



Submission on the Fiji National Budget Process 2017-2018

25/03/2017

Suva, Fiji

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), established in 1986, is a multi-ethnic and multicultural non-governmental organisation committed to removing all forms of discrimination against women through institutional reform and attitudinal change. The Movement, therefore, has the mandate to monitor the effective implementation of Fiji's commitment to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the role of the state on the Fiji National Gender Policy.

As a feminist organisation, FWRM uses feminist analysis in widely diverse fields to address gender inequality. Feminist analysis forms the basis of this submission, to ensure that Fiji's National Budget 2017-2018 is gender sensitive/responsive and that allocations are in line with policy commitments and is achieving the desired impact (gender- specific bench marks).

The endorsement and implementation of CEDAW and the Fiji National Gender Policy implies that women must be treated as equal partners in decision- making and implementation rather than just beneficiaries. This also implies the recognition that people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression including men and women, have different needs, preferences and benefit differently from policies and budgetary allocations.

We call for the strengthened process and improved budget allocation for the following areas:

A. Consultation Process: Accountability and Transparency

The Movement welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Budget process and commends the call for extensive participation in this process. However, we do have critical recommendations for ensuring this is a transparent and effective participatory process:

Recommendations:

1. Gender responsive budgeting: it is essential that a gender budget statement by the government is provided, highlighting key points in the budget from a gender lens. This will provide the opportunity to identify gaps and respond accordingly. A gender disaggregated approach to budget is necessary to understand the individual experience of national policies. The International Women's Development Agency with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and the Australian National University conducted a study in 2015 using the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) that found that the experience of poverty is different for men and women based on 15 dimensions of life. Similarly, the experience of national policies and budgetary allocation is different for the individual based on his/her gender.¹
2. We further recommend annual gender budget auditing. This will provide the opportunity to access the achievements and obstacles to attain gender equality in policies and programmes in the corresponding budgets.

B. Gender Equality:

Gender equality is a crosscutting issue, as it is central to successful development outcomes. Without substantive equality between women and men in Fiji, we will not be able to realise our full potential. Without taking women's needs and perspectives into account, any national planning will be based on an incomplete picture and thus less likely to succeed. Of particular concern are the needs of the most vulnerable women, including girls, lesbians, bisexual, trans diverse people, gender non-conforming identities, ethnically diverse women and girls, women of indigenous minorities, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, women living in rural and remote areas, young women, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles, women in creative industries and women in the informal sector and others.² Further to this it is critical to consider the intersectionality of women from their races, religion, education and other social categorization that contributes to discrimination in the society.

¹ <https://www.iwda.org.au/assets/files/THE-INDIVIDUAL-DEPRIVATION-MEASURE-STUDY-FIJI-PRELIMINARY-RESULTS-TO-INFORM-CYCLONE-WINSTON-RESPONSE-AND-RECOVERY-PLANNING-1-1.pdf>

² <http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images///PFF//PFF-Charter-Final-2Dec2016.pdf>

The 2014 Fiji National Gender Policy is a comprehensive document that recognises how important gender equality is to development. The Policy recognises that “development strategies are more equitable when they consider the different needs, constraints, opportunities and priorities of men and women.” And that “compelling evidence suggests that such inclusive strategies are also far more effective and sustainable.”

The policy further emphasizes on:

5.11 Responsive Gender Budgeting and Planning³

1. Introduce Gender Responsive Budgeting and gender audits in the planning, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the national budgetary process, and promote gender responsive budgeting by development practitioners to ensure optimum benefits to rural and urban women.

2. Create and utilise gender sensitive indicators in the economic planning processes to monitor the attainment of gender strategic goals.

7. Establish performance indicators including performance appraisals on gender equality in decision-making, distribution of public funds and investments in programming for youth.

Socio-economic priorities are reflected in the National Budget regulating government activities like health care, education, elimination of violence against women amongst other developments. CEDAW Article 2⁴ prohibits direct and indirect discrimination against women thus ensuring appropriate measures are taken by relevant institutions on the principle of equality modifying national policies to address the needs of women.

Recommendations:

1. The Fiji National Gender Policy and Fiji’s commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are fully integrated into Fiji’s National Budget 2017-2018.
2. FWRM strongly suggests that gender equality goals like Sustainable Development Goal 5 on “gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls” and gender sensitive indicators are built into the implementation and monitoring of the budgetary process and the progression of the indicators should be shared publicly.

³Fiji National Gender Policy (2014) Government of Fiji, p20-21.

⁴ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article2>

3. We call on the Ministry of Economy to incorporate Fiji National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action in their policy and budget implementation process. A strong commitment to implement the Fiji National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action needs to be demonstrated by the full range of government machinery and not only the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

C. Access to Justice:

FWRM has been working on legislative reform and policy change since its inception, including the successful lobby for Fiji's Family Law Act (FLA) 2003. The FLA marked ground breaking legislative reform in the Pacific, with attention to compliance with CEDAW. Since 2004, there have been 14 policy and legislative changes in Fiji that promote women's rights or criminalise domestic violence. FWRM commends the work towards the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 16: to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." Whilst much has been done and continues to be done to strengthen the capacity and delivery of judicial institutions in recent years to advance access to justice in Fiji, women's needs have not been recognised in this development.

DPP and Police Prosecution which prosecutes cases that deal with violence are the key players who are fighting for the justice of the victims. As such gender sensitive training is very important for the two organisations as they deal directly with the victims.

Recommendations:

1. FWRM welcomes the expansion and outreach of the Legal Aid Commission and the Family Court of Fiji; however, we also recommend that these services are made more accessible to women. This can be achieved through the provision of child friendly spaces and adequate provisions for lactating mothers, women with disabilities and ageing women.
2. Frontline Legal Aid staff needs to be trained to deliver gender-sensitive service, which will enhance service being provided. Lawyers should also undergo training to provide gender sensitive service to the members of the public when giving advice and representing the clients.
3. Gender sensitive training would benefit the victims greatly should it be provided to the State Counsels as well the Police prosecutors who regularly deal with cases involving violence.
4. FWRM recommends appropriate budgetary allocation ensuring continuous capacity development of the judicial sector that will ensure quality and on par delivery of services that incorporate the most recent changes to the legal system.

5. FWRM recognises the need to adequately resource judicial institutions with appropriately qualified and trained staff, hence, recommends budgetary allocation that will enable full human resource staffing for these institutions.
6. FWRM notes the importance of documentation and gathering of gender-disaggregated data from front line judicial staff mainly Fiji Police Force, Fiji Corrections Service, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Family Law Court of Fiji. Frontline judicial staff needs to be trained to deliver and gather gender-sensitive service, which will enhance policy implementation and policy formulation to adequately suit gender exclusive needs.

D. Education

Education is a critical contributor towards enhancing socio-economic and political status of a nation. Primary education is compulsory in Fiji and the Ministry of Education is responsible for the advancement of the education systems. Post severe Tropical Cyclone Winston, the re-building of the education system has been slow to the detriment of children in the most affected areas of Fiji. This statement bears in mind the largely unaddressed psychological and physical health and wellbeing of students mainly girls and adolescent girls in most affected schools that continue to deliver classes in temporary classrooms.

Recommendations:

1. The movement further states that immediate allocation should be provided to schools with temporary classroom facilities.
2. FWRM calls on government to allocate resources to ensure adequate sanitation needs of girls and adolescent girls in schools across Fiji.
3. The Ministry of Education's budgetary allocation should reflect counselling and psychological needs of students and teachers. Trained psychologists and counsellors should be allocated to schools across Fiji but most immediately to schools most affected by Tropical Cyclone Winston.
4. Teachers to also undergo gender sensitive training which they would be able to impart to the student leaders and eventually benefit the students. (Considering transgender students - preventing bullying and providing a safe education environment for all students).

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Balancing the scales

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