of each other, and then in 2000.

However, Fiji's economy has been able to recover at a remarkable rate given the tones of effort the Fiji Government, private sector, NGOs, the people of Fiji, regional organizations and international bodies. In the year to March 2004, inflation fell to 2.2 percent, compared with 4.2 percent recorded in December 2003. Inflation is expected to be around 3% by year-end. At the end of March, foreign reserves were adequate, \$725 million, equivalent to 3.1 months of imports goods and non-factor services or 4.5 months of imports of good only.

Social Development

Education and health remain a focal point in Fiji's governmental policy, recognizing that a healthy and well-educated population is a critical component for positive economic growth. Social Justice and Affirmative Action programs are being implemented to assist disadvantaged segment of our community under the provisions of Social Justice Act

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2001. The advancement of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans remains a key development issue, and so do the alleviation of poverty and job security for the 15,000 school leavers every year. There is also more emphasis on an integrated approach to rural development, where communities participate in the regional planning decision-making process. The mainstreaming of women's, children's and youth participation in the development process is also now reflected in government policies.

Environment

Fiji's environmental laws are several and mixed, remains of the colonial period when environmental problems were limited and clearly sectoral. At least 54 Acts have some vital role in environmental management, administered by 14 different ministries or departments, statutory bodies or other agencies. Most of the laws are both old and ineffective in the modern context of environmental management, or suffer from the lack of regulatory enforcement through inadequate staffing, lack of technical resources and funding, and through administrative failures.

Significant elements of the national economy (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining and, to a large degree, tourism) depend on the exploitation of the natural resource base. This implies that planning for economic development cannot ignore the need to conserve and manage those resources in ways that are sustainable.

National Policies on Environment

Fiji is party to a number of international conventions and treaties that relate to environmental issues, acceding to or ratifying many that place increased responsibilities at the national and international levels on the government. Fiji also actively participates in international discussions about such environmental issues as climate change and integrated coastal zone management

Fiji has developed its National Assessment Report (NAR) to assess the progress made and constraints in the timely implementation of the 15 priority areas under the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA). The report will facilitate in negotiation at regional and international meeting.

Policies and strategies for growth are contained in the Strategy Development Plan 2003-2005, which address 3 pillars of development (social, economic and environment) and the eight-millennium development goals (MDGs). There is a chapter on environment in the SDP 2003-2005 that has four broad policy objective and 19 key performance indicators.

How can IWP assist in addressing environmental concerns of Fiji

The IWP can assist in the timely implementation of the many national policies and legislation on environment in Fiji to benefit the many affected communities. The legislative review that is currently underway will assist in identifying and hopefully filling in gaps in the many legislation that exists. IWP's focal areas of waste, protection

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of freshwater resources and sustainable coastal fisheries. The focal areas of IWP are quite broad and covers most of the environment issues arising in the country. IWP could be used to address a number of issues at national and local level. Some of the areas that IWP could assist include the implementation of the National Biodiversity strategic Action Plan, Barbados plan of Action and National Environment Strategy.

Closing Statement

The Government of Fiji and the people of Fiji greatly appreciate the unlimited effort of the IWP pilot project team in collaboration with the funding agencies (GEF/UNDP and SPREP) for executing the project at regional level. Fiji is looking forward to working closely with IWP in assisting the implementation of national policies related to the four focal areas of IWP. On that note the Government of Fiji wants to say a Big Vinaka Vakalevu.....