



BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR
ACTION (BPfA) +30 FIJI COUNTRY PROGRESS
REPORT
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ARH	Adolescent Reproductive Health	DRR	Disaster Risk Resilience
AYFHS	Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Health Service	DVRO	Domestic Violence Restraining Order
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action	ECE	Early Childhood Education
CBA	Competency Based Assessment	FCGA	Fiji Country Gender Assessment
CCDRM	Climate Change Disaster Risk Management	FEMIS	Fiji Education Management Information System
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	FEO	Fiji Elections Office
CHW	Community Healthcare Workers	FLT	Financial Literacy Training
CMRIS	Consolidated Monthly Return Information System	FNAP	Fiji National Action Plan to prevent violence against women and girls
CPR	Contraceptive Prevalence Rate	FNCDP	Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child	FPSF	Fiji Program Support Facility
CRVS	Civil Registration Vital Statistics	FPSP	Fiji Parliament Support Project
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women	FRHADC	Fiji Human Rights Anti-Discrimination Commission
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade	FWCC	Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre
DOW	Department of Women	FWRM	Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
DV	Domestic Violence	GGGR	Global Gender Gap Report
DRM	Disaster Risk Management	GESI	Gender Equality Social Inclusion
		GFO	Gender Focal Officers
		GII	Gender Inequality Index
		GOS	Global Outsourcing Sector

GRPB	Gender Responsive Program Budgeting	NCD	Non Communicable Diseases
GWF	Graduate Women of Fiji	NCSMED	National Centre for Small Medium Enterprises Development
HDI	Human Development Index	NDP	National Development Plan
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	NDRRP	National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy
HPV	Human Papillomavirus	NER	Net Enrollment Rate
IT	Information Technology	NMW	National Women’s Machinery
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex	OMRS	Open Merit & Recruitment Selection
M4C	Markets for Change	PRRP	Pacific Risk Resilience Program
MEHA	Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts	PSIP	Public Sector Investment Program
MHMS	Ministry of Health & Medical Services	PWSPD	Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development
MIDA	Media Industry Development Authority	RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey	SDP	Service Delivery Protocol
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate	SOGIE	Sexual Orientation Gender Identity & Expression
MOAW	Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways	SPBD	South Pacific Business Development
MSME	Micro Small Medium Enterprises	SPC	Pacific Community
MWCSP	Ministry of Women, Children & Social Protection	SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights
MOF	Ministry of Finance	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Math
MSP	Medical Services Pacific		

TEST	Technical and Employment Skills Training	WEBC	Women Entrepreneurs' Business Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Program	WG	Working Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund	WID	Women in Development
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution	WPA	Women's Plan of Action
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	WPS	Women, Peace & Security

SECTION 1: HIGHLIGHTS OF FIJI'S PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY (2020 – 2024)

Fiji is pleased to present (BPA+30) progress report on the Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action (BPfA). This report highlights achievements, challenges, and core elements of the review process, emphasizing the advancement of all women and girls.

The Fiji BPfA+30 draws extensive insights from the Fiji Country Gender Assessment (FCGA) which has been launched in 2023. The FCGA highlights the successes and progress that have been made in favor of gender equality and towards achievement of the SDGs, in line with the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and identifies the remaining gaps and challenges where collective efforts are necessary to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in Fiji. FCGA was undertaken over the course of two years and realized through a whole-of-government and inclusive consultation process with various stakeholders. In this context and building upon the extensive consultation process for the FCGA and other key recent national strategic initiatives, the BPA+ 30 report also benefited from further consultations and input from civil society and women's rights organizations.

It is important to underline that despite the gender impact of the global health pandemic and the continued effects of the climate crisis, Fiji has still made strides in advancing gender equality over the last five years. These achievements are primarily attributed to the development and implementation of key whole-of-government gender equality policies. These strategic national efforts involve partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), feminist groups, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and Women's rights organizations.

1.1 Key Achievements

Despite significant challenges over the past five years, including health, economic, and climate crises, Fiji has exhibited resilience and ongoing progress in advancing gender equality. Throughout these adversities, the government has maintained a steadfast commitment to addressing gender disparities and fostering inclusivity. Fiji's 2013 Constitution adopts an intersectional approach to the protection of the rights of all Fijians to freedom from discrimination on the basis of personal characteristics, including sex, age, dis/ability, religion and culture, sexual orientation and socioeconomic or marital status

In such context, noteworthy efforts have been directed towards prioritizing key national gender equality initiatives, spanning the development and implementation of transformative, inclusive, evidence based and whole of government policies aimed at enhancing gender-responsive governance with specific focus on gender responsive budgeting, improving gender statistics, women's economic empowerment, and combating gender-based violence against all women and girls.

These efforts encompass several key initiatives, including the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD1) (2021-2023), the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence

against All Women and Girls (2023-2028) (FNAP), and the Fiji Country Gender Assessment (2023). Additionally, Fiji's first and upcoming Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (WEE NAP) (2025-2030). These endeavors demanded a high level of political leadership, resource mobilization, and, most importantly, partnerships with civil society, women's rights and faith-based organizations as well as all relevant stakeholders. Particularly, the National Women's Machinery has greatly benefited from such partnerships during the national consultation process of the Fiji National Action Plan (NAP) and the implementation of the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD1) and the current process of the WEE NAP consultation. These collaborations have played a vital role in strengthening the government's capacity by leveraging valuable local expertise and resources.

Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight significant achievements in critical areas. Fiji's commitment to closing gender gaps is evident in its notable progress in global gender equality rankings. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Fiji significantly improved its ranking from 103rd place in 2020 to 121st place in 2023. Additionally, Fiji's education sector exemplifies inclusivity and equity, boasting exceptional rates of school enrollment and completion, coupled with efforts to achieve gender parity. The provision of universal access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and tuition-free ECE underscores Fiji's dedication to providing lifelong learning opportunities for all, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status. Despite persistent gender gaps in workforce participation and employment rates, Fiji is witnessing an increasing number of women entering the workforce, indicative of ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and gender equality.

Moreover, digital technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet are empowering young women in Fiji to advocate for social change and inclusion. These technologies not only facilitate the shift in societal norms but also provide Fijian women with access to information crucial for their economic and income-generating activities, overcoming time and distance constraints. With the majority of Fijian women owning mobile phones and regularly accessing the Internet, they are leveraging this connectivity to explore new avenues of income generation and economic empowerment. Concurrently, Fiji is rapidly emerging as an attractive destination for the global outsourcing sector (GOS), boasting a predominantly young workforce, a significant portion of which comprise women. This presents a critical opportunity for Fiji's economic growth and development, with the potential to further engage women in the workforce, thereby fostering gender equality and supporting overall development efforts.

In addition, Fiji's social protection policy, implemented in 2022, prioritized addressing people's needs in a gender-responsive manner. Notably, women are the primary recipients of several key assistance schemes, including the Poverty Benefit Scheme, the Social Pension Scheme for older individuals, and the Care and Protection Allowance aimed at vulnerable families with children. Additionally, the Disability Allowance Scheme specifically supports women with disabilities, ensuring that they receive the necessary assistance and support to enhance their well-being and livelihoods.

1.2 Persistent Challenges

Despite the above achievements, Fiji grapples with persistent challenges that hinder progress towards gender equality. One such challenge is the prevalence of gender-based violence, which continues to threaten the safety and well-being of women and girls. Despite efforts to address this issue, gender-based violence remains a pressing concern that requires sustained attention and comprehensive interventions.

Moreover, women and girls disproportionately bear the brunt of climate change impacts, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Fiji recognizes the urgent need to mitigate these impacts and ensure that adaptation measures are gender-responsive, acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender equality and climate resilience.

Additionally, the non-recognition of unpaid care and high concentration of women in informal economy poses a barrier to women's economic empowerment and participation in the economy and labor force. Efforts to promote equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities are essential to overcoming this challenge and advancing gender equality in Fiji.

Discriminatory social and cultural norms further compound these challenges. Fiji's predominantly patriarchal culture perpetuates unequal power relations between men and women, both in private and public spheres. Addressing these entrenched norms requires concerted efforts to challenge and transform discriminatory attitudes and practices, promoting gender equality and social justice for all.

1.3 Forward Looking

To advance the goal of gender equality and empowerment of Fijian women and girls in all their diversity, the government of Fiji will build upon our achievements while recognizing the persistent challenges. Adopting a proactive stance, Fiji will incorporate lessons learned from past experiences and strengthen efforts with robust data and gender statistics, employing a whole-of-government, inclusive and transformative approaches. Close collaboration with civil society, women's rights organizations, and other stakeholders will remain paramount in driving progress forward. And to further this commitment, the government of Fiji is dedicated to implementing the following priority actions:

- **Prevention of Gender Based Violence:** The effective implementation of the National Action Plan to Prevent VAWG across 13 settings represents Fiji's strong commitment to preventing violence against all women and girls. It spans two five-year plans, focusing on both primary prevention (stopping violence before it starts) and secondary prevention (ensuring strong linkages to response services for survivors). The national action plan employs strategies such as transformative public education, strengthening respectful relationships, survivor-centered services, legal protection, and fostering gender equality. Accountability for the effective implementation of the plan lies with the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development and Gender-Responsive Budgeting initiative by the Government of Fiji.

- **Shifting discriminatory Social Norms:** The Fijian government affirms that creating an enabling environment for gender equality necessitates a zero-tolerance approach to gender discrimination. To challenge and shift discriminatory social norms, effective implementation of Strategy 5 within Fiji's National Action Plan (NAP) to prevent VAWG is a whole-of-government commitment. This strategy focuses on strengthening Fiji's societal systems and structures to promote gender equality, shared power between women and men, women's human rights, and women's leadership. The Fiji government is firmly committed to executing 22 key initiatives specified in Strategy 5 across 13 diverse settings as a pathway forward.
- **Women's economic participation and unpaid care:** The Fiji government recognizes that women's economic empowerment involves leveling the playing field, granting greater access to and control over economic opportunities. This includes gaining access to resources, information, decent work, and bodily autonomy. Additionally, it means amplifying women's voices and ensuring their influence in economic decisions, both at home and in public. The upcoming Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (2025-2029) is envisioned as a vital national policy measure and roadmap, translating these aspirations into tangible results through a comprehensive, whole-of-government, inclusive, evidence-based, and transformative approach. The WEE NAP Secretariat and Task Force, comprised of civil society and women's rights organization is expected to play a pivotal role in overseeing and supporting the development and implementation of the WEE NAP, ensuring extensive engagement and ownership across diverse sectors and settings.
- **Enabling Environment:** The Fijian Government acknowledges that the accountability for gender equality lies in gender statistics and analysis, the development of evidence-based policies, and gender-responsive budget investment. The Gender Transformative Gender and Good Governance: Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD) Phase 2 is a five-year program (2025-2029) aimed at strengthening the entire government's capacity and institutional framework for gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (GRP). The initiative emphasizes accountability and will encompass 28 ministries, departments, and agencies.
- **Climate Change:** Fijian women are resilient and make important contributions to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change resilience at local, national and regional levels. The Government of Fiji recognises the nexus of gender equality and sustainable development. Fiji was the first Pacific Island country to ratify the Paris Agreement, which confirms gender equality, women's empowerment and intergenerational equity as key to climate mitigation and adaptation and, thus, sustainable development. In this context, Fiji will continue to address important issues, including enhancing the participation of all women and girls in emerging fields such as STEM and the blue and green economy. Additionally, Fiji will focus on gender-responsive approaches to loss and damage, as well as inclusive climate crisis finance.

- **Promoting Women’s Leadership:** Fiji acknowledges that achieving gender equality necessitates not only treating the symptoms but also dismantling the underlying social norms and structural barriers that perpetuate inequality. This includes ensuring equal participation and access to resources across all domains. In this regard, promoting and ensuring women's leadership assumes paramount importance in reshaping societal narratives and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Therefore, Fiji remains unwavering in its commitment to enhancing women’s representation in decision-making roles across various sectors and all levels. Recognizing the transformative potential of women's leadership, the government prioritizes initiatives aimed at encouraging and supporting women's involvement in leadership positions at all levels of society.

1.4 Conclusion

Fiji affirms its unwavering commitment to bridging gender disparities and fostering a society rooted in equality. We acknowledge the enduring challenges that persist, yet through integrating coordinated strategies and setting forward-looking goals, Fiji will continue to actively promote a culture of inclusivity and sets a regional and global benchmark for sustainable development.

SECTION 2: PRIORITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES & SETBACKS

2.1 Priorities and Achievements

Over the past five years, the Fijian government has placed significant emphasis on addressing the structural barriers that impede gender equality in Fiji. This effort has been concentrated on fortifying a policy and institutional framework conducive to empowering all women and girls. Collaborating closely with civil society, faith-based organizations, and women's rights groups, the government has undertaken a series of consultations and developments for key national gender equality initiatives.

As highlighted in section one, these priorities encompass the formulation of the Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2023 (FCGA) and the National Consultation for the Development of the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against all Women and Girls 2023-2028 (NAP-VAWG). The National Consultation for the NAP, initiated in 2020 amidst the pandemic's challenges, extended over two years, resulting in the roll out of the NAP and a whole of population efforts to stop VAWG before it starts. Additionally, the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development, alongside Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting introduced in 2022 and poised to enter its second phase in 2025. Also noteworthy is the forthcoming Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan 2025-2029 (WEE NAP).

These endeavors are evidence-based, inclusive, and require whole-of-government collaboration, unprecedented levels of effort, awareness, partnership, and resource mobilization, particularly given the increased capacity demands on the National Women's Machinery amidst the pandemic. The Fijian government recognizes that gender equality cannot be advanced through isolated, fragmented actions lacking coordination, resources, and data.

Below is a snapshot overview of these initiatives in this section:

- NAP-VAWG is the first in the Pacific and 2nd globally takes a whole of government, transformative, inclusive and evidence based approach across 13 key settings focused on preventing violence against all women and girls. In 2020, the Cabinet approved a rollout of national consultations for the development of the FNAP. The process included 44 consultations, 8 validation sessions, and an online survey, engaging 2,188 Fijians across all four divisions. The outcomes of these consultations informed the development of the Fiji National Action Plan. Led by the MWCSPP and in partnership with civil society, faith-based and women's rights organizations, and relevant stakeholders, these consultations aimed to establish a shared understanding of the root cause and contributing factors of VAWG. In 2023, Fiji launched the National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent Violence Against all Women and Girls (2023-2028). The NAP-VAWG was officially launched in June 2023 with a commitment of \$6 million from the Government of Australia for a span of 4 years implementation. Additionally, the introduction of the NAP-VAWG budget line within the Fiji government's national budget spans across key sectors and settings, with an allocation of \$1millionFJD for the FY 2023-2024. The development of the NAP-VAWG was facilitated by a Secretariat comprised of the MWCSPP, FWCC, and UN

Women, as the technical arm to the Fijian Government. The NAP-VAWG Technical Working Group involved key civil society organizations and government ministries, which provided strategic and technical oversight throughout the development of the NAP-VAWG. The FNAP-VAWG is built around 5 overarching national strategies: 1) Transformative public education and social norm change, 2) Strengthening of equal and respectful relationships, 3) Survivor-centered and multi-sector coordination of services, 4) coordinated legal protection for survivors, and 5) Fostering an enabling environment for an equal society. These strategies are designed to promote long-term transformative change over a decade across 13 key and influential sectors and. This included a detailed and costed 5-year action plan with a strong emphasis on preventing violence before it starts and ensuring effective linkage to response services for survivors.

- **FCGA** - In 2020, with a Cabinet decision, Fiji embarked on a comprehensive, whole-of-Government gender assessment, marking the first initiative of its kind in the Pacific. The FCGA represents the Government of Fiji's commitment to "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) while pursuing achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, in particular, SDG5 in favour of gender equality, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The FCGA is divided into eight thematic chapters and provides key and updated statistics, sex-disaggregated data and analysis along with policy recommendations to foster improvements in each of the identified thematic areas. The FCGA process of development had successfully raised awareness on the importance of, and need for, gender statistics among data-producing Government agencies; confirmed a strong and high level of commitment and cooperation on statistical issues; trialed cross-Government coordination methods; and developed comprehensive lists of indicators related to gender statistics and effective gender policymaking. Going forward, the FCGA aims to: (1) contribute to evidence-based policy dialogues to support the integration of gender concerns and priorities into relevant policies, strategies, programs and budgets; and (2) enhance timely and quality data and gender statistics. Improved and better targeted data and statistics are expected to reflect more adequately the lived realities of all women and girls in Fiji and, as such, to facilitate the development of evidence-based policies that better respond to the identified needs and interests of women and girls in all diversity and to develop solutions that address the identified gaps and lay the foundation for gender equality.

As Fiji moved towards post-pandemic recovery, it was expected that improved data and statistics coupled with evidence-based policy dialogues will provide the information and insight needed to better target, address and respond to deepening disparities and socioeconomic challenges. As the impacts of the pandemic were particularly acute for women and girls worldwide, Fiji was not exempted, and the integration of gender concerns and priorities across strategies, programs and budgets of the Fijian Government, were of utmost importance.

- **Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development(ICD):** Endorsed by a cabinet decision in 2020 and led by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection (MWCSP), (ICD) is a “whole of government” initiative with an emphasis on strengthening technical knowledge, skill, competence and resources on Transformative Gender Analysis/Mainstreaming and Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning (GRBP) across government institutions along with the establishment of effective coordination and accountability mechanisms. During 2021-2022, the MWCSP, in partnership with the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development, and Statistics (MoF), initiated the first phase of the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICD1). This phase involved collaboration with 8 government ministries and one key disciplinary force. ICD1 designed to establish the necessary capacities across government institutions for gender-responsive planning and budgeting. It focuses on strengthening the technical knowledge, skills, competence, and resourcing for gender transformative mainstreaming; supporting effective coordination and accountability for gender equality outcomes through the formation of Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs); and developing a series of sector- and context-specific knowledge products and tools for use by government officials. Over the two-year pilot project, the MWCSP partnered with Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM) to work with 9 ministries and departments from the Social Services Sector (4) and Economic Services Sector (5). The overall goal of the ICD is to create an enabling environment to ensure integration of women and girls’ needs interests, concerns, contributions and perspectives into policies, strategies, programs, and budgets while ensure effective coordination and accountability for gender equality outcomes across the whole of government. The key approaches of ICD consist of being gender transformative, building partnerships and relationships, as well as blended learning methods and a whole government approach. Gender-transformative approach tackles the social norms, attitudes and social systems that are often the root causes of gender inequality in a society and strives to reshape and transform gendered power relations and structures. Senior government officials were nominated as GMAG members; they and, in some instances, other, technical staff participated in a range of capacity development activities over the course of the pilot phase. The key achievements of the ICD1 that support the integration of GRPB into Government include:

 - i. GMAGs within ministries were established to serve as catalysts for transformative gender mainstreaming and GRPB within and across government institutions. The adoption of Terms of Reference (TORs) also task GMAGs to develop and implement Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs) to advocate for and support the integration of gender concerns into policies, programs, and budgets.
 - ii. Eighteen (18) gender responsive budget submissions were prepared by the nine GMAGs as part of the FY2020-2021 national budget. All submissions were approved and most of the ministries received the amounts requested for their gender-related projects.
 - iii. A Gender Mainstreaming Lead Facilitator Team (LFT) was established comprised of senior personnel from the Ministry of Women and Finance. Technical trainings and mentoring were provided to strengthen their capacity in undertaking gender

analysis in their policies, programmes and budgets. More importantly in having knowledge to on the budget cycles, templates and mentoring on the overall processes of the GRPB initiative.

- iv. Partnerships to promote ICD and GRPB across government, between the Ministry of Women, Ministry of Finance, pilot Ministries and CSO partners, namely FWRM, were central to the success of ICD1.
- v. Underlying these achievements was the development of a suite of knowledge products to support GRPB and a program of awareness raising, training, and mentoring to enhance GRPB capacity within both ministries and the pilot agencies.
- vi. Key knowledge products included Gender Sensitization and Gender Analysis toolkits; Sector-specific Rapid Gender Analysis of 7 Sectors; GRPB training manual; and Facilitator Guides and Training of Trainer (ToT) materials. Capacity enhancement activities included orientation workshops and gender transformative ICD trainings for GMAGs, accompanied by coaching and mentoring during preparation of GRPB budget submissions; including a program of training, coaching, and mentoring for the lead facilitators.

The above achievements and lessons learned is expected to pave the direction and priorities ICD 2 for the next 5 years and the roll out of the ICD2 (2025-2030).

- **Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB):** since a 2020 Cabinet decision, the Fiji Government has actively worked towards the implementation of Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB). The Ministry of Finance has been instrumental in establishing GRPB across the public sector as part of reforms under the Public Financial Management Improvement Plan (PFMIP). 2020, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) introduced the first gender budget template and developed a Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) Guidance Manual for Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, which was launched earlier in 2024. In addition to expanding the implementation of GRPB in the budgets, the MoF has also developed guidelines for the development of projects under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) that require GRPB budget submissions for all investments. A recent review of the implementation of GRPB reported that among 18 MDAs, annual budgets from FY2020-2021 onwards have allocated funding for 35 gender-responsive programs valued collectively at F\$116 million.
- **WEE NAP** - In 2024, the Cabinet endorsed the development of the WEE NAP for 2025-2029, spearheaded by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection (MWCSP). This endorsement underscores the government's firm commitment to unlocking the economic potential of Fijian women and girls in all their diversity, ensuring their full participation and leadership in the economy. The Fiji government recognizes that women's economic empowerment involves leveling the playing field, granting greater access to and control over economic opportunities. This includes gaining access to resources, information, decent work,

and bodily autonomy. Additionally, it means amplifying women's voices and ensuring their influence in economic decisions, both at home and in public. The WEE NAP is envisioned as a vital national policy measure and roadmap, translating these aspirations into tangible results through a comprehensive, whole-of-government, inclusive, evidence-based, and transformative approach. The MWCSP has already established the WEE NAP Secretariat and revitalized the WEE Task Force in March 2024, including relevant stakeholders from women's rights organizations and all relevant sectors. The WEE NAP Secretariat and Task Force is expected to play a pivotal role in overseeing and supporting the development and implementation of the WEE NAP, ensuring extensive engagement and ownership across diverse sectors and settings. The consultation process, which began in May, aims to delve deeper into the critical issues faced by women and identify concrete actions for advancing women's economic empowerment. The consultations are structured around seven inquiry areas: Enabling Environment, Inclusive Finance, Social Support, Women's Entrepreneurship, Women in Key Sectors, Labour Force Participation, and Diversity of Experiences. A preliminary desk review with insights from the FCGA has already identified 95 key issues and 190 existing recommendations and strategies for progress on women's economic empowerment in Fiji. The Fiji WEE NAP is expected to be launched in early 2025.

In line with the above six strategic gender equality priority initiatives, sectorial achievements and challenges are highlighted as follows:

- **Gender & Education**

- i. Fiji has made significant progress towards its development as a knowledge-based society with a skilled workforce. Key performance indicators in the National Development Plan (NDP) are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and, alongside SDG 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Net enrolment in primary education is 100%. Moreover, the primary completion rate of 107% shows that Fijian children are not only enrolled in, but importantly also complete. At the secondary level, however, it falls to 85%, just under the NDP target of 86% (SDG 4.1), with adolescent girls (91%) experiencing higher secondary enrolment than adolescent boys (79%). As well as the secondary completion rate, which shows that 97% of girls successfully complete secondary school, compared with 74% of boys. The National Toppers Scholarship (NTS) is awarded to top-ranked students who have completed Year 13 or equivalent studies; during the period 2014–2020, women received 54% of National Toppers Scheme (NTS) awards to study in diverse fields.
- ii. Since 2002, the Matua Program has enabled people to complete their education, including adolescent Fijian girls and women who dropped out of secondary school due to pregnancy or other reasons. There is an increasing demand for second-chance

education: Between 2016 and 2021, enrolment in the Matua Program increased 80%, with women accounting for 63% of students.

- iii. Dominance of young women continues in academic program at the tertiary level, where they account for 60–65% of students and over 50% of graduates. Young men, on the other hand, outnumber young women in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) program at the tertiary level. It is important to highlight that women attending Fiji’s universities are increasingly pursuing studies in fields that are less traditional where they outnumber men in program for environmental science and management, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, suggesting a level of interest and commitment among women to pursue careers in fields that are non-traditional.
 - iv. Educational achievement in Fiji is further substantiated by the completion of secondary education by the majority of adults over 25 years of age and literacy among nearly all adult women and men.
- **Gender & Economy**
- i. Fiji’s score on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index has improved from 0.638 in 2017 to 0.674 in 2021, and gender parity is at 1.00. In 2017, Fiji was ranked 125th out of 144 countries and, in 2021, 113th out of 156 countries.
 - ii. The Employment Relations (Budget Amendment) Act, 2018 expanded paid maternity leave from 84 days to 98 days, providing greater support for women in the workforce.
 - iii. The National Policy on Sexual Harassment and the Employment Relations Act (ERA) in Fiji aim to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace, ensuring a safer and more inclusive work environment for women.
 - iv. Since 2022, the Fiji Development Bank initiated a scheme offering loans to women entrepreneurs. Over the past 14 months, FDB has approved a total of 1,000 loans, amounting to approximately FD \$2.5 million.
 - v. The Personal Property Securities Act 2017 (PPSA) continues to offer significant advantages for women and women-led businesses. Its expansion to include immovable property allows women to utilize these assets as collateral for loans and other financial transactions, consequently broadening access to credit and fostering economic growth. In 2021, the Ministry of Finance introduced its inaugural Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Policy 2021-2024. This policy acknowledges that effective mainstreaming of gender equity and social inclusion demands a comprehensive commitment across the entire ministry, focusing on understanding and addressing gender responsive perspectives in all operational policies, budget allocations, and service delivery.
 - vi. In 2014, 64% of all Fijians and 52% of Fijian women had access to and used formal financial services; the gender gap was 16%. By 2020, the overall proportion of Fijians accessing and using formal financial services had increased by one quarter to include 81% of Fijians.
 - vii. Over the 2014–2020 period, the rate of increase in women’s access was significantly higher (50%); nonetheless, a small gender gap remains between the proportion of

women accessing and using formal financial services (80%) and the rate among Fijian men (83%). Fiji has surpassed the 2021 target of 72% of women owning a bank account (SDG 8.10.2), as set in the NDP. Women with a bank account include all or nearly all women who are investors, receive a pension or government benefits, earn wages or a salary or work as a casual laborer, as well as 75%–80% of women who are self-employed in agriculture or non-agriculture activities or receive remittances.

- viii. Digital technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet, also benefit Fijian women in their employment and livelihoods activities. Most Fijian women own mobile phones that they use regularly to access the Internet. Women are leveraging this connectivity to explore new avenues of income generation or utilizing it to save time and overcome distance constraints in accessing information that supports their economic and income-generating activities. Overall, three quarters of Fijians own a smart phone, including more than 90% of young people. The majority of Fijian women with a mobile phone own a smart phone, particularly among working-age. Fijian women, and the proportions of women with a smart phone are higher than the proportions of men, except among older Fijians. (79%) of women and (80%) of men accounted for the more than 71% of the population connected to the Internet. This is double the rate of about 35% in 2014.
- ix. Fiji is rapidly positioning itself as a preferred destination for global outsourcing services (GOS), Fijian Women currently account for 65–70% of Global Outsourcing employees, 90% of whom are under the age of 35 years. It is expected that women will maintain their share of the GOS workforce as the industry expands.
- x. Although there are still significant gender gaps in the proportions of women in the workforce and employed, women are increasingly entering the workforce. The proportion of women earning wages or a salary increased from 62% in 2015 to 66% in 2019.
- xi. Fijian women in rural and peri-urban areas are moving beyond subsistence farming and fishing that prioritize household needs, to become more active in commercial production, processing and marketing.
- xii. In 2021, the Ministry for Women and Social Protection, in collaboration with UNCDF and the World Food Program, launched a pilot cyclone insurance product. This initiative targeted 274 recipients of social welfare assistance from our four main programs: Social Poverty Scheme, Children Protection Allowance, Disability Assistance, and Family Assistance Scheme. The pilot strategically aimed to benefit individuals, primarily women, in regions susceptible to severe climate shocks.
- xiii. Fiji was the 2nd country to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace and has put in place the National Policy on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace to help ensure accountability in cases of sexual harassment.
- xiv. Fiji's social protection policy (2021) prioritizes responding to peoples' needs in a gender-responsive way. Women are the primary recipients of the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Social Pension Scheme for older people, and the Care and Protection Allowance

targeting the families of vulnerable children. The Disability Allowance Scheme supports women with disabilities.

▪ **Women’s Leadership & Decision Making**

- i. Following the return of parliamentary elections, the 2014, 2018 and 2022 elections saw increasing participation of women standing for election. In 2014, 44 women candidates contested the election; eight won seats. In 2018 and 2022 the number of women candidates increased to 56, 24 per cent of the total number of candidates in both general elections.

▪ **Gender & Health**

- i. Fiji’s Constitution guarantees to all Fijians the right to health.¹⁹ Within this context, the goal of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services National Strategic Plan, 2020–2025 (NSP 2020–2025) is “a platform for multi-sectorial collaboration to improve health in Fiji”, by providing universal health coverage and quality health-care services. The NSP 2020–2025 was developed, taking into consideration the cross-cutting issues of gender, poverty and urbanization.
- ii. Nearly all Fijian women (99.7%) delivered their babies at a health facility, attended by a skilled health professional (SDG 3.1.2). The total fertility rate in Fiji declined from 3.4 births per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 1992 to 2.5 in 2001 and has remained relatively constant since then.
- iii. The Government’s Rural Pregnant Mothers program supports rural women who are pregnant and new mothers, with the aim to improve their maternal health and reduce child mortality. Over the nine months of pregnancy and the first post-natal month, eligible women receive a food voucher or, if they live in remote areas with limited access to stores or vendors, a cash transfer of F\$50/ month.
- iv. About one half of women (51%) are able to satisfy their need for family planning through the use of modern contraception (SDG 3.7.1), thus controlling the number and spacing of pregnancies. This is an improvement over the proportion that MHMS reported in 2019 (43%), although the global rate in 2019 was 76%.
- v. In Fiji, the onset of menstruation is widely viewed as a normal bodily function, and most adolescent girls and women have reasonably good access to education and information about menstruation and its hygiene management. 93.5% of Fijian women aged 15–49 years reported having a private place at home to wash and change menstrual materials. In general, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in workplaces and public places are in good standard but may lack soap for hand washing, toilet paper or safe and discrete options for disposal of sanitary materials. In 2022 and onwards, the government introduced a policy in its national budget to charge a 0% value-added tax (VAT) on the supply of sanitary pads, including all types of sanitary towels (pads) and tampons. This change aimed to make these essential products more affordable and accessible to the population, aligning with efforts to address concerns about menstrual equity and affordability.

▪ **Gender, Climate Change and Environment**

- i. Coupled with increasing challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters, women face particularly high risks. As a threat multiplier, climate change exacerbates gender inequalities and gendered power relations that, in turn, contribute to greater overall climate vulnerability.
- ii. Fijian women have strong social networks and “safety nets”, based on kinship relations and traditions of mutual support and reciprocal exchange (*solesolevaki*). Women are recognised for their experience and abilities to organize religious and community activities. In response to natural disasters, women organize and support a wide range of mutual assistance. In the aftermath of disasters, women have assisted other women with cleaning their houses, tended to the needs of people who require transfer to hospital, helped vulnerable people, such as older persons and people with disabilities, salvaged crops and prepared communal meals, shared clothing and cooking utensils, shared childcare and, when relief materials have arrived, ensured they are shared equally.
- iii. FemLINKpacific’s Women’s Weather Watch is an excellent example of bridging social capital whereby Fijian women from different communities share critical warnings and other information prior to and during natural disasters. Information is gathered from on-the-ground reports received from women and from official sources, such as NDMO; technical information is rewritten in simple, practical terms and text messages are sent to a network of women’s groups and their members. Women reported that, during Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston, they received critical information faster, in real time and with greater specificity about conditions in their villages, compared with radio broadcasts and that they were even more prepared in advance of TC Yasa and TC Ana in 2020. Fijian women are also active on Facebook and other social media that support bridging social capital and reinforcing the resilience of women and their communities in the context of natural disasters.
- iv. Fiji adopted the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (NDRRP), 2018–2030, which advocates for women, children and young people, persons with disabilities and older persons to be agents of change, and their participation as well as their knowledge and skills to be recognized as critical at all stages of Disaster Risk reduction (DRR) and Disaster Risk Management (DRM).
- v. Fiji has implemented the Fiji Cluster System to coordinate emergency relief and the restoration of key systems and services following disasters. The Safety and Protection Cluster includes sub-clusters focused on ensuring child protection and addressing the needs of women and girls who experience or are at risk of GBV. This includes issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) communities, including gender nonconforming people (GNC).
- vi. In Fiji, the number of deaths and injuries due to tropical cyclones (TCs), floods and other disasters is low even when large proportions of the population are directly affected and considering the increased frequency and severity of TCs and other disasters. However, reporting on casualties does not consistently provide data disaggregated by sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, disability or geographic location.

2.2 Challenges

- **Persistent Gender-Based Violence (GBV)** - Despite legal and policy reforms, GBV violence remains a significant challenge. GBV is experienced chronically by Fijian women and girls in all diversity across their lifecycle; 16% of adult women have reported being sexually abused before the age of 15 years with patterns of violence cascading into adulthood. . The most common form of sexual violence is child sexual abuse involving girls (and some boys) under the age of 18 years, accounting for 74% of all reported sexual violence cases. Over the course of the lives of ever-partnered Fijian women, nearly two thirds (64%) experience intimate partner violence, including physical violence (61%) and emotional violence (58%). More than four in 10 women experience severe physical violence, including 15% of women who are physically attacked during pregnancy. People of diverse SOGIESC (including lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, gay men, transgender men and gender non-conforming people) experience higher rates, and more severe forms of violence from partners, family members and communities with compounded barriers and discrimination within workplaces, schools, health care settings. It is important to underline that Women and girls living with disabilities are particularly at risk of experiencing physical, economic, sexual, and emotional violence from family members, partners, caregivers and institutions (i.e., health, social services). With more rigorous research required to understand the full extent of violence experienced.

The social, health and economic impacts of VAWG are enormous and penetrate all levels and aspects of society with an estimate cost at 7% of Fiji's gross domestic product (GDP). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is also an emerging challenge, posing significant threats to the safety and well-being of Fijian women and girls in all diversity. As digital platforms become more integrated into daily life, incidents of online harassment, cyberstalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, deep fake porn and other forms of digital abuse are on the rise. TFGBV not only cause severe psychological distress but also hinder women's ability to participate fully in both public and private spheres, including the workforce.

In Fiji, the root cause of violence against all women and girls is confirmed by the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent VAWG as patriarchy. Patriarchy manifests as beliefs, attitudes, social norms and actions that privilege men over women and therefore widen inequalities in power, opportunities and resources between men and women. Patriarchy disproportionately harms women and girls at the intersections of multiple identities, including those with disabilities, living in rural and maritime areas and those with diverse SOGIESC, among others. Contributing factors such as crises and disasters; economic insecurity, including in relation to food, shelter, and unemployment; poverty; and alcohol/ kava consumption exacerbate the conditions that contribute to GBV. Together, these factors create an environment and social context of gender inequality within which VAWG is normalized, accepted, and justified.

Gender Pay GAP, Employment and Labour Force Participation - Fijian Women's participation in the formal economy and labor force in Fiji remains significantly lower than that of men. Most working Fijian women are engaged in informal employment, facing limited job security and irregular and low paying income. These challenges are reflected in several key statistics: The labor force participation rate for women is 46%, compared with 83% of men. Only 40% of women are employed, compared with 78% of men, and women earn, on average, one third less than men. In addition, nearly three quarters of men who are older than the mandatory retirement age were employed (2019-2020) in compare with only one third of women older than the mandatory retirement age. Fijian Women account for fewer than three in 10 Fijians engaged in paid informal employment (28%) while 51% of women farmers are unpaid family workers compared with 61% of men farmers. People aged 15–24 years who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is 18%, with young women most affected, at a rate of 30%, three times the rate for young men; this rate has not substantially changed in recent years. 62% of LGBTQI+ community in Fiji are unemployed and in precarious work. 2 out of 3 young LBT people aged 18-19 years old have experienced homelessness due to their Sexual Orientation. Over the course of their lives, Fijian girls and women spend two to three times the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work, compared with boys and men. Time-use studies conducted in two rural districts found that, while men spent 30–47 hours per week on unpaid care work, women spent 67–80 hours, and young girls spent nearly as much time as adult women, on unpaid care work. These statistics are in the context where women outnumber men among students in academic programs at Fiji's universities, accounting for 60-65% of students and over 50% of graduates. It is crucial to highlight that Fijian women's labor force participation and economic contributions are also significantly impacted and challenged by crucial issues such as bodily autonomy, access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services, unpaid care and the pervasive problem of gender-based violence.

- **Underrepresentation in Leadership** - While progress has been made, women are still underrepresented in decision-making roles in both the public and private sectors.
- **Cultural and Social Norms** - Traditional gender roles and societal expectations can limit women's opportunities and perpetuate inequalities.
- **Natural Disasters** - Fiji's vulnerability to natural disasters, such as cyclones, can disproportionately affect women and hinder progress towards gender equality.
- **Pandemic Impact** - The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated existing gender inequalities, with women facing job losses, increased caregiving responsibilities, and challenges accessing services.
- **Limited Resources** - Resource constraints and competing priorities can impede the implementation of gender equality policies and programs.

2.3 Way Forward

- It is important for secondary and tertiary education as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes to align student skills, including those of young

women and girls, with current employment opportunities and with shifting local dynamics (pandemic, natural hazards, climate change, etc.), which may impact employment opportunities and related risks.

- The Government is also implementing specific policies to help promote and support women's entry into, and retention in, the workplace. At the same time, the Government is taking considerable measures to combat sexual harassment in the workplace and, thereby, support women's safe inclusion in the workforce.

SECTION 3: FIJI'S PROGRESS ACROSS THE 12 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

3.1 INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT, SHARED PROSPERITY AND DECENT WORK

3.1.1 Achievements

- Fiji has taken several actions over the past 5 years to advance gender equality in the world of work, encompassing formal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship. The 2013 Constitution enshrines the right to equal protection, treatment and benefit of the law regardless of sex or gender identity; We have become an upper middle income country that serves as a regional hub in the south pacific or Oceania, where it is host to many international organizations and diplomatic corps and serves as a link for other pacific countries and territories to the rest of the world, including for transportation, business and intra-regional and international trade. The economy relies heavily onto the Tourism Sector tourism which, in 2019, employed 36% of working Fijians, the majority of whom were women. Remittances represent the second pillar of the Fijian economy, increasing the participation of Fijians in the cash economy and, in 2019, contributing 5% to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Thou the economy have indicated growth and development, there is still a need for more effort invested in favour of women's economic activity, in particular women's labour force participation.
- Women's economic empowerment opportunities are improving in Fiji. Although efforts are needed to improve the proportion of women in the workforce and employed, more women are entering the workforce in paid employment in the formal sector. Women outnumber men in professional occupations and are well-established in fields, such as law, medicine, commerce and finance. Based on their educational choices, their participation in these fields is likely to increase as well as in fields, such as management and public administration, nutrition and food science and environmental management and climate change. Their opportunities are further supported by their membership and, increasingly, leadership in professional associations.
- The achievements of Fijian women's economic empowerment must also be assessed within the context of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, COVID-19 mitigation measures, including the closure of Fiji's international borders combined with the national lockdown and curfews, immediately affected about 115,000 people or about one third of Fiji's labour force. The collapse of tourism ricocheted through the Fijian economy, with particularly severe impacts on women's businesses and economic activities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 24% of Fijians were living in poverty.
- Most Fijian women own mobile phones that they use regularly to access the Internet and have benefited Fijian women by enabling them to save time and overcome distance constraints in accessing information that supports their economic and income-generating activities,

maintaining social obligations and contacting their family and friends, and receiving timely information about impending disasters. Recent surveys have found that 80% of Fijian women own a phone and, of them, three quarters (75%) own a smart phone. Women are leveraging this connectivity to explore new avenues of income generation.

- Women in rural and peri-urban areas are moving beyond subsistence farming and fishing to meet household needs, to become more active in commercial production, processing and marketing. Women working together in collectives gain confidence and strengthen their ability to grow their micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), most of which start out as informal businesses, to transition to the formal sector. Fiji is also rapidly positioning itself in emerging sectors that offer women new opportunities, such as global outsourcing services (GOS) and other aspects of the gig economy that benefit from digital technologies. In addition, Fiji has endorsed an approach to sustainable development that prioritizes the green, blue and circular economies where women are already positioned and where they are likely to continue playing important roles.
- As evidence of Fijian women's increased presence in the labour force and paid employment, a 10% increase in the overall labour force participation rate (LFPR) between 2015 and 2019 is attributed primarily to an 18% increase in women's LFPR. The proportion of women earning wages or a salary increased from 62% in 2015 to 66% in 2019. However, gender gaps remain among working-age Fijians (15–54 years): 46% of women are in the labour force, compared with 83% of men; 40% of women are employed, compared with 78% of men.
- Although preferences to join the workforce or to advance within a career may vary, according to Fijian women, traditional cultural and gender norms pertaining to women's roles and responsibilities for domestic and unpaid care work are generally the source of their limited engagement in the labour force. **In rural areas, women spend up to 80 hours per week on unpaid care work**, whereas men spend as little as 30 hours per week on similar tasks. The expectation that women prioritize caregiving coupled with cultural norms and beliefs that the primary role of women is to care for their families, including men, is internalized at an early age by Fijian girls and boys. Fijian women who work outside the home often face criticism, may experience efforts to control or regulate their movements, and may even experience violence for disrupting cultural norms.
- Approximately one half of employed Fijians work in the formal sector. Yet, of them, only 35% are women. The services sector accounts for 84% of women's formal sector employment. Since 2015, the proportion of women civil servants increased from 41% to 54% in 2018 and the proportion of women holding the role of Permanent Secretaries, the senior civil service position, had increased. Holistically, as of mid-2023, 59% of Civil Servants employed in Government are women. There are currently 5 female Permanent Secretaries as compared to 4 female PS's in 2022. There are 120 position holders that directly report to PS's, of which 35% are women.

- Women account for only 31% of private sector employees. Most working Fijian women are engaged in informal employment characterized by a lack of job security, irregular income and no social protection. This includes three quarters of rural women, women in informal settlements, older urban and rural women, including widows, women with disabilities and women who identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community. Women account for less than one third of Fijians in paid informal employment. Nearly four in 10 working Fijians, including 35% of working women and 62% of employed rural Fijians, are engaged in vulnerable employment, that is, they are self-employed or own-account workers, or they are subsistence or family/community workers.
 - Two thirds of Fijian women employed in the formal sector work as professionals, including lawyers, medical professionals and accountants, clerical staff, and, in services and sales, primarily in tourism. In the informal sector, women account for 67% of paid employment in services and sales, in occupations such as vending, domestic work and handcrafts. The concentration of women studying the fields of education, health care and social work positions them for work in fields that are expected to grow. However, due to their lower levels of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) training, Fijian women are not well-positioned to secure work in some emerging digital and technical fields.
- **Women in Tourism, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises & Emerging Sectors:**
 - i. Prior to COVID-19, women accounted for at least one third of Fiji’s tourism workforce, although other assessments have found that women outnumbered men in the tourism sector. Women’s opportunities in the tourism sector are linked to cultural traditions and gender norms about “women’s work”, with women employed in the areas of housekeeping, food preparation and other services. Many large hotels and resorts outsource to local businesses for these services, creating opportunities for women to establish MSMEs. Women account for two thirds of university students enrolled in tourism programs, but only one quarter of women employed in tourism hold professional or managerial positions. This is, in part, a choice of women for whom the long hours and other demands of the industry are not commensurate with their family commitments.
 - ii. Tourism is an important market for women who account for 91% of Fijians who make and sell handcrafts. For most women, their handcraft activities are supplementary to their primary domestic roles, although increasingly the income generated from sales of handcrafts is important to meet household needs. Women work as individual artisans, as part of a family group or in small groups or collectives of women artisans; they rely on sales to people within their family networks, including the Fijian diaspora, as well as sales in municipal markets and specialized markets, such as the Suva Handicraft Centre and the Suva Flea Market.
 - iii. Women-led MSMEs that produce and market handcrafts also act as market facilitators, buying, distributing, promoting and marketing the handcrafts of other producers. In Fiji

there are 24,000 MSMEs of which 97% are businesses and 18% is their contribution to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product - about one half of MSMEs are owned by women.

- iv. In 2021, however, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection and the World Food Program collaborated with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to launch a pilot program for a climate risk parametric micro insurance product, targeting smallholder farmers, fishers and market vendors.
- v. Recent initiatives facilitate women's MSME efforts and reflect an approach that supports the acquisition of the skills necessary to succeed in business through a comprehensive suite of services provided over an extended time frame. Government has made numerous efforts to support MSMEs and women entrepreneurs. Fiji has an online platform for the registration and administration of businesses, making it easier to do business and access finance. As part of Fiji's formal economy, women can conduct business as sole trading partnerships, incorporated companies and, importantly, as cooperatives and associations. Since it came into force in 2019, the Government's issuance of the Personal Securities Act has expanded the forms of collateral to secure credit, to include, among others, movable personal property, inventory and accounts receivable.
- vi. The Business Assistance Fiji (BAF) was established in 2020 to assist those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The BAF provides advisory services, training and funding options while promoting and developing startup businesses and encouraging women, youth and other groups to participate in business activities. The Fiji Enterprise Engine was launched in 2019, as a private sector-led, locally-owned acceleration and incubation program that offers business advisory services, mentoring and networking for members of the Young Entrepreneurs Council and the Women Entrepreneurs Business Council. The Fiji Bloom Accelerator Program was also launched in 2019, to assist women to formalize their micro-businesses. In 2020, the Women Entrepreneurs Business Council became the implementing partner for the United States-funded Academy of Women Entrepreneurs, which provides training and mentoring to women-led/owned MSMEs; among participants, informal businesses declined from 71% to 41% due to assistance provided to women to register their businesses.
- vii. The experience in Fiji has demonstrated the importance of women's collectives as a model for supporting the informal and formal businesses of individual women as well as for creating conditions that contribute to the transformative changes necessary to achieve gender equality. Collective structures: facilitate women's access to productive resources, training and support, including important non-economic services, such as health and childcare; provide safe places for women to practice leadership and decision-making; and build confidence, with many subsequently establishing and running their own enterprises.
- viii. The Government has endorsed an approach to sustainable development that is built on leveraging opportunities in the green and blue economies. 669 Women can play an important role in technologies based on clean and renewable energy. The initiatives in

Fiji to recruit and train rural women to manufacture, market and maintain energy-efficient cook stoves and solar panels are examples of the green-job potential for women's MSMEs. The Fusion Hub, a social enterprise founded by a Fijian woman, is an example of creating green jobs in the circular economy, by training single mothers how to reuse and up-cycle waste products (e.g. tyres, pallets, plastic and glass bottles and textiles) to make furniture and home decor products that are marketed to tourism businesses.

- ix. Access to and use of financial products and services, including those that build on digital technologies, also save women's time to manage household expenses, pay bills and receive remittances and social assistance. Financial services help women build savings and increase both their financial resilience and their opportunities to launch, build, formalize and sustain their economic enterprises. In 2020, 80% of Fijian women, 81% of people with disabilities, 83% of self-employed Fijians and 77% of Fijians aged 15–30 years were using formal financial services; for women, this represented a 50% increase since 2014. In 2020, 75% of women owned a bank account; while only 11% of Fijians with bank accounts used Internet banking, of them, 60% were women, and nearly one in five women used mobile money accounts, with 62% using them regularly.
- x. The NGO, Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC), is dedicated to amplifying the voices of women entrepreneurs in policy discussions. Part of the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation, WEBC aims to support women in the formal and informal sectors and foster sustainable communities. WEBC powers the Care Catalyst- Micro Business Women Child Care Incubation Program with the support of UNESCAP, which aims to empower women entrepreneurs in Fiji to start and manage child day care businesses. In 2023 this Program ran a four-month pilot program whereby 15 participants were trained. It focused on licensing, child development, safety, financial management, and marketing. The curriculum included workshops, mentorship, and practical assignments, with contributions from child care and business experts. Partnerships with government agencies and educational experts provided comprehensive support.
- xi. Recognizing the challenges of rural-urban drift, the impacts of COVID-19, domestic violence, and the climate crisis, WEBC is committed to addressing these environmental, social, and economic issues through its Green Policy, which aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy applies to all WEBC staff and activities, promoting sustainable business practices and supporting members in their sustainability journeys.
- xii. The Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, launched by WEBC has successfully empowered over 400 women entrepreneurs since 2019. The 7-month program supported by the US Embassy combines online modules with face-to-face sessions to tailor the Dream Builder Program to Fiji's context. Despite challenges such as familial responsibilities, a significant majority of graduates have implemented their learning, enhanced their businesses and contributed to economic growth

- **Fiji's Employment Sector**

- i. The Employment Relations (Budget Amendment) Act, 2018 expanded paid maternity leave from 84 days to 98 days. It also established paid paternity and family care leave; however, in 2022, the entitlements for family care leave and paternity leave were suspended (The Employment Relations [Budget Amendment] Act, 2022) to further assist businesses and employers to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees are entitled to 10 days of annual leave and, after three months of service, to 10 days of sick leave and three days of paid bereavement leave per year.
- ii. In April 2022, the Government increased the national minimum wage from \$2.68 to \$3.01 an hour and it further increased to \$3.34 per hour on July 1, 2022, then to \$3.67 on October 1, 2022, and it is expected to be increased further to \$4 per hour by January 2023. However, women earn, on average, one third less than men. In the informal sector, women are more likely than men to work part-time and earn far less than men for similar work. Women typically perform types of informal work that are invisible, such as home-based or outworker work in Fiji's garment industry, which reduces their capacity for collective bargaining and increases their exposure to exploitation. Rural women earn, on average, 75% of what rural men earn and an urban-rural wage gap of 45% significantly increases the poverty vulnerability of people in rural areas.
- iii. Women and men migrate for work for similar reasons, namely to earn money; however, migration is a gendered experience. Women are under-represented among Fijians who migrate to Australia and New Zealand on temporary work visas. This is, in part, because most programmes target economic sectors that offer more options in careers generally dominated by men due to early socialization that steers men towards certain careers and women away from them. An exception is Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme, initiated in 2018 and designed to recruit Pacific women to work in the hospitality and tourism, health-care and non-seasonal agriculture sectors. The migration of professional Fijians, including women working in education, health and social work, has been increasing since the 1990s, with destinations in the Pacific region and elsewhere. While pay levels are a factor, other reasons include better working conditions and access to training and career development.
- iv. In recent decades, Fiji has transitioned from a country that was 63% rural to one that is 56% urban. A significant aspect of rural-to-urban migration is the increasing share of Fijian women who are moving to cities to look for work and to gain greater access to education and other services. Fiji also has a National Employment Centre (NEC) which assists Fijians in securing employment of which 42.93% have been women since 2018 till date. The proportion of women earning wages or a salary increased from 62% to 66% from 2015 to 2019.
- v. The ERA provides a statutory framework in Fiji to promote the welfare and prosperity of all people. The Ministry of Employment, Public and Industrial Relations (MEPIR) in Fiji has taken several actions to enforce and ensure compliance with the Employment Relations Act 2007, particularly concerning maternity leave and the rights of pregnant women in the workplace. Here are the key actions and provisions in place: **Awareness**

Campaigns, whereby MEPRIR conducts awareness campaigns related to the ERA during workplace inspections. Additionally, formal awareness sessions have been organized for management in both the private and public sectors to educate them about the rights of pregnant women, especially those outlined in Part 11 on Parental Leave of the ERA; **ERA 2007 Section 104 (1)** explicitly prohibits the termination of female employees from employment on the grounds of pregnancy. This legal provision safeguards the job security of pregnant women which the Ministry of Labor strictly enforces; **Retaining Women with Post-School Qualifications** - Efforts are being made to identify ways to encourage more women with post-school qualifications to either remain in or return to formal employment. This is aimed at ensuring that women are not discouraged from pursuing their careers after acquiring qualifications; **National Employment Center**- Since 2010, the NEC has been providing various services to registered unemployed individuals. These services include registration, counseling, aptitude assessment, life skills training, specific skills training, work attachment, volunteer attachment, and work placement into local employment, foreign employment, and regional volunteer placements. Notably, approximately 513 women have been successfully engaged in local work attachment and volunteer attachment as of 2023; **Foreign Employment Opportunities** whereby a total of 1,494 women have been engaged in foreign employment under schemes such as the Recognized Seasonal Employment (RSE) Scheme and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme. These initiatives provide women with opportunities to work in foreign countries; **Encouraging Women in Non-Traditional Jobs** where MEPRIR has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with employers and training providers to create opportunities for young women to train in occupations traditionally dominated by men. This promotes gender diversity in various industries; the Fiji Civil Service has adopted an open and transparent recruitment process that aims to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The recruitment process is designed to be fair and free from nepotism or discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for all; recruitment panels are required by the Ministry of Civil Service to have gender balance and include members from other ministries or departments, ensuring a fair and unbiased selection process.

In the past five years, Fiji has grappled with various macroeconomic and fiscal policy challenges that have influenced the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action for gender equality. These challenges include economic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and ongoing structural issues like limited access to finance and education for women. These macroeconomic and fiscal policy challenges have had both positive and negative impacts on gender equality efforts in Fiji. On one hand, the government has recognized the importance of gender equality and has implemented several policies to support women's economic empowerment. For example, Fiji has prioritized investments in education and skills training for women, expanded access to financial services through microfinance programs, and promoted women's participation in decision-making roles in public and private sectors.

Economic shocks and structural challenges have also exacerbated existing gender disparities. Women, particularly those in vulnerable sectors like tourism and informal employment, have faced job losses, reduced incomes, and increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic. Limited access to finance and land ownership rights continue to hinder women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship opportunities. In response to these challenges, Fiji has implemented macroeconomic policies aimed at supporting a more gender-equal economy. These include initiatives to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship, improve access to finance and assets, address gender-based violence, and strengthen social protection programs.

3.1.2 Challenges

- i. The impacts of COVID-19 on poverty are not gender-neutral. Women who work in the informal sector lack job security and social protection; in the formal sector, many women are employed in minimum wage jobs. Like most of the world, women in Fiji were often the first to lose jobs when COVID-19 closed businesses and/or were unable to continue their economic activities because of increased demands on their time and energy for unpaid care work and, as a consequence, experienced new or heightened levels of poverty and food insecurity.
- ii. The low LFPR of women, however, overlooks the diverse contributions of women. In addition to their domestic roles, many women are engaged in agricultural, handcraft and other income-generating activities, as well as the imputed income of women's subsistence farming. Further, the low rate reflects the fact that women who have been unable to find work when they leave school or later in life simply withdraw from the labour force.
- iii. **Work-related Migration** – Cultural norms and expectations about women's roles, the perceived vulnerabilities of women travelling abroad, and the support women receive from their families are factors that influence women's decisions to migrate or not. Working overseas may require young women to delay starting a family or to live away from their children, each of which has social and economic consequences for household members left behind. Although the same impacts can be experienced as a result of the departure of men, the absence of women tends to be scrutinized more severely. Further, men's migration has increased the number of de facto women-headed households in rural areas, which could shift traditional gender roles. However, it also has the potential to increase women's workloads without changing their ability to influence or make decisions;

3.1.3 Way Forward

- i. Support the development and effective implementation of a whole-of-government, evidence-based and inclusive WEE NAP;
- ii. Strengthen government capacities on transformative gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and GRBP through implementation of the ICD conduct participatory sector gender analyses and ex-ante gender impact assessments to inform policies, programmes and services developed in relation to women's formal and informal employment, labour participation, livelihoods, and economic empowerment;
- iii. Develop and evaluate options for increased availability of day-care services, including options for public-private partnerships and strategies to ensure affordability.

3.2 POVERTY ERADICATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

3.2.1 Achievements

- **Social Protection & Financial Inclusion**

- i. Social assistance programmes are critical in Fiji, with the majority of Fijian households benefiting from social assistance. Fiji's 2021 Social Assistance Policy prioritizes responding to peoples' needs in a gender-responsive way. Women are the primary recipients of the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Social Pension Scheme for older people, and the Care & Protection Allowance targeting the families of vulnerable children. The Disability Allowance Scheme supports women with disabilities.
- ii. The Fiji National Provident Fund facilitates retirement savings. The Fund have accounted a representation of 44% of women members and 37% of active members. They also have a smaller share of the wealth, accounting for only 35% of the total value of FPNF accounts in 2021. In addition, most women in the informal sector are not FPNF members and, thus, do not have this form of social protection. In 2020 and 2021, 30% of FPNF members who lost income due to COVID-19 mitigation measures chose an option to make early withdrawals from their General Accounts; in 2020, early withdrawals accounted for 27–29% of total withdrawals compared to 16% in 2019, with COVID-19 accounting for 60–69% of early withdrawals.
- iii. Programs for affordable housing and housing assistance are available to eligible individuals and families. The Rural Housing Assistance program under the Ministry of Rural & Maritime Development (MRMD) was reintroduced in 2023. It is aligned with the government's longstanding efforts to ensure safe and resilient housing for the rural and maritime communities. The Government of Fiji has committed FJD\$3 million to this initiative which will not only improve living standards but will also provide security for the rural populace including women. The program has four (4) schemes which covers the payment of cartage cost for housing materials, construction of a new house, retrofitting of existing structure to withstand category 4-5 cyclones, completion of existing structure, construction of homes for Native Tree resource owners and provision of housing for recipients of Social Welfare Assistance. Under this program applicants are required to pay one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the total project cost, except for assistance offered to recipients of Social Welfare Assistance, which is fully funded by Government.

- **Women in Agricultural Value Chains**

- i. The majority of Fijian women in agricultural households in rural and peri-urban areas are engaged in agricultural value chains, including 61% who grow crops and/or raise livestock, 98% who harvest non-timber forest products, and 36% who are engaged in

fisheries. Much of women's work is defined as "economically inactive" because it is carried out in the household and, therefore, unpaid. However, an overall conclusion of the 2020 Fiji Agricultural Census (2020 FAC) is that agricultural value chains "may be underrated and unrecognized as a formal occupation, specifically for women". Fijian women, in general, have less access to agricultural extension services than men, in part because government services tend to target commercial crops that are largely grown by men. Nonetheless, there is a demand from Fijian women for technical assistance and training in areas, such as farm business management, that would support their increasing involvement in semi-commercial agriculture and new agricultural technologies and practices (e.g. climate-smart technologies and post-harvest handling);

- ii. The Ministry of Agriculture & Waterways (MOAW) provides financial stimulus in the form of equity to 30 commercial farmers and agro-processors in improving farm mechanization, agricultural infrastructure, and agro-processing infrastructure support and equipment. MOAW provides incentive grants in the form of equity that would meet 20% of the total investment cost, while the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) provides the other 80% financial solution. This Package helps strengthen the food system, exports, create new market opportunities for farmers and processors, and helps make supply chains more resilient to economic and natural shocks such as those caused by the pandemic and climate change. Farmers whose farm sizes are five acres and above and are registered entities, as well as those who are producers and processors of crop and livestock commodities, can access loans of up to FJD\$250,000 from the FDB with the Ministry providing an equity contribution of 20%. The program was only introduced in 2022 and so far 5.5% of the beneficiaries have been women.
 - iii. Fiji has programs and initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, such as access to finance, business development training, and networking opportunities. The government and various organizations collaborate to provide these resources. FDB allocates \$500,000 to support female entrepreneurs through its Women's Entrepreneur Loan Package. This initiative targets registered businesses operating for at least six months, offering loans ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 with a repayment term of up to three years. This allocation covers the 10% equity required for loan packages, making it easier for female entrepreneurs to access finance.
- **Health Sector in Fiji**
 - i. Fiji has undertaken several actions over the past five years to improve health outcomes for women and girls. In the 2023-2024 budget cycle, Government has significantly increased the budget for women's health through the family health allocation to \$300,000, Cervical cancer to \$200,000 and for the first time the MHMS has a budget for gender-based violence of \$50,000, antenatal cardiac care budget of \$100,000 all equating to more than 100% increase of budget for women's health.

- ii. The health-care and public health infrastructure in Fiji is well-developed. It has a solid foundation grounded in primary care services and supported by strong, in-country professional health education and training program. Fijians can access most health-care services for free or at very low cost. In the last decade, Fiji has consistently been included among a group of countries that rank second best on the Health and Survival sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index. In 2017, Fiji's maternal mortality rate (MMR) was 36 deaths per 100,000 live births, a significant drop from a rate of 51 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000.
- iii. It was also below Fiji's 2021 target of 39 deaths per 100,000 live births as set in the NDP, and half of the SDG 3.1.1 target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births. However, in 2019, the MMR rose to 96 deaths per 100,000 live births. Fiji has achieved the SDG 3.1.2 target, with 100% of births in Fiji attended by skilled professionals. In 2020, the Rural Pregnant Mothers program provided food vouchers to over 8,000 rural women who were pregnant, with the aim to improve maternal health and reduce child mortality.
- iv. The health-care services of the MHMS are decentralized throughout the country. Primary care services including maternal and child health care and family planning services, are provided at 100 rural nursing stations and 87 health centers located in rural, peri-urban and urban areas. Secondary care is provided at 20 sub-divisional hospitals and three maternity hospitals; tertiary care is provided at three divisional hospitals and two specialized hospitals located in major urban centers. The Free Medicine Programme enables lower-income Fijians to access a range of prescription medicines free of charge.
- v. The public-private partnerships (PPP) initiative facilitates Fijians' access to care with private practitioners and private dentists. The Free General Practitioners Scheme offers government-funded access to private dental care for those who previously depended fully on the public health system for dental services and are not current paying clients of private dental practitioners.²³⁸ Fiji is in the early stages of exploiting the potential of digital technologies to enhance the access to, and quality of, health-care services, including telemedicine for the Diabetes Centre²³⁹ and digital screening for cervical and breast cancers.
- vi. Three out of five health-care workers in Fiji are women, including 55% of doctors, 89% of nurses, 98% of midwives, 77% of lab workers, and 43% of logistical staff. Based on 2020 data, Fiji has met its 2021 target for one doctor per 1,000 population; however, targets for nurses and midwives (respectively, 5.5 and 1.6 per 1,000 population) have not yet been met (SDG 3.c.1).
- vii. Despite progress, systemic gender-based health inequities remain in Fiji and adversely affect Fijian society, particularly women and girls overall and with specific regard to their intersectional identities based on age, socioeconomic status, disability, cultural background, education, sexual orientation and where they live. They are embedded in traditional cultural and social norms and gender power relations that, structurally, define the roles and responsibilities of Fijian women and girls, prevent people from

talking about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues, influence the direct and indirect health risks that women face, and influence opportunities and constraints in accessing relevant and timely health-care services.

- viii. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the health of Fijians as well as the MHMS healthcare system, particularly during the surges of community transmission of the virus in 2021 and 2022. As of early 2022, more than 62,000 Fijians had contracted COVID-19, including nearly 800 who died.²⁴⁵ However, Fiji has been very successful in achieving high COVID-19 vaccination rates, with more than 90% of Fijians fully vaccinated as of January 2022. During the pandemic, health-care facilities strained to provide services, particularly when facilities had to close because staff tested positive for COVID-19. Women have been the majority of front-line health-care workers throughout the pandemic. They have worked tirelessly for over two years, and cumulative stress and fatigue have led to the resignations of high numbers of nurses. Moreover, all Fijian women and many girls have experienced heightened stresses due to the burden of additional unpaid care work during the pandemic, as well as COVID-19 mitigation measures that have limited their access to health care.
 - ix. Fiji's Free Health Schemes continue till date with 'necessary' improvements and new criterion for the public-private partnership to improve the scheme going forward. As of August 1st 2023, only patients with a combined household income of \$30,000 or less a year can qualify for the free services under the free health scheme.
- **Reproductive Cancers**
 - i. Reproductive cancers are the most common forms of cancer among Fijian women. In 2017, three quarters of women diagnosed with cancer had breast cancer (41%) or cervical cancer (32%). The majority of cases of breast and cervical cancer occur among iTaukei women. In 2020, the age-specific incidence of breast cancer was 65.1 cases per 100,000 Fijian women, while the related mortality rate was 41.0 cases per 100,000 Fijian women. The age-specific incidence of cervical cancer was 22.5 cases per 100,000 Fijian women, while the mortality rate was 9.0 cases per 100,000 Fijian women. In Fiji, women are encouraged to carry out breast self-examinations and physical examinations are conducted at health centres. Private clinics and hospitals offer mammograms and ultrasound services, but many women are unable to afford them.
 - ii. The MHMS provides cervical cancer screening as do NGOs, including Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji, Medical Services Pacific (MSP) and the Fiji Cancer Society. In 2019, 10–50% benefited from cervical cancer screening. This appears to respond to the targets set in the NDP for 43% coverage by 2021 and 50% for 2022 but does not comply with the WHO recommendation that 70% of women be screened by the age of 35 years and again at 45 years. It means that many Fijian women may not have options for successful treatment if they get cervical cancer. In addition to private labs and the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji, the Pacific Island Cervical Cancer Screening Initiative uses volunteers to screen and treat adult Fijian

women for the HPV virus, a precursor to cervical cancer; testing is conducted at local health centers or sub-divisional hospitals, and testing and treatment occur on the same day.

- iii. The coverage for the HPV vaccine in Fiji has been above 95% for the first dose and above 45% for the second dose. The school program was significantly affected in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but regained momentum in 2022. The HPV vaccination program in 2024 will take a policy change recommended by the WHO of reducing the two doses to a single dose with a reduction in the age at which it is administered, as data shows sexual activity at a younger age. Thus, year of administration will reduce from Year 8 to Year 6. The Ministry of Health uses Thin Prep as a priority screening method, followed by the traditional pap-smear and in certain instances Visual Inspection by Acetic Acid (VIA) is also utilized.
- **Women's & Adolescents Girls Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights**
 - i. In line with the improvements to maternal health, nearly all pregnant women in Fiji are seen by a skilled health professional at least once during their pregnancies and nearly 90% are seen at least four times. However, many women do not present for antenatal care until the second or third trimester of their pregnancies, an underlying cause of maternal mortality in Fiji. Further, the estimated rate of anemia among pregnant women is 40%, increasing the risks of premature delivery and low birth weight among babies and postpartum depression among mothers.
 - ii. Medical staffs strongly support the involvement of men in family planning. However, recent research found that many health workers are in need of: improved knowledge of the risks, uses and options for contraception; counseling skills, including how to engage with men to gain their support for, and acceptance of, the use of contraception; and/or sufficient time to provide counseling.
 - iii. Most urban Fijian women have good access to information about menstrual hygiene management and can choose from a range of commercially available and affordable sanitary products. Women in rural and remote communities, poor women, adolescent girls and women with disabilities encounter greater difficulties due to a lack of available sanitary products, higher costs and/or reliance on others to obtain products. In the 2021–2022 budget, the Government allocated funds to provide sanitary pads at schools to prevent adolescent girls from missing school due to an inability to afford them. In 2021, 94% of Fijian women aged 15–49 years reported having a private place at home to wash and change menstrual materials. In Fiji's municipal markets, the establishment of Market Vendor Associations has helped women vendors negotiate in favor of improvements to sanitary conditions.
 - iv. Government has expanded access to family planning services, including contraceptives and reproductive health education, to empower women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and family planning. The Ministry has developed and implemented activities to improve Family Planning (FP) outcomes of the country

through FP training; Stock Management and FP monitoring and Evaluation via Spot Checks which contribute to access to family planning services across the nation; and reduce unmet need and unwanted pregnancies across the nation, which we know contributes to reduction in maternal mortality and morbidity.

- v. MHMS is working with Persons with Living with disabilities to ensure Sexual Reproductive Health Services is provided equally to them. There have been pilot programs with eventual roll out nationwide in collaboration with the Disability Forum. The Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS) team has a specific individual who manages the supply chain management for Family Planning in Fiji for both government and non-government partners who have a Memorandum of understanding with the MHMS.
 - vi. To provide adolescents with confidential access to contraception and related information and eliminate negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes regarding their sexuality. Fiji over the past five years has reported more than 5,000 teenage pregnancies, of which 25% are individuals below the age of 15 years. While all health facilities in Fiji provide adolescents with confidential access to contraception and related information, there is a need for change in the typical stereotypical mindset. In 2022-2023 the MHMS with the support of UNFPA developed a Youth Friendly Health Services Guidelines with a training package, ready to be rolled out. The Fiji Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Health Service National Operational Guidelines (AYFHS Guidelines) provide technical and operational guidance to government authorities, non-government organizations and stakeholders in delivering health services to young people. This includes healthcare and non-healthcare professionals in a diverse range of positions, including facility managers, clinicians, allied healthcare providers, health promotion, outreach workers, and other support roles to ensure a standardized and comprehensive approach to providing AYFHS.
- **HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections**
 - i. As of the third quarter of 2021, 1,361 Fijians were or had been people living with HIV (PLHIV), with 48% women and 44% under the age of 30 years. Since 2000, there has been an upward trend in the annual number of new cases, including among women of reproductive age, due to voluntary testing during antenatal care visits (SDG 3.3.1). The high level of HIV infection among young people is concerning given that, in 2021, among Fijians aged 15–24 years, only 30% of women and 26% of men were able to correctly identify two ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV, knew that a healthy-looking person could be HIV-positive, and rejected the two most common misconceptions about HIV transmission. Further, in this age group, only 14% of women and 3% of men who were sexually active had been tested for HIV and knew the results. Moreover, 61% of women and 58% of men aged 15–49 years expressed discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV.

- ii. Since 2014, the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission programme has offered voluntary HIV testing and counselling to pregnant women when they make their first antenatal care visit. In 2021, 58% of women who had given birth in the previous two years had been tested and knew the results. However, in 2020, only 63% of MHMS health facilities offered HIV services and, of these, only 22% offered services pertaining to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) has been available free of cost since 2004. In 2016, 83% of HIV+ pregnant women were receiving ART. Antenatal testing and ART have contributed to 43% of HIV+ Fijian women achieving viral suppression of HIV.³⁸⁸ However, significantly lower proportions of men know their HIV status and are on ART meaning that, overall, only 29% of Fijians were virally suppressed in 2019,³⁸⁹ compared with Fiji's 2020 target of 90%.
- iii. The COVID-19 pandemic compromised the access of Fijian women and girls to SRHR services. In 2021, due to the conversion of two major hospitals to treat COVID-19 cases, Fijian women delivered their babies aboard a medical ship staffed by midwives who had been recruited from retirement. Other pregnant women who tested positive for COVID-19 were isolated when they went into labour and, due to the lack of midwives, would sometimes assist in the deliveries for other isolated women. Essential SRHR services – family planning, contraception and menstrual hygiene management – were disrupted due to COVID-19 mitigation measures that limited mobility, as well as the closure of clinics. During periods of lockdown and COVID-19 community transmission, the incidence of GBV spiked and, due to related stresses, continued throughout the pandemic at levels higher than pre-COVID-19. Many affected women and girls were unable to protect themselves against their abusers or to obtain medical, psychosocial or legal assistance.
- iv. Apart from these initiatives of the government, the MHMS has development partners who have supported in implementing programmatic delivery for Maternal Health through the Transformative Agenda funded through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) via the United Nations for Population Fund. The most recent initiative in Fiji is developing and implementing the Maternal Perinatal Death Surveillance Response (MPDSR) which Fiji has adopted after a training that was implemented through the UNFPA team in Fiji, which strengthens collaboration of the Obstetric and Gynecological team with the Pediatricians. This will not only provide strong monitoring and evaluation of deaths but contribute to policy and strategic changes required to further strengthen and reduce mortality in Fiji. This is anticipated to take place every quarter within the hospitals in collaboration with the public health divisions.
- v. The government has expanded access to family planning services, including contraceptives and reproductive health education, to empower women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and family planning. MHMS has developed and implemented activities to improve Family Planning (FP) outcomes of the country through FP training; Stock Management and FP monitoring and Evaluation via

Spot Checks which contribute to access to family planning services across the nation; and reduce unmet need and unwanted pregnancies across the nation, which we know contributes to reduction in maternal mortality and morbidity. MHMS is working with Persons with Living with disabilities to ensure Sexual Reproductive Health Services is provided equally to them. There have been pilot programs with eventual roll out nationwide in collaboration with the Disability Forum. The FPBS team has a specific individual who manages the supply chain management for Family Planning in Fiji for both government and non-government partners who have a MOU with the MHMS.

- **Fiji's Education Sector**

- i. Fiji has made significant progress towards its development as a knowledge-based society with a skilled workforce. Key performance indicators in the NDP are aligned with SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and, alongside SDG 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Fiji's Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary education is 100%, a significant achievement meaning that children aged 6–13 years are enrolled in, and benefiting from, primary education (SDG 4.1); the gender parity ratio or the ratio of girls to boys is 0.93, signifying that nearly all girls in this age group are enrolled in primary school (SDG 4.5).
- ii. The school-readiness of Fijian children entering primary school is enhanced by over 80% enrolment in early childhood education (ECE) during the previous year. Moreover, the primary completion rate of 107% shows that Fijian children are not only enrolled in, but importantly also complete, their primary education; this includes schoolchildren who start when they are older than six years. Together, the NER and completion rate demonstrate the value placed on primary education by the Government of Fiji and within Fijian society.
- iii. NER in secondary school (85%) is just under the NDP target of 86% (SDG 4.1). Adolescent girls are more likely than boys to transition from primary to secondary school; among children aged 14–18 years, 91% of girls are enrolled in secondary school, compared with 79% of boys. This disparity is further illustrated by the gender parity ratio (ratio of girls enrolled compared to boys) of 1.10, as well as the secondary completion rate, which shows that 97% of girls successfully complete secondary school, compared with 74% of boys.
- iv. The dominance of young women continues in academic program at the tertiary level, where they account for 60– 65% of students and over 50% of graduates. Young men, on the other hand, outnumber young women in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) program at the tertiary level. Educational achievement in Fiji is further substantiated by the completion of secondary education by the majority of adults over 25 years of age and literacy among nearly all adult women and men.
- v. Fijian children must enter Year 1 at age 6 years and remain in school until they have completed primary school, or until the end of the year in which they turn 15 years of

- age. In 2021, MEHA oversaw a total of 739 primary and 175 secondary schools in Fiji. The Government owns 13 schools, while the remainder is owned by diverse CSOs and FBOs. School Management Committees comprised of parents and other community members manage their local schools; these committees tend to be male-dominated.
- vi. A total of 871 ECE centers are distributed across rural areas (50%), remote and maritime areas (24%) and in Fiji's cities and towns (26%). In 2021, 21.5% of children aged 3–5 years were enrolled in an ECE program; the gender parity ratio has been 0.90 or above in recent years, although it tends to be lower in rural, remote and maritime areas.
 - vii. At primary school level (Years 1–8), the NER of 100% confirms that children aged 6–13 years are enrolled in school (SDG 4.1).¹⁴ The gender parity ratio of girls-to-boys is 0.93 (SDG 4.5).¹⁵ The primary completion rate is over 100%, indicating that students tend to complete primary school. In 2021, the transition rate from primary to secondary schools reportedly included nearly all students (99.4%). At the secondary school level (Years 9–13), the overall NER of 85% (SDG 4.1) – which shows the number of students of school-age who are enrolled at the secondary level relative to the total population of children of the same age in Fiji – indicates that a lower proportion of children aged 14–18 years are enrolled in school. However, the secondary school NER for adolescent girls is 91%, significantly higher than the NER for adolescent boys (79%), resulting in a gender parity ratio of 1.10 (SDG 4.5). In 2020, overall completion rates were 85% in Year 12 and 57% in Year 13, with significantly higher rates for girls (97% in Year 12 and 67% in Year 13).
 - viii. Fiji has adopted a dual approach to education for children with disabilities, with special schools for children with disabilities as well as an inclusive education program that integrates students with disabilities into mainstream schools. There are 17 special schools for children with disabilities, mostly located in urban areas. The majority of students (90–92%) are enrolled in primary school program; girls account for 37–38% of these students.²³ In 2021, a total of 398 mainstream schools were identified that enroll children with disabilities; girls accounted for 34% of students with disabilities. The 2020 MICS found that children with disabilities have low levels of foundational skills.²⁶ Among children with disabilities aged 7–14 years, 48.7% were able to successfully master reading and 44.7% numeracy. The rural-to-urban parity ratio for children with disabilities is 0.76 for reading and 0.55 for numeracy.
 - ix. Tertiary education in Fiji includes three main universities, Fiji National University (FNU), University of Fiji (UoF) and University of the South Pacific (USP). FNU and USP are “dual stream” institutions with academic and TVET streams. Other TVET institutions include the Australian-Pacific Technical Coalition (APTC) and a range of private training centers. The National Toppers Scholarship is awarded to top-ranked students who have completed Year 13 or equivalent studies; hence during the period 2014–2020, women received 54% of the National Toppers Scholarship awards to study in diverse fields, including medicine and health, commerce, social sciences, tourism, town planning and education. The Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS) provides no-or low-interest loans to students enrolled in a bachelor's degree program; in the period 2014–2019, an

average of 6,300 TELS loans were granted annually, with women receiving 51%.²⁸ In 2020, however, the number of TELS loans was reduced to 4,000, due to COVID-19 budgetary constraints.

- x. Women outnumber men among students in academic programs at Fiji's universities, with women accounting for 60–65% of students and over 50% of graduates.³⁰ In general, the fields in which most women are studying reflect gender norms and fields of study that are considered appropriate for women in Fiji, notably: commerce, including accounting, banking and finance, with over one third of female students at FNU and USP; medical fields, attracting over 20% of women attending Fiji National University and University of Fiji; and education and law. At universities, enrolments declined in 2020, with likely reasons being financial pressures and other demands resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- xi. Various program are being implemented to counteract identified challenges and to support more inclusive education. The Ministry of Education Matua Program facilitates second-chance education, enabling students to complete their education, including individuals who previously dropped out of school. The STEM Camp for Girls was put in place to encourage young girls (aged 6–13 years) from underprivileged areas, including urban informal settlements, to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in their education and future careers.
- xii. Nearly one in five (19%) Fijian adolescents is sexually active, the rate of teenage pregnancy is high, and the rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are rising among adolescents and young adults.⁴⁸ It has traditionally been taboo in many Fijian households to talk about sexuality and sexual relations, cultural norms reinforce unequal power relations between adolescent girls and boys as they explore intimate relationships, and most adolescents have limited knowledge about contraception. However, there is a broad consensus among Fijian secondary students, their parents and their teachers that more can and should be done to address sexuality and relationship education in schools. Adolescents express an interest in learning skills to negotiate safe sex practices and to manage gendered power in relationships, teachers express a desire to benefit from training in how to address sensitive subjects and facilitate increased parental involvement, and parents are increasingly willing to put aside taboos to talk with their children about sexuality and how to protect themselves against unwanted sex and to minimize potential risk of rape.
- xiii. Between 2019 and 2021, the Graduate Women of Fiji collaborated with the MWCSP, MEHA and other partners to conduct the STEM Camp for Girls to encourage young girls aged 6–13 years from underprivileged areas, such as urban informal settlements, to pursue STEM subjects in their education and future careers. Over the course of the program, about 100 girls participated and worked with professional women in STEM fields who were recruited as teachers and role models for the students. In addition to STEM education, young Fijians also need to build their skills in computer self-efficacy and in digital media literacy. Computer self-efficacy or the capacity to apply computer

knowledge and skills to different situations is often higher among boys than girls and, based on a study of Fijian students in Year 12 and Year 13, is a strong predictor of the intention to use technology for future learning. Another study of Year 12 and Year 13 Fijian students found low to very low levels of digital media literacy, that is, young Fijians lack skills to interpret media messages and evaluate the quality and veracity of information from different sources.

- xiv. Primary and secondary education in Fiji have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools closed for three months in 2020 and an additional six months in 2021.⁶⁸ MEHA adopted several remote learning strategies using television, radio and online platforms. However, remote and poor households often lacked the resources to access remote learning, and crowded living conditions during lockdowns were not conducive to children's study. Further, in most households, the demand on the time and energy of mothers significantly increased, as they were obliged to oversee and help their children with remote learning in addition to their routine responsibilities.

3.2.2 Challenges

- Focus on greater understanding of the cultural dimensions of Fijians' health-seeking behaviors as well as the social, cultural and gender norms that result in discrimination and barriers to appropriate health care for women (and men) of different ages, dis/ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or geographic location;
- Review and, as relevant, revise teacher education programs, in-service training programs and programs for teachers seeking to upgrade their qualifications, to enhance their commitment and capacity to promote the acquisition of transferable skills, particularly self-esteem and self-confidence, in all students. This requires that teachers and staff: to address their own attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices that reflect or reinforce discriminatory stereotypes; and Review and revise teacher education and training programs and expand their knowledge, teaching methods and tools to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for all students both explicitly and implicitly.

3.2.3 Way Forward

- Strengthen the technical capacity of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health & Medical Services on transformative gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) through effective implementation of the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD);
- Develop and implement programs to address and reduce the incidence of anemia among adolescent girls and women of reproductive age;
- Develop and implement an inclusive and comprehensive national breast cancer screening program to strengthen women's and men's knowledge and attitudes about breast cancer and the importance of breast self-exam, follow-up screening with health workers and, where required, treatment options;

- Strengthen the sexual and relationship education of boys/men and girls/women.
- Conduct a comprehensive gender and social inclusion analysis of curricula and teaching materials at the early childhood education, primary and secondary levels

3.3 FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES

3.3.1 Achievements

- GBV and VAWG afflict every country in the world. Despite its size, Fiji faces one of the highest rates of VAWG worldwide: 64%, compared to a 35% global average. The Government of Fiji recognizes the seriousness of this issue as well as the long-term socioeconomic impacts that it has on communities and is committed to build “a society free of all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence” and to empower and enable all women and girls to participate fully alongside men and boys.
- Demonstrative of this commitment, the Government has taken several measures to help address the root causes, contributing factors and consequences of VAWG. These measures include a National Domestic Violence Helpline 1560 and the National Child Helpline 1325, a Service Delivery Protocol (SDP) to ensure appropriate support to GBV survivors, and efforts in favour of the systematic compilation of data on GBV and a GBV database. In combination with historic national consultations, each of these measures are informing the development of a NAP-VAWG, which was launched in 2023.
- The NAP-VAWG marks a critical moment in the Fijian, regional and global history, making Fiji the first Pacific Island country and one of two countries worldwide to have an evidence-based approach to prevent VAWG before it starts. Global evidence demonstrates that VAWG is preventable and not inevitable – preventable within years, not lifetimes, if an evidence-based, whole-of-population and inclusive approach is developed.
- The national consultations, held in 13 key sectors and settings across Fiji, represent an inclusive whole-of-government, whole-of-population process, drawing on the firsthand perspectives of diverse groups of women, girls, and other community members and culminating in the development of the NAP. The SDP is a binding agreement that establishes principles and guidelines to ensure that GBV survivors receive vital services and support in the aftermath of GBV incidents. The national helplines facilitate reporting on violence that affects women and children, and the database facilitates the systematic collection and compilation of data on GBV in Fiji. Further, the Domestic Violence Act 2009 provides GBV victims with an element of protection by enabling them to obtain Domestic Violence Restraining Orders. Each of these measures provide Fiji with the foundation necessary to begin effectively preventing and responding to VAWG before it starts, by drawing attention to its root causes and contributing factors, improving support to those impacted by it, and holding accountable those who perpetrate it.

- Together, these measures represent the Government’s demonstrated resolve to achieve the SDGs, set out in the 2030 Agenda, with particular emphasis on SDG 5.2 which aims to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls (EVAWG), and to adhere to: CEDAW, BPfA and other international and regional commitments.
- In Fiji, there is a broad consensus that the root cause of VAWG is a patriarchal system that prioritizes men over women, values men’s contributions more than those of women, and sustains an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities between women and men. Men’s violence against women is normalized in Fiji and in the family dynamic, recurring from one generation to the next. It is both a means by which women’s subordination is perpetuated and a consequence of that subordination. In many households, societal norms render Fijian women economically dependent on men. In a “patriarchal bargain”, women assume unpaid domestic roles, including childcare responsibilities, in exchange for financial protection. In this arrangement, women are at risk of DV, particularly if they are perceived to have not upheld their end of the “bargain”.
- Poverty is recognized as a significant contributing factor of VAWG; however, promoting women’s economic empowerment may also have unintended DV consequences. For example, there are cases of men rebuking their wives when the wives’ income-generating activities interfere with their domestic responsibilities, or of men demanding and/or controlling the money that their wives earn. As a result of this perceived and normalized power imbalance between women and men, both subtle and more obvious forms of violence infiltrate the culture, ways of life, and relationships of every setting where women, men, girls and boys interact – from homes to schools, workplaces and beyond.
- **Violence against Women and Girls in Fiji**
 - i. Over the course of the lives of ever-partnered Fijian women, nearly two thirds (64%) experience *intimate partner violence (IPV)*, including *physical violence*(61%) and emotional violence (58%). More than four in 10 women (44%) experience severe physical violence, including 15% of women who are physically attacked during pregnancy. One third (34%) of Fijian women frequently experience marital rape and 28% experience economic abuse. One quarter of ever-partnered Fijian women (24%) experience ongoing IPV (SDG 5.2.1). Patterns of IPV start early in women’s relationships and persist over their lifetimes. Women who experience IPV are more likely to have a family history of IPV in their or their partner’s family, and more than one half of women who have experienced IPV (55%) report that their children have witnessed the violence. In addition, 31% of all Fijian women have experienced physical and/or sexual non-partner violence (SDG 5.2.2).
 - ii. In Fiji, the most common form of sexual violence is child sexual abuse involving girls (and some boys) under the age of 18 years, accounting for 74% of all reported sexual violence cases over 2015–2018. Among adult Fijian women, 16% report having been sexually abused before the age of 15 years. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions reported that, for 2017–2020, 94% of rape victims were women and 68%

of rape cases involved girls under 18 years of age; similarly, 63% of victims in rape cases decided by the High Court over 2016–2020 involved girls under 17 years of age. Transactional sex is often combined with alcohol and drugs, and young girls are sought out as partners. Digital technology creates opportunities to seduce and “groom” children as prostitutes or as subjects of child pornography, activities that are not criminalized in Fiji. There is a lack of quantitative information; however, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is engaged in a project to collect and analyze related data.

- iii. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional violence and neglect perpetrated by family members, health workers, caregivers and care institutions; however, there is a lack of quantitative research. Women who identify as LGBTQI+ experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and are highly vulnerable to GBV. Research has documented that high proportions of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and gender non-conforming people have experienced physical, sexual and psychological violence and, due to widespread institutional discrimination, they generally rely on one another for support.
- iv. The COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation measures put in place in Fiji resulted in a surge in reported DV in April 2020, as well as subsequent surges as Fijians contended with the impacts of three tropical cyclones and, in 2021 and 2022, community transmission of the virus. Periods of lockdown, containment and curfews placed added stress on women to find and pay for food and oversee remote learning and other needs of their children, in addition to their usual domestic responsibilities; men who were on unpaid leave or had lost their jobs experienced stress because they were unable to fulfill their roles as “breadwinners”. With restrictions on mobility, moreover, DV perpetrators and victims were crowded together in small spaces.
- v. In response to Tropical Cyclone Winston, in 2016, the Government mobilized the Fiji Cluster System that coordinates humanitarian relief; the Protection and Safety Cluster, led by the MWCPA and co-led by UN Women and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), established the GBV Sub-Cluster. Following TC Winston and, again, following TC Yasa in 2020, the MWCSP and MHMS and UNFPA established Women Friendly Spaces in cyclone-affected areas, providing a range of on-site counseling, psychosocial support, case management and referral services to help meet women’s needs for reproductive health services and rights and GBV support. In 2020, the MWCSP and its SDP partners adapted the SDP to the COVID-19 situation.
- vi. The MWCSP has led the development of the NAP-VAWG (2023-2028). This plan was developed in partnership with a Secretariat composed of MWCSP, the Fiji Women Crisis Centre, UN Women, and a technical working group of government ministries and CSOs approved by the cabinet. The role of the Secretariat is to provide strategic and technical oversight on the development and implementation of NAP-VAWG.
- vii. Since its inception in 2019, the Fijian Government had conducted a comprehensive national consultation process to ensure diverse voices and perspectives are heard. This

consultation process was designed to engage as many Fijians as possible across 13 key sectors and settings which includes the following: Education, Universities, technical and vocational colleges, Workplaces & Cooperations, Sports & recreation spaces, Arts, Health and Social Services, Faith-based Contexts Faith based contexts, Media, Advertising, entertainment, Public spaces, transport, Infrastructure, Legal, justice and corrections, Informal Sector, Disciplined Forces and Traditional Institutions and Entities.

- viii. The aim of the consultation process was to identify key priorities for VAWG, increase awareness on the issues of VAWG and the NAP-VAWG, and promote engagement on the issue. NAP-VAWG has set out short-medium, and long-term strategies to reduce levels of violence against women and girls by challenging its underlying root causes in order to affect changes in people's attitudes and behaviors. It promotes community leadership and embeds a much stronger culture of equal and respectful relationships between men and women. It focuses on domestic violence/intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women and girls, as data and evidence from Fiji demonstrate that these are the most prevalent forms of violence against women and girls which urgently need to be addressed. It is governed by a core set of 7 Key Principles that reflects Fiji's value: Whole of Government; Whole of Population; Inclusive; Intersectional; Accountable; Transformative; and Evidence-based.
- **Schools Setting**
 - i. Fiji's primary and secondary schools represent a key prevention setting of the NAP-VAWG, to address children's vulnerability to physical, emotional and sexual violence. In 2018, rape, attempted rape and defilement accounted for 18% of child sexual abuse cases in primary schools and 14% in secondary schools; there were 101 pregnancies among secondary school girls and three among primary school girls. One quarter of secondary school girls were subjected to harassment and 63% of primary school girls experienced groping. In 2018, there were nearly 26,000 incidents of intimidation and physical violence in Fiji's primary schools and 2,300 incidents in secondary schools. Girls are less likely than boys to experience physical violence; however, girls in primary school represented 56% of the targets of name calling and bullying. With increased access to digital technology, students are more vulnerable to cyber bullying, with girls accounting for one half to two thirds of cyber bullying victims reported in Fiji's schools in 2018.
 - ii. The High Court has ruled that corporal punishment is unconstitutional, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and Fijian schools are leading by example in efforts to end all forms of violence: Fiji's Child Protection Policy bans corporal punishment; and a Zero-Tolerance Policy is in place for schools. The Government has proposed an amendment to the Juveniles Act 1974 on reasonable punishment.
 - **Programs with Civil Society Organizations**
 - i. The MWCSP leads the Government's initiatives to develop and implement both the SDP and the NAP. Led by the MWCSP, the EVAW Task Force provides oversight for the

implementation of the SDP and the NAP, and includes representation from Government ministries, Fijian CSOs, and development partners. The SDP signatories include relevant Government agencies, as well as CSOs that are key front-line GBV service providers. The institutional structure for the NAP includes a Secretariat led by the MWCPA, with support from UN Women and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), and a NAP Technical Working Group (NAP-TWG) with representatives from key Government ministries, civil society, women's rights groups and FBOs.

- ii. Fijian CSOs, FBOs and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) working individually and through coalitions are at the forefront of initiatives to raise awareness about VAWG, lobby for EAW legislation, provide services to women experiencing or at risk of GBV, and engage men, boys and youth as advocates. Since the 1980s, the FWCC and FWRM have challenged sociocultural norms that GBV is immutably embedded in the cultural landscape of Fiji and have moved the discussion from the private sphere into the public domain.
- iii. FWCC has been a leader in providing counseling and support to GBV survivors, and FWRM advocates for women's rights and access to justice. Both CSOs act as secretariats for Fijian-based and regional coalitions that monitor Fiji's progress against its international commitments to EAW, and both provide training in areas such as support for GBV survivors and access to justice. The Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation and the Pacific Disability Forum collaborated to develop the Toolkit on Eliminating Violence against Women with Disabilities in Fiji, and the Pacific Disability Forum has partnered with the Fiji Police Force to train police, legal and justice officials. In the LGBTQI+ community, DIVA for Equality, the Rainbow Pride Foundation and the Haus of Khameleon are Fijian CSOs that conduct research and advocate for responsive policies and laws.
- iv. Transformative change on EAW requires active engagement with, and participation of, men and boys. Since 2002, FWCC has implemented the Male Advocacy Program which, through training and mentoring, encourages men to examine and reflect on their own attitudes and behaviors about gender inequality and VAWG and to become EAW champions in their communities. In 2019, Transcend Oceania, a Fiji-based CSO, inaugurated a regional project with similar objectives. In 2020, during the 16 Days of Activism, the Warwick Principles were launched, encapsulating best practices for engaging men and boys. Young Fijians are important change agents for EAW. As change agents, young people gain opportunities to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making that, traditionally, has not been afforded them because of their age.
- v. Since 2018, Oceania Rugby has worked successfully with over 2,000 students who play rugby, over one half of whom are girls, and their coaches, to change attitudes about gender relations and to promote EAW. Two CSOs in Fiji – MSP which runs the Child Helpline 1325 and the Reproductive Family Health Association of Fiji – have worked with young girls aged 12–14 years to help them understand their rights and to gain the skills

to make independent decisions about their bodies, while also working with the girls' parents to support their daughters' decisions.

- vi. The NGO, Rise Beyond the Reef, supports rural women artisans to produce and market handcrafts and, from the platform of greater economic security, to discuss discrimination and VAWG in the women's households and communities. The women's increased financial security has helped reduce domestic violence in the women's households, increased help from men and other family members to carry out domestic chores, and increased shared decision-making.
 - vii. FWCC, MSP and Empower Pacific are the principal Fijian CSOs and signatories of the SDP, offering a range of basic and skilled counseling services, medical assistance and/or legal advice to women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of GBV. Other CSOs and FBOs provide basic response and referrals, safe emergency shelters and other types of support for victims of GBV. These include, among others, Lifeline Fiji, House of Sarah, Catholic Women's League, Muslim Women's League, Salvation Army, Homes of Hope and Soroptimist Society.
- **Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) Setting**
 - i. Throughout Fiji, churches and FBOs are strong, active advocates campaigning to eliminate gender-based discrimination within their congregations and communities, building on the foundational role of religion in the lives of Fijians. The Methodist Women's Fellowship's programme of Gender Equality Theology is one example. Another is the Pacific Conference of Churches, which has implemented a regional programme of Safe Communities of Pacific Women and Men that adopts a faith-based approach adapted to the Pacific context to address VAWG, in collaboration with its 32 member churches and nine National Councils of Churches. The Anglican community's House of Sarah supports women parish members who have been trained as SDP first responders in their communities, implements the Preventing Violence in Fiji's Faith Setting project using innovative techniques to change attitudes about unequal power relations between women and men, and hosts the Christian Talanoa Network, an alliance of women's rights organizations and churches raising awareness and seeking to prevent VAWG.
 - **Formal & Informal Sector**
 - ii. In June 2020, Fiji became the second country to ratify ILO Convention No. 190, which recognizes the rights of workers to be free from violence and harassment in the workplace, a key EAW prevention setting. A 2016 survey of harassment and violence in Fiji's workplaces found that 20% of employed women face physical, emotional and/or sexual harassment in the workplace. The most vulnerable women are younger women, including those who work: in accommodation, hotels and restaurants; on a casual basis rather than full-time or part-time; in more junior positions; on shift work; or in jobs that require changing a uniform while at work. In Fiji's municipal markets, women account

for around 80% of vendors who often experience violence in their workplace, such as bullying from customers, intimidation from competing vendors, physical and sexual harassment from men drinking and using drugs, and threats and violence from their husbands/partners seeking to prevent them from working or to control the money they earn.

- iii. A significant majority of Indo-Fijian market vendors (70%) feel harassed and discriminated against because of their ethnicity and gender. The formation of Market Vendor Associations has enabled women vendors to negotiate with market management and local authorities, for example, to improve facilities to make it safer for women who stay overnight in markets and to establish protocols for grievance redress. In Fiji, DV has repercussions in the workplace, with majorities of both women and men feeling tired or distracted, being late or absent from work, or focusing on supporting colleagues who are experiencing DV. The estimated business cost is 10 working days per employee per year. Two thirds of Fijian businesses reported their employees experienced increased DV during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to partner with the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) to offer a training program on workplace response to GBV. Other employers such as Westpac Fiji and the National Rugby League have established corporate policies to raise awareness and sanction domestic violence and have implemented programs to support employees affected by domestic violence.
- **Media & Digital Technology Setting**
 - i. Legacy media and digital technologies provide critical ERAW prevention settings; however, they also can be vehicles that perpetuate and aggravate VAWG. In Fiji, effective communications strategies have: promoted the National Domestic Violence Helpline 1560 and the National Child Helpline 1325; contributed to wide community support and participation in events, such as the 16 Days of Activism against GBV; and mobilized action to confront sexual harassment in the workplace.
 - ii. At the same time, much of Fiji's news media reporting on GBV employs "episodic framing", that is, a focus on individual cases or events. VAWG is portrayed as a "collection of unacceptable, but individual, crimes rather than a systemic issue". This occurs when reporting discusses only what happened at an event without providing in-depth background or contextual information and without linking VAWG to social norms or, more broadly, to the issue of gender equality, and when it uses biased language that reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes.
 - iii. Fijians' access to the internet and social media increases the risks of women and girls being exposed to online content that harasses, is overtly abusive or threatens violence, while also increasing the risk of men and boys being exposed to the normalization of such abuse and violence due to exposure to the same. Online sexual exploitation of Fijian women and girls also has led to stigmatization by their families and communities.

- iv. Online GBV is an intersectional issue, disproportionately affecting women and girls based on their age, cultural background, disability or sexual orientation. Online pornography exacerbates sexual abuse perpetrated by young boys and by men. The majority of Fijian adolescents have low to very low levels of media literacy, that is, the ability to discern and deal with online threats, manipulation and misinformation. As a result, Fijian adolescents are at heightened risk of online exploitation. Targeted attention and awareness-raising is necessary to minimize the associated risks.
- v. Fijian women who experience DV and other forms of GBV wait, on average, 868 days or nearly 2.5 years before going to the police. One half of women survivors never tell anyone about it or, if they do, they turn to people close to them. Key reasons are that women who experience DV: consider it normal in Fijian society; fear retribution and increased violence if they report it; and do not believe the police will help them.
- vi. MHMS is currently running awareness programs amongst the health care workers mainly in the Tertiary based hospitals within the Emergency Departments & Obstetrics Gynecology Department with the Sexual Reproductive Health doctors for the necessary post-Exposure prophylaxis. The Ministry is working towards rolling out a National Training of Trainers in 2023 with Divisional Roll out of training in GBV on the recently developed guidelines. This is supported by MSP for GBV response in Fiji through its divisional clinics.
- vii. A guideline for comprehensive case management is designed with an aim to train and guide healthcare workers uniformly throughout MHMS and all other private health sectors. It is a comprehensive and easy reference package that a health worker requires when attending to a case of GBV and includes all laws in Fiji that guide gender-based violence issues. It guides evidence collection and giving evidence in court and links healthcare workers to all social support services available for victims. The roles of health care workers are defined from the start of receiving a case to where it ends when they have sorted all medical issues and made appropriate referrals to the appropriate services and authorities.
- viii. It gives healthcare workers knowledge and skills to manage and support cases of gender-based violence and ensure quality healthcare services to ensure safety and health for all members of society. The MHMS have actively contributed towards the development of NAP-VAWG and is now in the implementation phase. The National GBV Guidelines for the Health sector was finalized and launched in 2023 with a regional Training of Trainers completed in September and followed through will be a National Training of Trainers in Fiji with a national roll-out program to take place in the second half of the 2023/24 financial year.

3.3.2 Challenges

- Coordination of gender-based violence statistics and centralized for policy advise to government on strategies, policies and plans.

3.3.3 Way Forward

- Support the implementation of the NAP-VAWG(2023-2028);
- Strengthen the technical capacity of the MWCSP, MHMS, MEHA, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Fiji Police Force, Ministry of Local Government, Fiji National Disaster Management Office, and all other relevant agencies, on transformative gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and GRBP through effective implementation of the ICD initiative while ensuring that GMAGs are established across all agencies and GMAPs are developed and updated annually.
- Strengthen government policies and legislation to eliminate violence against all women and girls;
- Conduct research on the prevalence of violence against women and girls and the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in Fiji.

3.4 PARTICIPATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE INSTITUTIONS

3.4.1 Achievements

- **Actions and measures to promote women’s participation in public life and decision-making**
 - i. Fiji's national policies and the government's ratification and support of regional and international accords demonstrate the country's commitment to advancing women's leadership and decision-making authority. To begin with, all Fijian citizens are guaranteed certain rights under the 2013 Constitution's Bill of Rights, which include: the freedom from unjust discrimination, whether direct or indirect, on the basis of personal traits or circumstances, such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, age, marital status, economic or social status, health status, culture, ethnic or social origin; and the freedom to move around freely, form associations, and run for and, if elected, hold public office.
 - ii. In order to accomplish the goals of the National Gender Policy—which include advancing gender equity, equality, social justice, and sustainable development—one of its main strategies is to encourage women to hold leadership positions in all spheres of Fijian society. To empower women to realize their full development potential, the NDP seeks to expand the representation of women in civil society and at all levels of government. This entails gathering data broken down by gender, incorporating training in leadership and decision-making into programs for the empowerment of rural women, encouraging girls to pursue careers in non-traditional and STEM fields, and emphasizing women's leadership development, mentoring, and coaching. The NDP identifies the following targets as indicators of achievement of SDG 5.5: By 2018, women account for 20% of the Members of Parliament (MPs) (SDG 5.5.1); and, by 2018, 32% of the positions of Director for State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are women, with an annual increase of one percentage point to reach 35% by 2021 (SDG 5.5.2).
 - iii. Transformative change is a priority for the Fiji Government in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment. In order to bring about transformative change, the power structures and dynamics that uphold gendered inequality must alter. This entails both acknowledging and achieving the equal rights of women with a variety of identities. In order for women to have opportunities as leaders and decision-makers in this process, an environment that fosters their strategic capacity to use interrelated political abilities to formulate demands for policy, create and manage civic alliances, and interact with state entities must be established. With this view, the Fiji Government has promoted merit and an enabling environment for women’s equal participation over Temporary Special measures or quotas.
 - iv. Fiji's political empowerment ranking in the 2021 Global Gender Gap was 95th out of 153 countries, a considerable improvement over its 2015 ranking of 110th out of 145 countries. Fiji had exceeded its SDG objective for women's representation in Parliament and doubled the percentage of female members of Parliament (MPs) in the last 20

years. This is more than double the average percentage of female MPs in Pacific Island nations. The current percentages of women's representation however, fall short of the "critical mass" of 30%, which is sometimes mentioned as a prerequisite for bringing about significant changes in the way parliaments function.

- v. Fiji has taken several actions and measures to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making over the past five years.
- vi. FEO does not have specific awareness programs targeting women's full, free, and democratic participation in political and public life. However, they conduct nationwide awareness activities to educate voters and stakeholders about electoral processes, ensuring that information is widely disseminated to all voters, including women. The Know Your Election (KYE) campaign, conducted during the lead-up to both the 2018 and 2022 General Elections, was a major voter awareness campaign. It ran alongside a nationwide Voter Registration Drive and included translated materials in various languages.
- vii. During non-election years, the FEO also provides presentations on electoral processes at forums organized by NGOs, CSOs, and women's organizations. Their Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 includes plans to raise awareness about women's participation as part of their activities. Additionally, changes to electoral laws, including the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act 2012 and the Interpretation Act 1967, have been made to support gender equality in political participation.
- viii. FEO has contributed to the capacity-building in political leadership of women. In 2022, the FEO attended the "Mentoring Workshop for Aspiring Women Politicians" information session organized by the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians [CWP] Fiji Group. The CWP Fiji Group consists of all the women Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. CWP Fiji hosted a mentoring workshop for aspiring women politicians on 18 May 2022. The FEO attended this session as an invited speaker and presented on the Candidates Handbook, outlined the process to becoming a candidate and imparted critical information for candidates looking to participate in the 2022 General Election. The mentoring workshop had 192 women from around Fiji attending and led by the women MPs. The workshop was aimed at promoting women in politics and bring together women from all walks of life who were interested in entering politics. Formation of CWP Fiji Group in 2019 as an informal women's caucus to promote and encourage women to stand for elections and participate actively in politics.
- ix. FEO had not implemented special measures like a quota system to ensure equal and inclusive representation of women candidates on political party lists. The FEO also did not provide financial support or training for women candidates seeking public office as its primary role is to conduct awareness and information sessions on electoral processes for various stakeholders, including voters, political parties, media, civil society organizations, and the general public. While the FEO has conducted presentations to promote women's participation in elections, these efforts mainly involved organized

forums for women, organized by Women NGOs and the Media Watch Group, leading up to the 2018 and 2022 General Elections.

- **Women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)**
 - i. Fiji has implemented various measures aimed at improving women's ability to express themselves and take part in decision-making processes in the media and information and communication technologies (ICT) industry. In Fiji, digital access is widely available and is starting to affect how women participate in decision-making. According to 2020 data, 66% of Fijians have access to the Internet, while 139% of the population owns a mobile phone. Facebook is used by nearly 600,000 Fijians, or 65% of the population.
 - ii. Needless to say, the inclusion of women in the sector and in the decision making processes and levels is crucial and Fiji current policy framework for gender equality and women’s empowerment supports this. For instance, the National Gender Policy focuses on enhancing women's participation and representation in all sectors, including media and ICT and calls on inclusion for ICT reforms. The Policy advocates support for women-led media at national and community levels and requires regulatory reviews, gender audits, codes of conduct, training and stakeholder consultations to promote government commitments to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women.
 - iii. The 2018 Online Safety Commission Act (OSCA), the inclusion of rural and urban areas in government-sponsored free Internet connection, and the expansion of possibilities for students to acquire digital skills in educational settings such as schools and career training centers are examples of progress that have been detailed in the previous BPFA report.
 - iv. In Fiji, women are establishing forums where they may express themselves. CSOs have a long history of using legacy and, more recently, digital media to effectively highlight and counter harmful social and gender norms in their advocacy for diverse social groups. Examples of CSOs that do this include FWCC, FWRM, femLINKPacific, DIVA for Equality, and the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation. The femLINKPacific comic book "Herowins" is an illustration of how to create a good media character for young girls and shows how the views of women may impact public policy.
 - v. For more than 20 years, femLINKPacific has established the Rural Women Leaders’ Community Media Network, a community radio network that features material created by women and has amplified the voices of rural Fijian women and groups on a variety of human security-related issues. Women can now connect and work together in the event of emergencies, like natural disasters as they did during the COVID-19 pandemic, and make better decisions about their activities by sharing and disseminating information about weather, prices, economic opportunities, savings, and banking. Furthermore, research has shown how women can and do challenge the constraints of societal and

gender standards. A legal and policy framework to assist community radio and women's media networks is what's lacking.

- vi.** Fijian women, especially those in younger generations, are using digital activism as another "bottom-up" attempt to close gaps in the media. They are using it to assert their voices, promote social change, and guarantee the participation of a variety of social groups. What began as a way for women interested in digital activism to get around media censorship has evolved into a tool with the ability to explore, learn, reflect, and share on a never-before-seen scale, mobilize movements and collective action, create new social connections, and strengthen networks. It has produced safe avenues where young women can speak up against age and gender stereotypes in society. They are able to counter the misrepresentations and dominant narratives put forward by those institutions while also bringing sensitive issues—like the discrimination against women and other minority groups—to the attention of policymakers and mainstream media.
- vii.** Based on the outcomes of the computer study sections of the Fiji Secondary School Year 12 and Year 13 external exams administered between 2016 and 2020, Fijian girls enrolling in secondary school computer studies courses frequently outnumber and outperform boys. The percentages of females who passed were greater than the percentages of boys. In order to promote more expression and participation of women in decision making in the media, and through ICT in the future, girls need to have improved education and access.
- viii.** A STEM Camp for Girls was initiated by Graduate Women of Fiji (GWF) in 2019 with the goal of inspiring girls to pursue STEM subjects in their education and future careers. Out of over 200 applications, GWF selected 30 girls aged 6–13 years who reside in urban informal settlements in the Suva region, and five recruited professional women in STEM fields to serve as teachers and role models for the campers. MWCSP and MEHA supported the STEM Camp idea, and in 2020, GWF expanded the program based on its 2019 success. Thirteen more women received training to become trainers. In cooperation with Science Services Pacific, GWF held demonstrations at five to six schools in isolated parts of Fiji; secured funds to hold STEM Camps for thirty to thirty-five girls, each from Ba and Lautoka informal settlements; and formed an alliance with Fiji National University (FNU) to provide space for the STEM Camp and transportation support. Due to the pandemic, GWF held this program virtually and has a commitment to do so for a decade.
- ix.** There is an underrepresentation of women and the pervasiveness of gender discrimination in the media. Also, it is critical that Fijians acquire media literacy as the usage of digital media grows. Six out of ten (61.4%) Fijian students in Years 12 and 13 have poor to extremely low levels of media literacy, according to a recent research involving over 2,000 pupils. Their proficiency in deciphering media messages and utilizing various information sources and media devices is inadequate. These are the

digital skills that secondary school needs to cover, with a gender-sensitive approach that takes into account how different genders utilize the Internet and social media.

- x. The government will continue to strengthen its policies and support towards various organizations in Fiji that conduct capacity building programs targeted at women in media and ICT. These programs provide training, mentorship, and networking opportunities to empower women professionals and entrepreneurs in these sectors.
 - xi. There is a need to recognize how information and communications technology (ICT) can be used to subvert stereotypes and gender norms that undermine gender equality; and bolster the OSCA's enforcement to combat online sexual exploitation and cyber bullying of women and girls.
- **Current National Women's Machinery and Measures Taken to Strengthen it**
 - i. Fiji's main government entity dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women is the MWCSPP with a Department of Women that is the National Women's Machinery (NWM) for Fiji. There is a Minister responsible for the NWM who is currently the only female Cabinet Minister; and an Assistant Minister who is also a female Member of Parliament. The MWCSPP has a female Permanent Secretary who heads operations of the whole Ministry that also looks after Child Protection, Social Protection and Poverty Monitoring other than women's empowerment.
 - ii. The Mission of MWCSPP is 'Families and communities supported through Social Welfare and gender mainstreaming programs' and the Vision is 'Empowering the disadvantaged and women is a world where every individual has equal access to opportunities'.
 - iii. The operations and strategic management of the NWM is led by a Director. The NWM plays a crucial role in implementing policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at advancing women's rights and opportunities in Fiji. It is responsible for advocating, coordinating efforts, and providing policy advice to the government on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Fiji and over the past five years, the NWM was transitioning from program implementation to being a policy advisor to the Fiji Government, focusing on transformative policies to promote women's equality.
 - iv. The NWM has moved from the strategic commitments under the WPA and now focuses on three thematic areas - Women's Economic Empowerment, Ending Violence against Women, and Girls and Gender, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Reduction. The NWM is also moving towards improving the availability, access, and use of gender data and statistics which is crucial for guiding strategic interventions to address gender gaps and issues.
 - v. Over the past five years, the NWM has strengthened partnerships and networks with NGOs, CSOs, FBOs, development partners, and women's institutions to address gender gaps and issues. These efforts not only align with Fiji's commitments to the SDG Agenda 2030, CEDAW, BPfA, Fiji Constitution, NDP, and the NGP, but also improve the quality of policies and programs developed and implemented with the exchange of technical expertise, financial support and sharing of tasks towards achieving a common goal.

- vi. The NWM has taskforces and working groups under the various thematic areas that include NGOs, CSOs, FBOs, development partners, and institutions alongside government agencies. These forums have been crucial in development of the NAP NAWG, and the FCGA Report, and have been instrumental in the roll out of the ICD, Service Delivery Protocol, WRD initiative, Safety and Protection cluster amongst others.
 - vii. The WEE Taskforce is currently developing the WEENAP with the technical support of UNWomen; SPC RRRT has supported and facilitated the development of the 6th State CEDAW Report with a government wide consultation process; and DFAT is currently supporting the review and establishment of the ICD initiative and the establishment of an implementation unit.
 - viii. The department's budget allocation has fluctuated over the years, with the highest growth rate in FY 2021/22. In the new financial year (2023/24), the department has been allocated a budget of \$5.24m, representing a 20% increase compared to the previous year (2022/23). The total budget allocated to the MWCSPP for the past 7 years, amounts to \$892.2 million, of which \$30.3 million was allocated to the NWM. For the first time in the past decade, the NWM is approximately 90% fully staffed and has the support of development partners and Government to establish specific units for the implementation of the most recently developed action plans/initiatives.
- **Mechanisms and Tools Used To Mainstream Gender Equality Across Sectors**
 - i. Fiji has employed several mechanisms and tools over the years to mainstream gender equality across all government sectors. Fiji has a National Gender Policy that sets the framework for gender mainstreaming across all sectors. This policy provides guidelines and strategies for promoting gender equality in government programs and services.
 - ii. More recently, inter-ministerial coordination has been through the ICD initiative. The overall goal of ICD is to create an enabling environment to ensure integration of all women and girls' needs, interests, concerns, contributions and perspectives into policies, programs and budgets across government with investing in institutional and coordination structures, technical knowledge, evidence based and context specific knowledge products, gender statistics as well as skills, and capacity in transformative gender mainstreaming across government. The ICD is led by the MWCSPP in close partnership with the Ministry of Finance - endorsed by two (2) Cabinet decisions in January and December 2020. The ICD complements and supports the implementation of the GRPB initiative currently implemented by the Ministry of Finance (endorsed by a Cabinet decision- February, 2020 hence binding all ministries). FWRM is the lead technical partner supporting overall effective implementation of the ICD initiative from 2020. Technical assistance is supported by the Government of New Zealand via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and by the Government of Canada. Alinea International were engaged by Cowater International through the Canadian Trade and Investment Facility for Development (CTIF), a project funded by Global Affairs Canada as a Technical Assistance (TA) partner in 2021 to support the ICD phase one (1) roll out

through development of sector-specific training materials and knowledge products as well as provision of sector specific training sessions. In 2021, MWCSPP, Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS), Ministry of Education, Fiji Police Force, MCTTT, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Forestry, MOAW; and in 2023, MCS, MRMD, RFMF, MHMS, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Sugar Industry, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological services, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture and Heritage, and MEPIR underwent the first phase of the ICD.

- iii. Between 2020-2022 significant positive progress has been made toward achieving the aspirations of the ICD initiative including the formation and establishment of GMAG in 9 pilot agencies (FY 2021-2022) and 10 new agencies (2022-2023); the formation and capacity building of Gender Mainstreaming Lead Facilitators Team (GMFT) which include a total of 10 personnel from MWCSPP and MoF; GRPB submissions from 2020 to 2023; orientation, learning, coaching and mentoring sessions conducted (1 in 2021 and 2nd in 2022); Gender Transformative trainings conducted with 30 GMAG members across 9 government agencies; development of Gender transformative knowledge products, namely the Gender Sensitization toolkit (GS) 2020, Gender Analysis toolkit (GA) 2020, Review and Analysis of Gender Budget Submissions FY (2020-2021), Rapid Gender Analysis of seven sectors and settings (2021-2022) - Development of Gender Equality Rapid Gender Analysis Findings and Recommendations Power points (2022), Gender Equality Info graphic sheets for seven sectors and settings (2022), ICD Gender Equality: Achievements and Analysis in key sectors and settings booklet (2022), and Sector/Setting Specific Training Toolkits (2022) - ICD information and training video (2022).
 - iv. As mentioned earlier in this report, Fiji utilizes gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources in a way that promotes gender equality. This involves analyzing budgetary allocations to ensure that they address the specific needs and priorities of different genders and the MOF works closely with MWCSPP to roll out GRPB with ICD. By employing this mechanism, Fiji aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society where all genders has equal opportunities and rights across various government sectors.
- **National Human Rights Institution and Measures Taken to Address Violations of Women's Rights and Promote Gender Equality**
 - i. One of the core functions of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) is to protect human rights. NHRIs are established by the State, yet have authority and powers to operate independently from governments. They are recognized by the United Nations and have powers to monitor the human rights situation in their country, especially in relation to the most disadvantaged and marginalized communities; they are empowered to investigate complaints; to cooperate with civil society organizations; to review & advise the government on laws, policies, and practices; and to engage with the international and regional organizations.

- ii. Fiji's NHRI is the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC) and like other NHRIs, it doesn't stand alone. It is a part of a larger family that is represented through the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institution (GANHRI); and the 4 regional networks of NHRIs in Africa, the Americas, the Asia Pacific and Europe. The regional network which looks after Asian and Pacific NHRIs is the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF).
- iii. The FHRADC was established in 1999 and the Constitution of Fiji under section 137 provides for the removal and appointment of members of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC). The appointment is upon the advice of the COC to the President and appointment of members to the Commission is for a fixed term of 3 years thus appointment of members of the Commission is safeguarded under the Constitution.
- iv. Further, appointments to the Commission are based on the personal attributes, knowledge and experience of the appointed member on various matters likely to come before the Commission in accordance with section 45(3) of the Constitution, and not necessarily based on a person's gender.
- v. The Constitution also provides for any breaches of human rights and enforcement of the protection of human rights to be brought before the courts in accordance with section 2(4) of the Constitution. Part 4 of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission Act 2009 provides for the processes and procedures undertaken by the Commission for complaints and investigations and proceedings of complaints before the Commissioner.
- vi. The FHRADC had acquired "A" accreditation status with GANHRI and APF. After the 05 December 2006 coup, the then Director of the FHRADC withdrew our membership with GANHRI and APF. In February 2021, the FHRADC applied for its re-accreditation with GANHRI. On 24 June 2021, GANHRI awarded the FHRADC "B" accreditation status. The recommendations issued by the GANHRI's Subcommittee on Accreditation indicate few concerns with technical aspects of the FHRADC's legal mandate. The outcome of the accreditation review illustrates that the FHRADC is functioning independently in practice and is discharging the full breadth of its mandate to promote and protect human rights across Fiji. The accreditation outcome reaffirmed Fiji's commitment to human rights and sends a message that the FHRADC is operating in accordance with international standards. The FHRADC then applied for re-accreditation with APF. At its Annual General Meeting on 15th September 2022, APF also granted FHRADC a B accreditation status.
- vii. The FHRADC is now determined to strengthen its policies and guidelines to ensure compliance with requirements set under Paris Principles. The FHRADC now intends to apply for "A: status accreditation with GANHRI and APF. As such, the FHRADC has a five years Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027. One of the five priorities in this plan is addressing the interests of marginalized groups in our society being the interests of women, children and people living with disabilities.
- viii. The FHRADC plays a crucial role in addressing violations of women's rights and promoting gender equality. Some measures they take include: Investigating complaints

of violations of rights and producing reports to highlight these issues. Complaints received and investigated by the Commission include allegations of violations of the constitutional right to life; right to personal liberty; rights of arrested and detained persons; freedom from cruel and degrading treatment; freedom from unreasonable search and seizure; rights of accused persons; access to courts or tribunals; freedom of association; freedom of religion, conscience and belief; right to executive and administrative justice; freedom of speech, expression and publication; freedom of movement and residence; right to equality and freedom from discrimination; employment relations; rights of children; right to privacy; access to information; right to education; right to health; rights of ownership and protection of iTaukei, Rotuman and Banaban lands; right to economic participation; right to housing and sanitation; right to adequate food and water; right to social security schemes and freedom from arbitrary evictions Rights of persons with disabilities; The FHRADC has instituted legal proceedings and appeared as amicus curiae in court to uphold human rights principles, ensuring appropriate redress or remedies are afforded to the victims of human rights violations; the FHRADC has constructively engaged with diverse groups including the UN agencies such as UNDP, OHCHR, the European Union, Asia-pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, and International Red Cross. It is working with the Judiciary, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Correction Services and, statutory bodies such as the Legal Aid Commission and the FEO, Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission and Accident Compensation Commission Fiji. It has engaged with CSOs such as Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation, FWRM, Citizens Constitutional Forum, National Council of Women Fiji, DIVA, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality Fiji, FWCC, Soqosoqo Vakamarama, Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, Youth Champs 4 Mental Health, Provincial Youth Forum of Fiji Islands, Pacific Centre for Peace Building, Dialogue Fiji, Rainbow Pride Foundation, Haus of Khameleon, Strumphet Advocacy Network , Pacific Rainbow Advocacy Network, Survival Advocacy Network together with UNDP through public consultations held throughout Fiji on a number of human rights issues such as the first hour procedure and the rights of arrested and detained persons, LGBTI rights, rights of sex workers, racism, rights of persons with disabilities, rights of children in conflict with the law, freedom of expression and women's right to economic participation. The Commission in collaboration with Fiji Disabled Peoples Federations visited villages in Central and Western divisions reaching out to Fijians, advocating on rights of persons with disabilities and access to justice. The FHRADC in collaboration with the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and UNDP facilitated training for the Fiji Corrections Service on the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and on the purpose and procedure of inspections of places of detention. The Commission also collaborated with OHCHR, raising awareness on use of proportionate force with Fiji Police Force and on principles of non-discrimination; and the FHRADC monitors places of detention including corrections facilities, police cell blocks, Department of Immigration safe house and hospitals and is working with the Fiji

Corrections Service in implementing the minimum human rights standards in places of detention. These measures help create a more equitable and just society by addressing the challenges faced by women and promoting gender equality at various levels.

3.5 PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

3.5.1 Actions to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implementation of the women, peace and security agenda

- The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI) in Fiji is actively engaged in promoting the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, aligning with international resolutions like Security Council Resolution 1325 and related agreements. Their approach includes fostering a gender-inclusive workplace, providing gender mainstreaming training to staff, collaborating with disciplined forces for WPS advancement, and supporting interagency initiatives.
- Fiji, although lacking a formal WPS National Action Plan (NAP), has various government agencies involved in WPS-related activities. For example, the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) conduct training on gender-based violence and sexual violence. At Fiji's government's request, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) facilitated Fiji's first-ever Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plan Orientation Workshop in September of 2022. Fiji is a democratic government with multiple agencies working to further incorporate WPS concepts into the day-to-day operations of local government activities, planning and resourcing. Throughout the workshop, small group processes and application of measureable objective design set the conditions for follow-on resourcing and measureable indicators of programming success. Building on the foundations of UNSCR 1325 and the U.S. Government's WPS Act, the workshop consisted of two phases: Phase I – Establishing a charter for a coordinating committee consisting of Fijian government and civil society organizations to guide processes for policy approval and implementation; Phase II – Developing a National Action Plan outline by expanding discussions to local civil society organizations to gain insight into the best applications for gender perspectives in Fiji government programs. Around 40 U.S., international, and local representatives convened to help create Fiji's WPS National Action Plan outline.
- Additionally, the NAP-VAWG in Fiji aligns with WPS principles. Fiji's commitment to the WPS agenda extends beyond traditional security concerns, encompassing issues like climate change and cyber security. Women's representation in the RFMF and FPF has increased, though there remains limited representation in senior ranks. Both forces are committed to enhancing women's participation, as evidenced by their applications for Elsie Initiative funding to address barriers to women's meaningful involvement in peace operations and the armed forces.
- MHAI is also partnering with the RFMF to enhance arms tracking and monitoring.

3.5.2 Leadership, Representation and Participation of Women In Conflict Prevention, Resolution, Peace building, Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response, at Decision-Making Levels in Situations of Armed and other Conflicts, and in Fragile or Crisis Settings

- Fiji's defense and security sector strives to be gender inclusive so that it better reflects the communities it serves and gains the strength that comes from embracing diversity. Fiji participated in the United Nations Security Council Open Virtual Debate on, 'Women, peace and security: twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) at UN on Thursday 29th October 2020. Fiji, through its Ambassador and Permanent Representative at the UN Dr. Satyendra Prasad supported the call made by the UNSG H.E Antonio Guterres for an immediate global ceasefire and to focus all efforts on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and on the social and economic recovery. At this debate Fiji reiterated its committed to advancing women's rights; promoting gender equality, and this is reflected in the increase in women in leadership; in public service and in parliament and informed the world that Fiji was developing its National Action Plan to prevent violence against women and girls.
- The female Police Commissioner in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan at the time was Ms. Unaisi Vuniwaqa from Fiji, an achievement which Fiji is proud of; and she was appointed as the Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security in 2021. Ms. Vuniwaqa succeeds Nóirín O'Sullivan of Ireland. As deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, the Assistant Secretary-General is responsible for day-to-day management, supporting in the overall leadership and management of the Department. This appointment is the first of its kind from Fiji, and that too of a female leader, and has broadened the sights of aspiring women in the defense forces in Fiji and the region.
- The Fijian Government is determined to increase the numbers of women in its military and police deployments across its Peacekeeping operations as well. As the world's most significant United Nations peacekeeping contributor per capita, Fiji's commitment to peace and the rules-based order is evident. Women play a crucial role in that work, bringing unique experiences, insights, and strengths to peace operations and their work in Fiji. While there is room for improvement, recent years have seen growth in the proportion of women in the disciplined forces. Women currently comprise about 9% of RFMF personnel and 27% of the Fiji Police Force. About 38% of FPF personnel currently on peacekeeping deployments are women – well above the United Nations' 2028 gender target for deployed individual police officers – while just under 8% of deployed RFMF personnel are women.

These actions collectively contribute to building Fiji's capacity to respond effectively to conflicts and crises, both domestically and internationally.

3.5.3 Judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response

- Fiji has not made significant strides in enhancing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, particularly concerning women and girls in conflict situations as armed situations in Fiji have not been a common thing. However, Fiji is often victim to humanitarian crisis due to natural disasters and recently, the COVID19 pandemic.
- Fijian women, children, and male family members (who have traditionally been the main perpetrators of domestic violence) were all obliged to remain in their houses during COVID-19 lockdowns. Individuals who would typically be out working and conducting business were compelled to spend days together, frequently in close quarters.
- Women faced a lot of stress since they had to manage school-age children's requirements and distant learning in addition to carrying out their regular household duties and finding and paying for food to feed their families. Depression and other types of stress were experienced by Fijian men, a large number of whom describe themselves and their value as the "breadwinner." Stress levels were higher for both men and women impacted by the economic effects of COVID-19 due to the challenges of finding alternative job, the uncertainty of having to turn to the informal sector, and the possible loss of the safety net of remittances.
- Quick evaluations carried out during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic provided preliminary information about how COVID-19 affected the frequency and kind of GBV. People who are vulnerable—older, disabled, or possessing a variety of sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and sex characteristics—reported feeling more anxious and stressed out as a result of having limited mobility, having trouble getting support from others and services, and worrying about their personal safety.
- During crises, the risk was considerably higher for women in these groups who are more susceptible to physical, mental, and sexual abuse (e.g., those who had been mistreated or abandoned by caregivers who are also under stress). The vulnerability of women with disabilities and the LGBTQI+ community to increasing violence in their homes and communities as a result of COVID-19 was highlighted by women questioned in Fiji and numerous other Pacific Island. Other women who have been particularly vulnerable to GBV as a result of the income and mobility impacts of COVID-19 include women who live in rural and remote communities, as well as others who moved to cities and now reside in informal settlements.
- Rural women who suffer domestic violence already have limited access to resources like counseling, medical care, and legal assistance; social isolation and limited mobility further limit this access. With few options to satisfy family requirements and women frequently cut off from family and other support networks, situations that are favorable to increasing domestic violence prevailed in informal settlements, where up to 84% of households experienced a major reduction in income in 2020 as a result of COVID-19.
- The effect of COVID-19 on GBV in Fiji was described as "a crisis within a crisis" at the beginning of 2021. Approximately 60% of individuals who reported GBV to front-line

care providers in May and June of 2021 gave information for the GBV administrative data collected in 2021, which aids in measuring this epidemic. Four out of ten people (39%) said that COVID-19 had caused them to experience financial difficulties. Other changes included food insecurity (17%), the DV perpetrator's unemployment (13%), and the perpetrators' increasing use of alcohol, kava, and/or drugs (19%). Increasingly, women calling to report DV are also concerned about food security because they are not given money to buy food, or men have locked up groceries that their wives have bought and have demanded sex in exchange for food to feed the children, or simply thrown away the groceries women have bought.

- GBV risks are raised during and after natural disasters like cyclones and flooding because they intensify already-existing gender disparities. The incidence and prevalence of VAWG in the context of natural disasters in Fiji are not well-documented quantitatively, but the recent experience with cyclones and other disasters indicates a deep awareness of the risks and difficulties. For women and girls, crowded evacuation centers and other communal relief shelters with limited privacy are frequently dangerous places. The risk of GBV is increased by the stress, trauma, and heightened tensions that people encounter after a crisis. Women and girls in Fiji have reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse at the hands of other men, as well as partners or close family members, with every storm. Women and girls are regularly harassed or in danger of being harmed when they go to fetch water, use restrooms, and take a bath. When men coerce women and girls into performing paid sex work in order to get extra money, this is known as sexual exploitation.
- To address the situation, the MWCSPP took quick action. In order to modify the SDP in response to the COVID-19 scenario, MWCSPP had mobilized its SDP partners. Guidelines for the helplines, which previously offered in-person support, were included in a "Resource Kit for Fiji Helpline Workers: Responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Welfare Calls during COVID-19." This kit was designed to make sure that phone counseling would continue to be available to individuals who were under lockdown or could not otherwise access the services in person.
- Simplified guidelines, including a phone tree, instructions on how to obtain a DVRO by phone, and other guidance on how to handle disclosures and refer cases appropriately, were provided by the "Community Response Guidelines: Basic Guidelines for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence and Child Welfare Reports during COVID-19" to local community workers and others who encountered disclosures of GBV or child welfare concerns.
- The Government and Fijian CSOs mobilized again, in late 2020, after TC Yasa. WFSs were established at key locations in the Northern Division, and front-line service providers, such as MSP and Empower Pacific, increased the number of counselors on staff, extended their hours of operation, and reached out to informal settlements and other communities to mitigate the conditions that contribute to GBV. In cases where CSA was reported, MSP arranged for women and children to shelter in hotels for the provision of

emergency services, backstopping the efforts of the DSW during the lockdowns. FWCC and UN Women co-facilitated training that targeted front-line service providers on COVID-19 adapted referral pathways for survivors. MWCPA also initiated a project to collect, compile, analyses and share administrative data from front-line service providers on who accesses GBV services, as a pilot for a longer-term proposal to establish the GBV Administrative Data System as part of the roll-out of the SDP.

- In 2020, MWCPA formed the COVID-19 Response Working Group and, in partnership with FWRM, DIVA for Equality, the UN Women Market for Change (M4C) project and the Asian Development Bank, conducted a rapid assessment of “Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Women in Fiji”.

Overall, these actions demonstrate Fiji's commitment to upholding international standards and ensuring accountability for violations against women and girls in conflict and crisis situations.

3.5.4 Actions Taken to Eliminate Discrimination against and Violations of the Rights of the Girl Child, including Adolescent Girls

- In Fiji, gender norms are gradually shifting. It is a gradual process that carries a high risk of backlash and does not fully account for the intersections of women's identities with age, disability, or sexual orientation. Punishments for defying and deviating from firmly ingrained gender standards can be severe, especially for girls. In addition to being a destructive and dehumanizing type of punishment meted out to women and girls who oppose men's authority, discrimination and violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a reflection of the assumption that males are superior to women. Efforts by the Fiji Government are therefore, directed to bring about transformative change – changing social norms and attitudes that widen the gender gap and threaten the human rights of women and girls.
- Fiji has taken several actions in the past few years to address discrimination and violations against the rights of the girl child and adolescent girls. To begin with, ‘women and girls’ is the adopted language for policies and actions plans for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment developed and reviewed over the past five years. For instance, initiatives aimed at changing gendered power dynamics are included in the FCGA policy recommendations to advance equality for all women and girls in Fiji. It recommends that men and boys should get involved in addressing VAWG, promoting women's leadership, standing up for the rights and health of adolescent girls and women in regards to sexual and reproductive matters, and helping to reduce the risk of disasters and adapt to climate change in a way that benefits women and girls in all their diversity. The FNAP-VAWG is also inclusive of the prevention of violence against girls.
- The Legislative and policy framework in Fiji is also inclusive of girls. Fiji has enacted or amended laws to protect the rights of girls, including laws related to domestic violence, sexual offenses, and child protection. One of the major developments in terms of policy and legal commitments of the Fiji Government in the past 5 years in this particular area had been the ratification of the

Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The post pandemic situation exacerbated the vulnerability of all disadvantaged groups but it also did for children across the world.

- The Fiji Government has implemented programs to promote girls' education and eliminate barriers to their schooling. This includes providing scholarships, improving school infrastructure, and addressing issues like child marriage that can hinder girls' education. Child marriage is prohibited under our laws in Fiji as provided for in section 29 of the Marriage Act 1968 and in enforcing this, the Ministry of Justice partakes in REACH programs to increase awareness in rural areas on the legal marriage age which is 18 years for both men and women, the prohibition of child marriage and the penalties for failure to abide by such laws.
- The services provided by the Ministry of Justice is also made accessible through the REACH programs to allow accessibility for those who would travel long distances to access Birth, Deaths and Marriages services under the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice also participates in Roadshows organized by the MRMD and Disaster Management, and the Ministry of Itaukei Affairs wherein more awareness is shared to the rural and maritime areas on the legal marriage age and prohibition of child marriage in Fiji. The Ministry of Home Affairs through the Fiji Police Force conducts awareness by Community Policing Officers in schools and communities on the legal marriageable age of 18 years and above.
- Fiji has an inclusive education program in mainstream schools whereby 398 schools in Fiji enroll children with disabilities, of which 34 per cent of students were girls as of 2021. Fiji has 17 specially designated schools, mostly in the urban areas that cater to children with disabilities, 37 to 38 percent of which are girls. Between 2019 and 2021, the GWF in collaboration with government and other partners conducted a STEM Camp to encourage young girls aged 6-13 years from underprivileged areas such as urban informal settlement to pursue STEM subjects in their education and future careers. Over the course of the program about 100 girls participated and worked with professional women in the STEM field who were recruited as teachers and role models providing a safe and supportive environment for the students.
- Teenage pregnancy has major ramifications for adolescent girls and their children, which can influence their physical, emotional and mental health and have a determinative impact on their school and employment futures. Fiji over the past five years has reported more than 5,000 teenage pregnancies, of which 25% are individuals below the age of 15 years. While all health facilities in Fiji provide adolescents with confidential access to contraception and related information, there is a need for change in the typical stereotypical mindset. The information that is now available and the findings of previous studies point to important concerns concerning the sexual behavior knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of young Fijians. According to the MICS, just 29% of women and 40% of men who identified as sexually active young people said they had used a condom during their most recent sex. In the WHO Global School-based Student Health Survey, almost half (49%) of sexually active adolescents reported never used a condom during sexual activity. The majority of women and girls in Fiji have fair access to education and information regarding menstruation and the management of its hygienic aspects, and the commencement of the menstrual cycle is generally accepted as a normal physiological

function. Sanitary items are widely accessible and reasonably priced in urban regions, but in rural and isolated places, the selection is smaller, the quality of the products is lower, and the prices are typically higher.

- Efforts have been made to improve access to healthcare services for girls, including sexual and reproductive health services, as well as addressing issues like menstrual hygiene management for instance, Fiji has shown remarkable progress in the last 3 decades in Skilled Birth Attendance (SBA), Total Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) and Adolescent Birth Rates (ABR)- From 98% SBA in 1990 to 100% in 2021. In 2022-2023 the MHMS with the support of UNFPA developed a Youth Friendly Health Services Guidelines with a training package, ready to be rolled out. The Fiji Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Health Service National Operational Guidelines (AYFHS Guidelines) provide technical and operational guidance to government authorities, non-government organizations and stakeholders in delivering health services to young people. This includes healthcare and non-healthcare professionals in a diverse range of positions, including facility managers, clinicians, allied healthcare providers, health promotion, outreach workers, and other support roles to ensure a standardized and comprehensive approach to providing AYFHS. The Guidelines are intended to be used by government and non-government service providers and other stakeholders to plan and implement health services, including the scale-up of existing services. Importantly, the Guidelines ensure that the provision of AYFHS is in line with international standards, including the WHO Global Standards for Adolescent Youth-Friendly Services, other best-practice guidelines, and current evidence. The Guidelines also delineate the service delivery responsibilities of health workers, support staff, and facilities within the MHMS and other non-government service providers and stakeholders. As a result, implementing the Guidelines will promote comprehensive, integrated, accessible and sustainable health services. **The eight WHO Global Standards are as follows: Health literacy, Community support, appropriate package of services, Providers' competencies, Facility characteristics, Equity and non-discrimination, Data and quality improvement, Young people's participation.** Government also launched the free sanitary pad distribution program in the Fiji schools in 2022-2023 fiscal year.

3.6 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION

3.6.1 Actions to Integrate Gender Perspectives and Concerns into Environmental Policies, Including Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation

- The Fijian government has taken several actions in the past five years to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation, mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and land degradation. The National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2018–2030 and the 2021 Climate Change Act (CCA) endorses the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment and recognizes women as agents of change. The National

Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, 2020–2024, mandates for mainstreaming gender into all NBSAP-related programs and the Green Growth Framework identifies gender equality as key indicators of social development. In keeping with its commitment to gender responsiveness, the NCCP mandates that the response to climate change: acknowledge women as change agents with the expertise, leadership, and knowledge necessary for planning at the local, national, and international levels, particularly in the field of natural resource management; guarantee that the entire government is aware of the disproportionate effects that climate change and disasters have on women and girls; address the structural disparities that cause marginalization of women and other vulnerable groups; and make sure that the responses to climate change do not perpetuate existing inequalities. Gender-sensitive metrics are also needed by the NCCP in order to track and assess solutions.

- In the area of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), the Act addresses the development of climate-resilient infrastructure and the relocation of at-risk communities. In September 2021, the Climate Change Act of 2021 was enacted. The government of Fiji admits that there is a "climate emergency" and proposes a comprehensive strategy to government that centers on mitigating climate change, as outlined in Fiji's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). This approach is outlined in the bill that had been submitted to Parliament. The bill covered CCA in terms of at-risk community relocation and the creation of climate-resilient infrastructure. One of the eleven principles that the bill mainstreams throughout all policy creation and decision-making is gender equality and women's empowerment. The Bill stipulated that any relocations resulting from climate change must have the "full free and prior informed consent (FPIC) of the communities, following inclusive and gender-responsive consultation and participatory processes" in order to be approved. However, the measure makes no mention of requiring gender analyses or assessments, nor does it include any language requiring women to be involved in decision-making.

3.6.2 Actions to Integrate Gender Perspectives into Policies and Programs for Disaster Risk Reduction and Building Environmental and Climate Resilience

- Fiji has made significant strides in integrating gender perspectives into policies and programs for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and building environmental and climate resilience over the past five years.
- Policy for Gender in Agriculture (2022- 2027) which was developed as part of the Fijian Government's commitment to progressively realize gender equality for all its citizens, including by having a specific gender action plan for each sector and its ministry. The policy lays out the principles and mindset by which agriculture-related ministries will be able to mainstream gender into all their programs and activities, whether capital or development-related. The vision of the policy is to address the gender gap for agriculture in Fiji. This means that in the future, every Fijian farmer or person working in agriculture, whether a man or a woman, should have

equitable access to the resources and services that he or she needs to be productive, resilient and food secure. With this aspiration, the policy has, as its overall goal, institutionalizing a gender mainstreaming strategy, thus realizing better food and nutrition security, sustainable livelihoods, climate and disaster resilience, and successful commercial agriculture for women and men in Fiji. The policy is designed to integrate well with the Fijian Government's existing initiatives, including GRPB, led by the MOF, and ICD, led by the NWM.

- MOAW also has in place the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and the Youth in Agriculture Policy.
- The Fiji NDMO ensures that all its policies are gender sensitive and inclusive of the needs of the most vulnerable. A gender lens is mandatory in the formulation of disaster risk management policies and strategies and the NDMO has consistent collaboration with the MWCSF and UN Women in ensuring that the needs of women are considered in the discussions for DRR and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) measures. Examples of the work undertaken in this space include the formulation of a gender annex to the National DRR Policy and the planned gender training for Disaster Service Liaison Officers.
- The NDMO aims to provide inclusivity by actively involving women, including those residing in rural areas, in the development of DRR and climate change policies. Key policy documents, including the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, the National Humanitarian Policy, and the Community Disaster Risk Management Training Manual all emphasize the importance of actively involving women and girls in planning and discussions pertaining to DRM and CCA. Furthermore, the NDMO has taken measures to provide support for women, girls and all vulnerable groups for the duration of the disaster cycle. This is through the establishment of the Safety and Protection Cluster, of which is designed to address the unique needs of the populations prior to, during and after disaster events. The NDMO ensures that women are included in all discussions relating to disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management. The National DRR Policy, the National Humanitarian Policy and the Community Disaster Risk Management Training Manual all advocate for the engagement of women and girls in planning and discussions for DRM and CCA.
- In addition, there is a gender consultant within the NDMO to provide policy advice on gender issues relating to DRR and DRM.
- NDMO was also instrumental in the distribution of food rations to the communities during lockdowns.
- The MOF administered the Care Fiji Apps for Fijians to access support and also to help MOHMS trace contact. Work of the Safety & Protection Cluster through the Gender-based Violence in Emergency (GBV-IE) and the Child Protection sub clusters were activated during COVID pandemic where virtual trainings and coordination was undertaken with relevant stakeholders involved in addressing any incidences of GBV or child abuses cases occurring in communities.
- The UN had in fact recognized Fiji's efforts to address GBV during the pandemic as one of the best in the world.
- Given the nature of the pandemic and the unprecedented crisis, decisions had to be made quickly and most COVID-19 responses were determined by Government on the advice of experts through Cabinet and the parliamentary process where required. However, to ensure women's

participation in future crises as such, the Fiji Government had adopted strategies to involve women. For example, the NWM in partnership with UN Women has jointly ventured into the Women's Resilience to Disaster (WRD) Programme from last year for the next 3 years which will provide an opportunity and space for women to share their experiences and recommendations to support women and girls in times of disaster for security and protection of their rights to access services. WRD is designed to be interactive and draws peer learning principles by stock-taking the experiences of women and their contributions towards the prevention, preparedness and recovery systems. The sessions are also designed to build on the existing traditional and technical coping mechanisms to assist women and girls to withstand hazards, disasters and threats and increase resilience. The programme including a Talanoa Session and Mapping Exercise will support policy advisors in providing critical interventions with technical advice for a sustainable future.

- In addition, the NDMO has set up the Safety and Protection Cluster led by MWCSP to ensure that the needs of women, girls and all other vulnerable groups are adequately provided for prior, during and after disasters. In further highlighting policies and discussions, the Sendai Mid-Term Review 2023, Fiji launched a market-based parametric micro-insurance program in 2021 to address climate-related risks, this marked Fiji as the first nation in the Pacific to do so. By initially targeting smallholder farmers, fishers, and market vendors, the program intends to expand to include other livelihood sectors and small and medium-sized businesses. Two regional insurance companies underwrite the program, while aggregator partners facilitate its widespread distribution. To ensure equitable access, Fiji's Parliament passed legislation exempting parametric insurance products from VAT on August 1, 2021. This legislative move underlines Fiji's commitment to making these insurance benefits more accessible to low-income and vulnerable groups. This innovative insurance policy aligns with Fiji's broader efforts in DRR and CCA, aiming to provide financial protection against the impacts of natural disasters. As a form of micro-insurance, it prioritizes affordability and accessibility, promoting a more inclusive and resilient approach to managing climate-related risks and disaster response. This insurance policy is designed with the objective of providing financial protection to women and other vulnerable individuals in the event of natural disasters. As a micro insurance product, its fundamental purpose is to offer affordability and accessibility, particularly for individuals with limited financial resources.
- MRMD is positioned for the next phase of the ICD initiative and are currently in partnership with UNDP under the Governance for Resilience (G4Res) Project which have progressed the Risk-Informed Development (RID) that ensures all development programs are sustainable, risk informed taking into consideration climate change, disasters and gender and social inclusion risk through all the phases of project design, construction and operation in an effort to enhance the resilience of rural communities. This initiative recognizes that rural development has evolved from the traditional norm taking into account that women are integral in achieving development aspirations.

4.1 Achievements

4.1.1 National Strategy/Action to Promote Gender Equality

- The Women’s Plan of Action (WPA) was the initial national level action plan to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in Fiji which came in two volumes for the decades between 1998 to 2008 and 2010 to 2019. The WPA was especially established to implement the objectives and commitments of the BPA and adopted a whole of government approach to advance women’s rights through gender mainstreaming. Fiji did make notable improvement in promoting women’s empowerment across government in the two decades of implementing the WPA, especially in terms of establishing a robust legislative and policy framework that supports the rights of women and institutional strengthening through the significantly increased allocation of government budget towards the NWM. A lot was achieved - but more had to be done. Upon the completion of the WPA 2010 – 2019 term, the Department through the support of UN Women had undergone a ‘theory of change exercise’ to assist in the development of the new strategic role, direction and focus of the WPA for the next 5 – 10 years. This latter involved the review of the initial 5 thematic areas of concern and supported the transition from those 5 thematic priorities to 3 strategic thematic priorities with specific objectives and actions, focused on EVAWG, promoting WEE and Improving Protection, Preparedness and Resilience to disaster for all women and girls. From the ‘theory of change’ exercise, a situation analysis was conducted and it was realized that there was limited evidence and data to support the formulation of the next WPA. From this finding, the need for a country gender assessment in the country was identified in order to ascertain the gender issues that existed in Fiji.
- To address this gap, Fiji undertook the FCGA to assist in the development of the next strategic action plan.
- In February 2014, Cabinet had endorsed the implementation of the National Gender Policy (NGP) to be led and coordinated by the Department for Women in collaboration with relevant key stakeholders from the public and private sector. The NGP outlines the Government of Fiji’s commitment towards addressing gender inequalities and with a strategic goal that is to promote gender equity, equality, social justice and sustainable development in alignment to the 2013 Constitution of Fiji including instruments and obligations at national, regional and international level. It aimed to improve awareness among policy makers, planners, implementers and the general public of the provisions of the local and international instruments related to gender, and to identify strategies to implement these instruments. More importantly in promoting gender equality in all aspects of Fiji’s development, and to eradicate or modify institutional and social barriers that are embedded through policies, strategic plans and programs.
- In recognition of the NGP’s integrated approach towards the achievement of the 160 activities, it significantly needed actors such as whole of Government, NGOs, CSOs and FBOs, institutions

and development partners. There have been key critical interventions articulated in the Policy with a more detailed overall objective that is to (i) improve the quality of life of men, women, boys and girls, at all levels of society through the promotion of gender equity and equality, (ii) reinforce the inextricable links between gender equality and sustainable development goals in national development, (iii) promote active and visible gender mainstreaming in all sectors and within civil society to ensure agency for gender equity and equality in all spheres of national life, and (iv) remove all forms of gender inequality and gender discrimination in Fiji.

- As stipulated under the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the NGP, the MOF through the Department of National and Strategic Planning in collaboration with MWCSP was channeled to undertake its 4 years periodic evaluation to gauge gender mainstreaming initiatives against the national policies, independent commission rules and regulations, sectorial policies, programs, projects, budgets, national laws, integrated rural development plans, performance contracts and other Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms in Fiji. Through these collaborative efforts across government, MOF would provide monitoring guidelines to stock take information in government departments, private sector organizations and non-governmental organizations.
- From the assessments and findings from these exercises undertaken in that 4 year period, Fiji reached a well informed decision to undertake Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning with the full collaborative commitment of the MOF and the MWCSP. This began with women's empowerment and inclusion being a critical part of Fiji's first 5 and 20 years NDP. Fiji's NDP has been written to align with broader global commitments including the SDGs. Crucially, the Fijian Government had taken steps to apply SDGs to a Fiji-specific context. 3.1.9 of the NDP, titled Women in Development has one main aim, which is "Empowering women to reach their full development potential". The NDP committed to increase women's participation in formal sector employment; increase women's representation at all levels of government and civil society; eliminate violence against women and children; improve women's access to all social services; and review of legislation and policies to empower women. Between 2017 and 2022, the NDP laid out the programs and identified the lead agencies from within and across government to implement them. This includes the revision of the legislations, policies and plans as per the NGP to ensure gender equity is promoted; increasing the ability of women and their access to income generating activities through the WPA; reviewing of laws relating to eliminating violence against women and children as per the NGP. The NDP has also identified Key Performance Indicators to promote women in decision-making positions (SDG 5.5).

4.1.2 System to Track Gender Responsive Budget

- With key agencies tagged to achieve the national commitment to achieving gender equality in the NDP, a 'whole of government' approach was a non-negotiable and needed to be better adopted. This supported MOF to cement the NDP commitments of the Fiji Government further by articulating the role of financing gender responsive plans and programs across all government agencies. Also as part of government reforms under the draft Public Financial Management Improvement Plan (PFMIP), the MOF requested

assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to assess the “gender responsiveness” of the 2020 national budget. This assessment, undertaken in 2019 in collaboration with MWCSP, Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MoCTTT), led to an agreement to take active steps to implement gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in Fiji, which has since taken center stage. The MOF has since launched the ‘Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Policy 2021-2024 and Action Plan 2021-2022’.

- This Policy clearly acknowledges that existing gaps in the economic and political participation of women at all levels, the under involvement of people with disabilities (PWD), and high levels of domestic violence continue to constrain the overall development of the nation. This Policy, which builds on current GRB work, is a central part of the public financial management reform process. It recognizes that significant gains have been made in gender equity and social inclusion, while also acknowledging that patriarchal attitudes are still dominant in many aspects of Fiji society; that men often have a high degree of control over women, including their ability to access information & services, participate in income-generating activities and assume leadership positions; that women perform the vast majority of unpaid reproductive and domestic work and are primarily responsible for care of children, the ill and elderly, and that gender-based violence remains a serious and widespread problem that hinders the social and economic development of the nation.
- The Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Policy also recognizes Government’s commitment to gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) and seeks to support and build upon current efforts by Parliament, the MWCSP, MOF and other line ministries to mainstream GESI in sector policies, budgets, planning and delivery systems and build capacity. This Policy recognizes the pivotal and influential role the MOF plays in promoting, enforcing and fast-tracking GESI outcomes through GESI-responsive public sector budgeting and by “leading by example”. Global experience has shown that gender-responsive budgeting works best when ministries of finance lead. As such, this Policy recognizes that effective GESI mainstreaming requires a serious whole-of-Ministry commitment to understanding and addressing gender equity and social inclusion factors in all operational policies, budgets and service delivery decisions - and that this is not adjunct to MOF core business. This requires that MOF staff are consistently and consciously GESI-responsive and socially inclusive and assume a leadership role in advocating for GESI in their day-to-day work.
- The Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Policy emphasizes the MoF partnerships with state and non-state agencies and the active engagement of stakeholders from the private sector and civil society (including women’s groups, disability organizations, trade unions and academic institutions) is essential to achieving sustainable, equitable and inclusive outcomes across all sectors. The policy also strictly emphasizes that the MoF will not support projects and other activities that undermine basic human rights; fail to take into account the needs and rights of vulnerable group; have potential to cause negative gender, socio-economic and/or environmental impacts; fail to meet environmental and social safeguard requirements of GoF and funding agencies; engage in land acquisition or resettlement activities without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of stakeholders including women and vulnerable

- groups; and Involve any other negative impacts as articulated in the MoF Environment and Social Management System.
- In terms of tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, this policy has set out specific requirements to enable accountability, implementation and data collation. The overall accountability for Policy implementation and oversight rests with the MoF Permanent Secretary. The Heads of Division within the MOF are responsible for management and implementation of the specified actions identified in the GESI Policy, Annual Work Plans and incorporated in Costed Operational Plans of line ministries.
 - The Administration Division of the MOF collects and collates required data from each Division for Ministry Progress Reports, Annual Business Plans and Reports. Monitoring of Policy implementation and results are conducted through assessment of Public Sector Investment Plans (PSIPs), Annual Reports and other documentation. Divisions are required to collect data as the basis for activity M&E. Monitoring of Policy implementation and results will be conducted through PSIPs, Annual Reports and other documentation. Divisions are required to collect data as the basis for activity level M&E. Ministries, departments and agencies undertaking GRPB are also responsible for providing a gender performance report in their quarterly (Quarterly Performance Progress Report) and annual reports.

4.1.3 Formal Mechanisms for Different Stakeholders to Participate in the Implementation and Monitoring of BPfA

- In Fiji, following the strengthening of government mechanisms in line with Fiji's international and national commitments, the NWM and other government ministries have established stronger partnerships with the UN system, FBOs, CSOs, and Women's Organizations to better implement the BPA, such as Fiji achieving tremendous milestones in its policy and action in the area of prevention of violence against all women and girls, the collation and publishing of the FCGA; the launch of the development of the WEE NAP and staging of the National Women's Expos, together with the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship program; commemoration of international days like International Women's Day; reviews and renewed policy commitments at national, regional and international levels; the roll out of the ICD alongside the GRPB program of MOF; and awareness and advocacy campaigns in relation to gender based violence and breast/cervical cancer amongst other forms of progresses.
- Over the past five years, some significant examples of these partnerships and close collaboration are worth mentioning. The FWRM was the technical partner for ICD and provided sustained and hands-on coaching, mentoring, and strengthening processes and confidence-building that are considerable features in the learning journey of the GMFT of NWM and MOF. This has led to improvements in confidence levels, knowledge, and skills of the GMFT, made possible through the range of training and workshops administered during 2020 to 2022.

- Further partnerships were evident in the development of the NAP-VAWG was supported by a Secretariat, comprised of MWCSP, FWCC, and UN Women (as technical assistance to the Government of Fiji), and the NAP- VAWG Technical Working Group made up of key civil society organizations and government ministries, to provide strategic and technical oversight as the NAP-VAWG was developed.
- With Cabinet approval in 2020 and led by the Government of Fiji, the FCGA was supported by the Government of New Zealand along with Technical Assistance provided by the Government of Australia through the National Gender Advisor and UNWOMEN. FCGA was undertaken over the course of two years (2021-2023) and realized through a whole-of-government and inclusive consultation process with various stakeholders, including relevant Government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), the United Nations (UN) system, the Pacific Community (SPC), and Asian Development Bank (ADB), as well as other international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the 2023 and 2024, Fiji included CSOs and independent individuals as part of the Fiji delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women.
- The NWM, being the central policy-coordinating structure within government machinery as part of its gender mainstreaming efforts directly supports Women's Institutions. Women's Institutions like the Ba Women's Forum, Makoi Vocational Training Center (Fiji Women's Muslim League), Homes of Hope, Fiji Women's Crisis Center and Alamanah Hope Center have been allocated a total of \$3.9million from 2019-2024 government funding from 2019-2024 to administer women's economic empowerment programs and support to survivors of violence.
- The Fiji Government is also obligated to report on the implementation and monitoring of the BPfA and the SDG2030 under the UN System. Fiji participates annually at the Commission on the Status of Women and the Universal Periodic Review; provides periodic reports on UNCEDAW, UNCRC, and UNCRPD and BPfA. Stakeholders from across Government and the Civil Society were consulted in the reporting processes for the periodic reports and in the current BPfA periodic report, already consulted documents like the FCGA were used to extract data and information and via breakout sessions with key stakeholders to contribute towards the report. In terms of CEDAW reporting, Fiji has just completed the draft of the 6th State Report as per the simplified reporting process. The report is currently with the Office of the Solicitor General for legal clearance before it is channeled to Cabinet for clearance and submitted to the UN CEDAW Committee. The reporting process was consultative and technical and funding support was provided by SPC. There were two one-day consultations held in June and August of 2023 with Government stakeholders and a week-long write-shop was facilitated to draft the 6th State Report. The last report was submitted in 2017 and on the 09th of March, 2019, The UNCEDAW Committee adopted its concluding observations and recommendations on the implementation of the provisions of UNCEDAW in Fiji at its sixty-ninth session. These recommendations have been carefully considered by the NWM and with work in thematic areas of concern already progressing at the time, the implementation of some of the recommendations were easier or doable. This

includes recommendations to invest in the prevention of gender based violence through the adoption of a National Action Plan; Strengthen capacity building for law enforcement personnel to ensure that victims are under no circumstances forced or pressured to accept traditional apologies and dispute settlement in lieu of criminal proceedings against perpetrator; and Budgetary Provisions for Responding to GBV and Related Matters.

5.1 Achievements:

- **Fiji Country Gender Assessment** is one of the major milestone of the Fijian Government, the first government-led assessment undertaken through the coordination of the NWM with the unwavering support of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and stakeholders. This milestone is in response to Government's commitment in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as meeting the needs of line ministries in the formulation of gender responsive policies and programs in their respective sectors.
- The FCGA was endorsed by Cabinet in 2020 and favorably supported by the Government of New Zealand, technical arm of UN Women along with technical assistance of the Gender Advisor who's supported through the Government of Australia.
- The FCGA was realized through a cross-government and inclusive consultation process with the establishment of the **High Level Data Steering Group (DSG)** and the **Peer Review Committee (PRC)**. The establishment was essential, where the members of the DSG were from Government and nominated by their respective Ministers and Permanent Secretaries. The PRC comprised of members from CSOs, FBOs, development partners and academia. The FCGA can be accessed online through the Ministry of Women's website for more information on the composition of the Committee. This process successfully confirmed a strong and high level of commitment and cooperation on statistical issues; trialed cross-Government coordination methods; and developed comprehensive lists of indicators related to gender statistics and effective gender policymaking. These list of indicators were developed and aligned to the SDGs and NDP, and were individually presented to each of the respective Ministries. A series of meetings, consultations and email correspondence with Permanent Secretaries and Senior Officials from selected Ministries was conducted to gain agreement on the indicator lists.
- The members of this Data Steering Committee were provided with an insight into Fiji's data landscape and their awareness was raised on the importance of, and need for, gender statistics and this first round of consultations proved very effective in ensuring the focal points from each Ministry were informed of the types of data and statistics required for the FCGA. The Fiji Country Gender Assessment offers a detailed and thorough analysis of the progress that has been made in recent years as well as persistent challenges facing Fijian women and girls across various sectors and areas, such as health, economy, education, environment, gender-based violence, social and cultural norms, leadership and decision-making, among others.
- In 2023, the FCGA was launched with 3 volumes consisting of a Deep Dive document with its full chapters, Policy Briefs and the Visual Report. The uniqueness of the FCGA is that it has successfully raised awareness of the importance of, and need for, gender statistics among data-producing Government agencies; confirmed a strong and high level of commitment and cooperation on statistical issues; trialed cross-Government coordination methods; and

developed comprehensive lists of indicators related to gender statistics and effective gender policymaking.

- There are large amounts of data publicly available or available on request which will be suitable for developing Indicators that meet the needs of the FCGA. In particular, the 2017 Census and the Household Expenditure and Income Survey (2019-20), provide a large set of robust gender-related data and a wealth of potentially relevant data are available from the Health and Education Ministries; there may be some specific quality concerns with data relevant to the outer islands.
- Getting disaggregated data and others that provide for more deep analysis of gender issues may prove challenging – qualitative information may need to be relied on Issues for discussion and/or agreement by the FCGA Data Steering Group. In addition to the census and surveys undertaken, the national women’s machinery was fortunate to be part of the designing of the questionnaires, data processing and dissemination of analysis and findings of this Surveys/Census, to name the few:
 - i. Fiji Agriculture Census 2020;
 - ii. 2023 Voluntary National Review of the SDGs;
 - iii. MICS Survey 2021;
 - iv. Development of the Pacific Roadmap for Gender Statistics in close collaboration with SPC and the UN Women;
 - v. Involve in the review of the Statistics Act coordinated by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

- **Supporting longer-term improvements of gender statistics in Fiji**

Most countries require rapid and significant developments in their National Statistical Systems to support gender responsive policies and meet national and international planning goals. While the FCGA is limited by time and resources in how it can contribute to any longer-term wider improvements in the gender data landscape, the approach to data and the actions of the DSG could seek to support longer term benefits wherever possible and realistic. An important general observation is that Fiji, like many countries, has a highly dispersed gender data landscape in terms of data being generated and/or disseminated across multiple bodies domestically and internationally. On the other hand, gender equality driven development is a core part of Fiji national planning and relates to the SDG, CEDAW, and the BPfA. Also, gender policymaking often requires cross-cutting analysis and cooperation, including public accountability and data being freely available to independent researchers, the press and so on. Beyond improvements in data collection that may be identified during the FCGA, consideration is also therefore recommended of how the work of the FCGA, and the DSG specifically, can support the development of strategic improvements in the collation and dissemination of gender statistics in the future. For instance, the data collated by FCGA and the working arrangements developed could also support the longer-term development of an online centralized gender statistics data hub, which all data users could draw on, and/or help to establish or cement cross-Government working on gender statistics issues more broadly. Other key strategic considerations for the FCGA’s approach to data could include:

- i. Supporting or signposting, where possible, needs for enhanced statistical literacy, and uptake of evidence by data users (such as policymakers, public, the media);
- ii. Facilitating access and helping maintain longer term access to unpublished data, which may be held by Government bodies, CSOs, or even the private sector (e.g. in the garment industry);
- iii. Enhancing the value of data via the use of internationally comparative standards and frameworks;
- iv. Identification of where existing (or new) data collection processes may need to be adapted – such as additional survey questions, administrative record taking, or the use of so-called ‘big data’.

Each of the 7 chapters of the FCGA have itemized Policy Recommendations and more importantly Research & Data Recommendations that will assist in the Review of the next FCGA, to be proposed in the next 5 years. This will then expand other thematic areas of data needs in the next review considering emerging impacts of climate change and evolving gender issues that may arise in the coming years.

5.2 Forward Looking:

- In moving forward, the Government of Fiji is shifting how the achievement of gender equality is understood and pursued both within the Government and within the nation. By engaging with Fijian women, men, girls and boys together, as partners in addressing underlying barriers and root causes of gender inequality, the Government is taking the most vital step with a strong commitment to ensure effective implementation, coordination and sustainability of gender-transformative strategies and policies, including strong institutional mechanisms for transparency and accountability.
- As these and other measures are implemented and further Fiji’s support for gender equality, Fiji’s objectives for sustainable economic growth and employment will also be realized and Fiji will progress towards achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION & FORWARD LOOKING

From 2020 to 2024, Fiji has taken significant steps to implement BPfA which was adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The BPfA review report was highly informed and relied on the findings from the FCGA. The production of the FCGA was critical to highlight the gender issues in Fiji as well as highlight achievements across 7 key thematic areas as well as provide key recommendations to address the gender gaps and issues highlighted. The production of FCGA provided up to date statistics and achievements of all women and girls in Fiji that made reporting on the BPfA easier for this reporting period.

As per the 6 dimensions outlined for the purpose of this report, areas identified to be prioritized to accelerate the implementation are discussed below:

- **Inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work** - Fiji has made efforts to address women in poverty, promote their economic empowerment, and uphold their human rights. The focus has been on creating an environment where women can participate fully in the economy and access decent work opportunities. Fiji has worked toward improving education and training for women. The need to promote equitable job opportunities has been identified over the past years and this has been amplified during the process of developing this report. The WEENAP that the MWCSP is currently in the process of developing will not address the possibilities of creating an enabling environment for women in the workforce, but will more importantly address social and cultural norms and gender stereotypes that impact women's economic participation.
- **Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services** - Initiatives aim to enhance women's skills, knowledge, and access to education, contributing to poverty reduction and social inclusion. Fiji has a robust social protection system that caters to the needs of the most vulnerable in society – including the elderly, persons with disabilities, women, children and the poor. Education and health assistance schemes together with subsidy initiatives for basic utilities and public transport for the elderly and disabled. There is opportunity to support women who engage in unpaid care work through Social Protection. This remains an area that requires more data to substantiate its development and as a way forward, the NWM will be working closely with FIBOS to integrate this need in the next census, which is due in 2027. This has also been recommended in the FCGA.
- **Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes** - Fiji has made tremendous progress in terms of developing a thoroughly consulted, evidence-based, whole of Government, whole of population, inclusive, costed 5-year Action Plan to prevent violence against women and girls before it starts, addressing the root causes. With the action plan in place, complimented by an implementation plan and an Implementation & Coordination Unit to promote Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes. The NAP-VAWG has established accountability mechanisms through the revival of a high-level EAW Taskforce that ensures to set national EAW priorities and work plans, inclusive of VAWG prevention and response priorities. The community attitude

survey and VAWG prevalence study and the GBV administrative data are essential first steps to enhancing the key actions to achieve the five strategies laid out in the NAP-VAWG.

- **Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institution** - Fiji boasts of a healthy relationship with the Civil Society, women's organizations and development partners and that has been reflected in this report. However, the need to coordinate better with women's organizations remains a gap. With the development of the key collaborative transformation initiatives such as the ICD, GRBP, WEE NAP and the NAP-VAWG, and findings and policy recommendations of the FCGA, the policy level guidance of how actual transformative change is realized at the community level and in the lives of women and girls. As a way forward, the NWM will strengthen the utilization of its budgetary allocations towards better supporting Women's Organizations at the community level. Whilst the policies are in place for gender mainstreaming across government, the NWM will support the women's organizations to enhance the participation of Fijian women and girls at all levels. It will be ensured that the review of the NGP and the development of the WPA is thoroughly consulted and supported by the Civil Society, FBOS, NGOs, development Partners. The review of the 2014 NGP is a step in the right direction as it has set the foundation for gender mainstreaming. With gender transformative actions and policies in place now, Fiji requires an overarching policy that encompasses the evolved strategies of line ministries. Fiji, will also aim to take concrete steps to socialize the FCGA across government as well as FBO, CSO, NGO and development partners.

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