

# **Social Assistance Policy: Protecting the poor and vulnerable**

## *Preface*

Fiji's social protection scheme dates back to the 1920's, known then as the "destitute allowance". Specific target group were the elderly indentured laborers who were unable to support themselves. Subsequently, other Fijians were included in the scheme (1950s). Payments at the time were done via cash and cheques.

Currently, there are six major social assistance programs of the Fijian Government that are administered by the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation – Department of Social Welfare. The programs assist up to 88,000 beneficiaries as at year 2020 and have been allocated an annual budget of \$123,080,597 for the fiscal year 2020-2021. The major programs are the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Care and Protection Allowance, Social Pension Scheme, Disability Allowance, Rural Pregnant Mothers' Food Voucher and Bus Fare Subsidy program.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for these social assistance programs, a subset of the social protection system, by which the Fijian Government would assist poor and vulnerable Fijians through adaptive social protection programs. This Policy focuses on the five key strategic areas and builds on ongoing reviews and reforms. The first strategic area is the adoption of appropriate, gender-responsive and affordable social assistance programs. The second strategic areas is the achievement of cost-effective selection processes to attain policy objectives and, ultimately, stronger impacts on the poor and vulnerable. The third strategic areas is to develop an Integrated Social Protection Information System and a social registry to target social assistance programs to the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the event external shocks (economic or climate-related disaster), and enabling adaptive social protection responses. The fourth strategic area is to build administrative and human capacity for the optimal functioning of this policy; and the final strategic area is monitoring, evaluation of social assistance programs, including gender-disaggregated data and feedback loops to inform

policy changes. The first two strategic areas refer to overall strategic areas and the last three refer to system building components.

The Policy also focuses on supporting and advancing gender-responsive social assistance programs, ensuring that no one is left behind in the 2030 Agenda and will be implemented by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly Government Ministries, the private sector, faith-based and civil society organisations. The Policy considers the need to understand the extent to which social assistance programs are reaching out to the intended beneficiaries and its effectiveness, whereby the reporting, monitoring and evaluation of all social welfare activities, including the implementation of the Policy will be led by the Department of Social Welfare.

The Policy also includes an Implementation Framework with specific activities, timelines and budget requirements that would uplift the poor and vulnerable Fijians through an inclusive, efficient and adaptive provision of social assistance programs, which will be flexible in the event of a crisis, maintaining thorough management of government resources through efficient operational mechanisms.

#### *Acronyms*

<b>BC</b>	Birth Certificate
<b>BFSP</b>	Bus Fare Subsidy Program
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>C&amp;P</b>	Care and Protection Allowance
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of a Child
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CRVS</b>	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
<b>DA</b>	Disability Allowance
<b>DoSW</b>	Director of Social Welfare
<b>DSW</b>	Department of Social Welfare
<b>FNPF</b>	Fiji National Provident Fund
<b>FRCA</b>	Fiji Revenue and Custom Services

<b>FV</b>	Food Voucher
<b>FVPRPM</b>	Food Voucher Program for Rural Pregnant Mothers
<b>HH</b>	Household
<b>HIES</b>	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
<b>MWCPA</b>	Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
<b>MEPIR</b>	Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
<b>NDMO</b>	National Disaster Management Office
<b>NSPCC</b>	National Social Protection Coordination Committee
<b>PBS</b>	Poverty Benefit Scheme
<b>PWO</b>	Principal Welfare Officer
<b>SPS</b>	Social Pension Scheme
<b>SWO</b>	Senior Welfare Officer
<b>WO</b>	Welfare Officer
<b>PMT</b>	Proxy Means Test

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## Executive Summary

The vision for the Fijian Government is to promote the progressive realisation of the universal right to social protection to reduce poverty and social exclusion by delivering targeted and adaptable social assistance programs, protecting the poor and vulnerable against shocks - including those from climate-related disasters - promoting security and building resilience so that Fijians are able to fully participate economically, socially and culturally in society.

The Fijian Government also recognises that crises and shocks exacerbate in particular, existing gender inequalities, vulnerabilities and risks. Therefore, it is committed to achieve the goal of gender-responsive social assistance programs that can reduce these risks and vulnerabilities by extending coverage of social protection assistance and quality public services for women over the life cycle, and in particular for those in informal and precarious work while ensuring social assistance programs respond to the risks of gender-based violence (GBV) and integrate approaches to prevent violence against all women and girls.

This policy thus, provides a framework for targeted social assistance programs by which the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation would uplift the poor and vulnerable Fijians through an inclusive, efficient and adaptive provision of social assistance programs, which will be flexible to scale horizontally and vertically in the event of a crisis, whilst ensuring sound management of government resources through efficient operational mechanisms.

Social assistance programs are non-contributory transfers in cash or in-kind with the objective of supporting the poor and vulnerable. This includes both programs to reduce poverty and vulnerability as well as establishing adaptive social assistance programs that aims to build resilience that can protect vulnerable families from shocks and longstanding losses that can push them into poverty and higher levels of vulnerability. The policy also supports social assistance systems that contribute to human capital at different stages of the life cycle.

Different social assistance programs focus on specific subsections of the Fijian population who face specific vulnerabilities faced by individuals through the life cycle. Once the specific objectives have been decided, Government can use a mix of targeted or universal social assistance programs in order to achieve that specific social policy goal, with poverty-targeted

programs focusing on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals or groups and supporting them during life shocks.

This policy focuses on five key strategic areas and builds on ongoing reviews and reforms. The first two refer to overarching programmatic areas and the last three refer to system building components. It also focuses on supporting and advancing gender-responsive social assistance programs, ensuring that no one is left behind in the 2030 Agenda.

The key strategic areas are to:

- 1) Adopt appropriate, gender-responsive and affordable social assistance programs
- 2) Achieve cost-effective selection processes to attain policy objectives and, ultimately, stronger impacts on the poor and vulnerable
- 3) Develop an Integrated Social Protection Information System and a social registry to target social assistance programs to the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the event external shocks (economic or climate-related disaster), enabling Adaptive Social Protection responses
- 4) Build administrative and human capacity for the optimal functioning of this policy
- 5) Monitoring, evaluation of social assistance programs, including gender-disaggregated data and feedback loops to inform policy changes

The policy will be implemented by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly Government Ministries, the private sector, faith-based and civil society organisations.

## Purpose

Social policies are constituted of a variety of approaches to select beneficiaries from within and across the eligible group. For example, some provide support universally, some geographically, some are based on poverty characteristics, others on employment status or severity of disability. Fiji, like many countries, uses a mix of approaches. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for social assistance programs, a subset of the social protection system, by which the Fijian Government would assist poor and vulnerable Fijians through adaptive social protection programs. This would be done whilst ensuring the realisation of social protection rights and the sound management of government resources through efficient selection mechanisms. The policy also supports social assistance systems that contribute to human capital at different stages of the life cycle. It also aims to ensure that social assistance programs are efficiently and effectively implemented and administered in a transparent, gender-responsive and accountable manner.

## Policy context

Over the past decade, Fiji has made notable improvements to the menu of social assistance programs it offers and to its approach to targeting of benefits to poor households. Starting from 2010, the Government introduced the Food Voucher Program (FVP) and the Free Bus Fare Program (FBFP), as well as a Poverty Benefit Scheme in 2012, and a social pension scheme for the elderly, aged 65 years and over in 2013. The method of targeting poor beneficiaries in selected social assistance programs was also made more objective with the introduction of a proxy means-test (PMT).

While these reforms have made Fiji's the most developed social assistance system in the Pacific, there is an unfinished agenda to make social assistance programs more efficient and effective in protecting poor and vulnerable citizens. There is a need to have social assistance programs coordinated through a consolidated policy which reflects a holistic approach to protecting the poor and vulnerable and provides a firm policy framework and rationale for social assistance support through the life cycle. This policy calls for considerations on how to efficiently utilise public resources and how to ensure that the social assistance system is adaptable and shock-responsive, able to integrate across programs and agencies and quickly address economic and climate-related disaster emergencies by scaling up vertically and

horizontally with gender-responsive considerations. The policy also creates the framework for government response by allowing the consolidation of future adaptive social protection strategies, linking social assistance with social insurance and active labor market programs, enabling the effective use of diversity of social protection instruments and of government agencies to support the poor and vulnerable.

## **Social assistance programs in Fiji**

Fiji's social assistance schemes date back to the 1920's, known then as the "destitute allowance". Specific target groups were the elderly indentured laborers who were unable to support themselves. Subsequently, other Fijians were included in the scheme (1950s). Payment was done via cash and cheques. Since then, several programs were introduced as follows:

- 1974 – Destitute allowance was renamed 'Family Assistance Scheme';
- 1990 – Care & Protection Allowance was introduced to cater for the needs of children under the care of the Director Social Welfare;
- 2010 – Food Voucher Program introduced and beginning of electronic mode of payment;
- 2011 – Introduction of Bus Fare Program for the elderly and persons with disability;
- 2013 – Review of Family Assistance Scheme and implementation of Poverty Benefit Scheme and Social Pension Scheme;
- 2014 – Food Voucher Program for Rural Pregnant Women was introduced;
- 2017 – Introduction of Disability Allowance;
- 2018 – Insurance cover for social protection beneficiaries introduced.

Currently, there are six main social assistance programs with a total number of 88,081 beneficiaries and an annual budget of FJD123.1m (FY 2020/21). They are the:

- Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS);
- Care and Protection Allowance (C&P);
- Social Pension Scheme (SPS);
- Disability Allowance (DA);
- Rural Pregnant Mothers' Food Voucher (RPM);
- Bus Fare Scheme (BFS).



These programs support the most vulnerable groups in society, including women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Assistance to these groups is in the form of monthly allowances, vouchers and bus fare concessions. As in many countries, especially middle-income countries, this list demonstrates how Fiji's overall social assistance coverage is evolving into a life cycle approach: the RPM is aimed at pregnant women and infants; the C&P at children; the PBS predominantly at households with members of working age; the SPS (and BFS) at the elderly; and the DA (and BFS) at persons with disabilities. This represents an excellent basis for moving towards comprehensive life cycle coverage<sup>1</sup>.

The budget allocation for MWCPA has substantially increased (in absolute terms) for the main social assistance programs from FJD43.1million in 2016 to “\$123,080,597 for the fiscal year 2020-2021. The budget allocation for social assistance programs in 2020 represents about 1.2 percent of GDP, 0.8 percentage points higher than in 2017. The average social assistance spending is approximately 1 percent of GDP for Asia-Pacific region and 1.5 percent of GDP for developing countries, though differences in the definition of social assistance make such international comparisons difficult.

### *Poverty Benefit Scheme*

The PBS is the Government flagship program aimed to provide a safety net to the poor and vulnerable. It is a poverty-targeted cash transfer aiming at improving the welfare of the poorest and to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The PBS provides monthly cash transfer of FJD 35 per adult and FJD 17 per child under 17 years old up to four household members. Each beneficiary household will receive an additional FJD 50 Food Voucher. The beneficiary household is entitled to the benefit for three years maximum, after which the household situation will be re-analysed. An average of FJD78.50 was provided to the beneficiary households in 2019. As per 2019/2020, 25,106 households (approximately 125,530 individuals) benefited from the program.

The PBS has a graduation component aiming at supporting the beneficiary household to graduate out of the social assistance system within three years. At the starting of the PBS, the

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<sup>1</sup>Note that Fiji also has contributory schemes such as the National Fiji Provident Fund.

head of household has to declare the number of household members who are literate, has capacity to work and are willing to engage in income generation. The identification of those individuals will allow to tailor the best approach that can assist them either find a job or engage in income generating activities. The graduation program includes two main initiatives: (i) Welfare to Work Strategy and (ii) Welfare-to-Work Hiring Initiative. The first initiative intends to move people into work, with a special focus on women that are single parents, deserted spouses and those with the death of the breadwinner in the family. The second initiative aims to provide the individuals with coaching, mentoring, business skills training and financial literacy so they can start income-generating activities. The Department works in collaboration with the National Employment Centre.

#### *Care and Protection Allowance*

The C&P is a child benefit for vulnerable children (under the age of 18 years). Children's vulnerable type of households include single parents, deserted spouses, death of breadwinner, prisoner's dependent, foster parents/guardians and children in foster or institutional care. The C&P offers a monthly cash transfer up to a maximum of FJD127 to those vulnerable households. The benefit amount is determined according to a child's level of education (pre-school FJD 29, primary school FJD 35, secondary school FJD 46) and presence of disability (FJD 69). The cash transfer can be provided in cash or in a voucher for those households who reside in areas with no access to banking facilities. The benefit is provided for three years maximum, after which the household situation will be re-analysed.

#### *Social Pension Scheme*

The SPS is a non-contributory pension for elderly persons (aged 65 and above) who have never received superannuation through the Fiji National Provident Fund. The SPS is not cumulative with any other type of pension or the PBS, but it can be accumulated with the C&P in case the elderly person is the primary care giver for a grandchildren/child until they reach the age of 18 years. The SPS provides a monthly social pension of FJD 100. As per 2019/2020, there were 45,206 beneficiaries. The 2020-2021 budget estimate for SPS is FJD 55,301,389 aiming at covering 40,466 elderly persons, which is the highest budget amount among all social assistance programs.

### *Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher*

The RPM supports women who are pregnant and mothers living in rural areas with the objective of improving their maternal health and reducing child mortality. The RPM incentivises the early access to reproductive healthcare by providing 10 food vouchers (9 months of pre-natal and 1 first month of post-natal) or the equivalent cash transfer of FJD50 per month. The voucher is valid over a period of 60 days. The cash transfer is offered to recipients living in inaccessible areas with not many stores/vendors available. As per 2019/2020, there were 3,279 recipients. The 2020-2021 budget allocation for the program is FJD1,200,000, planning to reach 186 targeted people.

### *Disability Allowance*

The DA assists individuals with permanent disabilities. The DA offers a monthly amount of FJD 90 per person up to two members in the household so a maximum of FJD180 can be provided. The DA is not cumulative with PBS or C&P or government institutional care received. As per 2019/2020, there were 8,228 beneficiaries. The 2020-2021 budget allocation for DA is FJD 9,355,819 to cover 8,283 persons.

### *Bus Fare Scheme*

The BFSP supports the elderly aged 60 years and above and people with disability who uses the bus services in Fiji as a mode of transportation. The BFSP offers a bus fare concession of 50 percent for the elderly and 100% for the disabled persons. As per the MWCPA annual report 2017-2018, 10,982 of elderly persons and 1,176 persons with disabilities were assisted. A budget allocation of FJD 6,500,000 is planned for 2020-2021.

### *Other programs*

There are other programs supporting children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. The assistance for children includes a child protection program, residential homes, probation for juvenile and adults, child helpline and innovative child protection service. Support for women is provided through several initiatives across government and with women's groups. The support to persons with disabilities also comprise of grants to disability service providers and other initiatives such as training. In terms of provision to older persons, in addition to the SPS,

other initiatives and services include the state homes for older persons, national minimum standards for institutional homes and a National Council of Older Persons.

## **National and legal frameworks, International commitments**

Fiji became a member of the United Nations in 1970. It signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993; ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995; and in 2017 the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In addition, Fiji has a National Policy for Persons Living with Disability (2008-2018) and a National Gender Policy.

The Constitution of Fiji protects the fundamental rights, guarantees equality before the law. The Constitution recognises that every person has the right to adequate food and water (Section 36) and to social security schemes (Section 37). The Constitution states that:

*Section 36 (1) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to be free from hunger, to have adequate food of acceptable quality and to clean and safe water in adequate quantities.*

*(2) In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available.*

*Section 37 (1) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to social security schemes, whether private or public, for their support in times of need, including the right to such support from public resources if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents.*

*Section 37 (2) In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available.*

Fiji recognises the transformative and the development ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and considers that the 2030 Agenda, taken together with the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction as well as Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) provides a framework for achieving a sustainable, inclusive, prosperous and peaceful life for all Fijians.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation's mandate is to provide policy interventions for the poor and vulnerable – i.e. women, children, elderly and persons living with disabilities. Poverty reduction is a priority of the Fijian Government. Through the 5-Year & 20-Year National Development Plan, the Government commits to achieve *a socially inclusive Fiji and empowered Fijians* through policies that can promote a caring environment and improve the lives of vulnerable people (elderly, children and those with special needs). The National Strategic Plan 2018-2022 for the MWCPA is the guiding strategic document to concentrate efforts towards the national strategy, particularly aiming at achieving a new vision of *transformed communities with empowered women, children, older persons and the disadvantaged*.

## **Policy approach: improving the targeting and performance of social assistance programs**

### **Rationale for policy change**

Over the years, Government's social assistance program has evolved with the recognition of the differing needs of the poor and vulnerable. Government prioritised these differing needs by providing targeted assistance to the different groups. In the past 5 years, MWCPA continues to witness an increase in the numbers of individuals and households coming into the system, increasing budgetary pressures and the ministry's capacity to deliver these programs.

An important policy consideration is the extent to which social assistance programs are reaching out to the intended beneficiaries. The effectiveness of the programs can be measured by the accuracy in reaching the eligible households. External and internal reviews identified gaps in the performance of some social assistance programs. According to internal evaluations, only 30 percent of the PBS program beneficiaries are part of the poorest quintile. This percentage is lower than the global average of 37 percent.

Concerns about efficient use of public funds drive the emphasis on minimising inclusion errors (i.e. the share of program beneficiaries who are wrongly identified as eligible for the program). At the same time, concerns about achieving desired impact and the SDG goal of leaving no one behind is driving an emphasis on minimising exclusion errors – both are valid concerns. Existing targeting systems can be improved in Fiji but will never yield a perfect result because of the fluidity of the welfare status of the poor. The challenge of accurately identifying recipients of poverty targeted programs is common across developing countries. A recent global study indicated that exclusion errors – the proportion of intended recipients of a program who are excluded – in poverty targeted social assistance programs range between 44 percent and 98 percent.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, while Fiji is likely performing worse than some countries, it is doing better than others. Global evidence indicates that targeting errors fall, as coverage rises. In targeting only the poorest decile, targeting errors will remain high. Household incomes change rapidly as families face crises or respond to opportunities, which means that there is no fixed group of the poor. Instead, the identity of those in the poorest 10 or 20 percent changes continually, so it is not possible to accurately identify them.

A further concern is the transfer size and its ability to make an impact on beneficiary households. The adequacy of PBS benefits is low, with the benefit amounting to just about two percent of per capita household consumption.

These concerns highlight the need to address important gaps in the performance of the overall social assistance system in Fiji. In particular, survey-based estimates of the other programs, such as the C&P, SPS, RPM, and DA (all of which are categorically targeted to specific vulnerable groups), are not available to ascertain how effectively these programs reach their intended beneficiaries. There is also limited evidence on whether social assistance beneficiaries receive payments on time.

Both appropriate design and effective delivery is important to ensure programs achieve their intended objectives. This includes putting in place effective mechanisms for the outreach, intake and registration, assessment of needs and conditions, eligibility and enrollment, and determination of benefits. It is clear that there is a need to concentrate efforts and channel resources to the most in need to achieve a greater impact in poverty reduction and vulnerability. Eligible beneficiaries of social assistance programs need to be cross-checked with other

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<sup>2</sup>Kidd and Athias (2020).

databases to ensure the eligibility criteria are accurate and up to date. Effective payment systems are needed for notification and timely provision of benefits.

In particular, an integrated social assistance information system and a dynamic social registry, with updated information on actual and potential beneficiaries, would provide the basis for effective, fair, and transparent outreach, targeting and beneficiary management. It could also yield savings for government by identifying and minimising duplicate and ghost beneficiaries, and double dipping across programs. Most of all, it lays the foundation for moving towards an adaptive system, capable of scaling up temporarily in the aftermath of disasters.

Finally, making the overall social assistance system gender-responsive is a priority, given the focus on vulnerable women as the target group for C&P, SPS, RPM, and the graduation component of the PBS. Even though the DSW 2019/2020 data shows that there are more female beneficiaries of social assistance programs than males in general, gender considerations have not been mainstreamed in the delivery of these program and this represents another gap in design and implementation. Furthermore, there has been no assessment of whether the social assistance system has been adequately adapted to respond to the requirements of people with disabilities and other people who may experience limitations in their capabilities.

## **Policy objectives: five key areas for intervention**

### **Objectives**

The overarching goal of the Social Assistance Policy is to promote the progressive realisation of the right to social protection to reduce poverty and social exclusion. This will be achieved by delivering appropriately-designed and adaptable social assistance programs, protecting the poor and vulnerable against shocks - including those from climate-related disasters - promoting security and building resilience so that Fijians are able fully participate economically, socially and culturally in society. The policy also supports social assistance systems that contribute to human capital at different stages of the life cycle.

Monitoring the performance of social assistance programs can help to maximise the impact of those programs on poverty reduction, ensuring that limited resources are focused on those citizens who need them most.

This policy focuses on five key strategic areas and builds on ongoing reviews and reforms. It also focuses on supporting and advancing gender-responsive social assistance programs, ensuring that no one is left behind in the 2030 Agenda.

- 1) Adopt appropriate, gender-responsive and affordable social assistance programs;
- 2) Achieve cost-effective selection processes to attain policy objectives and, ultimately, stronger impacts for the poor and vulnerable;
- 3) Develop an Integrated Social Protection Information System and a social registry to target social assistance programs to the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the event external shocks (economic or climate-related disaster), enabling Adaptive Social Protection responses;
- 4) Build administrative and human capacity for the optimal functioning of this policy;
- 5) Monitoring, evaluation of social assistance programs, including gender-disaggregated data and feedback loops to inform policy changes.

## **Guiding principles**

This policy is based on the guiding principles of feasibility, affordability, sustainability, inclusivity, transparency and accountability. It is evidence-based and it aims to be flexible and responsive to rapid changes, adaptable to future emergencies and crises.

## **Assumptions**

This policy is based on the following assumptions:

- The design and implementation of the social assistance programs will be under the responsibility of the MWCPA with Department of Social Welfare and Department for Women working in close collaboration.
- The social assistance programs will be designed and delivered according to the principles above.
- The beneficiary selection of PBS is based on poverty-targeting will be based on the latest survey information data.
- Business processes, standard operating procedures and registration/recertification of beneficiaries will be reviewed, strengthened and kept up to date.



- The Integrated Social Protection Information Systems for social assistance programs will include all the information necessary for the different kinds of selection approach envisaged, for programs to ensure the program's effective implementation.
- The MWCPA will have adequate capacity and resources for the implementation of this policy.
- Government agencies will work to consolidate an Adaptive Social Protection Strategy by linking social assistance responses with social insurance and active labor market programs through an integrated social protection system that would be able to effectively and efficiently identify the poor and vulnerable and swiftly respond to economic and/or disaster-response needs.

## Policy Measures

This policy will help to review and improve the performance of social assistance programs and programs' delivery mechanisms, with an ultimate impact on the effectiveness of programs. Evidence from analytical reviews of the current social assistance programs and regulatory frameworks will guide this process. A range of policy interventions is presented below, which will be used to achieve the objectives established under this policy.

*Policy Objective 1:* Adopt appropriate, gender-responsive and affordable social assistance programs

*Rationale:* As Fiji's social assistance continues its evolution towards a life cycle approach, it is necessary to review the nature of poverty and inequality across the country and the eligibility criteria for each life cycle stage.<sup>3</sup> This should be done in a way that is sensitive to gender dimensions, and which finds an affordable balance between coverage and the achievement of policy objectives. It also requires that consideration is given now to the type of trajectory that each current program might follow, to ensure that all possible eligibility criteria may be captured.

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<sup>3</sup>Men, women, boys and girls experience different degrees of vulnerability and may be exposed to different risks while having different capacities to cope and recover from shocks. At a young age, girls could face barriers to quality education, including through their involvement in domestic work. Adolescent girls are at risk of early pregnancy and school dropout. Women are more likely than men to work in precarious, informal jobs, shoulder a greater burden of unpaid care, and face interruptions and inequalities in paid work. These lifecycle vulnerabilities accumulate and increase vulnerability in old age.

The existing eligibility criteria need to be carefully assessed in light of the specific program objectives. For this, alternative eligibility criteria, with their implications for increased (or reduced) coverage should be modeled to inform an assessment of the optimal level of investment to achieve the policy objectives, while remaining affordable. It is not necessarily that case that low investment will yield the best results; and, at the other extreme, vastly expanded coverage may deliver diminishing returns. For this, the Department of Social Welfare should work with the Poverty Monitoring Unit and the Ministry of Economy on the impact of these social assistance programs on beneficiaries. Similarly with gender: simply because the data show that there are more female beneficiaries of social assistance programs than males in general, does not mean that the way the programs are currently designed, implemented and monitored is necessarily fully gender-responsive.

*Policy interventions:*

- Undertake a vulnerability analysis that assesses the nature of poverty and inequality in Fiji as well as the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Fijians, to determine who should be prioritised for social assistance. The analysis should examine the latest household surveys in Fiji and be complemented by qualitative research. Determine who should be prioritised for social assistance across Fiji.
- Review and identify modifications to existing social assistance programs to improve efficiency including:
  - Undertake a field-based assessment of the performance of all major social assistance programs, in terms of coverage, targeting (both leakage and exclusion), and adequacy.
  - Review Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for all major programs to address implementation bottlenecks Undertake a review of the Ministry's current Financial Manual and a public expenditure tracking exercise to identify opportunities to improve efficiency in program costs and minimize the risks that exist in the administration and payments of social welfare funds.
- Develop costed options to enhance program design for greater effectiveness (i.e., achievement of the highest possible impact for a given budget):
  - Simulate the *actual impact* of these programs in assessing impact on poverty, on average and for the specific vulnerable groups targeted by social assistance programs.

- Simulations of the *potential impact* would also help identify opportunities to enhance program design to address gaps identified in the performance assessment (e.g., improving coverage, targeting outcomes, adequacy, etc). These simulations will highlight trade-offs in terms of increasing coverage versus adequacy.
- The analysis should be aligned to the results of the vulnerability analysis and the priority categories of the population identified. The analysis should be complemented by a cost-benefit analysis of different options.
- Develop a costed ten-year vision for the social protection sector in Fiji, including both social assistance and contributory schemes, with a view to developing a modern, integrated multi-tiered system that effectively reaches those who require social assistance, provides adequate transfers, maximises impacts and minimises perverse incentives.
- Undertake a fiscal space review of the social assistance system to ensure that any reforms and expansions of the system are affordable in the short- medium- and long-terms.
- Critically review the eligibility criteria for the different programs, in the light of their objectives, and elaborate a vision for how they might evolve over the coming decade.
- Review registration mechanisms. Assess the feasibility of an on-demand application for all social assistance schemes and the inclusion of additional safeguards should be incorporated to minimise exclusion.
- Identify options for PBS beneficiaries to exit sustainably from the program, including links with civil society organisations and other government agencies services and programs. These would need to be tailored to the needs of social assistance beneficiaries, especially the vulnerable groups prioritised by the Welfare to Work Strategy (i.e., women that are single parents, deserted spouses and those with the death of the breadwinner in the family). The review should also examine appropriate mechanisms for sustainably graduating recipients of social assistance from program, while providing them with an effective safety-net if they fall back.
- Undertake a gender analysis of all existing programs, and use its recommendations to strengthen gender-responsive aspects in social assistance programs by modifying design (e.g., development of standard gendered vulnerability assessment tools, ensuring suitable and transformative graduation options for women, strengthening interventions

to address gender-based violence such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) primary prevention approaches across social assistance programs which include national communications campaigns and etc), implementation and delivery systems (e.g., by ensuring women are enrolled as direct recipients of PBS and C&P programs and that benefits are paid directly to women).

- Review the existing Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) and recommend modifications as appropriate that are designed to be accessible and inclusive to ensure that social assistance support is responsive to the needs of the most marginalised.
- Undertake research to determine the extent to which well-designed social assistance contributes to sustainable and inclusive economic growth and strengthens trust in government and the national social contract.
- Assess current governance arrangements for the social protection sector and make proposals for any reforms. The review will determine whether the contributory and social assistance systems can be more closely integrated to streamline delivery mechanisms and strengthen the multi-tiered nature of the overall social protection system.
- Review appropriate legislative options to underpin the national social assistance system with a robust legal foundation. Determine whether to introduce simple legislation to cover social assistance programs or to align legislation with long term vision for the social protection system (including contributory and tax financed programs).

*Policy Objective 2:* Achieve cost-effective selection processes to attain policy objectives and, ultimately, stronger impacts for the poor and vulnerable

*Rationale:* The current suite of social assistance programs uses a variety of mechanisms (both household-based and individual-based) to select their beneficiaries. RPM is based on the individual woman, requiring her to be pregnant, and to live in a less accessible area. C&P aims at individual children up to the age of 18, but from a range of types of vulnerable household. PBS is poverty-targeted, using PMT and therefore based on household, rather than individual, characteristics. The SPS is based on the age of the individual, and on whether s/he is in receipt of any other regular income. The DA is again based on the individual, but in this case on the assessed severity of disability (though there is also a limitation based on the household, in that no more than two members in the household may receive the allowance).

As with the eligibility criteria, it is important to consider possible permutations of how these selection processes might evolve over time. This policy recognises that social assistance is not just about reducing current poverty, but that it is also an investment in building resilience by better enabling citizens to protect themselves from vulnerabilities faced through the life cycle. All the different approaches used currently will need to be reviewed and strengthened; and this in turn will dictate the indicators that will need to be included in the social registry (see next section). Thus for example, the selection processes may require, among others, the pregnancy status, age, employment status (formal/informal), severity of disability for each individual, as well as the geographic location, composition and type of each household; in addition to all the different household characteristics that will be needed for the PMT. The selection process should be kept simple and intuitive, with the criteria for selection being as transparent, equitable and objectively verifiable as possible to achieve the desired objectives of each program.

*Policy interventions:*

- Review and update beneficiary selection processes on all programs.
- Based on an assessment of national and international evidence, develop more effective, gender responsive and efficient targeting mechanisms for the poverty-targeted program to ensure it reaches the poorest and most vulnerable households, families and individuals.
- In the interim, update the proxy means-test model using the most recent HIES to increase targeting accuracy and performance indicators of poverty-based targeting programs (PBS). Review and revise the beneficiary targeting procedures in the PBS SOP accordingly. Implementation will aim to close the performance gap identified by the review of program operations, including closing the gap in performance as outlined by the HIES analysis.
- Until the social registry is operational, update all program beneficiary databases to ensure that benefits of social assistance programs meet the eligibility criteria. Explore options for cleaning and checking program databases for duplicates (through simple algorithm matching analysis, in the absence of a unique personal identifier) and ghost beneficiaries (through random field verification).

- Review of registration, enrolment and beneficiary management procedures in the current SOPs and development of new ones that will accommodate the changes and new initiatives that will be introduced as a result of these reforms (these will need to be revised further once the integrated information system and social registry are in place).
- Develop an effective and gender responsive communication and outreach strategy to raise awareness about the eligibility criteria and beneficiaries selection procedures, thereby increasing perceptions of fairness and minimizing exclusion. This should be tailored to ensure inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Ongoing and systematic reviews to be carried out with beneficiaries to determine their ongoing eligibility and identification of those that can be exited through graduation programs and the removal from the system of those that have deceased.

*Policy Objective 3:* Develop an Integrated Social Protection Information System and a social registry to be able to deliver social assistance programs to the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the event external shocks (economic or climate-related disaster), enabling Adaptive Social Protection responses

*Rationale:* Recent reviews have highlighted the urgent need for a consolidated registry of all beneficiaries of existing programs, and a common MIS across programs. An integrated MIS that supports registration broader than existing beneficiaries would also enable the system to be sufficiently adaptive for shock response and help to accommodate the dynamic movement of households and individuals in and out of poverty. An interoperable system that captures both social assistance and contributory schemes would enhance overall system performance. Enhanced modern registration mechanisms and a reset of business processes for all programs would strengthen management of the schemes, creating efficiencies for DSW while also reducing opportunity costs for applicants.

*Policy interventions:*

- Design, develop and implement a comprehensive social registry, serving all social assistance programs (PBS, C&P, DA, RPM, SPS, etc) and enabling adaptive social protection responses. Location, demographic and socio-economic information about households and individuals should be captured, with identification numbers to mitigate the risk of duplication of registrations.

- Design, develop and implement integrated social protection information system, that enables regular cross-checks or data matching with other government databases (such as the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), other social insurance, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS), the Fiji Revenue and Custom Services (FRCS), tax system and/or with the new Fiji digital national ID registry) to enhance selection mechanisms.
- Develop enhanced standard operating procedures (SOPs) incorporating re-engineered procedures consistent with new IT systems and databases.
- Review and adapt the disability certification mechanism in line with the CRPD. Develop an electronic database for the disability certification that is linked to social assistance schemes via the integrated social registry.
- Leverage the new integrated information system and social registry to support adaptive social protection, including through geo-reference data in the social registry to combine with disaster/hazard data from NDMO.
- SOPs and guidelines for existing schemes should be modified to include special procedures to support post-disaster response, pre-defined criteria that triggers immediate post-disaster response, accompanied by appropriate legislation (below) and flexible financing agreements.
- Design and implement management reporting for the provision of reliable and accurate data, including disaggregated data for policy decisions, budget allocation and future design of new programs.

The scope and core functionalities of this integrated system would then:

- Work in partnership with other government agencies to design adaptable social protection systems, building linkages with social insurance and active labor market programs.
- Leverage the proposed national identity system to allow linkage of the social registry to other Government databases.
- Establish systems for: on-demand inclusion in the social registry, wherever possible through online application; the addition of banking details; and the regular updating of addresses.
- Automate the generation of payment lists and their transmission to service providers, in order to minimise administrative and client costs.

*Policy Objective 4:* Build administrative and human capacity for the optimal functioning of this policy

*Rationale:* Recent reviews have highlighted that a key challenge facing the DSW is the high workload placed on its staff and insufficient training. Despite major changes to both the number and coverage of social security schemes administered by DSW since 2011, there has been no concurrent expansion of staffing resources. It can be expected that the introduction of the social registry and improved information systems will significantly reduce the workload of all DSW staff, much of whose time is currently devoted to tedious and repetitive administrative tasks. This will allow them to concentrate more on case management and social support.

*Policy interventions:*

- Restructure DSW in light of its new responsibilities to support policy and program implementation.
- Review and update all job descriptions, and undertake staff assessments to maximize the benefits of this restructuring.
- Review human resource requirements and develop a strategy for strengthening staff capacity. Assess the feasibility of establishing a cadre of professional staff working on social assistance schemes, including to enable social workers to provide tailored support to the most vulnerable members of society.
- Train staff in new standard operating procedures, systems and databases, through a combination of overseas courses and on-the-job training.
- Strengthen capabilities, knowledge and resources on gender-responsive social assistance in MWCPA to enable staff to deliver gender-responsive social assistance systems.
- Ensure sufficient IT equipment to support staff in their operations.
- Put in place mechanisms to promote information-sharing and coordination across department teams responsible for the implementation of the major social assistance programs; this will be critical for the success of the integrated social protection information system and social registry.
- Put in place mechanisms for coordination between the MWCPA and NDMO for adaptive social protection measures, between MWCPA and MPEIR and other stakeholders on graduation program for the exit of identified PBS beneficiaries, etc.



*Policy Objective 5:* Monitor and evaluate social assistance programs, including gender-disaggregated data and feedback loops to inform policy changes

*Policy interventions:*

- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to enable program administrators to assess in real time the effectiveness and efficiency of the social assistance system, while ensuring that all data is disaggregated by age and gender.
- Develop M&E tools for systematic monitoring and evaluation of SP programs to increase capacity and adapt system to future needs and priorities
- Routinely analyse administrative datasets, including gender-, disability- and age-disaggregated analysis, to improve performance of social assistance programs
- Include evaluations to identify efficient ways to improve performance of social assistance programs
- Periodically consult with a variety of stakeholders, including the beneficiaries themselves, and establish mechanisms to improve the design of social assistance programs and implementation.
- Work with the Poverty Monitoring Unit and the Ministry of Economy to develop a mechanism that regularly assesses the impact of these social protection programs on beneficiaries, including through low-cost telephone surveys.
- Strengthen the research capabilities of the DSW for analysis of data to determine trends and impacts for better planning and policy decisions.
- Use evidence-based results and data to guide policy decisions, strategic planning, enhancement of current programs and the design of new social assistance initiatives

## **Governance and Institutional framework**

The institutional arrangements for implementing the Social Assistance Policy are detailed in the following sub-sections.

### **Coordination Mechanism**

Overall responsibility for coordinating and overseeing the implementation of this Social Assistance Policy will be led by a National Social Protection Coordination Committee (NSPCC). The NSPCC will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and its membership should include representatives of the relevant government ministries and agencies.

Recognising the ongoing evolution of Fiji's social assistance towards a comprehensive life cycle approach, technical working groups could be established under the SPC to be responsible for the technical aspects at each life cycle stage. The benefit of this is that each life cycle stage has different objectives, which in turn requires different linkages to other services. This means that each life cycle stage requires a distinct, and smaller, number of key stakeholders (both within and outside Government, and among development partners), which in turn makes coordination much easier.

## **Planning and policy development**

Primary responsibility for planning and policy development in the social assistance sector will lie with the DSW under the MWCPA. Its mandate to carry out this role will be reviewed and strengthened, if necessary. Associated legislation and cross-cutting policies developed by the DSW will be reviewed and approved by the NSPCC.

The organisational structure and resourcing of DSW will be reviewed in light of its roles as defined in this policy.

## **Stakeholder consultation**

Consultations were held with government stakeholders and associated partners to gather inputs into the various aspects of this policy. A formal consultation mechanism will also be established with representatives of the key stakeholders during the implementation of this policy. This will be used as formal mechanism for monitoring progress and necessary reviews, if needed. The consultations will be conducted through the National Social Protection Coordination Committee. In addition, consultations with a broad range of stakeholders are also

part of Policy Objective 5, as a mechanism to include policy feedback updates in the design and delivery of social assistance programs.

## **Reporting, monitoring and evaluation**

The DoSW will lead the reporting, monitoring and evaluation of all social welfare activity, including the implementation of the Social Assistance Policy. The policy will be implemented by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly Government Ministries, the private sector, faith-based and civil society organisations.



## Implementation framework / Strategic Action Plan

Policy objective	Policy interventions / Activities	Lead implementing agency	Implementation timeframe					Estimated cost (FJD)
			2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
1: Adopt appropriate, gender-responsive and affordable social assistance programs	Undertake a vulnerability analysis that assesses the nature of poverty and inequality in Fiji as well as the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Fijians, to determine who should be prioritised for social assistance	DSW. The Dept. of Women will be the associated agency.						120,000
	Review and identify modifications to existing social assistance programs to improve efficiency							80,000
	Develop costed options to enhance program design for greater effectiveness							50,000
	Review appropriate legislative options to underpin the national social							100,000

	assistance system with a robust legal foundation							
2: Achieve cost-effective selection processes to attain policy objectives and, ultimately, stronger impacts for the poor and vulnerable	Review and update beneficiary selection processes on all programs.							50,000
	Based on an assessment of national and international evidence, develop more effective and efficient targeting mechanisms for the poverty-targeted program to ensure it reaches the poorest and most vulnerable households, families and individuals.	DSW						80,000
	Update the proxy means-test model using the most recent HIES to increase targeting accuracy and performance indicators of poverty-based targeting programs (PBS). Review and revise the beneficiary targeting procedures in the PBS SOP accordingly							100,000

	Until the social registry is operational, update all program beneficiary databases to ensure that benefits of social assistance programs meet the eligibility criteria.							100,000
	Review of registration, enrolment and beneficiary management procedures in the current SOPs and development of new ones that will accommodate the changes and new initiatives that will be introduced as a result of these reforms							50,000
	Develop an effective communication and outreach strategy to raise awareness about the eligibility criteria and beneficiaries selection procedures, thereby increasing perceptions of fairness and minimising exclusion							30,000
	Ongoing and systematic reviews to be carried out with beneficiaries to							30,000

	determine their ongoing eligibility and identification of those that can be exited through graduation programs and the removal from the system of those that have deceased							
3: Develop an Integrated Social Protection Information System and a social registry to target social assistance programs to the poor and vulnerable, particularly in the event external shocks	Design, develop and implement a comprehensive social registry, serving all social assistance programs (PBS, C&P, DA, RPM, SPS, etc) and enabling adaptive social protection responses. Location, demographic and socio-economic information about households and individuals should be captured, with identification numbers to mitigate the risk of duplication of registrations.	DSW						250,000
	Design, develop and implement integrated social protection information system, that enables regular cross-checks or data matching with other government databases							1,800,000



(economic or climate-related disaster), enabling Adaptive Social Protection responses	(such as the NFPF, other social insurance, CRVS, the FRCS tax system and/or with the new Fiji digital national ID registry) to enhance selection mechanisms.							
	Develop enhanced standard operating procedures (SOPs) incorporating re-engineered procedures consistent with new IT systems and databases.							100,000
	Review and adapt the disability certification mechanism in line with the CRPD. Develop an electronic database for the disability certification that is linked to social assistance schemes via the integrated social registry.							50,000
	Leverage the new integrated information system and social registry to support adaptive social protection, including through geo-reference data							70,000

	in the social registry to combine with disaster/hazard data from NDMO.							
	SOPs and guidelines for existing schemes should be modified to include special procedures to support post disaster response, pre-defined criteria that triggers immediate post-disaster response, accompanied by appropriate legislation (below) and flexible financing agreements.							100,000
	Design and implement management reporting for the provision of reliable and accurate data, including disaggregated data for policy decisions, budget allocation and future design of new programs.							100,000
4: Build administrative and human capacity for the optimal	Restructure DSW in light of its new responsibilities to support policy and program implementation.	DSW						150,000
	Review and update all job descriptions, and undertake staff							100,000

functioning of this policy	assessments to maximize the benefits of this restructuring.							
	Review human resource requirements and develop a strategy for strengthening staff capacity. Assess the feasibility of establishing a cadre of professional staff working on social assistance schemes, including to enable social workers to provide tailored support to the most vulnerable members of society.							50,000
	Train staff in new standard operating procedures, systems and databases, through a combination of overseas courses and on-the-job training.							200,000
	Strengthen capabilities, knowledge and resources on gender-responsive social assistance in MWCPA to enable staff to deliver gender-responsive social assistance systems.							40,000

	Ensure sufficient IT equipment to support staff in their operations.							500,000
	Put in place mechanisms to promote information-sharing and coordination across department teams responsible for the implementation of the major social assistance programs; this will be critical for the success of the integrated social protection information system and social registry.							50,000
	Put in place mechanisms for coordination between the MWCPA and NDMO for adaptive social protection measures, between MWCPA and MEPIR and other stakeholders on graduation program for the exit of identified PBS beneficiaries, etc.							20,000
5: Monitoring, evaluation and	Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to enable program	DSW. The Poverty						30,000

feedback loops to inform policy changes	administrators to assess in real time the effectiveness and efficiency of the social assistance system, while ensuring that all data is disaggregated by gender.	Monitoring Unit will be associated agency.						
	Develop M&E tools for systematic monitoring and evaluation of SP programs to increase capacity and adapt system to future needs and priorities							50,000
	Routinely analyse administrative datasets, including gender-, disability- and age-disaggregated analysis, to improve performance of social assistance programs							20,000
	Include evaluations to identify efficient ways to improve performance of social assistance programs							50,000
	Periodically consult with a variety of stakeholders, including the							40,000

	beneficiaries themselves, and establish mechanisms to improve the design of social assistance programs and implementation.							
	Work with the Poverty Monitoring Unit and the Ministry of Economy to develop a mechanism that regularly assesses the impact of these social protection programs on beneficiaries, including through low-cost telephone surveys.							40,000
	Strengthen the research capabilities of the DSW for analysis of data to determine trends and impacts for better planning and policy decisions.							40,000
	Use evidence-based results and data to guide policy decisions, strategic planning, enhancement of current programs and the design of new social assistance initiatives							50,000

Total - 4.69 million