



MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION #152/2018

**How does Government Intend to Achieve Gender Parity in Terms of
Economic Participation?**

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The Fijian Government has in place strategies to address the issue of gender parity in a cross cutting approach as promoting sustainable economic growth requires empowering women and dropping discriminatory barriers in diverse areas, among them agriculture, energy, health, education, employment and disaster risk reduction. Below are some areas in which Government aims to build the capacities of women, provide a level playing field and eliminate discrimination to better their economic participation for sustainable growth and development of Fiji:

Policy Guideline:

Fiji ratified CEDAW in 1995, and over the years the status of women in various areas of development has evidently improved. The CEDAW Committee has been commending Fiji for ensuring the implementation of the Convention

through a wide range of laws, policies and programs, with the support and active participation of women's civil society organizations. This has been translated into the Women's Plan of Action, which has Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood as one of the 5 main areas of concern. This remains a principle guiding tool for the National Women's Machinery and Government as a whole for women's development, whereby the Strategic Objective for this thematic area requires strategies to ensure that employees work in a safe, healthy, decent, conducive and sustainable work environment where more people can secure incomes from employment in the formal and informal sectors and acquire technical skills and productivity levels needed for higher income and economic development; that communities improve their livelihoods through small, micro and medium enterprise development; to maximize institutional capacity of key partners for gender mainstreaming; that communities benefit from sustainable development and management of marine and agricultural resources to maximize long term economic returns; and that all categories of poor are able to meet their basic needs. The work in this area will continue with the revival of the Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood Taskforce.

Women's Entrepreneurship:

Government programs to promote more entrepreneurship addresses in some way the challenge of women not being able to work in formal sectors because of their traditional roles. Increased access for Fijians to start-up business funds through the YES program or the Small Micro Enterprise Business Grant or

Income Generating Projects are some ways to promote business ownerships even in informal settings.

The continuous funding from Government to stage the National Women's Expo is also an effective avenue linking women artisans to markets, whereby the whole program has become more competitive and quality oriented since its inception. The National Women's Machinery has also been provided with a budget to fund the administration and capacity improvement of women's NGOs', Vocational Institutions like the Makoi Vocational Training Center and the Ba Women's Forum Training Center to help build the economic capacities and skills of women to either work in the relevant industries or start up their own businesses, creating employment for more women.

Strengthened Bilateral Relations:

The Fijian Government will also continue strengthening Bilateral Relations with countries like Indonesia, China and India to build the capacities of individual women under 'people to people' exchange programs, for example the Joint Technical Working Group (Fiji-Indonesia), and institutional establishments meant to train women for better economic participation. One such initiative is the Barefoot College to be constructed in Vanua Levu to train women in Fiji as Solar Engineers. The completion of this project is going to be one of the key priorities in the coming year for the Ministry in realization of the fact that women have an important role in mitigating climate change as well.

Gender and Climate Change:

Women and girls experience natural disasters and the impacts of climate change in ways that are distinct from men and boys. Rising sea levels and changes in air and water temperature have distinct impacts on women's traditional economic, agricultural and fishing duties, as do the impacts of over-fishing. Women, especially those in poverty, appear more vulnerable in the face of natural disasters. The Fijian Government's commitment to Climate Action is very evident and the signing of the Gender Action Plan at COP 23 under Fiji's Presidency is a great tool to address the issue of gender and climate change. The Fijian Government's commitment in this area is further reflected in the implementation of gender equality commitments in strategic documents for climate change and disaster risk management at the local level.

As mentioned above, the Barefoot College will promote more solar engineered facilities by women trained at this institution. We are also continuing the FJ Rocket Stove program for rural women to engineer low carbon emanating stoves for their own use, as well as a product they can manufacture to sell to others in their communities. The Ministry also works closely with organizations like the Ba Women's Forum that produces reusable cloth bags to replace plastic bags post the Government imposed levy of \$0.10 on the use of plastic bags. Also, as part of the IGP funding program, we will continue to assist more women (individuals and groups) to use their traditional knowledge and skills as alternative livelihood projects compared to agriculture and marine based means of income generation.

An Increase in Female Labor Force Participation Results in Faster Economic Growth:

The Fijian Government in its quest to reduce the Gender Gap in the labor force has in place labor laws and policies that ensures equal treatment and equal opportunities for men and women in the workforce. The 2013 Constitution recognizes the rights of all Fijians including women to employment and non-discrimination. The Constitution also provides for an avenue to seek redress where any violations of equal treatment or acts of discrimination occurs through the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission of Fiji.

The 2014 National Gender Policy articulates the commitment of the Government of Fiji to gender equality, equity and social justice. The Policy recognizes “ethnicity, disability, religion and gender often intersect and create a multiplicity of sources of discrimination against women in Fiji. Since its launch, the implementation of the plan has seen various government organizations undergo necessary workshops to understand what the policy entails, what it aims to achieve, how to achieve the goals and the responsibilities of each of the agencies in ensuring gender parity is a priority. This is further enhanced with the engagement of Gender Focal Officers within government who report on the implementation of the policy in each of their organizations.

The implementation of the Open Merit Based Recruitment Selection is the practical implementation of the Fijian Constitution’s pledge which defines the Values and Principles for the Public Service, including that recruitment and promotion will be based on objectivity, impartiality and fair competition and

ability, education, experience and other characteristics of merit. This will allow women an equal opportunity to apply for positions at any level of Government and recruitment based on their ability to do the job, assessed against objective selection criteria which do not discriminate against or give preference to any group or individual.

The Employment Relations Act allows for work conditions that are equally applied to both men and women in the workforce, including the private sector industries, determining leave conditions (including maternity leave of 84 days), wages, grievance procedures and sexual harassment policies.

The review of all employment policies and recommendations for changes will be one of the key focuses of the Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood Taskforce.

As Women's Education Level Increases, They are more likely to participate in the Labor Force:

The multiplier effect of girls' education on several aspects of development as well as its impact on economic growth is now commonly accepted: education reduces high fertility rates, lowers infant and child mortality rates, lowers maternal mortality rates, increases labour force participation rates and earnings, and fosters further educational investment in children. The education sector has been given tremendous priority by the Fijian Government that allows girls and women as much as boys and men to attain a proper education. **TELS** allows students to access loans for tertiary education and the statistics of women graduating from universities being consistently higher than men speaks volumes of how important such a scheme is to allow more women to

complete their tertiary education. The Toppers Scholarship Scheme also is not gender biased in any way. It is a merit based scheme and women and men receive an equal opportunity to receive this assistance for their tertiary education based entirely on their abilities and merit. The free education system is also benefiting Fijian families in terms of not having to decide which child goes to school based on the affordability. The program allows for every child to complete their primary/secondary education for free, preparing them for tertiary education.

Women's Better Health for Better Economic Participation

Fiji has been ranked 36/144 in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Index Report for the Health and Survival indicator with a score of 0.979/1. According to UN Women, Fiji is on track to achieve Millennium Development Goal 5 (improvement of maternal health). Deaths in childbirth are down from 60 per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 28 per 100,000 live births. Additionally, 99% of all births are attended by skilled birth staff. Unmet need for contraceptives has declined to 30% (from 46%) and the adolescent birth rate has almost halved since 1990. The life expectancy of women in Fiji is also longer in various age ranges as per the 2017 census release.

Violence against women is widespread in Fiji with 72% percent of all women having faced some form of violence in their lifetime. The Fijian Government has in place stricter laws to especially address the issue of domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape. The Domestic Violence and Child Helpline are recent tools to help women and children access help in case of being subjected to violence. Also the recently launched National Service Delivery Protocol sets the

stage for stakeholders of VAW to better address this issue that is in fact a factor impacting women's economic participation, health and productivity.

The Ministry of Health aims to address gender issues through specific program areas, such as increased focus on women's health, increased women's leadership in the ministry, and integration of gender into all the ministry's higher-level planning processes and training plans. The ministry also developed the Gender Action Plan (2013) as part of the 2012 Gender and Social Inclusion in Health Strategy. The plan's objectives include increasing data collection and analysis on women's health issues, improving understanding of gender and health issues in the ministry, and working with communities and non-government organizations to improve access and quality of health services in rural areas.

The work in the health sector to better women's health indirectly sets the path for better economic participation of women as healthier women are more able to participate productively in the labor market.

Conclusion

Gender parity in the economic empowerment of women cannot be achieved by Government alone. Government's task is to put in place a favourable environment for the increased participation of women in the economy. This Government has done through legislative reforms which specifically serve to empower women by repealing gender-discriminatory provisions and putting in place legal mechanisms which focus on the removal of barrier to participating in the economy like the Domestic Violence Act. The favourable policy framework also created by the various policies adopted by Government which

directly stem from our international obligations under relevant Conventions also boost the gender agenda for increased economic participation. Stronger partnerships with NGOs and the private sector is also a very critical component of our quest for gender parity. These partnerships are ongoing and the Ministry continues to create new partnerships with key stakeholders who share our national quest for gender parity.

Thank you.