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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on his mission to Fiji\***

### **Note by the Secretariat**

The Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr. Kishore Singh, undertook an official visit to Fiji from 8-15 December 2015. This report presents the findings of his mission on the situation of the right to education in Fiji.

The Special Rapporteur welcomes important reforms ushered in by the Government, along with national initiatives to overcome ethnic divides and to build a better Fiji for all. He reviews the legal framework of the education system, progress made in improving access, quality and equity in education, and considers the financial support to education.

The report highlights disparities in education and other challenges in the provision of quality education. It analyses developments as well as constraints in the ambitious program to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training sector.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for strengthening national efforts to realize the right to education in Fiji

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\* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent developments.

## Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on his mission to Fiji\*\*

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\*\* Circulated in the language of submission only.

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## I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr Kishore Singh, carried out an official visit to the Republic of Fiji from 8-15 December 2015, at the invitation of the Government.

2. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney General and Minister for Finance ; Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts; Honourable Jioji Konusi Konrote, Minister for Employment, Productivity And Industrial Relations; the Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources; and Mr. Naipote Katonitabua, Acting Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister. He was received by the Parliamentary Commission for Social Affairs, and also met with representatives of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, the Chief Justice of Fiji, the Chief Registrar of the High Court of Fiji, and members of the diplomatic community.

3. The Special Rapporteur had the opportunity to visit the University of the South Pacific. He visited technical institutions, as well as community and Government schools, and met their management, teachers and students in Suva, Lautoka and Sabeto. He met with several representatives from the international community and civil society, including representatives from the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, WFP, ILO, and representatives of numerous civil society organizations.

4. The Special Rapporteur expresses his gratitude to the Government of the Republic Fiji for its invitation and the full cooperation throughout his mission. He also extends his thanks to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Fiji and Geneva, and all those who took time to meet with him and share their experiences in the field of education.

## II. General overview

5. The Republic of Fiji is comprised of 332 islands in the South Pacific. Of the 332 islands and 522 smaller islets making up the archipelago, about 106 islands are permanently inhabited by Fiji's population of 880,000. Fiji's two largest islands host approximately 80% of the country's population. The large island of Viti Levu, accounts for over half of Fiji's land area and is home to the capital, Suva. Vanua Levu 64 km north of Viti Levu is another large island. The population is about 60% iTaukei and 40% of Indian decent. Nearly 99% of Itaukei were Christian, and around 80% of Fijians of Indian descent were Hindu.

6. Fiji has three official languages, English, iTaukei, Hindustani. iTaukei is spoken either as a first or second language by indigenous Fijians. Fijians of Indian descent speak a local variant of Hindi, known as Fiji Hindi. English is widely used as a lingua franca in more populated areas.

7. Fiji is going through an historic period of transition, and launched a national initiative to overcome ethnic divides and build a better Fiji for all under the slogan "One Nation, One Fiji". The Peoples' Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, adopted on 15 December 2008 is a landmark document which seeks to build Fiji from a fragmented society into a culturally vibrant and united democratic nation that seeks peace and prosperity. The Charter expresses shared vision and principles for building a better Fiji for all and to celebrate the diversity. It reflects the concept of a common good, with respect for diverse cultural, religious and philosophical beliefs, and a people driven by a common national identity. The Government's commitment to promoting a multicultural nation which

respects all ethnicities and communities, seeks to put an end to racial divisions through common shared values.

8. Under the 2013 Constitution of Fiji, all citizens of Fiji are known as Fijians and have equal status and identity, which means that they are equally entitled to all rights, privileges, duties, benefits and responsibilities of citizenship.

9. Fiji celebrated a democratic election in 2014 which seeks to develop a common national identity and promises to usher in an era of stability and progress. A new constitution was adopted in September 2013.

### **III. Legal framework for the right to education**

#### **A. International obligations of Fiji**

10. Fiji is State party to only a few international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols,<sup>1</sup> CERD, CEDAW, UNCAT and is a signatory but not yet Party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>2</sup> Fiji has not yet signed or ratified other important international human rights conventions on the right to education, including the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, or the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.

11. The Government has taken measures to better integrate its international human rights obligations into its domestic legal order and policymaking. In October 2012 the Government established the Fiji Human Rights Treaty Committee, co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General, and composed of Government representatives and civil society. The Committee had primary task of developing the National Human Rights Action Plan, which will incorporate the country's obligations under international human rights treaties to which Fiji is a State party, into national law and policy. The Special Rapporteur is supportive of these efforts to mainstream human rights into Government ministries and policymaking. In addition to strengthening the application of the right to education in national policies and institutions, this will also reinforce human rights for women, children and people in vulnerable situations.

12. Along with the international community, Fiji has also made political commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup> adopted by the United Nations Summit (July 2015). The goal 4 of the Agenda stipulates that "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes." Moreover, following the Incheon Declaration (May 2015) and the adoption of the Education 2030 Framework for Action on 4 November 2015 on the occasion of UNESCO General Conference, Fiji along with countries from all over the world reaffirmed political commitments to attaining the goal of universal quality education for all free of costs. Building an inclusive education system is a main thrust of the future development agenda.

<sup>1</sup> Ratified 13 August 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Ratified 02 June 2010

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7891TRANSFORMING%20OUR%20WORLD.pdf>

## **B. Right to education and the national legal system**

13. The 2013 Constitution of Fiji in Article 31 enshrines the right to education: “(1) Every person has the right to (a) early childhood education; (b) primary and secondary education; and (c) further education.” The same article also provides that “the State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right (a) to free early childhood, primary, secondary and further education; and (b) to education for persons who were unable to complete their primary and secondary education.” Article 26 affirms the Right to equality and freedom from discrimination and provides that “Every person has the right of access, membership or admission, without discrimination on a prohibited ground, to ... education institutions”.

14. The Constitution further provides that conversational and contemporary iTaukei and Fiji Hindi languages are to be taught as compulsory subjects in all primary schools.<sup>4</sup> It also reflects State’s human rights obligation for financing education as a public function. Art. 31(5) states that “in applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available.”

15. Thus, the Constitution as the supreme law of the land contains several provisions of key importance on the right to education. These provisions are, however, not adequately incorporated into current education laws. The present Education Act 1978 does not adequately reflect the State responsibilities and the international legal obligations as laid down in international human rights conventions. The act also lags behind vis-à-vis the plans made in the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan 2015-18. Many of its provisions have been overruled by practice or administrative instructions. The Government is in the process of drafting legislation to replace the Education Act, but it has not been enacted at the time of this report.

16. Fiji has several other laws in the field of education, including the Examination Act, the University of South Pacific Act, the Higher Education Promulgation of 2008, the Fiji Teachers Registration Promulgation of 2009, the 2009 Fiji National University Decree, and the 2011 University of Fiji Decree.

## **IV. Education system in Fiji**

17. Public education in Fiji is open to all students, regardless of their social, economic status, or background. It is also integrated and inclusive, taking students of all religions and backgrounds, and seeks to accommodate children with disabilities. Finally, it is co-educational, with boys and girls studying together in schools.

18. Fiji’s education system is divided into four sections: early childhood education, primary, secondary, and tertiary.<sup>5</sup>

### **A. Early childhood education, primary and secondary education**

19. Early childhood education is being progressively introduced throughout Fiji. Existing primary schools are enrolling five year old students in kindergarten, while some faith-based or community-run schools are enrolling children as young as 3, while private

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<sup>4</sup> Art. 31(3).

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, Mid-decade Assessment, available at <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/hnp/files/edstats/FJIfefapr07.pdf>.

day care is available in some areas for children aged 2-5. The government reports that there are 1,066 registered kindergartens in the country, with 1,030 registered ECE teachers, 11 of whom are male. Of the total, 889 had received teacher training in Early Childhood Care and Education while the rest had received some form of basic training in early childhood education. As of April, 2016, 11,836 five-year olds are enrolled in 526 kindergartens.

20. The ECE curriculum prioritizes teaching inter-personal relationships, developing cultural and spiritual awareness, demonstrating caring and respect for others, teaching inclusiveness, and including play-based indoor and outdoor learning. The ongoing developing of Early Learning Development Standards will be an important measure on how children are learning and progressing. The involvement of other ministries, including Health, Social welfare, and Communities offer an opportunity to improve the overall welfare of children.

21. The current policies provide that primary and secondary education is compulsory. The first eight years of formal education is within a primary school model, covering years 1-8. The following four years (years 9-12) are within secondary school and in principle, compulsory. At year 10, students are given the option to continue their formal education or join Technical College for specific skills training for Certificate II qualification.

22. In 2014, there were 138,672 primary school students, and 68,063 secondary school students.<sup>6</sup> The student-teacher ratio for primary schools was 24:1, while at the secondary level it was 14:1.<sup>7</sup> Net enrolment in primary school was at 99.43% in 2014, though it declined to 81.7% for secondary school.<sup>8</sup> This may be in part due to some students attending vocational secondary programs, along with those who have dropped out or sought employment directly. In 2015 there were 731 primary schools and 176 secondary schools in Fiji. This includes 75 secondary schools with vocational programs, 17 schools for children with special needs, and 3 technical college campuses.

23. A special feature of the education system in Fiji is predominance of community schools, vis-à-vis government schools. Out of all the schools in Fiji including ECE centres, only 14 schools are government run, the rest are managed by the community in which the school resides.

24. Community schools in Fiji often develop a connection between the wealth of the community and the resources of the school.<sup>9</sup> Disparities in wealth across communities perpetuated differences in the quality of education, although government programs to target poor children are improving the situation. A zoning policy has also been applied to ensure students are selected geographically and enrolled in schools close to their homes.

25. The Special Rapporteur notes that the nature and partnership between the Fijian Government and the school management committees (private or religious organizations) has changed over the last decade. He acknowledges that the Ministry of Education has standardized school management procedures, and has control over curriculum development and the appointment of staff, including school heads and principals. Further, the majority of funds for teachers' salaries, student school fees, and capital development are provided by the Ministry of Education.

26. Some 98% of schools are owned by the communities in which they reside, or faith-based organizations. While private schools are not under government control and follow

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.education.gov.fj/index.php/g/moe-statistics/student-enrolment>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.education.gov.fj/index.php/g/moe-statistics/student-teacher-ratio>

<sup>8</sup> Strategic Development Plan, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Crossley et al., *Education in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, at 250.

international curricula, community schools follow the same curricula as government schools, and receive the same level of government funding as government schools.

27. It may be noted that with regard to religion, conscience, and belief, Article 22 (4) of the Constitution of Fiji 2013 provides that “Every religious community or denomination, and every cultural or social community, has the right to establish, maintain and manage places of education ... provided that the educational institutions maintains any standard prescribed by law.” In addition, “In exercising its rights under subsection (4), a religious community or denomination has the right to provide religious instruction as part of any education that it provides.

## **B. Technical and vocational education**

28. National technical and vocational education and training system is undergoing transformation. From 2012-2014, pursuant to important policy measure, vocational courses are being mainstreamed in secondary schools in an endeavour to promote vocational training to meet skills requirements. As a Government initiative, from 2015, the MoE established technical colleges at various education districts to provide an alternate pathway to formal education and skills training for youths and school leavers.

29. There are 72 secondary schools that offer two-year vocational programmes preparing students for the employment market. Courses include: automotive engineering, carpentry, catering and tailoring, welding and fabrication, office technology, computer studies, marine studies, woodcraft, sports academy, and vocational agriculture. In 2014 there were approximately 3,459 students taking part, one third were female. Most male studied automotive engineering, welding or carpentry, while the majority of female students were in catering and tailoring.

## **C. Tertiary education**

30. The Government recognizes the critical importance of tertiary institutions for developing high-quality human resources, especially in an increasingly technology-driven world economy. It is grappling with the challenges facing the tertiary level institutions that include strengthening curricula as well as improving funding and facilities, and addressing challenges with staffing (especially among the lecturers).

31. At the higher education institutions, students can obtain degrees in the fields of the sciences, arts & humanities and social sciences. The Fiji National University is the largest University in Fiji, with highest enrolled in tertiary level education. In January 2010, six separate institutions were amalgamated into the Fiji National University.

32. The University of the South Pacific, with its main campus in Suva, is a premier university in the Pacific region. It is an example of intergovernmental partnerships in education, with collaboration of twelve Pacific Island states. Approximately 2,500 full-time students are enrolled in on-campus study, and an additional 5,000 study in off-campus/extension modes, based in various centres in neighbouring countries. The University conducts collaborative research through a research network and its research work includes better understanding of human rights as well as common ethics.

33. Fiji benefits from regional collaboration in the field of tertiary education. Australia makes a substantial contribution to tertiary and further technical education in Fiji. The University of Southern Queensland also operates two campuses in Fiji. Besides, Fiji also benefits from cooperation with New Zealand and France in the field of education.



34. Fiji has strengthened its oversight of tertiary education through the establishment of Higher Education Commission<sup>10</sup> and the Fiji Qualifications Framework for technical education and in the process of establishing the Fiji National Research Council.<sup>11</sup>

## V. Education reforms

35. Fiji has undertaken comprehensive reforms of their education system. Reforms driven strategies address a number of areas. These include (i) the implementation of curriculum framework to enhance spiritual, intellectual, social and physical development and strengthen instruction in iTaukei and Hindi as well as English; (ii) improvement in the numbers and quality of competent and motivated teachers and reduction of the pupil: teacher ratios; increased use of standards improvement measurement in schools; (iii) enhanced rural education programme by establishing appropriate infrastructure, building standards, review of school performance and piloting distance education programme; (iv) strengthened partnership between government, communities, development partners , municipal councils, school management committees, developers and parents; (v) expanded technical and vocational educational and training for skills development; and (vi) effective and efficient allocation of subsidies to tertiary institutions.

### A. Key pillars of reforms

36. The Special Rapporteur was informed that education reforms are driven by three key pillars: (i) strengthening staffing and quality delivery with a focus on professional development and improving methodology of teaching and learning, and recruitment of a large number of teachers to reduce the student-teacher ratio; (ii) review of curriculum and quality enhancement, developing specific methodologies for science and mathematics and reintroducing examination system in the education system for evaluating students' performance; and (iii) improving the quality of infrastructure, especially in remote areas, and raising the quality of classroom delivery as well as schemes of rural service allowances for teachers as incentives to serve in remote and maritime areas.<sup>12</sup>

### B. Policy texts underlying the reform process

37. As part of the reform process, Fiji has developed a gamut of policy texts, such as Early Childhood Education Policy (2013), Enterprise Education Policy; Examinations and Assessments Policy (2012), Grants Distribution Policy; Policy in Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Fiji, Policy on Establishment and Recognition and Registration of Schools; Policy on National Curriculum Assessment and Reporting, Policy on School Zoning (reviewed 2014), Rural Allowance Policy, Schools Standard Monitoring and Inspection Policy (reviewed 2014), and Special Education Policy (2013). In order to enhance their effectiveness, many of these policy texts could be converted into rules and regulations, with a coherent and holistic approach. This would also strengthen the national framework of the right to education. In the National Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Policy which provides general guidance schools for assessments of students, general

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fhec.org.fj/index.php/en/>

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see Fiji Qualifications Framework: <http://www.fhec.org.fj/index.php/en/fqf/about-fqf>

<sup>12</sup> Presentation to the Special Rapporteur by the Minister of Education Heritage and Arts, Government of Fiji, 14th December 2015.

prescriptions such as the requirement for "equitable and relevant assessments" for student progress reports require further refining.

## **VI. Entitlement to education and universalized access**

38. The right to education as an entitlement in terms of access to education is inextricably linked with the right to education as empowerment in terms of knowledge, values, skills and competencies as quality components.

### **A. Accessibility: provision of education, free of cost**

39. Primary and secondary education in Fiji is tuition-free, and students are now given free textbooks. School-based vocational centres are also tuition free. The "Topper's Scheme" scholarship program provides free tuition for the top 600 secondary school graduates. The Tertiary Education Loans Scheme provides loans to all students who are accepted into a university or technical college, though these remain repayable in full at 20% of the student's gross salary upon employment.<sup>13</sup>

40. The Special Rapporteur would like to recall that Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed the Government's fee-free programme, which attempted to eliminate the cost of primary and secondary education, though concern remained that indirect costs, including uniforms, exercise books, and transport costs, which are causing children to drop out of schools as their families could not afford the indirect costs.

41. Nearly all students in their last year of primary education move onto the first year of secondary education, with a commendable transition rate. However, the percentage of students completing primary education is diminishing due to cost of fees and transport.<sup>14</sup> It may be recalled that Fiji accepted the recommendations in the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of 23 March 2010<sup>15</sup> to ensure the full enjoyment by all children of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly with regard to access to education and health services.

42. The dropout rate which is very low in primary schools is much greater in secondary school. Girls' drop-out rate in secondary school is lower as compared to that of boys.

43. In this respect, the Special Rapporteur would like to underline the importance of the 'Matua' program aimed at providing continuing education for dropouts, to address the issue of unemployment. The Special Rapporteur considers it important to relate literacy to skills development.

44. The Government is making an effort for providing 1 tablet/laptop per child as part of commitment to digital literacy and recognizes the importance to distant teaching for small islands with policy of providing one learning device for use by the primary school students especially in rural and remote areas. Government has established ICT telecenters and launched digital literacy programs in schools in order to bridge digital divide in rural and remote centres.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://home.tslb.com.fj>.

<sup>14</sup> Int'l Council for Open and Distance Education, available at [http://www.icde.org/projects/regulatory\\_frameworks\\_for\\_distance\\_education/country\\_profiles/fiji/education\\_system/](http://www.icde.org/projects/regulatory_frameworks_for_distance_education/country_profiles/fiji/education_system/).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.upr-epu.com/files/159/G.E.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Statement by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Government of Fiji, 38<sup>TH</sup> session of

45. In order to strengthen digital literacy in Fiji schools, the Government partnered in 2014 with Reach 4 Your Future Foundation, an Australian non-profit organization to implement a Microsoft-based digital literacy program for primary students. In 2016, the program is being expanded to secondary students. While the Special Rapporteur supports such programmes, he urges the Government to be careful to ensure that such efforts are not captured by commercial or for-profit enterprises, as is the case in many other countries. Its repercussions on access to education free of costs also requires careful consideration.

## **B. Infrastructure limitations**

46. Infrastructure limitations constitute an important factor in regards to access to education. Accessibility is undermined by geographical isolation of some schools in Fiji. Many primary schools are located in the small outlying islands and remote areas. Students in those areas are facing problems of traveling to school daily. Teachers are reluctant to be posted at these schools because of poor living conditions and lack of proper infrastructure and utilities.

47. School infrastructure is a significant challenge for rural and maritime schools in Fiji. Schools on small, remote islands often lack a reliable supply of water or electricity. On the other hand, schools in wealthier areas are more resourceful than those in poorer ones.

48. The location of schools in the maritime areas and in the remote areas of the large islands gives rise to accessibility issues. Telecommunications are available to most parts of Fiji, but actual travel is still a challenge for some of the remote rural and maritime schools. This often contributes toward lower quality education delivery in those areas. The geography of the country and the distributions of schools have resulted in some constraints in terms of access to education. The wide distribution of the population contributes to this problem.

## **C. Disparities in access**

49. Disparities in access to education between the rural/remote and the urban areas continue to be a major challenge, as there is still marked variation in the standard of basic school facility resources. Rural schools are less economically viable and cannot supplement the government grants in order to maintain an acceptable standard of school environment that supports quality teaching-learning process. Pre-school is not yet covered as part of the “fee-free” education plan however, the Ministry is subsidising tuition for 5 year olds in ECE. Addressing access limitations for children living in poverty should continue to remain a priority for the government.

50. Schools for persons with disabilities deserve special consideration with regards to disparities in education. Fiji currently has 17 “special education” schools, which cater exclusively towards students with disabilities. These schools, with 120 teachers and 882 students in 2014, provide specialized education programs for students with physical and mental learning difficulties. As recognized in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,<sup>17</sup> such students are receiving an inclusive education within the mainstream education system.

51. The Special Rapporteur visited the Hilton Special School, which is a school for the education of students with disabilities. The capacity to address the needs of all students

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UNESCO General Conference, November 2015, Paris

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=284>

with disabilities requires to be strengthened. Greater support for students with disabilities in the 2016 budget should be targeted towards the creation of an inclusive education programme for all regular schools.

52. There remain significant gender disparities among education professionals. There are more female teachers in primary and secondary schools than male teachers. However, among professionals in the administrative/managerial category, this is not the case. Around 10% of leadership positions (principals or managers in) in primary and secondary schools were women.

53. Concerns were also raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child over adolescent pregnancy and subsequent school dropout; rural schools being frequently faced with a lack of access to water, electricity, or means of communication.<sup>18</sup> In its 2014 Concluding Observations to Fiji, the Committee asked Fiji to elaborate on the progress achieved in implementing the Inclusive Education Policy. The Committee recommended that Fiji allocate sufficient financial support to ensure that all schools are provided with the infrastructure necessary to provide for an effective learning environment.

54. The Special Rapporteur would like to commend the policy measure taken by the Government to rename schools which had ethnic names. This is an important reform measure to eliminate schools based on ethnicity, and was recognized by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its fourth review of Fiji.<sup>19</sup>

55. The Special Rapporteur would like to mention educational deprivation on account of poverty, which is the greatest obstacle to realizing the right to education. In accordance with the article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as UNESCO's Convention against Discriminating in Education, public policies need to be devised to provide financial and pedagogic support along with positive measures to all those who remain deprived of their right to education in an endeavour to mitigate inequities based, *inter alia*, on social origin, wealth etc.

56. There seems to be lack of concordance as regards the implementation of Vosa Vaka-Viti language instruction. The iTaukei traditions are fading out of schools, and there is fear that the language might be waning. However, concern has been expressed that compulsory Vosa Vaka-Viti language instruction is affecting indigenous students' knowledge of English, which is later affecting their attainments at tertiary education and future employment opportunities. Disparities between rural and urban students, and between iTaukei and other students should be addressed with targeted interventions.

## **VII. Empowerment and quality education**

57. There is a reported disparity in the quality of education in different schools. The gap appears to be related to the economic wealth of communities.

### **A. Quality concerns in the Education Sector Strategic Plan**

58. The first Education Sector Strategic Plan 2009-2011<sup>20</sup> developed in 2008 shows Fiji's commitment to address the quality of education. It affirms the principle of universal

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<sup>18</sup> Concluding Observations, Fiji 2014, the Committee on the Rights of the Child asked Fiji.

<sup>19</sup> CERD/C/FJI/CO/18-20.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/7e20f9ccaca3b6382563658a4ca2773b7a61c48f.pdf>

access to an expanding, improving and inclusive quality education, with innovative curriculum that promotes development of lifelong skills and good citizenship. It stipulates that all schools are well resourced to develop a workforce that is appropriately qualified and competent with increased prominence of TVET in education for developing a competent, skilled and productive workforce for sustainable development in Fiji.<sup>21</sup>

59. In order to improve the quality of education in Fiji, the Ministry of Education developed a three year plan to address nine priorities. These include (i) improving equitable access to education for all children; (ii) strengthening the Fiji National Curriculum Framework to ensure knowledge and wisdom, skills, cultural, moral and religious values are taught; (iii) ensuring school environments enhance student character, physical development, personal and national identity, and promote social cohesion; (iv) ensuring education professionals are qualified and reflect gender parity; (v) promoting technical education; (vi) strengthening the partnerships between schools and their communities to improve school management; (vii) improving information management; (viii) safeguarding Fiji's cultural heritage, and (ix) maintaining a qualifications framework to create skilled workers through the Fiji Qualifications Framework.<sup>22</sup>

60. The Special Rapporteur noted with great interest that Fiji has developed a national qualifications framework, to establish uniform national norms for quality, for infrastructure, curriculum contents and teacher qualifications. This framework must be refined to further promote civic education as well as moral values necessary for making children responsible citizens.

## **B. A holistic approach to quality**

61. The Peoples' Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, adopted on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2008, recognized the need to promote shared national values through national education curriculum for multicultural education and implement a progressive and responsive curriculum as part of quality. It embodies moral vision, inspired by the concept of social justice and common good, and embodies the concept of human dignity and equal opportunities. It also recognizes the importance of sharing spiritual and interfaith dialogue, seeks to set their morals and standards.

62. The compulsory teaching of conversational and contemporary iTaukei and Fiji-Hindi languages in schools is a welcome change as it promotes respect for cultural diversity and mutual respect for each other. Cultural diversity is inseparable from linguistic diversity, and the teaching of these languages responds to the needs of the multicultural society.

## **C. Assessment of student' educational attainments**

63. The Special Rapporteur would like to underline the importance of the assessment of student' educational attainments through a national uniform system, which ensures that minimum quality education achievements are respected in students' progression throughout the education system.

64. Ethnic differences are still a concern in terms of examination performance. Indigenous Fijian students lag behind other ethnic groups in major external examinations.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-19

<sup>22</sup> [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Fiji/Fiji-2015-2018\\_ESSDP\\_Education\\_Sector\\_Strategic\\_Devt-Plan.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Fiji/Fiji-2015-2018_ESSDP_Education_Sector_Strategic_Devt-Plan.pdf)

Similar gaps are also evident between rural and urban schools. Priority spending in education is a major factor that could contribute to the differential in performance.

65. The Rapporteur welcomes that annual testing and monitoring of results has been reinstated. It can be hoped that this will raise the learning achievements of all students and lead to further reforms.

66. In this respect, he commends the concept of education as a common good, embraced by the Government of Fiji. Education should enable the full realization of human rights as well as human development, it is also a noble cause, and must be safeguarded as a public good. Care must be taken not to envision education as a factory, with inputs and outputs, as education is a lifelong learning process. Instead, the policy focus should be on the students' educational attainments in whatever setting or level of education as a lifelong pursuit.

#### **D. Fostering human values as essential objectives of education**

67. It is commendable that the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan 2015-2018 underlines the importance of strengthening the Fiji National Curriculum Framework to ensure knowledge and wisdom, skills, cultural, moral and religious values are taught in order to improve the quality of education in Fiji. The Strategy also expresses the need for ensuring school environments enhance student character, physical development, personal and national identity, and promote social cohesion;

68. It is also important to consider that the Constitution of Fiji allows the State to direct any educational institution to teach subjects pertaining to health, civic education and issues of national interest, and any educational institution must comply with any such directions made by the State.

69. It may be also noted that Fiji accepted the recommendations in the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of 23 March 2010 to integrate the component of human rights education and training into its education system.<sup>23</sup>

70. Full development of human personality is essential objectives of education, laid down in international human rights conventions. Education can create a better world by enabling children and adults to develop attitudes and behavior patterns so that they are enthused with the spirit of mutual respect and solidarity and become respectful of one another's ways and culture. Four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be, propounded by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (1996) in its report "Learning: the Treasure within", are of perennial importance. The Fiji National Curriculum Framework is grounded on these four pillars in its development and implementation.

71. The Special Rapporteur hopes that while expanding education opportunities, empowering role of education and quality is not neglected and that provision of quality education receives constant attention, with focus on humanistic mission of education.

#### **E. Challenges facing the teaching profession**

72. A number of concerns were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur during his visit. There has been an acute shortage of qualified teachers at the secondary level. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about the state of the teaching profession in Fiji.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.upr-epu.com/files/159/G.E.pdf>

73. The personal hardships of living and teaching in remote and maritime schools is a serious detriment to finding qualified teachers to teach in such schools. Although a rotation system exists to ensure teachers do not remain in one place, additional consideration needs to be given to incentives and transparency in the operation of this system to ensure that teachers have incentives to serve in rural and remote schools.

74. Teacher remuneration remains a contentious issue in Fiji. Teacher pay was recently reduced for newly recruited teachers during probationary period. This makes it particularly difficult to attract and retain well-educated teachers, who often seek other government positions when possible. The recent move towards placing all teachers onto temporary contracts undermines the professionalism, and will deter qualified candidates from pursuing a career in teaching. In order to attract and retain better quality candidates, teacher working conditions and salaries should be an incentive, not a disincentive. Increases for teachers in rural and maritime areas, however, are welcomed.

75. Teacher qualifications remain an area of concern. Recognizing the lack of educational qualifications of teachers, the Government is promoting professional development incentives. Teacher pay is increased based on educational qualifications, and teachers are provided time off to upgrade their qualifications. Despite this, very few teachers have pursued this option.

## VIII. Financing of education

76. Investment in education is an obligation of States under human rights law, and the resources allocated to the education sector on enduring basis bear evidence to the Government's commitment to development of education in Fiji.

77. Civil society continues to praise the government for sizeable portion of the budget that is dedicated to education. The contributions have maintained over the years and have been an integral aspect of Prime Minister Bainimarama's campaign. In 2014, the Government announced a \$541.5 million budget to the education sector. This figure is almost double what was spent in 2000 and approximately \$100 million more than 2013. Education-related spending was about 4.1% of GDP in 2015.<sup>24</sup> This was projected to rise to 7.5%, consistent with a similar rise since 2014. In 2015, Government allocated the highest level budget to education - 16.7% of the total government budget<sup>25</sup> Enhanced budget in 2015 also provided for the introduction of subsidized tuition for five year olds at accredited pre-schools; free tuition at vocational schools; the introduction of a scholarship scheme for the top 600 secondary school graduates as well as student loan program for all other graduates seeking post-secondary education; and a free milk program for Year 1 students.

78. A 7.6% increase in the education budget for 2016 is intended to provide for the recruitment of 350 new teachers; to increase teachers' salaries in both the primary and secondary schools; to increase the remote location allowance for teachers; and to allow for the establishment of eight more Technical Colleges. Education and training continue to remain Government's priority. Investment in the Education Sector has been unwavering with the largest share of Fiji's annual budget devoted to this area.

79. The unprecedented increase in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as it demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/944500a8-490a-41b3-802c-372783f0fdc1/2016-NATIONAL-BUDGET---ESTIMATES.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> Statement by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Government of Fiji, 38 session of UNESCO General Conference, November 2015, Paris

country. The Special Rapporteur was informed that 80 % of grants in Prime Minister's Office is used for education.

80. Domestic resources can also be mobilized from local communities that own community schools which supplement funding through fund raising activities. Such funding sources are organized by the school managements and target specific projects within the school or contribute towards recurrent costs. However, wealthier communities are more adept in supplementing government funds for education.

81. Development partners also contribute to the education budget, and the education system relies on this to fill in gaps. Without these donations, the system stands to fail short and derail the progress of certain activities, especially new initiatives identified to holistically uplift learning and teaching.

82. Despite enhance budget on domestic resource mobilization, education continues to require further investment. Many schools seeking to raise their standards and quality are constrained by their Government-provided budget.

83. The Special Rapporteur would like to suggest a model, whereby all education-related fundraising, for example through philanthropy, is placed in a national trust fund. This fund would enhance the national investment in education by domestic resource mobilization. With equity-based approach, financial resources for education should be judiciously utilized.

84. Primary and secondary education is designed to be compulsory and free. In the last three years, the government has allocated approximately 500 million dollars each year to education.<sup>26</sup> This results in schools receiving between 425 and 710 Fiji dollars per child for primary and for secondary schools, depending on the school roll and student year.

85. In order to address geographic differences, the Ministry of Education is experimenting with awarding grants based not just on student enrolment, which favoured larger, urban schools, but with consideration for all operating costs. The new formula takes into account a number of indices: school distance from main towns or city; accessibility by boat or road; mark-up price on materials and transportation costs in view of distance and difficulty of access; availability and frequency of public transport and telecommunications, socio-economic status of small-island schools, and the availability of amenities such as water, electricity and medical facilities.

86. The Special Rapporteur understands that the present funding formula which provides money on a per-student basis disproportionately benefiting large urban schools at the expense of the small rural ones is being reviewed to give more financial support in marginalized and rural areas.

87. In addition to academic merit, a scholarship system should also ensure that students from rural or economically disadvantaged environments are given better opportunities for education.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Speeches/2014-national-budget-announcement.aspx>; see also <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/227158/free-education-for-primary-and-secondary-school-students-in-fiji>.



## IX. Skills development: valorising technical and vocational education and training

88. Fiji, like almost all developing countries, needs to address skills development through technical and vocational education and training as part of quality.

89. In response to youth unemployment and a high demand for skilled labour, the Government of Fiji has embarked on an ambitious program to strengthen this sector in Fiji. The Government recognizes key importance of technical and vocational education and training and from high school, students can opt for technical colleges. A range of technical courses and programmes are offered in these colleges, which provide free skills development programs. The Government should give impetus to creating a viable, attractive technical and vocational education and training programme with competency-based incentives for students.

90. It may be recalled that in its 2014 Concluding Observations to Fiji, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to undertake impact assessments of educational strategies and take corrective measures to ensure that school leavers are prepared for the demands of the national job market.

91. The development of the Fiji Qualifications Framework, established by the Fiji Higher Education Commission lays down qualifications for National Certificate in 25 trades and vocations<sup>27</sup> and sets down a system whereby students can learn trades which they can practice throughout Fiji, as well as the Pacific. Further, through close collaboration with industry, students, schools and the Government can provide targeted training to ensure graduates are able to find employment.

92. In his visit to technical colleges, he found they were of reasonable quality, but that they needed to become wider in coverage and student in-take. Moreover, collaboration with industry was weak, and it was reported that companies preferred to hire employees from abroad, justifying their choice by the lack of skilled local workers.

93. Increasing the attractiveness of technical and vocational training and education within Fiji must begin in the school system. Recent reforms to introduce access to technical and vocational education and training programs in secondary schools, and to develop skill-specific programs in conjunction with the industry is a promising goal. However, the implementation will demonstrate whether Fiji's youth will be able to find employment.

94. The Special Rapporteur observed with concern that professional post-secondary institutions reportedly received inadequate funding to maintain their buildings and operate their classes. "The Government and the private sector should recognize that technical and vocational education is an investment, not a cost, with significant returns."<sup>28</sup> It should be ensured that the quality of technical education is sufficiently high and respectable to allow graduates to be attractive to potential employers, without excessive additional training requirements.

<sup>27</sup> National Certificate in Agriculture, in Aircraft Maintenance, in Automotive Electrical & Electronics, in Automotive Mechanic, in Baking and Patisserie, in Basic Security Operations, in Beauty Therapy, in Body Works and Spray Painting, in Cabinet Making & Joinery, in Carpentry, in Cookery, in Electronics & Engineering, in Electrical Fitter Mechanic, in Fabrication & Welding in Fitting and Machining, in Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanic, in Heavy Mobile Plant Mechanic, in Marine Engineering in Printing, in Navigation & Seamanship, in Printing, in Plumbing & Sheet Metal, in Public Transportation –Bus Driving, in Refrigeration, Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning, in Saw Doctoring, in Cerin Tourism (Tour Guiding)

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education, paragraph 9

95. The national shortage of skilled tradespersons leaves serious gaps, particularly in the construction and tourism industries. The Government must develop innovative approaches to ensure that national human resource policies and education system lead to reducing this foreign dependence by developing a competent and skilled national workforce. The human resources development strategy needs to harmonize with the immigration policy geared towards increasing the size of the trained workforce.

96. Care should be taken that technical and vocational education and training programmes are not constrained on account of meagre resources. These programs deserve greater financial investment. Institutional collaboration with industry and sustained public private partnerships can be possible avenues to mobilize more resources. Raising the social esteem of technical education, and making it professional rewarding is essential, as is developing critical thinking skills in students. This can be done by awarding national prizes to technical and vocational education and training students to raise the profile of technical education in society.

## **X. Reforming the legislative framework of the right to education**

97. Education reforms have been rapidly advancing in Fiji; however the underlying legal framework has not kept pace with this and requires to be updated. Education Act of 1978 needs to be modernized. The Act contains provisions on school fees which are not in consonance with the new Constitution of Fiji and the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan 2015-2018 for providing education free of costs.

98. It must be noted that the Education Act of 1978 has certain commendable elements such as the concept of “best interests” of education in relation to regulating private providers of education, and certain minimum facilities as an important condition for recognition of private schools (articles 15, 16, 19 and 30). The concept of Management of schools in part IV of the Act, along with liability of management as well as part XII on Regulations regarding the financial accountability, for maintaining proper accounts of income and expenditure of schools and of controlling authorities of schools are elements of great interest in revising the Act. These are very pertinent today in the context of privatization in education so that education is preserved as public good and safeguarded against forces of privatization and it is not allowed to be reduced to business.

## **XI. Enforcement of the right to education**

99. In order that the right to education is safeguarded in case of any breach or violations, national legal system should provide mechanisms – judicial as well quasi-judicial - for its justiciability and enforcement.

### **A. National human rights institution**

100. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission was established according to Section 45 of the Constitution. It consists of five members who are appointed by the President on the advice of the Constitutional Offices Commission. The Commission can receive and investigate complaints, seeking to resolve them through conciliation. Where complaints remain unresolved, the Commission can refer these to a legal process. As of the date of the visit of the Rapporteur, the revised Committee had not appointed a chairperson to head the Commission.

101. Concerns were brought to the attention of the Rapporteur that the selection of Commissioners was not fully respectful of the principle of independence of the

Commission, established in the Paris Principles. Moreover, as of 2014, the new Commission was not accredited by the International Coordinating Committee Of National Institutions For The Promotion And Protection Of Human Rights.<sup>29</sup> The Special Rapporteur urges the Government to ensure the Commission full independence in its work, comply with the Paris Principles and take steps towards making the Commission accredited as such. It is also important that teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders have recourse to an independent body to resolve in case of breach or violation of the right to education disputes outside of the court system, which is unduly expensive for many issues.

## **B. Adjudicating the right to education**

102. It is well acknowledged that the right to education is a justiciable right. In his 2012 report to the Human Rights Council<sup>30</sup> the Special Rapporteur reported on the several ways and the many jurisdictions in which violations of the right to education have been brought before courts, both civil and common law. New education legislation in Fiji should specifically identify the rights of students as well as the responsibility of teachers to ensure that equitable, quality education is available for all. Knowledge on how the right to education has been adjudicated, particularly in other common-law jurisdictions, would be useful to courts, the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, as well as government and lawyers to ensure this right is protected in case of its violation.

## **XII. Conclusions**

103. **Fiji is going through a historic period of transition in the education system. As a result of important reforms ushered in by the Government, along with a national initiative to overcome ‘ethnic divide’ and build a better Fiji for all, education system is undergoing transformation. Despite political instability, Fiji celebrated a democratic election in 2014 which seeks to develop a common national identity and promises to usher in an era of stability and progress. The right to education is established by the new Constitution, adopted in September 2013 and important reforms have been ushered in by the Government. The Special Rapporteur is encouraged by the commitment the Government of Fiji has shown towards implementing the right to education. The unprecedented increase in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as it demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this country.**

104. **Fiji has achieved universal access to basic education, and the Special Rapporteur was impressed by the progress he observed to implement the right to education throughout the country. However, disparities between rural and urban students and between iTaukei and other students remain and should be addressed with targeted interventions.**

105. **Despite the reforms and national efforts, student educational attainments remain below expectations, and more needs to be done. Fiji must now continue to take measures to improve the quality of the education system in keeping with the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan 2015-18. The Special Rapporteur noted with great interest that Fiji has developed a national qualifications framework, to establish uniform national norms for quality. Quality in teaching, curriculum content**

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<sup>29</sup> [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/Chart\\_Status\\_NIs.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/Chart_Status_NIs.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> A/HRC/23/35

and pedagogy as well as school infrastructure are the basic tenets which must be constantly improved.

106. In response to youth unemployment and a high demand for skilled labour, the Government of Fiji has embarked on an ambitious program to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training sector, with innovative institutional structures in the form of Technical Colleges. However, raising the social esteem of technical and vocational education and training and making it professional rewarding is essential, even as funding for this sector of strategic importance must be enhanced.

107. It is incumbent upon government of Fiji to raise profile of the right to education on account of its political commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (2015) mentioned above, as well as to the Incheon Declaration (May 2015) and the adoption of the Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted at UNESCO General Conference in November 2015.

### **XIII. Recommendations**

108. Taking into consideration the above and his findings during the mission, the Special Rapporteur wishes to make the following recommendations with a view towards contributing to the improvement of the education system in Fiji.

#### **Ratifying international instruments**

109. The Government of Fiji should promptly sign and ratify the key international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UNESCO 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education. The Government should also ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed in 2010.

#### **Overcoming disparities in education**

110. Fiji must overcome disparities in education such disparities as rural urban areas and promote a system of equitable access to education in favour of all those who remain marginalized, and take affirmative measures with special consideration for the poor. More needs to be done to address public perceptions against persons with disabilities. There is an urgent need for a public information campaign to deal with social stigma and to educate teachers, parents and children to promote the right to education for children with disabilities.

111. The education policies should seek to bring about equality of opportunity both in law and in fact. The fundamental principle of equality of opportunity provides the essential basis for the establishment of an entire range of programmes and policies, guided by equitable approaches in favour of the marginalized, in particular the children from poor families.

#### **Modernizing Education Law**

112. Recent reforms in education in Fiji are underpinned by a transformative policy framework, and programmatic approaches which are commendable measures. However, national legislation has not kept pace with these reforms and practices. The current Education Act dates from 1978, and its provisions no longer reflect current educational policies and practices.

113. Fiji, therefore, needs to modernize its education law and to create an enforceable legal framework. The new Act should also integrate a large number of policy texts which have come into existence.

114. A modernized education law should be comprehensive so as to strengthen foundations of the right to education in national legal system. It should ensure that all aspects of the right to education are clearly defined, alongwith role and responsibility of parents, students, teachers, and community. It should also lay down objectives and contents of education, with the focus on humanistic mission of education. The new Law should cover all key dimensions of the right to education including universal without discrimination or exclusion; norms and standards for quality of education; revamping technical and vocational education and training for skills development; fostering lifelong learning; enhancing national investment in education; regulating and controlling private providers of education and safeguard education as a public good. Whether there is one comprehensive education law or set of laws addressing various key areas, this should be accompanied by rules and regulations necessary for effect implementation.

115. While elaborating the new Education Act, it would be important to retain some important provisions of Education Act of 1978 most pertinent today, notably the concept of “best interests” of education as a guiding principle for regulating private providers of education, their recognition being contingent upon certain with certain conditions, as required in 1978 Act. (articles 15, 16 and 30). In particular, considering the importance accorded to responsibility and accountability in the provisions of education today, it is important to retain the concept underlying the Management of schools in part IV of the Act, along with liability of management and their financial accountability as mentioned in part IV of the Act.

116. The laws and policies should put premium on ensuring that education is not reduced to business and it is safeguarded against forces of privatization.

#### **Human rights and anti-discrimination commission**

117. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission should be strengthened to meet the requirements of the Paris Principles and should be duly accredited as soon as possible to provide an independent mechanism for Fijians to enforce their human rights.

118. In particular, guidance should be given to the Commission as well as the national courts on how the right to education should be adjudicated;

#### **Upgrading standards and quality of education**

119. As a follow up to the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan 2015-2018, the Government should develop and implement necessary quality norms and standards. In keeping with the National Assessment Framework, Fiji should embrace a ‘comprehensive system of quality education and learning’ based on a holistic concept, which goes beyond the instrumental role of education in mathematical literacy and numeracy, and places a premium on the humanistic mission of education. Further consideration should be given to strengthening the Fiji National Curriculum Framework to ensure knowledge and wisdom, skills, cultural, moral and religious values are taught.

120. The quality imperatives should be a determinant factor in investing in education as against recurring expenditure so as provide necessary financial resource base for giving effect to quality standards, and curriculum development. Enhancing

**national investment for fostering quality as a public policy concern deserves much more consideration.**

**121. Quality education also necessitates that teachers should be capable of developing critical thinking in children and adults, and nurture in them moral values.**

**122. In order to meet quality imperatives, Fiji needs to set common standards and norms conducive to building professional excellence, accompanied by instruments for monitoring and assessment of the quality of education.**

#### **Fostering respect for cultural linguistic diversity**

**123. Following elimination of single ethnicity schools and the compulsory teaching of iTaukei and Fiji-Hindi at a conversational level in schools, measures aimed at promoting respect for cultural diversity and mutual respect for each other must be intensified, as cultural diversity is inseparable from linguistic diversity in a multicultural society.**

#### **Strengthening the teaching profession**

**124. Teachers in Fiji face many challenges. Professional standing and the social esteem of the teaching profession needs to be valorized.**

**125. Questions regarding the status of teachers must be addressed in an endeavor to make teaching profession more attractive, and socially better esteemed, with career development perspectives. Contractual teaching which erodes teachers' morale, motivation and commitment must not be embraced; rather, the Education Law should clearly define roles and responsibilities of teachers, ensuring that the teaching profession becomes an attractive career. Transparency is vital to ensure there is no perception of undue interference in the selection, placement or promotion of teachers.**

**126. Reviewing the accountability and oversight of teacher performance is a vital function of the Ministry of Education, and greater resources should be allocated to ensure that teachers are meeting the standards set by the Ministry. The current system relies on Head Teachers adopting and disseminating new and revised curricula, and they are responsible for overseeing local teacher performance. The Ministry should develop and implement mechanisms which identify teachers who require additional training and support, and ensure that they are able to improve their performance to ensure that children in all schools benefit from quality education.**

**127. A fair and effective teaching rotation policy should be strengthened to encourage teachers to teach in remote and maritime schools. In addition to financial incentives, a fair and transparent rotation policy should be included in promotion and placement considerations.**

#### **Role of parents and community**

**128. Education is a primary responsibility of Government. But it is also a social responsibility. Parents, teachers and community have important role in school management educational governance in local settings. The Government must make greater efforts to include parents as key stakeholders in improving education. Parents must be provided with channels to flag concerns to the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.**

### **Strengthening technical and vocational education and training**

129. The Government should continue to strengthen the secondary school curriculum with a view towards creating a viable, attractive technical and vocational education and training programme which will provide qualified, capable graduates into professional post-secondary institutes. This programme should seek to increase the number of women entering technical fields and the workforce as well.

130. Closer partnerships with industry are needed to ensure graduates have the skills needed to find work after graduating. In-school vocational training fairs, on-site school visits, and similar initiatives may help students better appreciate the career possibilities associated with non-academic career options.

131. The perception among teachers, students and parents of technical and vocational education and training as a career path of last resort must be transformed. TVET should be made more attractive and professionally esteemed as a system that produces the skilled workers that the economy of the Fiji requires. Technical institutions should not be treated as a stream apart, but as an integral part of educating Fiji's youth.

132. TVET should be valorised as a professional career path, with a campaign for raising its social perception and esteem. Policymakers, educators and teachers must work with students, parents and industrial partners to help spread the message that competencies and skills which respond to the rising aspirations of youth in today's globalized economy provide leverage in economic development and social progress. Teachers must also be trained to enable them better to guide students towards non-academic career options in a positive light.

133. Recognizing the economic importance of strengthening the TVET sector, the Government should continue to strengthen funding for vocational post-secondary institutions. The Government should explore diverse range of funding mechanisms and resources for TVET. For example, within the preview of the Corporate Social Responsibility tax, enterprises can be encouraged to invest in TVET in recognition of its key importance for industrial development and economic growth. Even a TVET fund could be envisaged in order to leverage existing resources for national TVET programs, in particular for technical equipment and facilities. The Government should consider sharing to the maximum extent possible funding for TVET with industry and the private sector with appropriate incentives to this end.

134. While the proposal for a formal Memorandum of Agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Trustees or School Board pursuant to policies on development and management of the Technical College of Fiji is a welcome development, it is even more important to broaden this approach, providing a Memorandum of Cooperation with industry and enterprises as well in order to develop an institutionalized collaboration with them.

### **Funding of education**

135. The significant recent increases in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as it demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this country. However, the distribution of funding should be better allocated to address the specific requirements of each school to ensure that the quality of education is equitable and quality standards are comparable throughout the country. The current disparities in quality and infrastructure between large, urban schools and rural and maritime schools must be urgently addressed.

136. The Government should consider enacting legislation which establishes a funding model for education which establishes minimum funding levels, and provides equitable mechanisms to address inequalities. One example could be the establishment of a national education endowment fund into which all money which is raised privately be pooled and distributed according to need to ensure schools in wealthier areas are not unduly advantaged.

**Key role of Fiji for promoting right to education in the Pacific region**

137. Fiji is an education hub in the Pacific region, and it would be opportune if Fiji were to organize regional level events in order to exchange experiences on key areas such as skills development or education programs for preserving cultural heritage and Pacific ethos. In a region where countries have committed themselves to regional cooperation, Fiji can play a pioneering role in giving visibility to such concerted action.

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