



International
Labour
Organization



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT ON CHILD LABOUR



• CHILD LABOUR • SCHOOL DROPOUT • PROSTITUTION • DRUGS

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT ON CHILD LABOUR



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CONTENT

CHAPTER ONE: TACKLE	5	Kids are drug mules Glue sniffer	
CHAPTER TWO: CHILD LABOUR	13	Survey notes a growing trend in inhalant abuse cases Laws target abuse Children as young as 10 trying marijuana Students sleep from marijuana Increased drug use a concern for state Shift in drug abuse Schools in the capital top substance abuse list Worrying statistics	
More Needs To Be Done Spotlight on children in domestic work Survivor recalls ordeal Boat found, two still missing at sea Fighting child labour High incidence of child labour The cost of child labour Child labour warning Children engaged in the worst form of labour 215 million in child labour Child labour awareness Teachers fight child labour			
CHAPTER THREE: POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT	25		
Mad metal rush Pain lives here Reforms to target rural poverty rise Unemployed youths Truth behind our poverty Poverty in provinces Money trouble forces teenager home Unwanted orphans scrounge for food We need a home Child labour a necessary evil for poor 45% of people in poverty 35pc in poverty Shattered dreams All for her children Child labour training for 347			
CHAPTER FOUR: DROPOUTS	41		
Sacrifice: A teen quits school to support his family Journey for a job Drop-out numbers high in district School dropouts increase Concern at dropouts Dropouts rise : 15pc of our kids don't survive primary school No interest in school Money woes cause drop-outs Fiji School dropouts leave over finances Study shows exam failure not as common Reports link school dropout and child labour Dropouts blame the system			
CHAPTER FIVE: SEX & PROSTITUTION	51		
Alarming figures Fight against child prostitution not easy Island girls trade sex Exploitation Young girls lured into illegal activity Raped girl, 11, a mum Sex for cash at 12 Pimping for \$500 a day A pimp's women Child sex for cash Survey shows child abuse Easy money lures children Concern in rural areas Sex trade persistent 8 girls in sex claim Shocking! Shocking crime statistics last year Poverty Breeds Child Labour and Sex Tourism			
CHAPTER SIX: DRUGS	67		
Girl 8 among sniffers Ban the toxic stuff			
		CHAPTER SEVEN: PARENTAL NEGLECT	79
		Jobless parents push child labour Parents use children to beg: ILO Survey puts dropout blame on parents Kids left in play centres	
		CHAPTER EIGHT: COMMUNITY EFFORTS	85
		Dropouts return for pioneer marine studies Youths toil home soil Villagers address sex trade Hope reborn at Nasau Businessman spreads hospitality gospel Centre to equip youths New approach to reduce school dropouts Students rely on handouts Switch to cash crops	
		CHAPTER NINE: EMPLOYERS, WORKERS, NGOS	93
		NGOs fight child labour Child labour fight targets 5-year-olds Education decreases poverty NGO fights poverty When child labour is not legal Protect children Protect children from child labour Fighting prostitution Go to school Children advocates want careless parents punished Network rescues 187 FTUC, FTU join hands to battle child labour Fiji Child Labour DVD to be launched Federation faces child labour challenges	
		CHAPTER TEN: GOVERNMENT	105
		Child labour laws under scrutiny Lawyer pinpoints 'defects' Work age review in the pipeline First human trafficking case Plans to end child labour in the sugar industry Alarming Database for child labour Porn access Police target child labour Fighting poverty Ministry aims to eliminate child labour State targets school leavers Back to school for drop-outs Govt offers drop-out help Focus on child labour State steps up fight against child labour Welfare rules under review Education emphasis Combating child labour in the sugar industry Minister for labour visits Labasa Employing children in hazardous work prohibited Child labour awareness for schools Maximum advocacy on child protection New manual to boost child care in Fiji	
		REFERENCE	122



 The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) - ILO

TACKLE-FIJI

INTERNATIONAL CHILD LABOUR FORUM

Education: the right response to child labour

Ending child labour through education



INTRODUCTION

IN recent years, the media's involvement in disseminating information on issues related to child labour has increased markedly. In fact, the role of the media in highlighting and drawing attention to all kinds of social problems involving children has been the hallmark of all progressive societies globally, from the child soldiers of war-torn Africa, the drug and substance addiction of children on the streets of Central and South America and the child prostitution of Thailand.

In the Fiji situation, up to 2008 there was hardly any coverage of issues related to child labour. If indeed there was, any coverage of these issues basically featured pointing out defects in laws that deal with child labour. This has, however, started changing. Recently, there have been attempts from a community "broadened by knowledge" to address and highlight children's needs.

The release in 2009 to 2010 of child labour research findings in Fiji, no doubt performed an important and significant role in placing issues affecting children on the public and political agenda. The research studies of working children in commercial sexual exploitation, on the streets, in rural agricultural communities, in informal and squatter settlements and in schools provided shocking statistics and highlighted the many, often co-existing, forms of abuse suffered by children.

Most importantly the research findings helped draw public attention to the status of children in society, highlighting children's dependency and vulnerability to abuse and neglect. As a result, the media monitoring of the situation has resulted in a marked increase in the flow of articles on the government's plans - to raise the minimum working age, to establish a child labour monitoring unit, to prosecute the country's first case of domestic human trafficking, to prosecute companies employing children, to help dropouts through the design of special vocational courses and to implement child protection laws.

The Fiji media today is focussing greater attention and resources on areas of human interest, especially on the status and treatment of women and children. This report is a collection of various media articles on child labour and related issues published in The Fiji Times during the EU funded ILO TACKLE - Tackling Child Labour through Education project. It highlights the multi-dimensional scope of child labour, and the crucial role played by the media on advocacy and awareness.





CHAPTER ONE

TACKLE

BACKGROUND

The International Labour Organization (ILO), funded by the European Union (EU) and in agreement with the Committee of Ambassadors of the ACP Group of States, launched in 2008 a major project aimed at tackling child labour through education (TACKLE) in 11 countries across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Countries in the Pacific included Fiji and PNG.

The project was developed in the context of a strategic partnership signed in 2004 between the ILO and the European Commission, aimed at reinforcing their joint efforts to reduce poverty and improve labour conditions in developing countries. The overall goal of the partnership is to accelerate the fight against poverty and work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

TACKLE OBJECTIVES

TACKLE's overall goal is to contribute towards poverty reduction in the least developed countries by providing equitable access to basic education and skills development to the most disadvantaged section of the society.

The TACKLE Project objective is to strengthen the capacity of the national and local authorities in the formulation, implementation and enforcement of policies to fight child labour, an obstacle to poverty alleviation and access to basic education, in coordination with social partners and civil society.

TACKLE KEY RESULT AREAS

To achieve the project objective, TACKLE works through 4 Strategies or Key Result Areas:

1. Improve country level child labour and education legal framework in project countries.
2. Strengthen institutional capacity leading to improved ability to formulate and implement child labour strategies.
3. Target actions to combat child labour designed and implemented to develop effective demonstration models.
4. Enhance knowledge base and networks on child labour and education through improved advocacy and dissemination of good practices

The TACKLE project, as the first comprehensive project for addressing child labour in the Pacific region, focused on strengthening institutional capacity and mainstreaming systems and structures into the functions of relevant government agencies, employers and union bodies and civil society groups.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT

Major milestones included establishing the Child Labour Unit in 2011 by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, through which, Fiji has:

- Strengthened child labour provisions in labour legislation, education and child welfare laws
- Regulated the Fiji List of Hazardous Occupations Prohibited to Children

- Implemented a centralised database and a system of child labour referrals, inspection and processes which has been fully integrated into the Labour Standards and Compliance Services
- Improved Fiji's Fairtrade status through establishing a child labour monitoring and reporting system with the Fiji Sugar Corporation, Fiji Sugarcane Growers Council and the Cane Producers Association and farmers
- Established district child labour monitoring systems and processes through Inter-Agency committees.
- Conducted child labour trainings nationally and a school-based survey with the Ministry of Education to establish data of working school children.

As a result of the inspection systems and processes established by the Child Labour Unit, the Ministry has been able to:

- Withdraw forty (40) children from child labour and facilitate their reintegration into schools
- Prevent one hundred and seven (107) children from dropping out of school and engaging in child labour through counselling and monitoring
- Charge three (3) employers for employing children in the hazardous work. These cases are before the Employment Relations Tribunal for adjudication.

Fiji is currently in the process of finalising the National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour in Fiji, targeted to be presented to cabinet for endorsement in August, 2013. The recent US Department of State Trafficking In Persons Report 2013 recognised and commended the work of the Trafficking Units of the Police and Immigration - and the Child Labour Unit - for their efforts on training stakeholders on trafficking and collaborating to bring traffickers to justice. Officers from all three units have benefitted from trafficking training at the ILO International Training Centre in Turin and locally.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Fiji Ministry of Education has focused on improving the quality of formal education curriculum through the introduction of two new enterprise

education courses into the TVET Basic Skills Employment Training programme for all secondary school students in Fiji. These are the Know About Business (ILO) training modules and Start Your Own Business training modules. Know About Business (KAB) is being piloted to be integrated into the Fiji formal education system through TVET Basic Skills Employment Training programme for all secondary school students. The Start Your Own Business (SYOB) training course led by the Ministry of Education aims to provide children in vocational courses at secondary schools with business and entrepreneurial skills and was rolled out nationally in 2012.

FIJI ISLANDS BUREAU OF STATISTICS

Another major milestone of Fiji TACKLE's work has been the integration of a Child Labour Module into Fiji's Labour Force Survey (2010) led by the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics and incorporating child labour indicators in the Agricultural Census (2009).

FIJI COMMERCE AND EMPLOYERS FEDERATION (FCEF) AND FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS AND TEACHERS UNION

With the ILO Social Partners - the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF) and Fiji Trades Union Congress and Fiji Teachers Union, efforts have focused on mainstreaming child labour concerns into the work of the Federation and the Unions through the appointment of Child Labour Focal Points, strengthening of workplace-based policies, and training of more than 500 workers and employer representatives. The Federation conducted training on child labour and codes of conduct, promoted CSR programmes to support children's education, reviewed and locally adapted Child Labour Employers Guide Books, and incorporated child labour as an area of concern to be tackled by the Federation.

The Fiji Trades Union Congress and Fiji Teachers Union implemented a direct action programme preventing over 500 children at-risk from engaging in child labour, providing them with education and

counselling support; established over 30 school-based child labour monitoring systems; conducted community outreach campaigns to 130 families to create awareness on the child labour provisions in the labour law. In addition, the Fiji Teachers Union has collaborated with the Fijian Teachers Association under the Fiji Teachers Confederation to launch a joint action plan to eliminate child labour.

BUILDING CAPACITY OF TRI-PARTITE PLUS PARTNERS

A main area of the work of TACKLE has been on building the capacity of tri-partite partners, including civil society, community based organisations, media and academia.

Child Labour Research training by Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) was organised for government authorities, social partners, civil society, media and academia. Child Labour training was also conducted by the TACKLE Project Advisory Committee in the five major divisions throughout the country for all Labour Inspectors, Labour & OSH Officers, divisional Welfare Officers, Education & FIBOS officers and workers and employers representatives.

A total of thirty representatives from Fiji have participated in child labour specialised training programmes at the ILO-International Training Centre in Turin focused on labour inspection, policies and practices; child labour and education; the labour dimensions of trafficking; hazardous child labour in agriculture; reporting on the Child Labour Conventions; statistical tools for the analysis of child labour and youth employment data; entrepreneurship; labour market data collection and analysis; and investigating forced labour and trafficking.

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PILOT DEMONSTRATION MODELS AND DIRECT ACTION

TACKLE aims to withdraw children from child labour, prevent vulnerable children entering child labour and give priority to addressing children in, or at risk of child labour through education and training interventions. These interventions are aimed to develop demonstration models of good practice which can be replicated by governments and other relevant bodies in on-going programmes, and can include:

- Formal education and training interventions aimed at withdrawing children from child labour
- Formal education and training interventions aimed at preventing children from entering child labour
- Non-formal education programmes for out-of-school children in child labour
- Skills- training programmes for older children in or at-risk of being involved in child labour
- Programmes meeting the needs of particularly disadvantaged children
- To develop pilot demonstration models, three direct action programmes were implemented from 2011 to 2013.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO TACKLE CHILD LABOUR AND POVERTY IN SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

This action programme aimed to build the capacity of squatter (informal) communities to address child labour issues and remove 200 children from hazardous child labour. The implementing agency, People's Community Network has been successful in:

- Establishing a community-based child labour monitoring system. This involves the identification of children through community representatives or peer mentors trained as part of the programme, and referral of these children to the organisation. Monitoring officers from PCN are then sent out to investigate the cases and enter children's details in to the Direct Beneficiaries Monitoring and Reporting System.
- Providing training on child labour and 'barefoot counselling skills' for Peer Mentors who provide the initial contact with children.
- Identifying and supporting the withdrawal of over 200 children from hazardous work. The organisation has put over 100 children back in school and provided on-going monitoring and counselling.
- Piloting for the first time in Fiji a bridging programme for out of school children in child labour and at risk. A curriculum was developed and teachers recruited to coordinate the programme. The lessons learnt from the bridging programme were shared with education stakeholders at a public forum in 2012 to generate discussions on the need for a national alternative education strategy for out-of-school children in child labour or at-risk.
- Organising skills and income-generating training courses for participants, especially mothers from informal settlements.



ELIMINATING THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR: PREVENTING AND REMOVING CHILDREN FROM COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN FIJI

This action programme aimed to prevent 100 children at-risk from engaging in child labour, target 6000 children through a preventative school-based approach and withdraw 50 children from commercial sexual exploitation. Faced with many challenges, the implementing agency was able to:

- Identify children for prevention and withdrawal from CSEC and develop child care plans which have included providing these children with on-going counselling support, and participation in life-skills training. In Suva, children targeted for prevention and withdrawal received literacy, numeracy and life- skills training as part of a 4-week bridging programme.
- Assist children targeted for withdrawal with visits to the STI clinic and coordinate counselling sessions with Peer Mentors. In most cases these children have called the project team for advice at all hours of the day and night, highlighting the challenging nature of the project and the need for more decentralised counselling services.
- Train Peer Mentors to monitor and provide counselling services to targeted children and establish a committee of stakeholders to advocate against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

With technical support from TACKLE and in collaboration with the MOE, Save the Children has assisted schools develop school-based child protection policies to reduce risks and vulnerabilities that lead to drop-out and exploitation of children. Over 100 teachers and MOE staff were trained on child protection and child labour issues and developing school-based child protection policies. Twenty six schools have since developed school-based child protection policies and all forty schools appointed school Child Protection Officers.

EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT AND REMOVE CHILDREN FROM CHILD LABOUR

In November 2011, a major action programme to contribute to the elimination of child labour through strengthening institutions and creating systems and structures to prevent children from being engaged in child labour was launched by the Fiji Trades Union Congress and Fiji Teachers Union. The action programme aimed to empower families and communities, directly targeting 300 children for prevention from engaging in child labour and providing them with educational support through a school-based approach targeting 15 schools. The action programme has been successful in:

- Preventing over 500 children at-risk from engaging in child labour by providing them with educational and counselling support. Students were unable to meet school fees as low as \$7 FJD per school term and many had accumulated arrears over the past years which were cleared by the project. Almost 80 per cent of those assisted were from farming communities with no stable or regular source of income. They were from families that practiced barter system amongst the community they lived in. Characteristics of risk factor included children from single parent families who were either deserted by their mother or father; families affected by expiry of land leases or recent natural disasters; children living with aged grandparents; family with a higher number of young children; adults who were not working at all; lived in conditions with no proper housing facilities, electricity or water source. Focal points reported that they had to visit parents at home due to students missing school due to the inability to provide lunches, school uniforms and books. The project played an important role in the society to retain students at school due to the increased poverty rate in the country, high unemployment, mass job redundancies, and the growing cost of living in Fiji.
- Conducting child labour training workshops with 33 schools and trade union members. Youth Committee and Women's Committees of the FTUC were sensitised on the issue and had resolved to



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include in their annual work plan some activities to assist in the elimination of child labour.

- Appointing 80 Child Labour Focal Points. These Child labour focal points were trained on the identification of students who were at risk of dropping out of school and how to counsel parents and students who may become victims of child labour. The appointed school teachers assisted in the monitoring of academic performance of students who were part of the project.
- Sensitizing 130 families to child labour issues and improving their understanding of the law. Parents were informed on their responsibilities regarding children's education, the kind of work children could be engaged in, and the role of parents in eliminating child labour as many had been unaware of local legislations and international conventions on child labour.
- Coordinating a national poster competition to raise awareness amongst the students about their role on child labour and generate interest amongst schools to recognise the fact that child labour was a growing problem in Fiji and must be addressed at school level.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING MECHANISMS AND COORDINATION

The TACKLE project enhanced the knowledge base and networks on child labour and education, created mechanisms for knowledge sharing, particularly of the knowledge generated through the project, supported child labour research, mobilised social partners and civil society to build their role in national dialogue and advocacy on child labour and raised awareness on issues related to child labour and applicable laws.

Research studies were completed on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Survey; Children working on the Street; Children working in Rural & Agricultural Communities; Children working in Informal Settlements & Squatter Communities; and children working in schools.

The Child labour network was coordinated and information shared through Information Sessions; Symposiums; Stakeholder Dialogues and National Child Labour Forums.

The first Child Labour Forum in December 2008 and mid-term Forum in 2009 developed and reviewed the Child Labour Action Matrix. The National Child Labour Forum held in February 2010 supported the development of action programmes. In collaboration with the MOL, a Child Labour Forum was held in May 2012 to contribute to the development of a Fiji National Action Plan to eliminate the worst forms of child labour including trafficking. The Child Labour Forum held in 2013 launched a DVD on child labour, shared lessons learnt and documented good practices.

World Day Against Child Labour on June 12, has since 2009, been coordinated by Project Advisory Committee members and stakeholders. Activities to mark the day have included training workshops conducted by FTUC & FEF, oratory and poster competitions by the Ministry of Labour, Sports Days by People's Community Network, and youth activities by Save the Children. The media have played a key role in putting child labour on the national agenda by the national and international media coverage on child labour related issues.

Child Labour and Development Course for Post-Graduate University Students was undertaken with the University of the South Pacific and provided as a development studies special topic course. A literature review on child labour in the Pacific and student work on child labour issues and strategies in Solomon Islands, PNG and Fiji were presented at a public forum, attended by USP students, representatives from government and NGOs, and the general public.

TACKLE IN THE PACIFIC

Additional technical support included:

- Child Labour ratification training workshop conducted in July 2010 for tri-partite partners from selected Pacific Island Countries including Solomon Islands, PNG, Kiribati, Samoa, Tuvalu, Republic of Marshall Islands and Fiji.
- Social Dialogue and Child Labour training for trade unions in the Pacific region conducted in February 2011, representing Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, PNG, Vanuatu and Fiji.
- Coordinated design, funding and monitoring of Mini programme on “Targeting Children Working in Child Labour as Street Vendors” implemented by the Samoa Council of Trade Unions in 2011 as part of World Day of Child Labour activities.
- Coordinated design, funding and monitoring of Mini-programme on “Child Labour Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour through Organising in the Informal Sector and Awareness Raising” implemented by the Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions implemented in 2011 as part of World Day of Child Labour activities.
- Coordinated design, funding and implementation of Child labour research projects and awareness forums conducted with national partners in 2011 and 2012 motivate support for action against child labour in Tuvalu and Kiribati.
- Coordinated design, funding and implementation of research studies on child labour conducted in PNG in 2010-2011 and report launched in 2012.
- Coordinated design, funding and implementation of Research studies on trafficking and child domestic work and other forms of child labour in PNG designed and currently being implemented in 2012-2013.

SCREAM CAMP



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CHAPTER TWO

CHILD LABOUR

MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO FIGHT CHILD LABOUR

EPELI Duve was reported missing at sea on July 2, 2013, while out on a fishing trip with two older gentlemen. He was only 14-years-young and had lost his father at sea two years ago during a diving incident.

Sadly, his disappearance received little attention. No one asked why he was out at sea on a day when the weather office had warned mariners against strong winds and harsh seas.

The media reported on the ordeal of the 60-year-old survivor who swam for four days before being rescued - and follow up news two weeks later - reported there were still no sign of the missing fishermen

Epeli's tragic story rings home a grim reality - that pervasive poverty is both a main cause and consequence of child labour. A child staying up all night on a fishing boat is another common example of hazardous work involved in child labour.

It also reflects the finding of a recent ILO report that domestic work was not recognised as a form of child labour in many countries because of the blurred relationship with employing family.

The child is "working, but is not considered as a worker and although the child lives in a family setting, she or he is not treated like a family member".

This familial and legal "care vacuum" disguises an "exploitative arrangement", often characterised by long working hours, lack of personal freedom and sometimes hazardous working conditions. The hidden nature of their situation makes them difficult to protect.

SPOTLIGHT ON CHILDREN IN DOMESTIC WORK

ON June 12 this year, to mark World Day Against Child Labour, the International Labour Organisation called for concerted and joint action at national and international levels to eliminate child labour in domestic work.

An estimated 10.5 million children worldwide - most of them underage - are working as domestic workers in people's homes, in hazardous and sometimes slavery-like conditions.

Six and a half million of these child labourers are aged between five and 14.

More than 71 per cent are girls.

According to the latest figures in a new ILO report titled Ending Child Labour in Domestic Work, children work in the homes of a third party or employer, carrying out tasks such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, gardening, collecting water, looking after other children and caring for the elderly.

“You have the urban squatter environment where people are living from hand to mouth. The environment they live in is not conducive to doing school work because of overcrowding and they lack basic facilities ”

Vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual violence and abusive working conditions, they are often isolated from their families, hidden from the public eye and become highly dependent on their employers.

Many risk being commercially sexually exploited.

The report also estimated that an additional five million children, who are above the minimum legal age of work in their countries, are involved in paid or unpaid domestic work globally.

The report calls for improved data collection and statistical tools so that the true extent of the problem can be ascertained.

It also presses for governments to ratify and implement ILO Convention 138, concerning the minimum age for admission to

employment and ILO Convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour.

However, it stresses that domestic work is an important source of employment, especially for millions of women.

This has been recognised in the landmark ILO Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers which, the report says, should also be promoted as part of the strategy to eliminate child labour in domestic work.

Domestic workers of all ages are increasingly performing a vital task in many economies.

We need to ensure a new respect for their rights and to empower domestic workers and their representative organisations.

An essential aspect of this new approach involves tackling child labour.



Nanise Bulouvere with her children Viritariki Buli, left, Meciusela Vuli and Taufa Lisala (back) in Ba. Picture: BALJEET SINGH

SURVIVOR RECALLS ORDEAL

A BA fisherman swam about 10 kilometres for two days before being rescued by a group of fishermen on Thursday morning.

And still missing at sea are two others — a father of six young children and a 14-year-old.

Rupeni Nakaseva, 50, looked exhausted. Weak and worn out, his voice was barely

audible as he related how huge waves battered him around in the open sea. He carries injuries caused by coral and bruises on his body.

He said the group left Ba on Tuesday morning for a fishing trip on a fibreglass boat. The boat capsized about 4pm that afternoon.

That was the last time he saw one of his companions, Josevata Bona Volivoli, 37, who had just recovered from a diving incident that left him bedridden for about two months. Also missing is Epeli Duve, 14, whose father died at sea a few years ago. In an interview from his hospital bed in Lautoka, the 50-year-old said he never gave up hope even though the swim to shore was a nightmare.

“When we started to swim to shore, I looked back and only saw (Epeli) Duve following me,” he said. “There was no sign of Bona.”

“I then requested Duve to go back and look for Bona while I tried to swim ashore to get assistance. Little did I know that was the last time I’d talk to him.

“After hours of swimming, I came to a reef but I could not stand as I was too weak.

“I then floated for hours on the shallow water near the reef waiting for assistance. I stayed like that until I was rescued by some fishermen on Thursday morning.”

Mr Nakaseva did not respond to questions on whether he was aware of the strong wind warning issued by the weather office.

He said the sea was calm when they left Ba.

“But it changed and got worse when we went further out to sea.

“After our boat had capsized, we tried to overturn it but were unsuccessful.”

The fibre glass boat and 60-horse power engine belonged to Mr Nakaseva. He said the sea had been the main source of income for his family over the years, as it was for the Volivoli family. A distraught Nanise Bulouvere said her husband was the sole breadwinner.

She explained that Mr Volivoli had just recovered from an injury suffered while using the underwater breathing apparatus (compressor) which kept him bedridden for

more than two months.

“This was his first fishing trip after that injury and we never imagined such a disaster would haunt our family,” said Mrs Boluvere.

“He always wanted to give his best to support his family, especially the children.

“Through fishing, he was able to provide education for five children and put food on our table.

“The past two days without him, we have been having tea and cassava at every meal.”

She was, however, hopeful that her husband would return home safely.

“I have faith in the Almighty Lord that we will safely reunite.

“We have been praying for him and we believe that the Lord will bring him home since he has unfinished business in looking after our children.”

The missing fishermen hail from Marou Village in Naviti, Yasawa, but reside at Badrau, Ba. Grandmother Eta Katonivualiku was also trying to come to terms with her grandson's whereabouts when approached by The Fiji Times at their home on Thursday afternoon.

“It is difficult to believe that my grandson is missing at sea,” she said.

“He is only 14 years old and has a lot to offer to our family after the death of his father some years back.

“His dad also died at sea and I don't want a similar fate for my grandson.

“I am hopeful that the Lord will help save my boy.”

Police spokeswoman Ana Naisoro confirmed the search continues for the two missing fishermen.

BOAT FOUND, TWO STILL MISSING AT SEA

THE fibre glass boat belonging to a group of Ba fishermen who went missing last week was found at Tabuqarau reef near Kese Village in the Yasawas.

One of the occupants of the boat was

rescued last week while two more remain missing at sea.

The search for the 34-year-old man and a 14-year-old was called off yesterday by the Divisional Police Commander Western at approximately 5pm but is expected to resume soon.

FIGHTING CHILD LABOUR

Yesterday was a special day for many reasons. Apart from the fact that the Flying Fijians defeated the New Zealand Classic All Blacks at the ANZ Stadium in Suva, it was a day set aside to observe World Day Against Child Labour.

The International Labour Organization says “hundreds of millions of girls and boys throughout the world are engaged in work that deprives them of adequate education, health, leisure and basic freedoms, violating their rights.

“Of these children, more than half are exposed to the worst forms of child labour such as work in hazardous environments, slavery, or other forms of forced labour, illicit activities such as drug trafficking and prostitution, as well as involvement in armed conflict,” it says.

The ILO launched the first World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 “as a way to highlight the plight of these children”.

It is a day set aside to observe the campaign against child labour around the globe and this is reflected in the “number of ratifications of ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour and ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for employment”.

The ILO says the day “provides an opportunity to gain further support of individual governments and that of the ILO social partners, civil society and others, including schools, youth and women's groups as well as the media, in the campaign against child labour”.

The revelation then that about 500 children in Fiji were found to be engaged in the worst form of child labour is a major concern.

This was confirmed by the ILO's first

comprehensive study conducted over five years.

The program dubbed Tackling Child Labour through Education highlighted that children under the age of 15 were engaged in the worst form of child labour, including sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, begging and hazardous work while many more worked below minimum age employment.

It was a comprehensive study that touched on the main reasons these children engaged in such work. And this included poverty, family breakdown, education, unemployment, internal migration, crisis situations, among other reasons.

The fact that we know we aren't immune to this level of exploitation should be incentive enough for us to do something about it.

It is important though that we first understand what child labour is and we work around ensuring our children are given an opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Acceptance of this fact is the first step towards fighting it, and that should be good for Fiji.

HIGH INCIDENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

A REPORT has revealed that the scale of child labour in the country is high. Of the 214 children surveyed by the International Labour Organisation, 170 were found to be in child labour including children below 12 years.

The majority of children engaged in child labour were between 15 and 17 years old, said the International Labour Organisation.

Labour Minister Filipe Bole said he could not comment on the issue as he was yet to see the ILO report. In its December 2010 report on Child Labour in Fiji, the ILO said the majority of children in child labour were engaged in hazardous work followed by children below 15 years in non-hazardous work. Children were also found engaged in the 'unconditional' worst forms of child labour, namely sexual exploitation and begging.



“Street children in child labour were found to be engaged in a wide variety of activities,” the report stated.

“The most common types of work are pushing wheelbarrows in and around the

In the urban areas, some children missed out on school to collect and sell scrap metal or work as wheelbarrow boys, supermarket packers in small-scale businesses

Suva Market, street vending and scrap metal collection.”

“Other types of work they are currently engaged in are collecting scrap metal, selling sweets and vegetables on the streets, shining shoes, loading minivans and unloading trucks, market vending and begging.”

“Younger children (below 15 years) tend to be vendors on either the street or in the Suva Market while scrap metal collection, wheelbarrow pushing and sex work predominate for the older cohorts of street children in child labour.”

The report said as expected, the Suva-Nausori corridor, where most of the business opportunities were present, had the widest variety of job types.

It said street children in the Western and Northern divisions were employed within a smaller range of employment types with the predominance of car washing and street or market vending.

“Of the total number of street children in Fiji, 33 children stated that they worked over 12 hours per day and 87 children worked eight to 12 hours per day.”

“The most common form of work for children below 12 years and between 12 to 14 years was as market vendors and scrap metal scavengers.

“Street children in child labour between 15 to 17 years were most commonly involved in hazardous work.”

The report said 10 children involved in the unconditional worst forms of child labour were below 12 years and 15 to 17 years old and

were engaged in sex work and begging.

Challenges faced to tackle child labour include low funds and limited resources, lack of programs for the children, lack of family support and supportive attitude towards children.

“Children themselves do not want to stop working as they enjoy earning money and working/living on the streets,” the report said.

“Street children in child labour are aware of the power of money and want to continue to earn that money.”

THE COST OF CHILD LABOUR

STUDENTS from 10 schools attended a ceremony marking World Day Against Child Labour at the Suva Civic Centre yesterday.

The theme for 2013 is ‘No to Child Labour in Domestic Work’.

Chief guest and acting permanent secretary for Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Samuela Namosimalua highlighted the issue of child labour in Fiji.

“The consequences of child labour on the life opportunities of those affected are difficult to measure. No price can be placed on the cost of lost childhood, or the psychological and emotional damage suffered by children trapped in child labour, particularly hazardous child labour,” Mr Namosimalua said.

He said while the awareness on the issue of commercial child labour had “probably never been greater than it is today”, children missing school to attend to domestic work was a problem often overlooked.

“Many a time, we hear that some children have to stay home and away from school to look after their younger siblings.”

Mr Namosimalua urged members of the public to report any instances of child labour to the Labour Ministry.

The Ministry of Education-organised oratory and poster competition among primary and secondary school students were judged and prizes were also awarded at the event.

The Ministry of Labour with the assistance of the International Labour Organization (ILO) has recorded a concerning 146 cases of child labour in Fiji since 2011, including 24 in the first five months of this year.

Under the Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP), the minimum employment age in Fiji is 15.

CHILD LABOUR WARNING

SUGARCANE farmers associations can be deregistered if any form of child labour is found in their farming areas during the next crushing season.

Sugar Tribunal Commissioner Timothy Brown said furthermore legal action could be taken against farmers who indulge in this form of labour.

Mr Brown said they received allegations of such forms of labour among the Lautoka and Rarawai cane producers and that this would not be entertained.

“We have a memorandum of understanding between the Sugarcane Cutting Gang Association under which all sugarcane cutters must be above the age of 18 years old,” said Mr Brown.

“We have also partnered with the Ministry of Labour in ensuring that this crime is put to a stop.”

Mr Brown advised farmers to refrain from engaging children in cane cutting because it was a heavy form of labour not fit for children.

“It is different in cases where farmers like to teach their young ones how to handle farms but for those cases where children are labouring for the purpose of money is really wrong.

“Children belong in schools and they should not be used as a means of getting money.”

Mr Brown said they were also educating farmers on the harms of using weedicides such as paraquat since they often had adverse effects on the natural environment.

“We have been doing awareness programs and informing farmers of the need to keep a



balance in their ecosystem so that they can have a healthy environment which is needed for high sugar productivity,” he said.



CHILDREN ENGAGED IN THE WORST FORM OF LABOUR

ABOUT 500 children in Fiji have been found to be engaged in the worst form of child labour.

This was confirmed by the International Labour Organization's first comprehensive study conducted over a period of five years.

The program dubbed Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE) highlighted that children under the age of 15 were engaged in the worst form of child labour, including sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, begging and hazardous work while many more worked below minimum age employment.

The comprehensive study also revealed the main reasons these children engaged in such work was poverty, family breakdown, education, unemployment, internal migration, crisis situations, among other reasons.

The research also offered lessons learnt from current action programs to withdraw and prevent children from these types of work.

One such lesson was the fact that many of the children dropping out of school.

The lack of social support was also one issue highlighted in the report - which stated that relevant education programs for child labourers and out-of-school children posed a challenge to effectively removing children from the worst forms of child labour.

TACKLE is a global program aimed at tackling child labour through education in 11 countries across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, including Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

It is funded by the European Commission and supported by the ACP Group of States.

Working with the ILO's tri-partite partners and civil society groups, the program formulates, implements and enforces policies and programs to fight child labour. The program works through four strategic areas: improving the legal framework; strengthening institutional capacity to implement child labour strategies; developing effective demonstration models targeting child labour and enhancing the knowledge base

215 MILLION IN CHILD LABOUR

AN estimated 215 million children worldwide are involved in child labour and more than half of this number are victims of its worst form, according to a recent report by the International Labour Organization.

Of this figure, 127 million are boys and 88 million are girls.

The figures were revealed to a group of students during World Day Against Child Labour celebrations in Savusavu on Wednesday. In his address, the Ministry of Labour's mediator Northern, Sadrug Ramagimagi, said the children concerned should be in school.

"By entering the market prematurely, they are deprived of this critical education and training that can help to lift them, their families and communities out of the cycle of poverty," Mr Ramagimagi said.

"Child labourers may also be exposed to physical, psychological or moral suffering that can cause long-term damage to their lives."

Mr Ramagimagi said the ILO was pursuing legislative and policy reforms to eliminate child labour in domestic work and the provision of decent work conditions and appropriate protection to young workers.

He said the ministry's child labour unit was working on approaches to deal with child labour in Fiji.

“Firstly, the direct approach in withdrawing children from child labour who are below 15 years and admitting them into the school system and with the assistance of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Police Department, the Ministry of Education and the non-government organisations, these children are given their basic right to education.

“Secondly, in a situation where the children who are 15 years and above and are not willing to go back to school, they are registered and trained under the National Employment Centre.”

Mr Ramagimagi said this opportunity would ensure that children graduate with skills and qualifications to be able to fit into the employment sector.

On the third approach, technical vocational centres within the secondary school system also educate children in a wide range of technical and vocational training.

CHILD LABOUR AWARENESS

IT IS important for employers in the Northern Division to know issues of child labour, says Fiji Commerce and Employment Federation CEO Nesbitt Hazelman.

Speaking at the Child Labour Workshop in Savusavu yesterday, Mr Hazelman said there had been cases where employers failed to fully understand and differentiate child labour issues.

“This is the first time for us to bring the program to the North and it is an attempt to pursue a strategy of awareness from security forces, government departments and employers,” he said.

“The aim of this workshop is to help employers in the North know how to identify issues that surround child labour and when does it breach or become a child labour.” He said it was important for employers in the division to know such issues to prevent them from breaching labour laws.

Child labour is an offence against fundamental principles and rights at work

TEACHERS FIGHT CHILD LABOUR

A WORKSHOP aimed at highlighting the role of teachers in battling child labour in Fiji began on Monday.

The workshop, hosted by the Council of Pacific Education (COPE) and Education International (EI), involved the Fiji Teachers Union and the Fijian Teachers Association.

Speaking at the event yesterday was Marie Fatiaki from ILO’s Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE) program, who said child labour was an issue that must be addressed.

“In the most recent global report on child labour that was released in 2010, the number of child labourers in the world had decreased from the previous report, which was released in 2006, from 215 million to 218 million,” Mrs Fatiaki said.

She explained that although people tended to use the words “child labour” very loosely, it had a very specific definition.

“It’s work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous or harmful to children and also work that interferes with children’s schooling.

“Either it deprives them of the opportunity to attend school, which means they are in full-time employment and are unable to go to school because of it, or they have to go to work and go to school at the same time and it ends up having a negative impact on their schooling.”

Mrs Fatiaki clarified that a “child” was someone who was under the age of 18 years.

At present in Fiji, the minimum age for work is 15 years.

STUDENTS CELEBRATE WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR , JUNE 12th 2012 / 2013



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STUDENTS POSTERS ON CHILD LABOUR







CHAPTER THREE

POVERTY & UNEMPLOYMENT

POVERTY in Fiji continues to grow at a worrying rate due to an economic downturn, the situation made worse by natural disasters that devastated subsistence agriculture and caused a loss in income for farmers and casual workers.

The floods and hurricanes of recent years also seriously affected marginal households and communities already on the edge of poverty.

This resulted in people thinking up and resorting to new ways of earning money. Nowhere is this poverty more pronounced than in the country's rural areas.

At one stage, in the Western Division, which has the highest population of Fiji's poor, an unheard of trade began. Rural stores began the sale of chicken heads as a source of protein for those who could not afford any kind of meat.

Lately, the Fiji authorities had to confront the scrap metal theft issue. While the scrap metal trade is a legal business, the rate and intensity at which people, including children, took to it, revealed in real terms an entirely new phenomenon - any kind of metal, scrap or not, that was not nailed down was dislodged and sold to scrap metal dealers.

At the Vatuloula gold mine, the police were called in to disperse hundreds of scavengers who had set up camp at an old dump site within the mine premises. The foragers, the overwhelming majority from Ba and Korolevu (rural areas), included entire families with children as young

as breast-feeding babies. They set up makeshift camps and scavenged day and night for any kind of used metal in the "scrap metal paradise".

Children didn't go to school and even breastfeeding mothers were digging.

But the foraging for scrap metal was not limited to such sites. In the towns and cities, thieves cut through power and telephone cables. The damage to the power and communication infrastructure ran into thousands of dollars. Eventually, the authorities set up taskforces of various departments and ministries to maintain a strict control of the scrap metal trade.

Other popular cash-raising activities that continue to draw children include bottle selling and collecting plastic bottles for recycling, while many continue to work in family-oriented activities in plantations and sugar cane farms.

The Fiji Bureau of Statistics figures for 2012 show that 43 per cent of people in rural areas live in poverty. Nationally, the figure is about 35 per cent.

As of 2012, a total 11,860 youths remain unemployed in Fiji, although there have been fresh attempts by the government to arrest this figure. For example, the government's Northern Development Program for Vanua Levu (the country's second largest island) shows that it has managed to provide for the livelihood of 22,000 people via this program – about 18 per cent of a total population of about 135,000.

In the urban areas, some children missed out on school to collect and sell scrap metal or work as wheelbarrow boys, supermarket packers in small-scale businesses

The Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation has also expressed concern at the alarming number of high school and tertiary graduates who fail to secure employment each year. Official figures reveal that an average 15,000 children leave school each year - and only a third find employment.

MAD METAL RUSH

THE scrap metal headache took a new twist this week as reports revealed that police were called in to disperse hundreds of scavengers who had set up camp at an old dump site within the Vatukoula Gold Mine premises.

The foragers, who came all the way from Ba and Korolevu in Tailevu, included families with children as young as breast-feeding babies.

They began arriving about a month ago, armed with digging equipment and materials for a makeshift camp.

And residents say the hunt for metal scraps became so competitive, the scavengers worked day and night.

Police assistant spokesman Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri confirmed that police were assisting the company's security personnel in maintaining peace after a resident who complained about damage to his plantation was terrorised. He said the situation was now under control.

The officer-in-charge of the military in Lautoka, Major Petero Tale, also confirmed that he was made aware of the situation.

"We were told because of the number of people who were involved. Fortunately the security and police were able to contain and

bring the situation under control," he said.

Resident Pasepa Kamoe said Vatukoula was a scrap metal paradise and as soon as word got out that some members of the community had been given permission to dig, the "race by outsiders began".

"They lit fires at night. They worked day and night. Children didn't go to school. Even breastfeeding mothers were digging," said Mrs Kamoe, whose home was under 24-hour security on Tuesday after the mine boss put an end to the expedition.

"This dump site at Low Cost is from the 1970s where machinery, tractors were dumped, buried deep in the ground. My husband is 67 and retired and he along with several others have farmed on top of it," she said.

"That farm is our livelihood. So when they started uprooting his farm, he started complaining to the security and to the police, but both needed the company to intervene because the land belongs to the mine.

"So he went and complained to mine officials. That's when they came and saw what was really going on. The place was a mess. Just like an archeological dig site."

She said the company then called all the residents for a meeting and ordered they vacate the area.

"We had police and security outside that night because after that people got angry and destroyed our pig farms and stoned our home," Mrs Kamoe said.

A resident pointed out that the residents were to blame for abusing the "goodness of the company".

"The company had about two months ago said 'yes'. Then they put a stop to everything because people were abusing, they were getting drunk with the money they were earning and fights were breaking out in the community. They also started getting the older workers to show other dump sites where machinery and old metal were buried or discarded," she said.

"They only have themselves to blame."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

NOTHING in this world expresses total, utter defeat like a grown man crying – nothing.

Because men don't cry. They do stuff. They go to war. When they win, they pop open the champagne. When they lose, they pick up the pieces, dust themselves off and prepare for whatever war comes their way next.

They just don't cry. But Moti Chand did cry. I saw him. To be sure, there were no big crocodile tears, just a reddening of his eyes as tears welled up in them and a momentary shuddering of his body that seemed to express the dark depths of his helplessness.

Perhaps, I felt he cried because he reminded me too much of my own vulnerability to pain and how I would despise it even more if such an experience were to happen to me. But Moti Chand did cry. I was there. I saw it.

I had arrived in our Northern Bureau a day earlier to conduct training for our reporters in the office there, a quarter yearly assignment that I looked forward to with much anticipation because it allowed me to get out of the city office, even if just for a few days.

Just before lunch, a man dropped by and said he wanted to talk one of the reporters.

He sat quietly in a chair by the door and waited patiently for the reporter to finish what she was doing. It turned out they knew each other.

As they huddled quietly around a computer, I walked over to them and the reporter introduced her guest as Moti Chand, a father of four girls who was seeking a small piece of land on which to build a house for his family.

Wanting to find out more about his situation, I asked him how he had fared so far. Haltingly, in a soft voice, he explained.

MR CHAND lives in a leaking tin and wood shack with his wife and four daughters. His wife works two days a week as a housemaid earning \$10, or sometimes \$20, a day, depending on how well-

off her employer for the day is or how much work needs to be done.

Two of his daughters go to school, one in primary school and another in secondary school. The two younger ones are not of school age. Mr Chand does odd jobs for a few dollars a day but today he's in the office because he needs \$20 to pay off his fifth form daughter's school fee arrears. If he doesn't find the money, she'll not be able to attend class the next day. She won't be allowed into school until the arrears are paid off.

He's gone through the process of lodging an application for a piece of land but the authorities tell him he'll have to wait in line. He's been waiting in line for two years because there's no land available where he wants to build his house. So he waits.

In the meantime, he lets the reporter know he'd like to buy a kerosene lamp so his daughter can study after sundown. There's no electricity in his shack, no piped water. She studies in the shade of a mango tree immediately after school because she can't do her homework in the dark.

Preferably, he says, he'd love a battery-powered lamp because he won't have to keep buying kerosene. But a battery-powered lamp is expensive. Then he turns to me and says, "Sir, I work hard. I do this for my family. God knows."

I feel so terrible that a man with so much pain should address me as 'sir'. I don't feel worthy at all, not one bit, of the lofty title that he addresses me by. I look at him and wonder where he's going to get the money for his daughter's fees or the money for the lamp.

And I feel even more terrible that the money his wife makes in a day is the amount of money I was about to spend on lunch.

And for a little while, inside, I cry for his helplessness. And I cry at my own helplessness to do anything about his.

By **IOWANE BURESE**
CHIEF OF STAFF FIJI TIMES, July 2013



Nowhere else to go ... Asenaca Valebuliti outside the tents in which her family lives.

PAIN LIVES HERE

AN emotionally-scarred father is struggling to make a living and meet the demands of solo parenting four children, his family life story as fragile as the shelter his children call home.

Eremasi Kunikoro, 32, is an out-of-work young man faced with the daunting daily challenge of providing for his children on scant income and at the same time tending to a bedridden son who requires almost round-the clock-attention.

At Nadelei Koro Naba Dua, Vatukoula, Mr Kunikoro and his children live in little makeshift shelters made of tarpaulin roof and grass reed walls.

The father of seven said he settled in the area because he had nowhere to go after losing his job late last year.

The precariousness of his family situation is shared in the loss of a son in 2011 to blood sepsis and the separation from his wife and two children in 2010 because she was diagnosed with brain tumor and had to relocate to Lautoka for treatment.

An aspiring beekeeper, he said the floods last year and damage caused by Cyclone Evan destroyed the farm he was working on.

Looking at the continuous onslaught of bad luck, the Lomaiviti man maintains his spirits and looks at his life as a test of faith.

"Maybe God is trying to teach me something," he offered.

"All I can do right now is pray for help. I have to be resilient. I have to keep believing that one day things will get better."

Reforms to target rural poverty rise

Tevita Vuibau Tuesday, August 21, 2012

A REPORT on poverty launched yesterday shows rural poverty has absolutely increased and could be even worse by now.

Using statistics provided by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the report found that 43 per cent of people in rural areas were living in poverty. This is a major difference from urban areas that had a much lower rate at 18 per cent.

The report titled Poverty in Fiji: Changes 2002-03 to 2008-09 was authored by Dr Wadan Narsey and sponsored by AusAID.

"One of the strong conclusions of this report is that rural poverty has absolutely increased and, of course, by now it is even worse than what it was in 2008-09," Dr Narsey said.

"Basically the conditions in rural areas have been absolutely deteriorating."

Dr Narsey said indicators of wellbeing like average household incomes supported this conclusion.

“If you adjust for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 27 per cent Fiji wide, what you can see nationally is that urban average household income increased by 19 per cent.

“And rural average household income declined by 13 per cent, this is taking aggregates in urban areas and aggregates in rural areas.”

Dr Narsey said the rural urban gap had also increased from -31 per cent to -50 per cent and this was contributing to the rural-urban drift.

“This is bad news for everyone who wants to foster rural development because as long as that gap in average households income is there the rural people are going to keep moving from rural to urban areas.

“At the end of the day everyone wants a decent standard of living for their families and if they see that things are better in urban areas they are going to move.

“We have to devote the bulk of our poverty alleviation resources and the capital funds to rural areas to reverse this rural poverty decline.”

Permanent secretary for Poverty Alleviation Govind Sami said the ministry was looking at reforms and other new policies to address the issue of rural poverty.

UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS

A TOTAL of 11,860 youths remain unemployed in Fiji.

This is according to latest figures released by the Ministry of Labour’s National Employment Centre.

According to NEC, out of the 11,860 unemployed youths, 5309 were males and 6551 were females ranging from 15 years of age to 25.

Labour Minister Jone Usamate said the highest number of youths unemployed were from the Central/Eastern Division amounting to 5532 followed by 4529 in the Western Division and 1799 in the Northern Division.

Mr Usamate said the reasons, for the high number of unemployed youths were:

- * Low qualifications where a high number

of school leavers exit school at an early age;

- * Tightness in the formal employment sector of the Fijian economy; and

- * A lack of job opportunities.

He said the adverse effect of the global financial crisis, lack of creative ideas and minds, replacement of workers by technology, mismatch of labour supply and demand, no co-ordination between industries and education institutions, lack of supervision from parents, and urban migration were other factors which also led to the high unemployment rates among youths.

Mr Usamate said many of the clients registered with NEC were school leavers.

“The centre was established to provide a one stop centre for unemployed to find employment and to upskill and prepare them to enter the labour market,” he said.

Mr Usamate said since the establishment of NEC 1390 youths found employment which was 5 per cent of the total registered unemployed.

“We do not have data of those clients who have been terminated from their jobs after finding employment from NEC.”

He said unemployment was a huge challenge globally and had adverse effects on developing countries like Fiji.

Mr Usamate said the ministry under NEC provided training in areas of formal employment, self employment, foreign employment and the Fiji Volunteer Service.

“Apart from the unique feature of NEC, the ministry is closely working with various stakeholders in other regional countries within the Melanesian Spearhead Group for employment opportunities for our unemployed clients,” he said.

Mr Usamate said the ministry was inviting possible candidates for job opportunities in the United Arab Emirates.

Child labour must be a concern of national employment policies

While poverty was a main reason, a contributing factor to dropouts were parents who do not set their priorities right “either because of lack of awareness or attitude or plain laziness”

TRUTH BEHIND OUR POVERTY

Wadan Narsey (Fiji Times June 10, 2007)

WHO are the poorest in the country? Who are the largest groups of poor? How much ‘affirmative action’ resources should government give to each group to close the “poverty gap?”

In Fiji, these are politically charged questions that are asked all the time.

And politicians love to give their own answers, often without the benefit of any facts what-so-ever, to suit their own political agenda. Well, hopefully, not any more. The Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics has published two survey reports which provide hard facts to the above questions and many more.

Using the survey data, I will soon publish a new book, An Analysis of Poverty in Fiji.

Here are the highlights of my lecture at the launch of the two bureau reports written by me.

WHO ARE THE POOREST

In 1991, the national incidence of poverty in Fiji was 29 per cent (not 25 per cent as has been quoted for more than a decade) this is the percentage of Fiji’s population considered to be below the “Poverty Line”.

If we adjust the poverty lines used in the 1997 Fiji Poverty Report by the Consumer Prices Index, we get a poverty line of between \$33 and \$35 per adult per week, or about \$132 per week for a household of five persons.

The national incidence of poverty in Fiji for 2002-03 is then about 34 per cent.

But who were the groups most in poverty? More so the rural people.

Rural Fiji-Indians: 47%

Rural Others 45%

Rural Fijians 39%

Urban Fiji-Indians 26%

Urban Fijians 23%

Urban Others 12%.

It is not surprising that rural Fiji-Indians were the most in poverty, given the decline of the sugar industry, the collapse of the garments industry, and the expiry of land-leases.

Who are the largest groups of poor

While the incidence of poverty is higher (36 per cent) for all Fiji-Indians compared to all Fijians (33 per cent), note that Fijians are in the majority in terms of population. Not surprising, therefore, that Fijians have the largest share of poor people (at 53 per cent) while Fiji-Indians have a slightly smaller 44 per cent.

So, if you gave “affirmative action resources” to bridge the poverty gap only on the basis of need, Fijians would still get 54 per cent of the resources and Fiji-Indians would get 43 per cent.

Fiji does not need Poverty Alleviation Affirmative Action based on race. It is, therefore, a national tragedy that our blind politicians act as if it is only “their own” ethnic group that deserves poverty alleviation, and not the others.

Note that some 71 per cent of the poverty alleviation resources should go to the rural sector (only 29 per cent to the urban).

And that the Western Division should get about 38 per cent, and the North (which has the highest incidence of poverty among the divisions) should get 32 per cent of the resources.

We not only need a “Look North” but a “Look West” policy.

WHICH GAP FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

For decades, politicians have shouted, if you want political stability, “you must bridge the gap between Fijians and Fiji-Indians”.

But where exactly is the gap?

For the first time in Fiji’s history, the average reported household income for Fijians is shown to be higher than that for Fiji-Indians.

And if you rank Fijian and Fiji-Indian households by income per capita, then 90 per cent of the Fijian households are somewhat better-off than 90 per cent of Fiji-Indian households.

Only at the top 10 per cent of the households, do Fijian households lag behind Fiji-Indians by about 15 per cent in income per capita.

MAKING RICH FIJIANS RICHER

So if Affirmative Action has “to close the gap” for political stability, then government has to make rich Fijians even richer.

Politicians must, therefore, stop complaining that some governments’ policies were only helping the elite Fijians.

Of course, the Affirmative Action policies should not be hand-outs but reward Fijian entrepreneurship.

AND THE REAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the 2004-05 Employment and Unemployment Survey), the official rate of unemployment in Fiji is around 5 per cent - 3 per cent for Fijians and 6 per cent for Fiji-Indians. Technically, these numbers are correct survey results.

But they do not take account of the thousands and thousands of workers (mostly self-employed, family workers, or community workers) who work much less than eight hours per day, and/or who work much less than 240 days in the year.

When all this massive underemployment is taken into account, the shocking estimates for “effective unemployment” are:

Fijians 32%

Fiji-Indians 22%

All Fiji 27%.

Now we can understand the large numbers of unemployed people we see around the country.

And why thousands of people suddenly appear for police, army or security guard jobs.

Men and household work

For the first time in Fiji, there is national data to show that working women (as wage earners, salary earners, or employers) do some 15 hours extra of household work, compared to working men.

Is it any wonder that women lag behind men professionally? Where can they find the time to develop themselves professionally, or in leisure activities. If men were to do their fair share of household work, women would have on average seven to eight hours extra a week to devote to their own personal development.

Do we value our Bureau of Statistics

There are many other juicy stories in the two survey reports.

That children get into the world of work to assist in earning enough for the basic needs of the family

For example, there is data on the provincial distribution of foreign remittances, which are far greater than loans from banks to the rural areas.

There is rich data on our consumption habits, savings habits, modes of transport, daily travelling times, etc.

It is a terrible pity, therefore, that the bureau is too under-resourced to do more surveys and analysis that are taken for granted in Australia or NZ.

It is a pity that the Fiji public service for decades has refused to recognise the extremely valuable and simply irreplaceable technical contribution that the bureau staff make to the country's ability to monitor developments and formulate correct policy.

These technical bureau staff are given ranks whose salaries are three levels lower than comparable staff in other departments who do much less valuable work. These bureau staff are extremely marketable regionally and internationally, and they have been leaving in droves over the last 20 years.

They will continue to be encouraged to leave, as long as the PSC does not upgrade their positions to their appropriate levels. What a pity. For in these troubling times, with our country even more polarised ethnically and politically, we need to face facts, not our prejudices.

POVERTY IN PROVINCES

THE incidence of poverty is relatively high in the two provinces of Macuata and Cakaudrove with at least 47 per cent of people living under the poverty line.

And the situation has spurred a call for all government ministries to collectively reduce this by 7.5 per cent at the end of the year and 15 per cent by next year.

This was revealed to the Poverty Alleviation, Women and Social Welfare Minister Doctor Jiko Luveni during her visit to the north last week.

Commissioner Northern Lieutenant Colonel Ilai Moceica said poverty reduction was one of the key priorities for the region this year.

"Poverty alleviation is a cross-cutting issue and we have designed strategic plans to promote economic development in the north," Lt-Col Moceica said.

"We are working with different stakeholders to complement the vision of the Roadmap and the People's Charter. We are working with

Investment Fiji to link our domestic market to the regional and international markets for our local products including those produced at women resource centres in the north."

Lt-Col Moceica said the initiative was aligned to Pillar 8 of the People's Charter-reducing poverty to a negligible level by 2015.

MONEY TROUBLE FORCES TEENAGER HOME

The issue of school dropouts in Ra has brought to light the plight of a 16-year-old who was forced to leave high school because of financial difficulties.

Prior to the death of her father last year, Milika Sura of Togovere Village had dreams of becoming a teacher and ably supporting her family.

"My mother is unemployed so she could not afford to send me to school," she explained while attending to chores at their village home.

"I was in Form 5 last year and was really looking forward to being in sixth form this year.

"Unfortunately, my mother and I had no choice. After my father died, we could not afford the expenses of sending me to school."

Mereyani Lomawai, 50, said she wanted her daughter to return to the classroom as she knew education would secure the family a good future.

"This year was supposed to be Milika's last year in school and it really hurts me that I cannot provide educational support because of financial constraints," said Mrs Lomawai.

"I don't have any money to support my daughter's education and it always brings tears to my eyes when I see her doing household chores.

"I really want my daughter to complete her studies."

Milika attended Khalsa College in Ba last year. "My childhood dream was to become a teacher," she said.

"I am not sure what the future has in store for me but I cannot blame my mum because she is getting old and has a lot on her plate in meeting our daily needs."

Milika said she spends her days helping her mother around the house. Sometimes she goes out fishing "otherwise I help out on the small plantation we have".

She says another reason she quit school was to help her mother ensure that at least her brother would get an education.

"My brother is attending Drauniivi Public School and I don't want him to suffer the same problem I am facing now. So I want to help my mum support my brother's education," she said.

UNWANTED ORPHANS SCROUNGE FOR FOOD

ALFRED Kumar is only 17 years old but he has the calloused hands and feet of a workman three times his age.

And the visual testament of hands, tough and thick through wear, unravelled the story of two orphaned teenage lads who have lived alone for two years in a harsh Lautoka house without water, electricity and food.



Face of neglect ... Alfred Kumar in his run-down Lautoka home.

Alfred, a congenital heart patient, spends the day scrounging for food in the city. He also begs for money needed to keep his 15-year old cousin, Shavneel, a third former, in school.

Alfred explained they sourced water from a neighbour who sometimes provides them meals.

The duo's story was relayed last week to this newspaper by people living in the Waiyavi neighbourhood.

Earlier this week, Alfred sat in The Fiji Times Lautoka office in clothes worn for weeks without wash.

His eyes were blood shot and weary. He was tired, having walked from his two-bedroom sparsely furnished tin shack to the city.

He could only hold down one cream bun and a cup of tea.

"I did not eat breakfast but it's hard for me to take down food," he said.

"I can only eat a little at a time, I am so used to it," he offered as he doggy bagged the rest of the buns and bananas.

"I will take this home and keep this for Shavneel."

According to Alfred, he is the eldest of three brothers and was adopted by his mother's sister and husband from birth.

"Shavneel is my aunt's son," he said.

"My uncle died seven years ago and then my aunt also died two years ago.

"My mother remarried and they say her husband does not want us kids

"One of my brothers is with a Fijian family in Nadroga while the youngest stays with my mother but he spends at least three times a week with me and Shavneel.

"I take what people give me and I give Shavneel whatever I can. He is lucky, a church helped with his school stuff but there are so many other things he needs.

"I am lucky I haven't gotten sick and that me and Shavneel get along really well.

"We only have each other and we talk about a lot of things.

"One thing we always wonder aloud is,

*Some children
are used by
parents to beg*

‘Will our lives ever change?’

“I miss having a mother. And I also think about my brothers a lot.

“Me and Shavneel have very little and we struggle, but we always keep our hopes up that maybe one day our lives will really change.”

WE NEED A HOME

A FAMILY living on the brinks of poverty may be relocated soon to a better place for their wellbeing.

The Prasad family has been evicted twice from the land they had occupied at Kabisi, Sigatoka and Cautata in Tailevu.

Shyam Chandra Prasad, his wife Prem Lata and children Shamal, 7, and Shayal, 5, were first evicted from Kabisi in July last year when Mr Prasad’s father’s land lease expired. Mr Prasad was taken to Cautata by a farmer and offered work and a house to live in with his family.



Shamal Prasad and his sister Shayal with their parents.

But after living there for more than six months, problems arose over wages and working conditions and Mr Prasad was evicted by the farmer.

He was on the roads of Tailevu with his family and belongings when Pastor Etuate Sokiveta came to their rescue and offered them a piece of land and some building materials.

The family built a shack which has one door but no windows nor a toilet or bathroom, and it gets flooded whenever it rains.

On Tuesday, The Fiji Times highlighted the plight of Shamal and Shayal Prasad and that of their family, which resulted in people from overseas and in Fiji offering to assist them.

The Foundation for the Education of Needy Children in Fiji (FencFiji) managed to enrol Shamal in Class One at Krishna Vedic School in Kuku, Nausori.

Shamal and Shayal have cardiac problems and the two children are malnourished, with Shayal dependent on medicine for her survival.

Mrs Prasad said, “We are looking for a place to move to because the house we currently live in is not good enough for my children’s health.”

“I went to the Housing Assistance and Relief Trust in Valelevu but I got a negative response from them.”

Mrs Prasad said she was concerned about her children’s future because the house they currently lived in was unhygienic and they felt insecure.

FencFiji national coordinator, Irshad Ali said he wrote to HART on Thursday requesting to accept the Prasad family in one of its flats.

“But the family was told that they do not qualify for a flat because they are not under the social welfare assistance scheme,” he said.

“I am now urgently trying to resettle the family somewhere else so that they can live peacefully and in hygienic conditions for the wellbeing of the children.”

CHILD LABOUR A NECESSARY EVIL FOR POOR

CHILDREN are often enlisted to do their part in boosting household income because of the poverty situation in the country, a report has revealed.

The International Labour Organisation report said the poverty situation had definite repercussions on the ordinary people of the country. The report stated that the poorest households had to search for every means of income they could find to meet their basic needs.

In its December 2010 report on Child Labour in Fiji, the ILO said children were often asked to boost their families income because of the poverty situation.

As part of the survey, the ILO team visited 20 settlements in the country, surveyed 192 households and interviewed 362 children, of which 180 were working.

The report said children worked as bottle boys, shoeshine boys, wheelbarrow boys, prostitutes, house help or babysitters to support their families financially.

It said children were enlisted to help contribute to the family income because between 35 to 40 per cent of Fiji's population lived in poverty.

"Another 30 per cent live just above the poverty line and so are vulnerable to poverty," the report said.

"Fifty five per cent of those in full time employment earn wages below the poverty line and 15 per cent of Fiji's population live in over 200 squatter settlements, mostly around urban areas."

"In 2002, the poorest 30 per cent of the population earned 10.19 per cent of all incomes while the top 30 per cent earned 60.2 per cent of all incomes."

The report said 66 per cent of children who dropped out of school did so for no reasons connected with poverty.

"These issues are particularly rife in

squatter settlements where many of the poorest people in the country live and a relatively high proportion of children have dropped out of school."

"When parents are unemployed, partly employed or in low paid employment, they often look to their children to assist with the basic needs of the household."

The report said education played an important role in ensuring that child labour was addressed in society.

It said children who spent most of their time doing school related activities were less at risk of being involved in child labour.

"From the children's case studies, there is a feeling amongst those that have dropped out of school that it is better to find a job and help earn money for their family rather than remain idle."

"The most common reason provided by the household for children dropping out of school was that the children were not performing well, poor in studying or not interested in school."

"From the key informants interviews, all stakeholders felt that education was very important for children in their settlements."

"However, there was recognition that many families struggle to make ends meet and that priorities had to be met in terms of providing the basic essentials such as food, shelter and clothes," the report stated.

Labour Minister Flipe Bole is yet to see the Child Labour in Fiji report and therefore was not in a position to comment.

45% OF PEOPLE IN POVERTY

FORTY-FIVE per cent of people in Fiji are living in poverty, this was revealed at a workshop on poverty alleviation impact assessment.

The figures, derived from the yet to be released Household and Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES 2008/2009), was presented to the workshop by the Poverty Eradication Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Children who have been deprived of the opportunity to develop the fundamental educational and vocational skills for adult jobs will be the last in line for work when they grow up

This would mean that 360,000 people in Fiji are living in poverty.

Also revealed at the workshop was the fact that the Government, between 2000 and 2008 had spent \$1.5 billion on poverty eradication programmes but the figures from the survey had shown that instead of eradicating poverty, levels had grown since 2000.

The \$1.5 billion were budgetary allocation provided by the taxpayers.

Latest economic statistics provided by the Poverty Eradication Unit indicated that income inequalities as well as the percentage of the population living below the poverty line may have worsened.

Workshop facilitator Dr Howard White of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation told the workshop that the level of poverty has increased from the last survey done in 2007 which showed that poverty was around 32 per cent.

He said Fiji suffered from the twin-paradoxes of poverty in the midst of plenty and rising poverty accompanying rising spending on poverty alleviation programmes.

He said the wealth of the nation was not trickling down to the grassroots but was shared among a few.

Dr White said that there was a need to promote programmes which would allow people living in poverty to have equal opportunities to goods and services enjoyed by those in the high income brackets.

Permanent secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister, Lieutenant-Colonel Pio Tikoduadua said White was brought in to assess the impact of poverty in Fiji.

He said Government wanted to see the proportion of Fiji's population living below the poverty line drop from 35 per cent to less than 15 per cent by 2020.

Dr White, who has previously led the impact evaluation program of the World Bank, will also be looking at ways in which he will be able to assist Government in reviewing its pro-poor programmes so as to reduce poverty to a negligible level by 2015 as mandated by the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress.

35PC IN POVERTY

THIRTY-five per cent of the population in Fiji are living in poverty.

The statistics was provided by permanent secretary for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation Govind Sami.

Speaking in a seminar The Challenges of Poverty to the Constitution held at the University of the South Pacific last week, Mr Sami said poverty had increased in rural areas but decreased in urban areas.

"Poverty remains high...at 35 per cent of the population," Mr Sami said.

"Incidents of rural poverty are 43 per cent and urban poverty are 18 per cent.

"The overall poverty reduction is regionally driven while urban poverty has declined significantly, rural poverty remains virtually unchanged," he said.

Mr Sami said the Northern Division had the highest rate of poverty while the Central Division had the lowest.

"The Northern Division which corresponds to the island of Vanua Levu, is quite homogenous recording 53 per cent poverty across the division," he said.

Mr Sami said increase in rural poverty was attributed to decline in relevance of the agricultural sector.

"Highest rate of poverty is among agricultural workers and the largest is among construction, tourism and finance workers," he said. Mr Sami said households with children

and elderly were significantly poor.

“Poverty increases with household size with the number of children and elderly.”

He said higher poverty rate for these groups remained an important concern in the country. Mr Sami said there was also a strong link between low education and poverty.

“Those with no formal education contributed to 47 per cent of the poverty rate while those with secondary level education contributed to 10 per cent of the poverty rate,” he said.

He added the Fiji government remained committed to reducing poverty to a negligible level by 2015.

SHATTERED DREAMS

A 10-YEAR-old blind boy’s dream to become a professional singer has been dashed by the reality that his grandparents, who took him in seven years ago, cannot afford to pay for his travelling expenses to attend the school for the blind. Rayasi Tulave lives with his grandparents at Qelemumu Village outside Labasa town. And he has been in tears almost every day since his grandfather told him he would not be able to return to school.

His grandfather Emosi Mokolau, 68, and grandmother Marica Seninawanawa, 64, took care of Rayasi’s educational needs since he moved in with them.

Last year, Rayasi was in Class One at the school for the blind and was excited about his classes describing his year as a fruitful one in which he made many friends.

When The Fiji Times visited him yesterday, Rayasi hung on tightly to his grandmother’s clothes and whispered: “O au via vuli. Au sega ni via tiko i nakoro, au via vuli.” (“I want to go to school. I don’t want to stay in the village. I want to learn”).

Mr Mokolau said when he told his grandson that he would not be going to school because of their financial problems, Rayasi only responded with tears.

“From the time I told him that he was not going back to school he never stopped crying and he kept saying to me that village life is not good for him,” he said.

“His mother, who is my daughter, couldn’t look after him because she had no job to support him. Rayasi was the only child.

“We’ve sold our products but it wasn’t enough to pay the travel expenses,” Mr Mokolau said. Part of the money earned last year from selling mats and dalo was used by them to travel to Suva whenever they took Rayasi to school and back home for holidays.

Rayasi said he wanted to go to school because he wouldn’t want to grow up and stay in the village all his life doing nothing.



Young Rayasi Tulave with his grandparents Marica Seninawanawa and Emosi Mokolau.

ALL FOR HER CHILDREN

EARLY every morning Rabul Nisha braves the biting cold and marches out into the morning darkness to harvest cane just like a man.

When her husband abandoned her with her four children about 10 years ago, Mrs Nisha picked up her cane knife and has been doing so every harvesting season ever since.

Cane stalks tower above her but she determinedly finishes her line. She feeds her



Rabul Nisha

four children, puts them through school and has managed to build a one-room tin shack at Nakama outside Labasa.

The lines etched on her face mark the hard labour she endures to stave off poverty.

The 45-year-old originally from Kasavu outside Savusavu wakes before dawn, cooks her family's meal outside in the cold before she walks to the cane field.

"Whatever money I get I am able to meet my family's need for food and other welfare," she said. "It's a tough job, can be tiring for a woman because we are not really built for hard labour. But for me it's the only job that I can do because I didn't even finish school. My aim this season is to build a better home for the children."

The one-room tin shack has cow dung mixed into its earthen floor and leaks during rainy weather.

"In that one room we eat, socialise, sleep, the children do their homework.

"I'm working hard so that we can get a new home and I have to try and raise enough money from harvesting this season."

***Worldwide 60 percent
of all child labourers in
the age group 5 - 17 years
work in agriculture,
including farming, fishing,
aquaculture, forestry, and
livestock.***

CHILD LABOUR TRAINING FOR 347

THE Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment has trained at least 347 teachers from 197 rural agricultural-based schools in the country on issues of child labour.

This is aimed at ensuring children remained in school in a bid to fight against child labour in the sugar industry.

Officially opening the stakeholders training on child labour in the sugar industry in Labasa yesterday, mediator northern Sadrugu Ramagimagi said it was only proper that an accurate system was in place to ensure such problem was not an issue in Fiji.

“These teachers are trained on the issues of child labour and the various assistance that can be provided to children to ensure that they remain in school,” Mr Ramagimagi said.

“The school bus fare subsidies from the Ministry of Education and the Care and Protection allowance provided by the Social Welfare Department are some of the incentives government has provided for our children.

“Government is committed to ensuring that our children are given the full right to education to the highest level and we will continue to implement programs that will benefit our future generations.”

Mr Ramagimagi said it was noted that child labour was an enormous problem that kept children out of school and hampered the healthy development of their minds and bodies.

“Many rural girls and boys are often exposed to planting and harvest crops, spray pesticides and other farming activities.

“We are collectively working towards building a better Fiji and at the same time working towards eradicating child labour from our society.

“We must all join hands to ensure that children are not exploited as cheap labourers but are given full right to education and development.”



Facilitators at the stakeholders' workshop in Labasa yesterday.

Many children work as street vendors, in particular during major events such as sports tournaments and festivals





CHAPTER FOUR

DROPOUTS

“*Children have a purpose in life and education makes it easier for them to realise these intentions*”
former Miss South Pacific Alisi Rabukawaqa

THE devastating impact of natural disasters in recent years dramatically heightened social tensions in the country where children could easily become victims of child labour.

And in light of this risk the Save the Childrens Fund called on parents and communities to be vigilant towards the care and protection of children.

“These are serious issues the people and State must tackle,” said child rights manager Iris Low-Mckenzie.

“These challenges are unquestionably, creating uncertainties for us. Poverty is increasing and people are sometimes overwhelmed by changes that are often incomprehensible to them.”

“Natural disasters can act as push factors towards child labour. Children are therefore increasingly vulnerable to poverty which can lead to an increase in street children, children not attending school as we experience in Fiji and resort to selling bean or cleaning the streets at night, sexual abuse, violence and forced labour.

“Therefore there is a risk that the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Fiji will be on the rise.”

She said children sent to live with family on the idea they would be better off could be enslaved in a daily life of domestic labor, receiving little to no education.

I don't so you can ... Noa Nete collects firewood to earn money and support his family in Lautoka. Picture: ANOKH KUMAR

“And they are vulnerable to be abused physically, mentally and sexually. On the other hand, children who were not affected by the flood are prone to move to the city areas for a better life.

“However, once they realize the hardships there is in the city, they are vulnerable to forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation.”

Allowing children to go to school is a crucial factor for poverty reduction and human development, says United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reproductive health advisor Dr Wame Baravilala. “Achieving universal primary education for all boys and girls by 2015 is supported through the empowerment of women, training teachers to be gender sensitive, promoting the value of educating girls, postponing early marriage and childbearing, allowing pregnant teens to continue studying and return to school after delivery, offering scholarships and providing universal access to reproductive health.

“Women’s empowerment is an engine of development. Equal political, economic, social and cultural rights can help unleash the productivity of women.”

SACRIFICE: A TEEN QUILTS SCHOOL TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY

THE need for money has driven Noa Nete, 14, to quit school and work to support his family. The work ranges from helping with household chores to working for minimal pay - digging drains, painting homes, gardening or helping neighbours.

He was exposed to this lifestyle last year, after his family faced the difficult decision of pulling him out of school just before his Class Eight exams. By then he was also ready to leave school because of the relentless teasing he got from students about unpaid school fees.

His mother, Eleni Wati Sorokibau, 46, said she simply could not afford to keep him in school because her elderly husband was out of work and she had five other children to take care of. "We were having money problems; bus fare, lunch money and all those other costs. He had an older sister in Form Four and we sat and talked about it for a long time," she explained.

"Since Seleima was ahead in education and about to sit her Fiji Junior Examination, we decided to support her and put whatever financial resources we had behind her. She managed to pass her exams and is now in Form Five."

Mrs Sorokibau said she was sickly and this made life tougher for the family who live at Saweni, just outside Lautoka.

"My husband is 66 years old and was out of work long ago. We now survive with whatever

little each member of the family can bring in," she explained.

"Noa has been very good as he helps with chores around the house and looks for work with the neighbours, at construction sites and at the farms around the area.

"We would love to have him back in school but our circumstances just won't allow it."

Mrs Sorokibau also revealed that tragedy struck the family last November when her mother's house was razed.

JOURNEY FOR A JOB

LEWENI Vio, 13, dropped out of school without completing Class Four -- but believes he has plenty of time to pursue his dream.



Job search ... Leweni Vio sells mandarines in Lautoka

The need for money has driven Noa Nete, 14, to quit school and work to support his family. The work ranges from helping with household chores to working for minimal pay - digging drains, painting homes, gardening or helping neighbours

That is why he left his highland village for the city, hoping to snatch a job at a car repair garage.

The Fiji Times caught up with the Ra lad at Tavakubu, on the outskirts of Lautoka city, selling mandarins from his Nailuva Village.

“I want to be a mechanic. I really want to be a mechanic,” Vio said. “That is why I have come to the town so that my uncle can look for a job for me at some garage where I can start pursuing my dream.”

He was quick to quip that he could read and write and was not illiterate. “If I had a choice, I would prefer to be in school,” he said.

“But my parents couldn’t afford to send me to school and I have been at home for three years now. I have an older sister who attended Form Six at Adi Cakobau School but she left school because we did not have the money for her to continue her education.”

Vio moved to Lautoka to live with relatives a few weeks ago and his uncle Roni Tokalau said it was because the family did not want him to succumb to peer pressure in the village.

“There are a lot of kids who have dropped out of school, we have young men in the village, and so we did not want him to waste his time there. He was brought to live with my sister so we could engage him in meaningful work and also get him to work to help his family,” Mr Tokalau said.

DROP-OUT NUMBERS HIGH IN DISTRICT

SCHOOL drop-outs remains a major concern in the four villages of Lawaki district in Ra.

Nawairuku Village headman Waisea Nagonelevu said there were more than 100 children in the district who had dropped out of school.

Out of this, he said more than 20 were of primary school age. The issue, he said, had been raised over the years at village and district council meetings.

“Villagers, especially parents have been urged to send their children to school as required by the government. It seems people

Parents should encourage their children to go to school and parents must also remember that it is their duty to provide their children with the educational support they need

are not taking reminders seriously as most children are helping their parents out in the farms instead of attending school,” he said.

Mr Nagonelevu said parents were at fault in most instances while there were also cases of families who faced financial difficulties.

“Parents should encourage their children to go to school and parents must also remember that it is their duty to provide their children with the educational support they need,” he said.

He said not being in school led to other social issues like crime.

Mr Nagonelevu said Operation Tabutabuvuli launched by government to send children back to school had been hailed a success in other parts of the province, except at Lawaki.

“We are working closely with the Ra provincial administrator’s office in trying to send these children back to school.

“It is a very challenging task but I am confident that most of these children will return to classrooms next year,” he said.

SCHOOL DROPOUTS INCREASE

A SECOND district in the province of Ra is reporting a high and increasing number of school dropouts.

Nalaba district revealed this week that 30 school-age children were presently at home. A similar number was reported by the Nasau district representative during the district meeting last week.

The province last year launched Operation Tabutabuvuli out of concern for the number of school dropouts.

At the Nalaba district meeting held at Burelevu village last week, the school dropout issue was again highlighted.

Nalaba district rep Tevita Nakaba said more than 30 children from the villages of Mataveikai, Burelevu and Nativi were staying home.

He said nine of these children were supposed to be in primary school.

Mr Nakaba blamed the parents for not playing their role in supporting their children's education.

"The parents are the ones to be blamed because they are the ones that should talk to their children," he said.

"This issue has been brought up in many tikina and village meetings but we still see many children roaming the village during school hours.

Parents should play a lead role in fostering education and emphasising to children the need to attend school

"The major cause of this problem is that parents are neglecting their role to support their kids' education."

Mr Nakaba said the Government had done its part by providing free education to primary school students.

CONCERN AT DROPOUTS

SCHOOL dropouts continue to be a major cause of social and economical problems in the highlands of Navosa, says district officer Atunaisa Keve.

Addressing Draubuta villagers last week, Mr Keve said education needed to be a priority as it would bring about developments to the people and to their vanua.

He said parents should play a lead role in fostering education and emphasising to

children the need to attend school.

"The government is promoting education by assisting students through bus fares and school fees exemptions.

"Parents and guardians have no excuse for not sending their kids to school because of the assistance given by the government. Another good thing about education is that it broadens the knowledge of the students to learn more about the environment and the world we live in rather than their minds being limited only to the village."

Mr Keve's comments came in the wake of revelations that more than 20 children in the village were not attending school.

Village headman Isei Nalavi said more than 10 students in the village were supposed to be in school.

"We have more than 10 children here that are supposed to be in high school excluding many more who have dropped out from Forms Six and Seven.

"I have talked to the parents on this issue and they (parents) are the ones to be blamed for not sending their kids to school."

Mr Nalavi said the dropouts in question spent their days helping their parents out on the farms. He said he would approach the Ministry of Youth to organise workshops in the village to upskill these dropouts.

DROPOUTS RISE : 15PC OF OUR KIDS DON'T SURVIVE PRIMARY SCHOOL

INTERIM Education Minister Filipe Bole says less of Fiji's children are able to survive the full eight years of their primary education and even a lesser number are able to make it to forms six and seven.

Mr Bole said the survival rate of students shows that about 15 per cent of Fiji's children do not survive the full eight years of their primary education while an average of about 74.9 per cent of those who start secondary education in Fiji get to Form Six and an even lesser percentage make it to Form Seven.

Speaking at the 101st Fiji Principals' Association conference at the Fiji College of Advanced Education in Nasinu yesterday, Mr Bole said among the barriers which affected children's education in Fiji were school fees, discrimination, conflict, poor school quality, poor infrastructure, lack of good teachers, child labour, health crisis such as the HIV pandemic, distance to schools and poverty.

Mr Bole said the survival rate of Fiji's children is similar today to other developing countries, even though we had a head-start in the 1970s.

"Of the children who enrolled in Class One in 1998, only 80.2 per cent reached year eight in 2005. Of those who started Class One in 1999, only 85.8 per cent in 2006 and of those who started Class One in 2000, only 86.1 per cent reached year eight last year.

"In statistical terms, around 15 per cent of Fiji's children do not survive the full eight years of their primary education," said Mr Bole.

He said the survival rate in secondary education in Fiji is less than in primary education.

"Of those who enrolled in Form Three in 2003, only 78.5 per cent reached Form Six. Of those who started Form Three in 2004, only 74.9 per cent reached Form Six in 2007. On average about 74.9 per cent of those who start secondary education in Fiji get to Form Six and a lesser percentage make it to Form Seven," he said.

Mr Bole said in many countries, including Fiji, children from the poorest 20 per cent of households are three times more likely than other children to miss out on schooling altogether or be absent from school.

"Poverty prevents children from accessing formal schooling properly. While many countries, including Fiji, have abolished school fees they are still a major obstacle to children's enrolment," he said.

Fijian Teachers Association president and Nasinu Secondary School principal Tevita



Koroi said they are aware of the problems facing children in Fiji.

Mr Koroi said the statistics given by Mr Bole was alarming and should be made known to parents and stakeholders involved.

The survival rate of students shows that about 15 per cent of Fiji's children do not survive the full eight years of their primary education while an average of about 74.9 per cent of those who start secondary education in Fiji get to Form Six and an even lesser percentage make it to Form Seven.

“When we look at one student not attending school, the number is not so alarming but if we add all the students missing school because of the barriers highlighted, the total number is alarming.

He said parents and guardians need to be aware of the effort put in place by the Ministry of Education and schools to have children educated.

“They should make use of the effort and take advantage. Fiji is fortunate to have an education system where education is accessible to everyone.

On the comment that lack of good teachers was a problem, Mr Koroi said there should be in-service training of teachers.

He said the \$800,000 allocated for about 9000 teachers in Fiji was not enough to effectively train them.

“FTA has been saying the budget must be proportionate to the number of teachers so they can be better trained and equipped to produce better results.

NO INTEREST IN SCHOOL

THE number of children dropping out of school because they're “not interested” is much higher than those driven to leave school because they can't afford it.

This sobering finding by the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics rattled stakeholders attending a three-day National Child Labour

Forum that came to end yesterday, many conceding that a multi-pronged approach was needed to improve students' chances of completing school.

The sample survey was of 4000 households spread across the country. Preliminary numbers indicate that out of the 5313 children surveyed who were not at school, 579 “had never been to school”.

And of the 4734 dropouts, 1700 or 36 per cent cited “not interested” as the reason they were not in school. A total of 1400 or 29 per cent said they “could not afford” it.

Ministry of Education officials participating at the forum said the report showed there was a need for a multi-pronged approach to dealing with the dropout epidemic.

“We were taken by surprise. The findings made us realise that the problem is bigger and more complex. Here we are hearing from the students themselves and that is very telling,” said Apao Solomone, the ministry's principal education officer and human resources manager.

“We have always focused assistance on the financial needs but now we have another issue. We will be meeting with the FIBOS next week because we want to review the data and see if we can speak to the students and find out ourselves what the problem is and how we can make the school more engaging.”

According to Serevi Baledrokadroka, the principal statistician at FIBOS, the survey was included in a normal labour force survey, to support the International Labour Organization's Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE) program.

He said the initial meetings of the European Union-funded program found there was no available data on child labour.

“It's new, it was done for the first time between 2010 and 2011, arising out of a TACKLE meeting,” he said.

“We saw there was a need for data and decided to include a module on children who had dropped out of school, children aged between the age of 6 and 17.”

Alumeci Susu Tuisawau, the acting director Curriculum Advisory Services & Technical Vocational Education and Training CAS/TVET at the MOE, said action on how to keep children in school had started.

“We are also in the process of reviewing our curriculum and we will be looking at how subjects are being taught and if there are areas where we can make learning more interesting for students,” she said.

Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh said the transformation of students would have to include talks of better teachers, smaller classes, more individualised instruction, more tutoring, and extra time with teachers, strengthen communication with parents and track absenteeism.

Permanent secretary for Youth and Sports Josefa Sania said his ministry would undertake a detailed survey of the dropout problem

MONEY WOES CAUSE DROP-OUTS

FINANCIAL constraints have been cited as the major cause of school dropouts in the country, says the Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh.

He said studies had revealed that 48 per cent of students do not complete high school education while 2 per cent of children fail to reach the level of Class Six.

Mr Singh made the comment at the opening of the new FTU office in Labasa on Saturday.

“A study conducted by the International Labour Organisation some years back revealed that children are in danger of dropping out because of financial constraints.

“Students in rural settlements, villages and outer islands usually drop out because of lack of financial support,” he said.

Mr Singh said children should also learn in a composed and serene environment because it would boost their learning capabilities.

“The school environment should be child-friendly because this will encourage students to study well.

“Exciting activities should also be included in schools to keep the interest of students in school,” he said.



FIJI SCHOOL DROPOUTS LEAVE OVER FINANCES

Study shows exam failure not as common

STUDIES have shown that school dropout cases in Fiji are the result of financial problems.

In a research conducted at the Nabua Matua Program last year, students' responses were used to identify factors that caused some to drop out of school.

Interim Education Minister Filipe Bole said the school dropout issue was a global problem even amongst developed countries whose education systems are much more advanced than Fiji's.

The macro-factor identified financial problems (29.5 percent) as a major cause. Examinations failure rated a mere 15.4 percent.

At the micro level, 31 per cent left school because of truancy, peer pressure and lack of interest, 17.4 percent left because of health reasons, 14 per cent left to work in order to help the family, 14 percent left because of family problems or the death of a parent, 7.1 per cent left to study at post secondary institutions while 3.5 percent factors attributed their departure to the coup of 2000.

Mr. Bole said the factors stated above were consistent with findings elsewhere in the world, particularly developing countries.

The study also revealed other challenges faced by many local education consumers were best categorised either as socio-economic, cultural and political or institutional or structural or psychological factors or even geographical.

REPORTS LINK SCHOOL DROPOUT AND CHILD LABOUR

A MAJORITY of the street children engaged in child labour are not attending school.

Of the 214 street children surveyed by the International Labour Organisation, half were not schooling but involved in child labour. They include five children below 12 years, 14 children between 12 and 14 years, and 81 children between 15 and 17 years.

According to the ILO, the most common reason given by children for dropping out of school was no school fees.

Other reasons were lack of interest in school, peer pressure, failed exams, mistreatment by teachers, expulsion, to support the family, parents did not send them to school and work pressures. The ILO made the revelation in its December 2010 report on Child Labour in Fiji.

Labour Minister Filipe Bole said he was yet to see the report “but school fees should not be blamed because the Government is paying it for children”.

The ILO report stated: “With regards to the ages received by street children in child labour, the data is revealing.

Says less of Fiji’s children are able to survive the full eight years of their primary education and even a lesser number are able to make it to forms six and seven

“Sex work, although the sample is small, pays higher wages with four of the five children in sex work reporting weekly wages of more than \$200 and the fifth earning more than \$100.

“Scrap metal collectors, wheelbarrow boys and some vendors also reported earning wages in excess of \$100 per week.”

The report states withdrawing children from street labour would need to take into account the wages that working on the street affords.

DROPOUTS BLAME THE SYSTEM

SCHOOL dropouts are blaming their teachers, parents and the academic system for their decision to leave school prematurely.

The revelation in an International Labour Organisation child labour survey in Fiji included the fact that some students left school for two days a week to work.

“The children said the education system, teachers, and facilities in the schools needed to be improved in order to attract children to remain in school,” the findings by ILO said.

Poverty, parental or family neglect and other social problems, combined with the need for cash for personal wants, remained the key factors that pushed children into child labour, including the worst forms of child labour, the report said.

About 25 per cent of the 588 students interviewed through the school-based survey, within the work force were at risk of dropping out of school because they wanted to leave school for various reasons, the report released earlier in Suva said.

“A significant number of children below the ages of 12 and 15 years have dropped out of school and are in child labour.

“More children are seemingly involved in work as migrant labourers, moving internally to selected areas around Fiji as seasonal farm labourers, sex workers or as street workers,” the survey said.

The high number of school dropouts is a contributing factor to child labour.

The survey found that some children left school during the cane harvesting season to harvest sugar cane and failed to return to school thereafter.

“Some children in agricultural areas miss school for one to two days a week to help their parents harvest produce for the market, and to accompany their parents to the market to sell their produce.

Some children who had started working as casual labourers and helping hands eventually left school to continue with the work they were engaged in, mostly attracted by the cash they received,” the survey revealed.



Poverty, parental or family neglect and other social problems, combined with the need for cash for personal wants, remained the key factors that pushed children into child labour, including the worst forms of child labour





CHAPTER FIVE

SEX AND PROSTITUTION

The commercial sexual exploitation of children exists in Fiji

THE relationship between teenage sex and teenage pregnancy and the school dropout problem is widely-documented.

Truly, it is a global phenomenon. But its effects on dependent economies and small island nations like Fiji can be quite profound.

To be sure, the large majority of teen pregnancies are an accidental result of young people experimenting with their sexuality.

Along with peer pressure, films and television, suggestive advertising and the information explosion via the internet, research has found that the breakdown of the family structure and the rise in single parent households was also a major factor contributing to the rise in teen pregnancies.

Add to this the element of poverty and economic dependency, and the situation can be a true human catastrophe.

Children who bear children will drop out of school and place a new burden – mostly economic – on their families. And as a result of this early pregnancy, many are not equipped to enter the workforce or the labour market with the proper or necessary qualifications. Many then turn to menial work or labour-intensive work to support themselves and their babies. In time, many turn to prostitution or sex work as an easy means of cash, and this perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

THE ILO REPORT- CHILDREN IN COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A total of 104 children in commercial sexual exploitation (78% females and 22% males) were interviewed. Of the 104, 88% of children interviewed were 16 and 17 years old. The youngest interviewed was 13-years-old.

Although the total number of 13-year-olds participating in the research was low, research findings

suggest that there could be more children in commercial sexual exploitation in the younger age bracket.

Overall, only the Western division had a wider distribution of the children's age. In the Western Division children as young as 13 are engaged in CSEC.

Although the majority of children interviewed were female, through observations on the streets and in the nightclubs in the research location sites, the research teams noted that the age of the sex workers are decreasing and there is also an increase in the number of young boys in sex work. Of the children interviewed, all the males were single. Some of the females, about 7%, were living with their partners.

From the survey it was noted that the children engaged in CSE were from different ethnic groups in Fiji, with the majority of child sex workers participating in the survey of indigenous Fijian origin, at 82%. All the children interviewed, aged 13 and 14 years are school students (still in school).

Some of the children aged 15 to 17 years are not in school, and of the 66 children aged 17 years, about 80% of them are not in school.

REASONS WHY CHILDREN ARE ENGAGED IN CSE: PUSH FACTORS

UNDERLYING factors ‘pushing’ children into commercial sex work, as indicated by the children, are the need for money, peer pressure, family problems and parental neglect.

Most of the children have indicated that their need for money is the main factor that led them into CSE, closely followed by peer pressure and family problems/ parental neglect.

The fact that children involved in CSE drop-out from school at an early age seldom have sufficient qualification to obtain a decent job and earn enough, they are more inclined to experience poverty. Where there is high unemployment and few opportunities to earn cash, the risk of children entering into commercial sexual exploitation is greater.

Children who remain at home while parents are working or are busy with community and family commitments they often lack adequate supervision and protection during the day and at night as well.

Unsupervised children may be drawn into “wrong company” (peer pressure, has been the second most influential push factor), engaging in high risk activities or be attracted to high risk locations such as bars and nightclubs.

Family problems and parental neglect are so closely intertwined that the discussion of one will overlap into the other.

Family problems become complex and daunting when coupled by dysfunctional families, absent fathers, lack of financial resources and the capacity to address pertinent family issues. These types of situation expose vulnerable children to abuse and commercial sexual exploitation.

EDUCATION

THE ILO Child Labour in Fiji report highlighted the critical link between education and child labour. The children interviewed were between the ages of 15 and 17 years and the most common reasons given for leaving school was family problems (parental neglect, no family support), and financial difficulties (unable to pay school fees, had to leave to get a job). Other reasons given were peer pressure, poor academic performance, problems at school, pregnancy, and being told by family members to leave school.

The adult sex worker data also revealed that 20.7% had reached primary school level, 66.7% had reached secondary school level and 10.3% had reached tertiary school level. At least 2.3% had not had any formal schooling. Financial difficulties and family problems were the main reasons given for dropping out of school.

SOCIO- ECONOMIC STATUS

Children participating in the survey ranked their family's socio-economic status from very poor, poor, OK and well-off.

The types of work that the children are involved in daily, apart from being sex workers, include domestic work (mostly girls), hair dressing (only boys) and working in restaurants and hotels. 17% of children identified themselves as full time sex workers, and a significant number of female child sex workers identified their working status as school students.

The majority of adult sex workers were identified as being unemployed (20.6%), and in either full-time (16%), or part-time (19.5%) sex work. Other types of work included domestic work, part-time hotel work, self employment, and as work as hairdressers (mostly males).

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The majority of children in CSE live with their families (56.7%) or friends (23%). A small percentage of children in CSE live alone (6.7%) and some children live with others (13.7%) including aunt, aunt and uncle, grandmother, grandparents and partner. The most common reasons given by children for 'relocating' or leaving their initial family were related to family problems and included ill-treatment/physical abuse by step-parents (and parents), parental neglect, separated and remarried parents, inability of parents to look after them, and pregnancy.

The majority of adult respondents live with their family (42.5%) and friends (32.2%). A number of adults also live alone (14.9%), and with others (10.3%), including adopted father, niece, partner, and older sister.

ALARMING FIGURES

THREE young girls aged between 10 and 14 were among the 328 teenage pregnancy cases recorded at the Lautoka Hospital in 2010.

And 70 of the pregnancies involved girls between 15 and 17 years.

These statistics were provided by Lautoka Hospital's senior gynaecologist and Viseisei Sai Health Centre medical director, Dr Swaran Naidu. She said the findings were based on a European Union-funded survey.

She also revealed that the highest number of pregnancies — 255 cases — involved those between the ages of 18 and 19.

There were 169 cases of indigenous teenage pregnancies. Dr Naidu said the record showed the numbers would continue to rise in the near future.

"A snap shot on the number of teenage births at the Lautoka Hospital for 2010 shows the incidences of teenage pregnancy and birth will continue to be an issue for years to come.

"It is recognised that teenage pregnancies is unacceptably high in Fiji at 10 per cent of all deliveries.

"In recognition of the fact that teachers have an important role in helping with the behaviour, modifications in attitudes and decision-making processes in the young, there is the family life education (FLE) program in schools."

She said the Viseisei Sai Health Centre had conducted a project on Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls in Reproductive Health through education, awareness raising, advocacy and providing targeted health care through rural outreach clinics.

The main issues targeted were those identified by the Ministry of Health as priority areas, which included unplanned pregnancies and STDs.

She said young people were supposed to be the most robust, healthy and full of potential.

FIGHT AGAINST CHILD PROSTITUTION NOT EASY

SAVE The Children Fiji believes that convincing children involved in prostitution to leave the lucrative business would be the biggest challenge it would face.

The organisation said it would also be very difficult to find alternative employment for the child sex workers because of their involvement in prostitution.

As the organisation prepares to embark on pulling out 50 child sex workers off the streets from next week, it is also prepared for the obstacles it would face.

Save The Children Fiji chief executive Chandra Shekhar said a survey by the International Labour Organisation last year proved that children are involved in prostitution.

Save The Children Fiji believes that convincing children involved in prostitution to leave the lucrative business would be the biggest challenge it would face

“But what we are trying to do is contact these children and help them find alternative ways of earning money,” he said.

“We know that children involved in the sex trade will be hesitant to talk to us and leave the business.”

“It’s not easy for a person to live a business where he or she makes more money in one night than by working somewhere.”

“For example, if a person makes \$100 a night through prostitution, then that person wouldn’t want to work somewhere and earn that same amount in one week.”

Mr Shekhar said people involved in prostitution were well aware that it was a business from which they make easy money.

“If the child sex workers talk to us, then our biggest challenge will be to convince them that it’s not the value of the money they should think about but their lives and future,” he said.

“And no doubt it will also be hard to find alternative forms of employment for these children because of their background.”

“People say this and that but they will be reluctant to give these children jobs if they know that they were once involved in prostitution.”

Mr Shekhar said the organisation had also started receiving requests from schools to carry out awareness programs on the child sex trade.

The organisation aims to get 50 children out of prostitution by the end of the year and prevent 100 from entering the lucrative business.

ISLAND GIRLS TRADE SEX

SOME children from outer islands work as prostitutes at night and attend school as students by day. These children are usually found around the Nabua and Vatuwaqa areas.

A police officer from the Nabua Police Station said these young girls were usually found in the Nabua and Vatuwaqa areas. The officer’s interview is part of a report prepared by Save the Children Fiji (SCF) on the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

These students were sent to the city to live with relatives and continue their secondary education as such services were not available in remote isolated islands. However, struggling relatives have their own offspring and tend to and leave these visiting relatives to their own devices increasing the vulnerability to fall into activities like CSEC.

“After talking to these girls we have discovered that they have been sent to Suva from the outer islands, like the Lau group, for educational purposes.

Unfortunately the assistance they get in either cash or kind that is sent to relatives does not reach them,” the officer said.

“They resort to selling themselves for \$5 to \$20 in order to buy stuff for school because their parents would want them to do well at school.

“It’s heartbreaking to see the same young girls the next day trudging along the road to school with their backpacks.”

The report said for most of these girls, leaving the islands was the only choice if they wanted to further their education.

A majority of them are billeted with relatives living in urban areas.

EXPLOITATION

YOUNGER children are being introduced to prostitution and stakeholders have revealed that withdrawing those already sexually exploited for commercial purposes has been a difficult process — for various reasons.

The revelation prompted discussion on the magnitude of the problem and saw participants at a Child Labour Forum in progress in Cuvu, Sigatoka, seek clarity on the role and responsibilities of agencies involved in the monitoring, policing and enforcement of laws covering child labour.

Save the Children Fiji, which was involved in a 2010 survey on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) had established in its interview of 109 children that some children started sex work as early as 10 years.

In its latest brief to the International Labour Organisation organised forum, the SCF said “withdrawal strategy was very challenging.” Expanding on the issue, ILO national project co-ordinator Marie Fatiaki, said withdrawing children from CSEC was difficult “even though we have identified where they are”.

“They are not removed. To date there has been no prosecution of those using children in commercial sex. There are hardly any safe houses, the one that we know is already full, so what are the alternatives for these children?”

Mrs Fatiaki also revealed she was engaged in a smaller research on children in traffic and information filtering in showed younger children were being targeted.

She said the European Union-funded Tackling Child Labour through Education project (TACKLE) was aimed at reducing poverty by providing equitable access to education and skills development to the most disadvantaged section of society.

Participants agreed the project, which started in 2008, enabled networking between agencies, the establishment of the first Child Labour Unit at the Ministry of Labour, improved knowledge of child labour and brought attention to the importance of prevention work and the importance of keeping children in school.

According to SCF, earlier case studies and research enabled participants to identify the risks and vulnerability factors — allowing the

Police say they are aware of cases involving girls being used for commercial sex with yachties who come to Fiji

use of knowledge to identify children at risk of dropping out of school.

Through a preventative based approach Ms Fatiaki reported that 50 children were prevented from CSEC.

“Faced with many challenges, the implementing agency was able to identify children for preventative and withdrawal from CSEC and develop child-care plans which have included providing these children with ongoing counselling support, and participate in life-skills training,” she said.

“In Suva, children targeted for prevention and withdrawal received literacy, numeracy and life skills training as part of a four-week bridging program.

“Children targeted for withdrawals were taken for STI clinic visits and counselling sessions with peer mentors co-ordinated.”

She said under this initiative, 50 teachers and Ministry of Education staff were also trained on child protection and child labour issues and school-based child protection policies were developed.

YOUNG GIRLS LURED INTO ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

POLICE say they are aware of cases involving girls being used for commercial sex with yachties who come to Fiji.

However, assistant police spokesman Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri said he still had to get an update and report from the Fiji Police Border Security team on the issue.

Insp Sokomuri’s comment came in the wake of concern raised by the Homes of Hope over what it claims is an increase in commercial sex involving young girls and yachties who visit

Fiji. The home provides support and shelter for single mothers and is based in Suva.

However, Fiji Yachting Association president Tony Philp believes it would be unfair to point a finger at the entire yachting industry.

Mr Philp said so far this year 300 yachts had visited Savusavu but it was not fair to blame all of them for cases involving commercial sex. He said there may be extremely isolated cases and the reports on the cases are more likely to be on general tourism instead of yachties only.

Homes of Hope co-ordinator Lynne Roche claimed girls had been taken onto yachts and had been involved in commercial sex with yachties often arranged by a middleman or one of the yacht owners.

Girls have also been offered as sexual objects to government officials for favours for certain villages and fathers have offered daughters to bosses for promotions and salary increment, she said.

"In one case a single mother was forced to have sex with a village elder so she could stay in the village," she said.

"For all the girls that have been through the home, 41 per cent were raped, 27 per cent are victims of rape and 27 per cent encountered some form of abuse," she said.

Figures provided by Ms Roche showed 47 per cent of the girls came from families where parents were divorced. The youngest single mother at the Homes of Hope was 13-years old, 23 per cent were under 18 and 8 per cent had only been educated up to primary school level.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre believes the sale of girls and wives by fathers and husbands was an ongoing phenomenon. FWCC co-ordinator Shamima Ali said it was not an epidemic but was happening.

Ms Ali said the FWCC did not have statistics on the issue but they had women who report the cases to the centre. She said the issue of sex trade and young girls being victims of the trade was visible in the local community.

"You can go into some hotels and see some young girls and boys accompanied by much older men and no questions asked. Some of our own locals also prefer younger girls and are continually harassing them," said Ms Ali. She said the FWCC was doing its part in raising awareness on the issue and how members of the community could protect their daughter.

RAPED GIRL, 11, A MUM

THE vulnerability of sexually-assaulted children received heightened attention yesterday as reports confirmed that an 11-year old pregnant victim carried her baby to term while another eight-year old fell pregnant while living with relatives.

Both incidents occurred in the Western Division and Lautoka Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Jemesa Tudravu confirmed the cases had been referred to them.

The incident involving the 11-year-old was exposed during a Save the Children Fiji workshop in Lautoka this week where it was acknowledged that awareness and publicity campaigns were encouraging the public to "come out."

Dr Tudravu said the rape victim gave birth at the age of 12 years earlier this year.

He said the young girl who fell pregnant while living with relatives is suspected to be the hospital's youngest birth mother.

SCF chief executive officer Chandra Shekar said the cases were atrocious and mindboggling.

"It just shows the level of failure of human respect in society - that children are falling victim of rape through the lust of adults," he said. "At a time when they are supposed to be looked after, they are tasked with looking after another child. This is totally unacceptable and society should not turn a blind eye, even to the slightest suspicion of abuse."

He said the responsibility of caring for children should start from the parents themselves.

“It is now time for parents to be teaching sex education themselves, so the children can learn how to keep themselves safe. Also, authorities should also treat reported cases with urgency confidence so that the public can come out, knowing they are protected,” Mr Shekar said. “We must not let the perpetrators get away with such atrocities.”

The four day workshop is about child sexual abuse and trafficking where focus is also on the recently gazetted Child Welfare Decree.

The decree requires professionals to report cases of abuse. Failure to do could result in prosecution and hefty fines.

SEX FOR CASH AT 12

MOST of the 40 sex workers interviewed for a report started at the age of 18, while others were only 12 years old when they first received money for sex.

Called Risky business - sex work and HIV prevention, the report said none of the 40 sex workers, 22 females and 18 males, were forced or sold against their will.

The report found that most of the sex workers had previously been sexually abused by family members and later took up the offer of money to perform a sex act when it was offered by another adult.

Written by Karen McMillan and Heather Worth, the participants interviewed were from Suva, Lautoka, Nadi and Labasa.

The report found that many transgender (males), who came from villages sought out other transgender and sex workers as kindred spirits, attracted to an inclusive community to express their sexuality and femininity.

“A number of the transgender participants said that they had been raped or sexually exploited by family members and would rather move away and get paid for sex than have to provide it for nothing at home. One or two of the women said rape within the family drove them from home at a young age, but for most this was not the case,” the report said.

“Many women experienced violence and



abuse from a male partner and choosing to leave that relationship had necessitated taking up or returning to sex work as the only means of supporting themselves and their children.”

Others, the report said, took it up to pay for studies.

One male, nicknamed Violet, 25, said he was introduced to the sex trade by a teacher.

“I’m from a very poor family,” he said.

“We got kicked out from our family - we’re from a step-family. My mother, she started working as a house-girl. I was so small at that time, only 10.”

Violet said while his older sister worked, money earned was not enough.

“We can’t go to school and we can’t buy things for the school, bus-fare, no food so my two sisters they’re working,” he said.

“My elder sister she’s working in one potato shop. She can just afford \$20, \$25.

“One school master asked me (for oral sex) and he gave me \$20. “When I get the money I can pay my bus-fare, buy my pens and my books. Now I’m a sex worker, just like that.”

PIMPING FOR \$500 A DAY

GIRLS as young as 16 years old are being sold for sex in Fiji by pimps to earn quick cash of up to \$500 a day.

This has been revealed to The Fiji Times by the head of Fiji Police Force's Human Trafficking Unit, Inspector Aminiasi Cula.

Inspector Cula said the force was following strong leads into the trafficking of young girls in the country by pimps. He said a large number of girls were being traded mainly in Suva by pimps who earn large sums of money through the illegal business.

"In this type of industry, children or mostly girls, are being used for sexual exploitation where they are taken from one place to another for clients to take them, go out with them and do sexual exploitation and pay later for what they have done," he said.

Inspector Cula said in this illegal sex trade in Fiji there were pimps who received cash from the clients for the sexual work the victims did.

The clients call the pimps to arrange for the victim to go or the pimps come in and choose which victim they want to take

"It is an issue of match fixing. The clients call the pimps to arrange for the victim to go or the pimps come in and choose which victim they want to take."

He revealed that the clients pay the girls after having sex with them.

"The ages of the girls involved range from 16 to 20 years and it is happening in Suva and around Fiji."

Inspector Cula said the cases being followed by police were genuine and there was a need for people to know that such things were happening.

"Investigation wise, we are trying very hard to gather all the evidence of those who did the recruitment, transportation and those who did the exploitation."

He said the unit had information that foreigners were also involved in the illegal trade.

"We have got names and we are working on them."

Insp Cula said the involvement of children in the sex trade was a result of broken families.

He said most of the time children from broken families end up on the streets.

"Most of these children are from broken families. It is important for parents to teach them. Parents should find out the amount of hours their children spend in school," he said.

Inspector Cula said Fiji had prosecuted two international human trafficking cases and a local one was before court.

"We have information and are working on some local and international cases as well."

A PIMP'S WOMEN

A MAN living with three women in a de facto relationship forced two into prostitution while the third, who is the mother of his two children, begged on the streets as a means of earning money.

Usaia Cirikiwai of Youth Inc. Fiji, said a committee working to remove beggars from the streets came upon the case while interviewing the women last year.

"The mother of his children was begging on the street with two kids. She and the two women who worked as prostitutes were working while the man stayed at home and collected the money they made," he explained in an interview outside the ILO workshop on child labour research held in Sigatoka.

He said members of the committee visited the man at his Koronivia home to verify the story and found it to be true.

"He just stayed home and used the women's earning for his enjoyment, buying food and drinks," Mr Cirikiwai said.

He said while the focus was on wheelbarrow boys, many street kids were involved in soliciting alms.

Director Social Welfare Ilisapei Rokotunidau said the department had no jurisdiction over the removal of beggars but worked with the police and city council to identify individuals eligible for welfare assistance.

“It’s a difficult issue to control because after assessment we assist with a minimum of \$60 and maximum \$100 a month. They tell us this is the amount they collect in a week on the streets,” she said.

“You also have beggars who know no other life. She was born crawling on the street and the only life she knows is sitting on the street. She is in her 40s and does not have the capability to make a living through other means. It is hard to eradicate.”

The ILO has identified and sponsored four sectors for child labour research. Street kids is one of the areas that will be researched over the next few months.

CHILD SEX FOR CASH

OVER 500 children are involved in the worst forms of child labour in Fiji, it has been revealed.

Of these, 109 were involved in prostitution, some as young as 10 years of age, the International Labour Organization said yesterday.

“Children who live with extended families, children who suffer parental neglect, children who live in violent households and children who have been victims of physical and sexual abuse are very vulnerable to this form of exploitation,” according to the findings by ILO.

Those involved in child labour were interviewed during a research commissioned by the ILO. The findings were released in Suva.

In the executive summary, ILO said there was an increase in the number of children involved in child labour, and in the worst forms of child labour in Fiji.



The report contains accounts of victims of the system. A 15-year old school dropout of a squatter settlement said she engaged in commercial sex to meet her material needs.

Residing with her parents, the girl said her parents were clueless about how she earned money.

In a week she earned an average of \$100, the report said.

“She started getting involved in the business through her peers,” the report said.

The majority of people that facilitated the exchange for cash, goods or kind were males.

Younger children are being introduced to prostitution and stakeholders have revealed that withdrawing those already sexually exploited for commercial purposes has been a difficult process — for various reasons

Children who live with extended families, children who suffer parental neglect, children who live in violent households and children who have been victims of physical and sexual abuse are very vulnerable to this form of exploitation

Some were foreign residents in urban areas in Fiji, others were family members or family friends, the report said.

Most child sex workers lived with their parents or guardians, the ILO findings said. Children in rural areas were also involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

“There is a critical need to promote interventions to withdraw or prevent children from becoming trapped in child labour, especially in the worst forms of child labour.”

SURVEY SHOWS CHILD ABUSE

REPORTS prepared by civil society organisation on commercial sexual exploitation of children, child sexual abuse and child labour survey have created a lot of discussion.

Save the Children Fiji (SC) Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) project officer Amita Jhoti Prasad said findings of the two recent research projects conducted on CSEC/CSA and Child Labour confirmed that sexually related cases were happening.

“As an advocate of Child Rights, SC has taken a bold step with commencement of the new project Combating Trafficking and other forms of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Fiji,” she said.

Ms Prasad said children had the right to be treated in a respectable manner and brought up in the spirit of understanding, security and love.

“Whether it is the involvement of middlemen/women, family members, friends, neighbours or any other third party involvement (local/overseas) in either arranging or transporting children for sexual purposes, the simple message is that children can’t be bought and sold,” she said.

“They expect respect and are in our society not for the sake of using their bodies to make money, getting pleasure, pleasing them with cash or kind and taking advantage of their young age.

“Therefore everyone should respect the rights that are accorded to children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and any other relevant treaties/ legislations put in place for their protection, development and survival.”

Ms Prasad said in some cases parents and others with responsibility treated children as shadow human beings.

“This should not be the case,” she said. “The process of listening to the views of children helps build their public identity and status.”

EASY MONEY LURES CHILDREN

A REPORT on the child sex trade indicates that some children are forced into sexually exploiting themselves.

The International Labour Organization said about 70 of the 104 children interviewed during a survey on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children stated they always kept all money.

It said a portion of the earnings was taken by the landlord, mother, aunt, family members and the ‘madam’ or middlemen.

Although the survey was unable to identify if children were forced into the trade, the report said “the fact that there are others who benefit from the illegal activity financially indicates possible forced sexual exploitation.”

The ILO’s December 2010 report on Child Labour in Fiji states that most children in the sex trade were there for ‘easy money’.



“Money made weekly ranged from \$10 to \$900 which was mostly spent on themselves or on school items,” the report said.

“Expensive gifts, 3G mobile phones, jewellery, clothes and perfumes, were also listed as attractions for children in commercial sex work.

“The second most common reason is that they want to be with their friends or follow their peers.

“This indicated that some children are lured rather than pressured into the activity by their friends.”

Furthermore, the report said one per cent of the children interviewed stated that they were involved in the sex trade for pleasure.

It also said the most common form of payment was money, while other things were

rent paid, food, groceries, drinks and cigarette, clothing and accessories, and help with the school work.

The report also said children from rural areas usually live with extended family members to attend high school in urban areas.

“However, living away from parents often increases the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse and commercial exploitation.”

“In this study, 10 children confirmed they were sexually abused between the ages of 6 to 10 years old, 34 between 11 to 14 years old, and 45 children between the ages of 15 years to 17 years old.”

“Previous experience and studies in this field show that child sexual abuse is a push factor for children entering commercial sex work.”

“Perpetrators of child sexual abuse identified were generally males, and included cousins, father, stepfather, relative’s husband and others - neighbor, school student, teacher and stranger.”

Some child sex workers also left their homes and relocated because of ill - treatment, physical abuse by parents or step - parents, parental neglect, separated and remarried parents, inability of parents to look after them and pregnancy.

The report said peer pressure was the second major reason for child sex workers to relocate.

CONCERN IN RURAL AREAS

CHILDREN in rural areas are involved in the commercial sex trade, it has been revealed. In a recent survey on child labour in Fiji, the International Labour Organisation said it was generally assumed that sex work only existed in urban centres and that sex workers did not live at home.

The perception of rural children’s non-involvement in commercial sex proved untrue.

The ILO said there was a critical need to promote interventions to withdraw or prevent children from becoming ‘trapped’ in child labour, especially in the worst forms of child labour.

It said the trade of scrap metal had grown in the last few years so much that specialist communities had evolved.

“These communities are squatter settlements that are located on the periphery of major towns and cities.

The communities of Navutu in Lautoka and Nanuku in Vatuwaqa are situated in and around industrial areas while the community of Vunato sits right beside the rubbish dump at Lautoka,” the ILO said. Some families within the community had set themselves up as buyers or middlemen for scrap metal.

“This service is well used by collectors who don’t have to travel the extra mile to the buyers,” the ILO said.

THE commercial sexual exploitation of children exists and persists in Fiji.

And it would be safe to say that most communities are aware of this most virulent form of exploitation. People are just not sure how to address the issue because the situation is usually complex.

Young girls who end up on the streets have usually been sexually abused as children before entering prostitution in their teens. Many also come from impoverished backgrounds and so are vulnerable to the lure of easy money.

As revealed in a 2010 ILO Child Labour Report, in some cases parents are aware their children are involved in CSEC but turn a blind eye as long as the income derived to meet the family’s needs. Perhaps the most disturbing statistic was the fact that 56.7% of the children surveyed (who were engaged in the illicit sex trade) lived at home with their parents and many still attended school.

A quick survey of business districts today will reveal that more – and younger – children are on the streets trading sex for cash, in plain and open sight.

Experts on prostitution say a “bigger discussion” is needed to effectively deal with the problem.

*SEX TRADE PERSISTENT

CRIMINALISING sex work is a waste of time and money, says an advocate for sex workers rights. Survival Advocacy Network project co-ordinator Rani Ravudi made the comment at a dialogue with stakeholders to mark International Sex Workers Day last Friday.

She said sex work was the oldest profession globally and was not going to stop or disappear regardless of laws passed to make it illegal.

“Therefore it is a waste of police and court time and money making it a crime. By making sex work illegal, the State is creating an environment where sex workers are beaten, verbally abused, and sexually abused with no support or help,” she said.

Ms Ravudi said women, children or young people forced into prostitution by family or friends had no avenue to seek help because of the law.

“So the best thing a country can do is to assist sex workers to take control of their lives, work in a safe environment, prevent underage sex workers and the spread of HIV by decriminalising sex work or at least stop police and community abuse of sex workers now,” she said.

More than 70 people attended the dialogue including former High Court judge Nazhat Shameem, Legal Aid Director Sunil Sharma, a police representative and a senior officer from the Attorney-General’s office.

The dialogue was organised for discussions on the impact of the law, legal aid services, sex workers right while been detained, Police policies regarding sex workers and the issue of sex workers health and violence.

The dialogue was closed to the media for the protection of the identities of sex workers who attended.

8 GIRLS IN SEX CLAIM

EIGHT girls appeared in court yesterday to accuse a villager of sexually assaulting them at a rural boarding school.

The girls - who were aged between seven and 12 at the time of the assault - claim they were indecently assaulted in their dormitories by the nephew of the school cook, between March 1 and April 30 in 2004.

Prosecutor Ana Tuiketei said they had to analyse evidence against the 20-year-old who is charged with 11 counts of indecent assault.

The girls - who were aged between seven and 12 at the time of the assault - claim they were indecently assaulted in their dormitories by the nephew of the school cook, between March 1 and April 30 in 2004

Ms Tuiketei said the State needed a specialist such as a psychologist to help the girls with their testimonies.

The State also asked for time to review the evidence. Ms Tuiketei said the accused was 16 at the time of the alleged incident and some of the girls had moved on with their lives.

Magistrate Makereta Waqavonovono granted the State time to assess the evidence.

It is alleged the accused helped his uncle who was a cook staying at the school.

The man lived with his uncle and allegedly sneaked into the dormitories when the girls were alone. Ms Tuiketei requested a three-week adjournment. The girls reported the matter to their parents who then lodged a complaint.

Ms Waqavonovono adjourned the case to August 18 for the State to inform the court about its stand on the evidence.

SHOCKING!

A 10-YEAR-OLD is among the 109 known child sex workers in Fiji.

The shocking revelation is contained in the latest survey on child labour conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The report was released in Suva yesterday.

The findings showed that the age group of children in the sex trade range between 13 to 17 years. An earlier ILO report however, showed that the youngest sex worker in Fiji was an eight-year-old.

The recent findings by Marie Fatiaki, the national programme officer for ILO further

revealed that 78 per cent females and 22 per cent males are involved in commercial sex work. The findings also highlighted that 79 per cent of the children indulging in commercial sex ply their trade while living at home with their families, 13.5 per cent live on their own and 22 per cent at their friend's house. The figures also reveal that parents of children involved in the sex trade are fully aware and endorse what their children are doing.

At least 67 per cent of the children involved in sex works say that they receive cash payments while the other 33 per cent said that the money they earn are given back to their landlords, aunties and parents.

In line with protecting children from the harsh conditions of child labour, the report highlighted that out of the 170 children interviewed, 138 children on the streets were involved in hazardous works.

Out of all the hazardous works being carried out by children 19 per cent work long hours and 51 between the ages of 8 to 12 years carry heavy loads. Ms Fatiaki said these children work in harsh conditions like rain, extreme sunshine and are even exposed to insults. "Many children started doing hazardous works from the age of 12 and more so 59 per cent of the children involved are school dropouts," Ms Fatiaki said. She said some of the hazardous works carried out by these children included operating outboard motors, cutting sugarcane, and spraying chemicals under harsh weather conditions without wearing protective gears, and selling peanuts.

SHOCKING CRIME STATISTICS LAST YEAR

A TOTAL of 8012 crimes were recorded in Fiji last year with the majority recorded in the Western, Northern and Southern divisions.

This was revealed by the Fiji Police Force at their fourth quarter parade at Nasova on Thursday.

Last year, 448 cases of rape and attempted rape were reported, with 264 indecent assaults and 101 defilement of young girls. Also last year, the north recorded the highest number

of murders with eight followed by the Western Division with seven.

Statistics released by the force show that cases of assault were reported in the West (1441 cases), South (1059), 611 in the East and 502 in the North. Police Commissioner Brigadier General Ioane Naivalurua said offences such as rape, attempted rape, defilement and sexual offences continued to be of great concern throughout the four quarters of operations.

He said serious offences such as rape, which robbed women and children of their innocence, was an issue of morality which the police were ill-equipped to fight alone.

Brig-Gen Naivalurua said this was why steps have been taken to enlist the services of religious organisation and other stakeholders.

He said the end of January marked the end of the 2012 policing calendar, one that had been described as challenging in terms of the fight against crimes.

POVERTY BREEDS CHILD LABOUR AND SEX TOURISM

Shailendra Singh (Fiji Times June 18, 2008)

Beyond the fabulous palm-fringed beaches and cascading waterfalls of the islands of the Pacific is a sordid reality – child labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Lack of reliable data makes it difficult to assess the magnitude of the problem, but rough estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggest that with growing poverty child workers make up an estimated 19 percent of the labour force in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and 14 percent in the Solomon Islands. A recent Asian Development Bank (ADB) report has predicted that an additional 5 percent of people in the Pacific – or some 50,000 people – would slip into poverty because of high oil and food prices. According to economist and former Fiji government minister, Ganesh Chand, the prevalence of child labour has increased in the region because of social problems triggered by poverty.

With education not free in Fiji, rising costs were forcing children out of school and into the ranks of the workforce in order to supplement family incomes, Chand told participants at a seminar to mark the International Day Against Child Labour in Suva. Chand appealed to schools to “cut costs and increase efficiency”. Sex tourists in the South Pacific are also preying upon children. A report by the U.N. Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Pacific – based on studies in 2004 and 2005 in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – said that in each country child prostitution, child pornography, and child sex tourism and trafficking occurred. The report said that children in the South Pacific were at “high risk” of being traded for sex by family members and friends because of poverty.

A Pacific regional workshop on poverty recently discussed that in Port Moresby and Lae child prostitution was increasing as social and economic problems increased in Papua New Guinea. Research findings tabled at the workshop indicated that one third of the sex workers in some areas were children aged between 13 and 19, although children as young as 11 were also found to be working in the sex industry.

Similarly, the Solomon Islands conference on child protection heard that the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the country was beyond dispute. Furthermore, there were increasing numbers of street children and sex workers in Honiara, with over 100 girls under the age of 15 involved in the sex industry.

Researchers and social workers had also been in contact with 30 boys under the age of 15 involved in prostitution in Honiara. A report by the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, titled ‘The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child’, concluded that large numbers of girls were engaged in child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation of girls.

Gabriela Koheler Raue, the head of the Social Section with the European Commission for the Pacific, announced 2 million dollars in funding assistance for Fiji, focused on education. This is under a partnership protocol for TACKLE, the acronym for Tackling Child Labour through Education. TACKLE was designed to address child labour in 11 countries across Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific, with Fiji and PNG being the two Pacific Island countries.

The project is to be implemented over the next 48 months by the ILO. It will also involve national authorities, agencies, the civil society and social partners. “Child labour is today still a real and pressing issue to be tackled by many countries globally in co-operation and partnership,” Raue said at the seminar in Suva. “Many children still miss out on school because they have to support their families and contribute to the household income by offering their labour on the market, often under harsh conditions.”

The Netherlands, meanwhile, has allocated 2.5 million dollars for the elimination of child labour in PNG. The funding is part of a 36-month programme that also covers Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

According to Werner Blenk, ILO’s director for the Pacific, “campaigning against child labour is really a campaign for proper education. We need a situation where children go to school, get proper qualifications, join the job market and lead healthy lives. We cannot have generation after generation of children working.” The ILO estimates that 246 million children worldwide aged between 5 and 17 years are engaged in labour. More than two-thirds of these children – a figure that corresponds to 180 million – are exploited in the worst forms of child labour. Blenk describes it as a vicious cycle. “Poverty breeds child labour but it’s also the other way around: children in child labour are not well trained, and they become physically and psychologically exhausted before they are mature. So how can they contribute to national wealth and productivity?” “Breaking this vicious cycle is the foremost challenge,” he added.



CHAPTER SIX

DRUGS

WHILE Fiji does not have a runaway drug problem, there is nonetheless serious concern about the exposure of children and teenagers to the problem and its effects on truancy, the school dropout rate and poverty.

In recent years, canned glue has been the “drug of choice” of young people of primary and secondary school age, causing truancy and health problems and providing a form of escapism from the harsh living conditions in which many of them live. Right now the government has begun a crackdown on vendors who sell the adhesive to children.

The general availability of the substance to children, particularly in urban centres, has made the problem a sticky one to deal with.

Many children are turning to sniffing glue at primary school level.

And as they grow older, a good number graduate from glue-sniffing to marijuana-smoking, perhaps the country’s most serious drug problem.

Children as young as 10 years have been arrested for smoking the drug and media reports reveal some children have been used by dealers to “push” it among their peers, even at school.

Fiji’s geographical location in the South Pacific also makes it an ideal location for the transshipment and manufacture of other more serious substances like methamphetamines. Just a few years ago, Fiji police, with the help of international counterparts, discovered chemicals and a plant capable of producing billions of dollars worth of such drugs.

Glue is the most common inhalant among youths in Fiji.

The seriousness with which the police consider the problem has been accompanied by fresh measures to bolster security and control at Fiji’s port of entries. And the war against marijuana has also received a big share of government funds in campaigns to control the drug problem, especially in rural areas where it is grown in abundance.

In this area, too, the growth of non-government organisations working with young people to steer them away from drugs and truancy is a noticeable and welcome development.

This has been accompanied by efforts by the police through their community outreach programs to discuss the issue with children at every level – the school, the village and the family.

GIRL, 8, AMONG SNIFFERS

NINETY-SIX inhalant and solvent abuse offences were recorded in the Central Division for the past two years.

And a Class Three female student of Suva is the youngest victim that was reported sniffing glue in March this year.

National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC) director Misaele Driubalavu said cases reported in the Central Division were “shocking”.

He said authorities needed to pay more attention to this issue because there had been cases of abuse of volatile substances by students.

“From the research we have conducted we will need to take some precautionary measures,” he said.



He said while volatile substances could not be banned they would try and control the sale of these items to children under 18 years old.

Mr Driubalavu said with many schools located in the Central Division, 67 offences were reported in Suva while 29 was reported in Nausori.

He said the Eastern Division was the second highest with 33 cases, Northern with 31 cases and the lowest was reported in the Western Division with 30 abuse cases.

Two glue brands — PVC and Dunlop — were mostly bought by students on the list of offenders, whose number continued to increase.

Mr Driubalavu said they were working closely with the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Police Force's Drug Unit and other relevant authorities to control the abuse of this substance.

He said according to a research conducted from 2005 to 2011, primary school students sniffed glue because they wanted to experience it, some because of peer pressure thinking

that it was cool, while some indulged out of disappointments at home or in schools.

Earlier on, medical expert Doctor M Parameshvara Deva, a consultant psychiatrist with the Ministry of Health, said there were serious health implications of glue sniffing.

“Glue has hallucinogenic properties. It makes a person high and feel nice. Quiet people become boisterous.

Repeated glue sniffing is known to trigger off dependence and wanting more. When taken over the years, it has been known to produce brain damage,” Dr Deva said.

“Glue sniffing, like other addictions such as alcohol, cigarettes and amphetamines are an indication of inner turmoil and unhappiness—caused by many factors from home to school, to poverty. So the problem is to solve these other sources of stress.”

BAN THE TOXIC SNIFF

IF all goes according to plan, the draft Volatile Substance Abuse Decree should be approved by Cabinet by the end of this year.

This will be the first time Fiji has a decree that will control the sale of glue or other volatile substances to children under the age of 18.

New volatile substances have been identified by the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC) as major threats for children under the age of 18.

And the high number of inhalant cases by young people, particularly the accessibility of glue in the local market, has prompted authorities to draft this decree.

Under the draft decree, a person who sells or supplies a volatile substance to a child in circumstances where it is reasonable to suspect that the child may inhale or use it to become intoxicated, commits an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

NSAAC director Misaele Driubalavu said the latest statistics released by the Education Ministry on the 2011 Schools Information

Management System showed a high number of drugs and substance abuse as well as sex-related activities.

He said 212 inhalant cases were reported in 2011 alone.

A nationwide public consultation on the draft decree is in progress and will end in September.

Mr Driubalavu said the draft decree aimed to control the sale and supply of volatile substances, and the protection of children from any harm resulting from volatile substance abuse and related purposes.

In early 2010, they discovered there was no legislation against the selling, buying, processing, using or sniffing of volatile substances and a proposal paper as well as a Cabinet paper on these were drafted.

By August of 2010, Cabinet approved the drafting of a legislation to control the sale of or supply of substances that could be abused by children and provided enforcement measures.

Internet research showed that both Western Australia and the Northern Territory of Australia have enacted separate legislation on solvents which are separate from illicit drugs and licit drugs.

While the Ministry of Education is doing its best to try and eradicate the problem, Mr Driubalavu said it would need the collaborative efforts of all relevant stakeholders, including police.

Police spokesman Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri said this was a good initiative as the work to address issues such as drugs and substance abuse, as well as sex-related activities, were discussed from a very young age in schools — both the primary and secondary divisions.

The council has also proposed a list of new volatile substances in the draft decree that will be banned from sale to children under the age of 18.

Medical experts confirm that consumption and or inhaling of volatile substance have very serious health effects.

For example, the glue contains toluene, butane, hexane and lead.

When sniffed, it can cause giddiness, nausea, slurred speech, vomiting, hallucination, nose bleeding, shortness of breath, cardiac or respiratory arrest and in the worst case scenario, death.

“It would therefore be prudent to have a law that can safeguard the wellbeing and health of our children,” said Mr Driubalavu.

Under the draft decree, a person who sells or supplies a volatile substance to a child in circumstances where it is reasonable to suspect that the child may inhale or use it to become intoxicated, commits an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years

KIDS ARE DRUG MULES

IN A bid to avoid police patrols, marijuana cultivators in the upper reaches of Navosa were allegedly using children to transport large amount of drugs to clients at strategic locations.

Police made the shocking revelation while addressing a group of students and parents at the Natoaika Fijian Primary School in Naitasiri yesterday.

The group was told that pre-school students from one of the villages walked past a police drug unit team from Suva with a bag full of marijuana.

Police Drug Intelligence Unit officer Matelita Vakacegu told the students that use of primary school students to cart illicit drugs across hilly terrain of Navosa was something that worried police and highlighted laxity on the part of some parents who condoned such illegal practices.

Police spokesman Inspector Atu Sokomuri confirmed that drug cultivation was becoming a family affair with children being used to either transport the drugs to buyers or even selling it to their peers.

He said police had found evidence of children being involved in drug cultivation, transporation and sales.

"It is becoming a family affair really. We have been telling them to refrain from drugs and find other alternatives as their means of survival," said Inspector Sokomuri.

This as Ms Vakacegu called on parents to be responsible and drive efforts to prevent them from indulging in drugs, alcohol, kava and smoking which was detrimental to their lives.

Ms Vakacegu said police were reliably informed that a number of primary and secondary school students were into drugs which affected their academic performance.

She said unlike previous decades, drug cultivation had now reached all 14 provinces in the country and would continue to grow in

years to come. Ms Vakacegu said the onus was on parents to educate their children over the disadvantages of smoking marijuana. She said it had been proven that students who smoked marijuana found it hard to cope with school work.

A report by the International Labour Organisation had similar findings.

One of the case studies provided by the ILO showed that two children in primary school were paid \$20 each to deliver a parcel allegedly containing drugs.

The study showed that the youths were offered a ride after school and told that they would make easy money and all they had to do was to drop a package.

According to ILO consultant, Dr Mili Kaitani this was one form of child labour that is being seen in the country.

She said in such cases the children were from financially-secure families and the money they earned was for personal entertainment.

A total of 214 children were interviewed and it was found that 63 per cent were involved in child labour.

Dr Kaitani also said that children were being used as sex workers with evidence that the activity was organised, with timed pickups and drop-offs.

GLUE SNIFFER

SHE calls herself Akisi, and even when she talks, she pauses to take a sniff from the can of glue she is carrying.

Despite Health Authorities in Fiji warning that glue sniffing induces a state of hallucination marked by incoherent speech, inability to maintain balance and causes suffocation, it is still happening.

Police spokesman Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri said police cannot stop shop keepers from selling glue as it is not prohibited but they can ask them to be mindful of what they are selling the items for or to whom.

Akisi is a young sex worker who says she cannot let go of the habit. At the age of 19, she

is a single mother with a four-year-old son and works the streets so she can support him.

“I started sniffing glue more than a year ago. I have it because without it, I start feeling angry and sometimes I start getting into fights,” said Akisi.

She buys her glue from neighbourhood shops because hardware stores do not open at night and ask a lot of questions.

“One can of GP (glue), depends on how big it is, costs as much as \$7. I sniff it because it gives me a different type of high and helps me not to remember what I did through the night,” she said.

Glue in neighbourhood stores is reportedly sold twice as much as that found in hardware stores.

Akisi and other girls stand along MacGregor Road at night to attract clients.

“I make around \$100 to \$200 a night, it's normally \$50 per client and depends on what they want. So it's good that I sniff a lot of glue and not be totally aware of what I am doing,” she said.

SURVEY NOTES A GROWING TREND IN INHALANT ABUSE CASES

INHALANT abuse is becoming a notable trend in student drug and substance abuse cases.

This, despite a 24 per cent reduction in the cases reported in both primary and secondary schools last year.

The National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC) education officer, Talica Malani, revealed this at a training of trainers workshop on drugs and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and school drugs policy review consultation held at Ro Qomate House in Labasa yesterday.

According to a research by NSAAC last year, 23 per cent of students had sniffed glue and benzene out of a total sample of 2147 students.

“Inhalant abuse, for example sniffing glue and benzene among young school students



A group of teachers who participated at a drug and substance abuse workshop held at Ro Qomate House in Labasa.

has become a major worry for parents and schools,” Mrs Malani said.

“This is a growing trend among school students despite an overall decline in the percentage of drugs and substance abuse among the schooling population,” she said.

According to a School Management Information System (SIMS Data), the total number of drug and substance abuse cases reported by schools dropped from 526 cases in 2009 to 399 cases in 2010.

“Compared to the past five years, there has been a positive change in the trend of substance abuse among school students whereby there has been a decrease of substance use,” Mrs Malani said.

Out of the total sample number of 2147 students in 2004, 69 per cent had tried kava, 51 per cent alcohol, 43 per cent cigarettes or any other tobacco products and 13 per cent marijuana.

In 2010, out of a sample of 2147 students, the overall proportions on substance use were 53 per cent kava, 38 per cent alcohol, 36 per cent tobacco, 23 per cent glue and benzene, 3 per cent rubber smoke, and 5 per cent marijuana.

The drop in reported cases, she said was the result of vigorous awareness campaigns with various government departments, the police drug unit, non-governmental organisations and religious groups to create an impact on student behaviour.

However, she added children needed to be closely monitored by parents and advised on the harmful effects of drugs on a person's health.

"Parents need to spend more quality time with their children rather than spending too much time in various social activities, which requires them to be absent from their homes.

"There is a need for parents to instill greater sense of discipline in their children," Mrs Malani said.

"But more work needs to be done and we continue to seek the assistance of various stakeholders to intensify the awareness campaign in future. We need the support of the churches because we believe the spiritual teaching is a powerful tool in drugs and substance abuse prevention."

LAWS TARGET ABUSE

NEW volatile substances have been identified by the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council as major threats for children under the age of 18.

And the high number of inhalant cases by young people and the accessibility of glue in the local market have prompted authorities to draft a Volatile Substance Abuse Decree.

Under the draft decree, a person who sells or supplies a volatile substance to a child in circumstances where it is reasonable to suspect that the child may inhale or use it to become intoxicated, commits an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5000

or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

In a bid to avoid police patrols, marijuana cultivators in the upper reaches of Navosa were allegedly using children to transport large amount of drugs to clients at strategic locations

Director NSAAC Misaele Driubalavu said the latest statistics released by the Education Ministry of the 2011 Schools Information Management System showed a high number of drugs and substance abuse as well as sex-related activities.

He said 212 inhalant cases were reported in 2011 alone.

A special task force from the Fiji Police Force will assist in providing comments to the final drafting of the decree.

While the Ministry of Education is doing its best to try and eradicate the problem, Mr Driubalavu said it would need the collaborative efforts of all relevant stakeholders including police.

Police spokesperson Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri said this was a good initiative as the work to address issues like drugs and substance abuse as well as sex-related activities were discussed from a very young age in schools - both the primary and secondary division. The council also proposed a list of new volatile substances in the draft decree that would be banned from being sold to children under the age of 18.

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre executive director Shamima Ali said it would be unnecessary to ban these new volatile substance or items.

She said there was a need for wider consultation because the decree should include information gathered from the community.

Last week the council held a one-day consultation with selected civil society groups.

Sikeli Qounadovu, the council's project assistant information officer, said for the past decade they had been primarily focused on schools because of the limited funding and manpower.

He said the unit was looking at strengthening its relationship with NGOs in its effort to raise more awareness on drugs and substance abuse and how they contributed to child abuse, violence against girls and women, sexually transmitted infections and non-communicable diseases.

CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 10 TRYING MARIJUANA, SAYS FIJI SURVEY

SUVA, Fiji Islands (November 29, 2001 - Fiji's Daily Post/PINA Nius Online)---A Fiji Ministry of Education survey has found that 13 percent of students queried had smoked marijuana. Some had first tried the drug as early as the age of 10, Permanent Secretary for Education Emi Rabukawaqa said.

Speaking at a Suva Muslim College awards ceremony, Mrs. Rabukawaqa said many schools have become "war zones" as they battle growing drug and substance abuse, bullying, truancy and discipline problems.

Fiji may have a long way to go compared to America in the seriousness of drug abuse it faces, she said, but it was bad enough.

St. Giles Hospital attends to an average of 10 marijuana cases weekly, she said, and the majority are between the ages of 18 and 25. The youngest was 12 years old, she said.

She said: "There is a need to develop a culture where respect, patience, self-discipline, tolerance, and joy for learning are among the virtues that students, parents and teachers should strive for."

Two children in primary school were paid \$20 each to deliver a parcel allegedly containing drugs

STUDENTS SLEEP FROM MARIJUANA

A SCHOOL in the hinterlands of Viti Levu is trying its best to curb the smoking of marijuana to keep students awake in class.

Navosa Central College principal Jone Malimali said some of his students as young as Form One smoked marijuana "although we can't see them actively".

He said the problem was such that "before, we used to sweep marijuana out of classrooms".

Mr Malimali said that getting the children involved in extra curricular activities had helped ease the problem.

"We are trying to get them involved in other things so that they can change."

He said he was aware some of his students still smoked marijuana.

"The symptoms are there, they sleep in school and their exam results are very poor.

"They are mostly boys and they often have odd behaviour.

"The worst part is that it drifts right to the primary school students." Mr Malimali said the sad part was that marijuana was a source of living for most families.

"It's their livelihood, so the children will see it from there.

"And since they are young, they will want to experiment to know what's it like smoking marijuana."

Mr Malimali said it was peer pressure.

He said they were working with the community, church and police in the Valoma project to eradicate the use of marijuana in Navosa.

Drug cultivation was becoming a family affair with children being used to either transport the drugs to buyers or even selling it to their peers

The high number of inhalant cases by young people and the accessibility of glue in the local market have prompted authorities to draft a Volatile Substance Abuse Decree

Police Commissioner Esala Teleni said a comprehensive strategy would be needed to eradicate marijuana from the province.

Mr Teleni said it would take time and needed a national approach to combat it.

Valoma project is an initiative of the vanua, lotu (church) and matanitu (government), to help eradicate the use of marijuana in Navosa and was proving to be a success. Outgoing High Court judge Justice Kishor Govind said the use of marijuana should not be condoned.

He said marijuana abuse brought about evils which could lead to other bigger crimes.

Interim Education Minister Filipe Bole said he was concerned with the problems the students were facing but it needed to be confirmed if the students were really sleeping in class.

INCREASED DRUG USE A CONCERN FOR STATE

FIJI has recorded an increase of 34 percent in marijuana cases in secondary school and 28.5 percent in alcohol consumption amongst primary school students from 2008 to 2009.

This revelation was made today by the Minister for Education, Filipe Bole during the launch of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

Bole labeled this data as alarming and one which gave reason to be concerned especially about the increase in alcohol cases at primary level.

“It is time we put our acts together and make our plans known as the ministry hopes to reduce the number of drugs and substance abuse reported cases by 10 percent in 2010,” he said. Bole stressed drug usage breaks down the very fabric that holds our communities and families together, alienates children from their parents and transforms schools into places of violence and chaos.

“Drug offences in our schools include reported cases of alcohol, marijuana and cigarettes,” he highlighted.

He said the concept of drug-free schools was borne out of the need for schools to align themselves to government’s expectations of drug-free workplaces.

Bole said drugs and their associated ills have been plaguing the society since time immemorial and even today, centuries later, we are still fighting the same battle but need as much support as we can.

“The war against drugs and child abuse cannot be carried out in isolation by an individual or an organisation and we need the nations support to combat this,” Bole said.

SHIFT IN DRUG ABUSE

THERE has been a reported shift from marijuana abuse to glue-sniffing.

In the past, the country’s only mental institute, the St Giles Hospital, saw patients every week for marijuana abuse.

But there has been a decline in the number of people going to the hospital with mental problems related to abuse of the drug.

Hospital medical superintendent Dr Peni Biukoto said marijuana was seen as a strong contributing factor to mental illnesses.

“When I started work in mental health in the year 2000, the main drug being abused was cannabis,” he said.

“There were also cases of alcohol and kava being abused. However, it is now shifting from marijuana abuse to glue-sniffing.”



Students of Pandit Shreedhar Maharaj College at Wainibokasi in Tailevu hoist their anti-drug banner as the school joins the campaign against drug abuse on Monday.

Dr Biukoto said during his early years in mental health, youths facing mental problems as a result of marijuana abuse frequented the hospital.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have glue-sniffing cases coming to the hospital but we do know that the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council has formalised a decree on glue-sniffing.”

On Wednesday, a group of Sydney-based musicians gave \$10,300 to the hospital for the welfare of its patients. When asked by a musician, Dr Biukoto said marijuana was a major contributing factor to mental problems in some people. “In 2010, marijuana use was quite high and high school students used

to come to the hospital with mental health problems,” he said. “Young people with mental health problems arising from marijuana abuse came to the hospital every week before but there is a big change now.”

Dr Biukoto said the youngest patient who visited the hospital with mental health problems as a result of marijuana abuse was a 13-year-old. He said while marijuana was the most common drug being abused in the country right now, there could be other drugs too.

But, he said, there were no testing facilities available at the hospital to check if other drugs had been taken by the patients.



Police officers on horseback with uprooted marijuana plants in Navosa.

SCHOOLS IN THE CAPITAL TOP SUBSTANCE ABUSE LIST

SCHOOLS in Suva recorded the highest number of marijuana offences in 2011, making up 26 of the 54 annual recorded cases, statistics have revealed.

Apart from marijuana offences, Suva has also topped the other school districts in sexual offences and inhalant offences, the data shows.

The statistics are from a school assessment by the 2011 Schools Information Management System (SIMS) which showed high number of drug and substance abuse cases among students.

According to the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council's information and research officer, Sikeli Qounadovu, this SIMS data was collated from various school heads annually.

"The council this year will focus mainly in raising awareness on drugs and substance abuse, child abuse and the elimination of violence against girls and women to schools within the Eastern Division," he said.

"According to the 2011 SIMS released by the Ministry of Education, of the total of 1712 offences recorded from all nine education districts, 294 were from the Eastern Division."

In the statistics breakdown, Nausori schools were also noteworthy, recording the highest offences related to kava and alcohol consumption.

At present, the council has sent a team to Ovalau for a Training of Trainers workshop for teachers and peer education training for students in an attempt to help curb this trend.

"The workshop, which began last week, is aimed at training teachers to help children who are the victims of child abuse and domestic violence."

"Poverty, Drop-outs, Unemployment, Child Labour, Drug Abuse...these are all linked"

Fiji has recorded an increase of 34 percent in marijuana cases in secondary school and 28.5 percent in alcohol consumption amongst primary school students from 2008 to 2009

WORRYING STATISTICS

THE Ministry of Education has released worrying statistics about drugs, sexual offences and substance abuse among students in Fiji.

The revelation that an average of 63 primary schools in the country report cases of students' involvement each year in these illegal activities is a major concern.

Between 2009 and 2011 a total of 72 high school pregnancy cases were reported.

Over the same period, high schools around the country registered 215 sexual offences, 54 marijuana cases and 522 incidents of smoking.

The high school offence list over the same period included 268 cases of alcohol use and 369 cases of kava consumption.

The irony though is that as the statistics were released, police uprooted about 40 marijuana plants with a street value of \$50,000 in Navosa this week.

It effectively confirmed the notion that drug farming continues in some parts of our country.

The statistics released by the ministry should inch out concern among parents and guardians. We may wonder whether this is a reflection of our society now.

We may ponder on the many attributing factors that add up to make the situation what it is now, but what needs to be done is obviously something that should be discussed, with some urgency. It is clear there is work to be done.

There obviously needs to be more awareness of the dangers of drug abuse and other issues we may put together as social ills.

As thousands of students converge on the Capital City for the annual Coca-Cola Games, now more than ever, we need to be vigilant.

Perhaps this could even be a good time to create awareness about such issues.

We can only hope that this isn't a reflection of a fragmented society.

Reality hurts. And it isn't a comforting thought at all when one considers the impact of drug abuse at primary school level.

When figures are added up and age groupings considered, we are left with what could be a bleak future for our youth.

What is comforting though is the fact that we have statistics.

These are hard facts that stakeholders can work with.

It is important that there are figures attached to worrying trends. For that is where we are able to start addressing issues.

Perhaps then, this is reason enough to have hope for better things.

Now that we have confirmed figures, the onus is on the movers and shakers in society to consider the fact that we may have ill-informed students.

The Ministry deserves acknowledgement for releasing these figures.





CHAPTER SEVEN

PARENTAL NEGLECT

CHILDREN NEED AND DESERVE THE LOVE, CARE, AND SUPPORT OF BOTH THEIR PARENTS

SHE ran away from home almost a year ago to escape the difficult family life she was facing, only to now live dangerously on the streets. The youngest in a family of nine, she says she has a big family, and yet she has experienced little love from parents who are no longer living together.

As a sexually active teenager she has slept with many men - and yet - has not experienced intimacy. Sere, 18, is sadly a young girl who walked into prostitution as a means of getting the financial support and love her family was not able to provide.

"I took off from home about a year ago and since then I haven't spoken to either my parents or my brothers and sisters. But I don't miss them so it does not matter," she shared.

"When I left home I came straight to Lautoka, walked around and came across a group of young girls making a living on the streets. They welcomed me so it was not that hard to get into this kind of work."

The life she lives is far removed from the settings of the rural Ba community she was brought up in.

"We have a 16-year-old who tested positive for HIV. And there are a few girls who like to remain high on glue throughout the day, one of them just got out of hospital where she had an operation because of the sniffing."

"I'm not on contraceptives but I use a condom all the time. This is not something I want to do for the rest of my life. I want to go home but I don't know whether they will accept me, or whether things at home have changed."

PARENTS play an irreplaceable role in the lives of their children. This vital relationship positively impacts a child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

QUICK FACTS

- Children who have parental support are likely to have better health as adults.
- Students with involved parents tend to earn higher grades, have better social skills, and are more likely to graduate and go on to post-secondary education.
- Children are more likely to be socially competent and have better communication skills when they have parents who are sensitive to their needs and emotions.



JOBLESS PARENTS PUSH CHILD LABOUR

CHILD labour is often the product of parental unemployment, the International Labour Organization said.

And child labour leads to youth unemployment, ILO Pacific island countries specialist Laila Harre said earlier this week.

“That is because children who have been deprived of the opportunity to develop the fundamental educational and vocational skills for adult jobs will be the last in line for work when they grow up,” she said during the launch of the ILO findings on child labour in Fiji.

“This means that child labour must be a concern of national employment policies.”

Where child labour is a problem, there is almost always inadequate income for adults from work or social protection is inadequate, she said.

What started as a week’s activity during the school holiday had become a routine during harvesting season,” the survey said.

Child labour is an offence against fundamental principles and rights at work, Ms Harre said.

“Child labour can only be addressed through social dialogue and tripartism - that is through the active participation of government, workers and employers in the development of labour laws and standards and institutions which promote and enforce them,” she said.

The findings of an ILO survey also revealed that over 500 children are involved in the worst form of child labour, including prostitution.

PARENTS USE CHILDREN TO BEG: ILO

SOME children are used by parents to beg, an International Labour Organisation survey on child labour in Fiji has revealed.

“We see child sex workers in the evening,” a respondent of non-government organisation said in the findings.

Another community respondent in the report said most young children in a particular settlement in Suva were involved in the business of scrap metal - particularly copper and aluminum - where they earned quick money within the day.

“That helps them and their families,” the respondent said.

The survey also found boys aged between 13-17 were harvesting sugar cane.

The study showed they were discouraged from returning to school because they had missed out on a host of the academic curriculum.

“What started as a week’s activity during the school holiday had become a routine during harvesting season,” the survey said.

“They were lured by the good money and cash that was paid to them.”

In the urban areas, some children missed out on school to collect and sell scrap metal or work as wheelbarrow boys, supermarket packers in small-scale businesses.

They also worked in the informal sector collecting and buying bottles, doing mechanical work and construction.

“Many children work as street vendors, in particular during major events such as sports tournaments and festivals,” the ILO survey said.

“The collection of scrap metal is becoming a larger scale activity involving an increasing number of street children and children from squatter and informal settlements.”

SURVEY PUTS DROPOUT BLAME ON PARENTS

ABOUT 70 per cent of dropouts are forced to leave school because of poverty, the education curriculum and the attitude of parents. A recent survey on the prevalence of child labour in Fiji has found that children get into the world of work to assist in earning enough for the basic needs of the family.

Education Ministry statistics show that of the children who enrolled in Class One in 1998, only 80.2 per cent reached year eight in 2005. Of those who started Class One in 1999, only 85.8 per cent in 2006 and of those who started Class One in 2000, only 86.1 per cent reached year eight.

Fiji Trades Union Congress executive Agni Deo Singh, who took part in the survey, said the eldest child was often forced to give up schooling to look after the family.

He said while poverty was a main reason, a contributing factor to dropouts were parents who do not set their priorities right “either because of lack of awareness or attitude or plain laziness”. Mr Singh said the baseline survey conducted for the International Labour Organisation’s TACKLE program (Tackling Child Labour through Education) revealed that the trend was more prevalent in the rural agriculture sector.

The reports will be officially released next month. “Apart from earning for family there are other reasons. Access to higher education — because of the smaller education population in rural and outlying areas there are no high schools. This adds to further costs,” Mr Singh said.



“They give up because they cannot afford it. Then you have the urban squatter environment where people are living from hand to mouth.

That children get into the world of work to assist in earning enough for the basic needs of the family



The environment they live in is not conducive to doing school work because of overcrowding and they lack basic facilities.”

He said in agricultural communities, children were doing all sorts of work, some heavy and physical that hindered physical development as well as a health risk.

“There are children under 15 harvesting cane, on copra plantations they are carrying sacks of copra while in vegetable farms they are exposed to chemicals and fertilisers without any proper gear. In urban areas there are no protective gear in backyard garages, no health and safety rules are observed. And we must not forget the girls who are kept at home as housemaids,” Mr Singh said.

“We also have extreme problems where they are involved in the sex industry. There are parents who spend lavishly in other areas but ignore the child’s education needs.”

“Then we have a school system that does not support the slow learners - the last 10 in the class are the drop outs.”

“There has to be teachers to cater for this group and provide incentive and budgetary allocation to cater for people who are competent and can develop through practice.

“We need to invest in technical vocational training.”

KIDS LEFT IN PLAY CENTRES

POLICE are investigating reports that some parents are using play centres in urban areas to keep their children in while they visit nightclubs with friends at night.

Chief Operations Officer Assistant Commissioner of Police Rusiate Tudravu said they were aware of some parents using play centres to keep their children in while they went pub-crawling.

“ *Most young children in a particular settlement in Suva were involved in the business of scrap metal - particularly copper and aluminum - where they earned quick money within the day* ”

“We have received a few reports and we have already started investigations into the matter. Parents need to play their role and look after their children as the play centres are places where children should not be kept unsupervised at night,” ACP Tudravu said.

“At this stage, it is a matter of investigation and it is quite serious.”

The cases were also highlighted at the International Labour Organisation’s tackling child labour through education project workshop held in Savusavu this week.

Project national officer Marie Fatiaki said the information had not been released but were additional findings recently compiled as part of the project.

She said such trend was common in urban centres, particularly in Suva where some play centres opened for 24 hours.

Child labour is often the product of parental unemployment

In an interview, Ms Fatiaki said some parents dropped their children off at play centres and returned to pick them up after night clubbing.

“It is common in Suva. These are information we have gathered as part of our additional findings to the project,” Ms Fatiaki said.

“Children stay at the centres and play games at night waiting for their parents to return from the nightclubs to pick them up.”

Ms Fatiaki said they had worked closely with police to address the issue.



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a young man in a white school shirt and dark shorts walking on a sandy beach. The background is a clear blue sky and the ocean.

CHAPTER EIGHT

COMMUNITY EFFORTS

DROPOUTS RETURN FOR PIONEER MARINE STUDIES

SEVENTEEN school dropouts of Naviti, Yasawa, have returned to the classroom as pioneer students of the first-ever marine studies program offered at Yasawa High School this year.

School principal Salaseini Vereivalu said the school, in collaboration with Vinaka Fiji, a non-profit organisation — had teamed up to offer a lifetime opportunity to school dropouts.

She said the students were enrolled on a two-year course.

“Vinaka Fiji, in collaboration with the seven village headmen of Naviti Island, have identified three main areas of support and will work on ways to assist villagers. Education was one of them,” said Ms Vereivalu.

“These 17 students have adapted well to the school laws despite being out of the school system for more than six to seven years.”

Vinaka Fiji volunteer Frances Parker said the organisation identified the resources surrounding the island and had introduced a course that would benefit the villagers and the environment.

“The future of the Yasawas lies in the young people and this is why we are encouraging young people to stay in school, have an education and hopefully gain work in the tourism industry,” she said.

“Yasawa is also blessed with beautiful marine life and this is the reason we are offering marine studies for the students.

“Yasawa and Fiji can become the coral capital of the world if we can teach young people and get them to understand the coral, reef and other marine resources.”

Ms Vereivalu said the vocational students were between the ages of 17 and 24 years.

YOUTHS TOIL HOME SOIL

MANY young people seek paying jobs after leaving school but for the youths of Bukuya in Magodro, Ba, farming is an essential project that must be undertaken to generate income for their families.

The village has a farming project involving about 100 youths.

Project facilitator Epeli Neivuvu said the youths were all school-leavers.

“They do kava and dalo mostly,” Mr Neivuvu said.

“Some of these youths, even though they don’t have the proper knowledge to plant certain things, are still going ahead and earning money.”

Mr Neivuvu added that the youths also learnt to plant bananas and vegetables such as cabbages and tomatoes.

“For kava and dalo, it is mostly a long-term harvest. It is a good investment for their future.

Some of the school dropouts of Naviti, Yasawa, who have been accepted back to Yasawa High School. Picture: MACIU MALO



Josefa Pisolome, right with Rokolui Vunigasau at the National Youth Centre in Nasau, Navosa. Pictures: JAIPRASAD

The money can be used to build their houses and finance their children's education."

Mr Neivuvu said youths were a vital part of the wellbeing of their community.

"These youths are very community-oriented and regularly clean up the health centres and schools."

Mr Neivuvu stressed the need for young people to choose the right path and not turn to criminal activities when unemployed.

"They really look up to Watisoni Votu who is from our village.

"He is an ideal role model for our youths.

"We also believe youths have taken a stand against poverty because they have chosen farming and now are able to earn money to feed themselves and their families."

VILLAGERS ADDRESS SEX TRADE

POLICE are working with villagers in the North following reports of a sex trade involving foreigners that was highlighted during a meeting of chiefs two weeks ago

At the meeting in Nabouwalu, Tevita Celua, the rep and nephew of Buli Raviravi, a Nabouwalu chief, raised his concerns about two cases of alleged paid sex work that were brought to his attention.

Mr Celua said the cases involved two girls over the age of 18.

"I have spoken to them about what they did. They are of legal age but it is sad that such cases are happening in our very own village, it is very sad," he said.

"We have gone to the police and asked for their assistance, so they have come to visit us."

Northern Police Commander SSP Fulori Rainibogi said community policing officers had visited the village and spoken with the elders.

"It is part of our duavata community policing approach. We have continuously worked with them, visiting the villagers and reminding parents of their duties. Children may turn 18 or 21 years of age and still live with their parents, so it is really the parents who should act," she said.

"There was no official report lodged except that they informed our officers and asked for our help in talking to parents and we have done that.

"Parents must discipline their children even if they are above 18 years of age and live under their parents' roof. It is better for parents to continue to talk to their children then see them suffer later in life."

While police have done their part in working with the villagers, Mr Celua has also spoken to the mothers of the two girls.

"I have visited their families and urged them to continue to guide their daughters through life," he said.

"We have seen the girls bring food from the shops and I have questioned where they are bringing their money from when they don't work and are school leavers."

Mr Celua said he called a village meeting where elders and parents were reminded of their roles in keeping their children away from illegal activities.

HOPE REBORN AT NASAU

Josefa Pisalome dropped out of school a couple of years ago with hardly anything to look forward to.

This all changed after he attended a Start Your Business course for two weeks as part of his 10-month training at the National Youth Training Centre in Nasau, Navosa. The 22-year-old from Domokavu from Vaturova in Cakaudrove is looking forward to returning to his village as an aspiring small-scale commercial farmer.

Josefa said being the youngest of 12 siblings had contributed to him not completing his education at Vaturova Korotasere Junior Secondary School.

However, one of his brothers encouraged him to enroll at the National Youth Training Centre in Nasau at the beginning of the year. He has been hard at work there with a nephew, Rokolui Vunigasau.

The two were among youths from the 14 provinces who were given a second chance in life by the Ministry of Youth.

Josefa is one of the 35 agriculture students that took up the two-week SYB course sponsored by the International Labour Organisation. ILO business adviser Abdul Hafiz Ali said the course gave students studying agriculture the necessary skills and knowledge to be commercial farmers when they got back to their villages.

Mr Ali said the business course taught the basics, in this case to agriculture students, of how to successfully start an agro-business.

“We are encouraging them to be commercial and not subsistence farmers,” he said. Mr Ali said these were only one group of potential agro-businessmen or women.

Director Sefanaia Qalobogidua said that agriculture students were the ones who attended the SYB course.

Mr Qalobogidua said the centre had a total of 75 students who would be graduating on December 4.

BUSINESSMAN SPREADS HOSPITALITY GOSPEL

A FIJIAN businessman is taking hospitality courses to under-served rural areas to prepare villagers for job opportunities in the tourism industry.

Uate Tamanikaiyaroi, the owner of Femmus School of Hospitality, and his team are in Navolau, Rakiraki, this week training young women in housekeeping, food preparation and flower arrangement.

Penang Sangam High School student Seruwaia Naibere said she was grateful for the opportunity as she wants to pursue a career in the tourism sector.

Mr Tamanikaiyaroi said he planned on taking the courses to other rural settlements in the Western Division.

With 20 years experience in the industry, he had started his business from scratch, beginning from his lounge before operating



Amelia Levu, left, with Luse Leba and Seruwaia Naibere of Navolau Village during the Femmus School of Hospitality course in Rakiraki yesterday. Picture: BALJEET SINGH

out of a building in Waimanu Road, Suva.

He said a backlog in fees forced the company to move to Suva Street. The school caters mostly for high school dropouts and domestic workers.

The school provides basic skills in front-office operations, food and beverage services and housekeeping-accommodation that could be further enhanced with on-the-job training.

Mr Tamanikaiyaroi said they had managed to do well despite the many challenges they had faced.

CENTRE TO EQUIP YOUTHS

THE Ra Youth Association is targeting to build a \$50,000 training centre at Nanukuloa this year.

Youth coordinator Eka Rokara said the main objective of the training centre was to cater for the massive school dropouts in the province.

Mrs Rokara said they have sent some of their youths to study at the National Youth Training Centre in Sigatoka.

“Some of these youths that have been enrolled at Sigatoka will be training our school dropouts on how to make use of their skills, talents and resources,” she said.

“We want to up-skill these school dropouts and to involve them in some sort of income generating entities.”

Mr Rokara said the setting up of the training centre in Ra would help solve the problem of unemployment thus improving the standard of living in the province and to individual households.

“This training centre will be responsible for all kinds of trade which includes agriculture, mechanics and business studies to name a few,” she said.

“School drop-outs in the Ra province are increasing year by year and the creation of this training centre will ease the unemployment problem.”

Mrs Rokara said negotiations would also be made with some government departments to help these youths secured better future.

She said they had been working closely with the Ra Provincial Office and government departments in Ra for assistance to construct the new training centre.

“We have made our proposal to the provincial council and have requested some funds to build this new centre.”

“The youth association will refund the funds to the council

NEW APPROACH TO REDUCE SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

THE Fiji National University is training primary schoolteacher trainees to carry out class-based assessments (CBA) to monitor student progress and achievement in line with an Education Ministry policy on the National Internal Assessment Framework.

According to a statement, the university's Dean of Humanities and Education, Dr Eci Nabalarua said the new learning approach was aimed at reducing school drop-outs within the notion of “no child left behind”.

She said all trainee primary schoolteachers heading out into the field had been trained to undertake classroom-based assessments.

She said the assessments were part of the ministry's national internal assessment framework. She said the assessments would help monitor student progress and achievement in a more formal, structured way.

Dr Nabalarua said assessment activities were not exam-focused but more aligned with assessment for learning.

She made the comments while addressing second year Diploma in Primary students at the School of Education in Lautoka.

A total of 262 students will be going out for teaching practice at 128 primary schools nationwide.

“When you students graduate at the end of the year, it is most likely that you will be

“ The National Employment Centre has received a positive response from school dropouts in the Yasawa Group - More than 117 drop-outs in Yasawa are already in the system, many have now secured jobs in hotels ”

given a job, because there has been extra competency that has been built into your program this year where all of you have been trained in implementing the national internal assessment framework,” Dr Nabalarua said. She said that should give them confidence to carry out CBA when asked to do so.

STUDENTS RELY ON HANDOUTS

Vatukoula Convent School will, after a fortnight's break, today continue feeding the 140 students that are facing financial difficulties at home.

And school headteacher Ledua Niubalavu said there would be no bus fares allocated for these students.

Mr Niubalavu said a donation from Mount Saint Mary's Kindergarten students would allow them to provide lunch until the end of this term. “They came today (yesterday) and donated foodstuff that will be used for lunches until the end of the month,” he said.

Mr Niubalavu said the donation was much needed, given that most of those students attendance depended on the food available in school.

Fiji needs special education programmes for out-of-school children

SWITCH TO CASH CROPS

MORE than 10 cane farmers in the district of Tavua have switched to vegetable and root crop farming.

This has been confirmed by Tavua district officer Apisalome Ulusova.

Mr Ulusova said those farmers opted for an alternative source of income and had become successful in the new industry.

“These farmers have been transporting their farm products to Joe's Farm in Suva to be exported overseas and they are doing well,” he said.

“These farmers are planting vegetables and rootcrops on land once used for planting sugar cane.

“And they are also getting easy money compared to planting sugar cane.”

Mr Ulusova said most of the land which used to be farmed under the Agriculture Landlord and Tenant Act remained vacant and uncultivated.

“We are also liaising with various landowners in Tavua to involve our youths in sugar cane farming,” he said.

“There are many school dropouts in Tavua and one way to keep them busy is to involve them in farming.

“So we are discussing with some mataqali to lease out lands to our youths.

“The sugar industry needs to be reviewed and it is important for us to all play a role in helping the industry back on track.”

PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY NETWORK - TRASH FOR CASH WORKSHOP



Youth coordinator Eka Rokara said the main objective of the training centre was to cater for the massive school dropouts in the province.





A man with dark hair, wearing a red shirt with a traditional Fijian pattern, is shown in profile, speaking into a microphone. The background is slightly blurred, showing an outdoor setting with other people.

CHAPTER NINE

EMPLOYERS, WORKERS, NGOs

NGOS FIGHT CHILD LABOUR

WITH 146 recorded cases of child labour in Fiji since 2011, NGOs play a crucial role in addressing this issue.

Chandra Shekhar, a former CEO of Save the Children Fiji and founder of Help a Child Trust (HELP), said in many cases, parents themselves sent children to do work and earn money for the family. Therefore, he said, action must be taken against those parents.

“Getting children to work may be a short-term solution but they are depriving their children the chance to become more capable of earning a better living if they are kept away from school now,” Mr Shekhar said.

Zubnah Khan, communications officer for Save the Children Fiji, said in many instances, particularly in rural areas, awareness on child labour was limited.

“Most subsistence communities do not see their children harvesting crops or looking after siblings as child labour,” Ms Khan said.

She also said a 2009 research project found that over 100 children, aged mainly between 14 and 17, were involved in commercial sexual exploitation in Fiji.

This week, an article in this newspaper reported that about 500 children in Fiji were engaged in labour involving “sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, begging and hazardous work”.

Ms Khan said a number of NGOs, as well as government departments, “have been continuously undertaking measures to address these issues”.

She said Save the Children Fiji had embarked on a project funded by the International Labour Organization on Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Fiji, targeting children involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

While child labour remains a growing issue in Fiji, Ms Khan said the laws protecting children from child labour in Fiji were very good, as they ratified all the relevant conventions.

CHILD LABOUR FIGHT TARGETS 5-YEAR-OLDS

CHILDREN as young as five years old will be targeted in a survey on eliminating the worst forms of child labour in the country.

Save The Children Fiji’s survey on “Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour – Preventing and Rescuing Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Fiji” was scheduled to start last night. Funded by the International Labour Organisation, the survey will be held with four strategies – prevention, withdrawal, institutional strengthening and, awareness and advocacy.

Nesbitt Hazelman left the CEO of the Fiji Commerce and Employer Federation at a child labour forum

“We will try to prevent 6000 children between five and 17 years old through school based approach and we are targeting 12 schools with high number of students from poor families”

Save The Children Fiji’s project coordinator Amita Prasad said the organisation wants to prevent 100 children between 14 and 17 years old from entering commercial sexual exploitation.

“We will randomly select children who have dropped out of school and not working, those from poor socio-economic background and those living in squatter settlements,” she said.

“We will try to prevent 6000 children between five and 17 years old through school based approach and we are targeting 12 schools with high number of students from poor families.”

Ms Prasad said the survey would include five to 13-year-old students in six primary schools and 14 to 17 years old students in six high schools.

She said the number of primary and high schools targeted would be equally distributed in the Central, Western and Northern divisions.

“We will also train teachers at the schools that we visit on what to look out for when it comes to commercial sexual exploitation of children,” she said.

“Our second strategy is to try and withdraw children who are already in commercial sexual work as identified in the last research by the ILO.”

“The third strategy is institutional strengthening, whereby we want to build the capacity of key stakeholders and form a committee with the Ministry of Labour and police.”

Ms Prasad said the organisation would deal with each child on a case management system or individually. “The fourth strategy is to create awareness and advocacy, in which we will train members of Kids Link Fiji to create awareness on the issue,” she said.

“It will be a difficult task to talk to children involved in commercial sex work because they will try to run away when they see us.” “They will say yes for withdrawal from the commercial sex work but when the real time comes, they hesitate because of the easy money they get.”

Ms Prasad, however, said she and her two workmates were fully prepared and trained on how to approach children in commercial sex work and interview them.

EDUCATION DECREASES POVERTY

ALLOWING children to go to school is a crucial factor for poverty reduction and human development, says United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reproductive health advisor Doctor Wame Baravilala.

“Achieving universal primary education for all boys and girls by 2015 is supported through the empowerment of women, training teachers to be gender sensitive, promoting the value of educating girls, postponing early marriage and childbearing, allowing pregnant teens to continue studying and return to school after delivery, offering scholarships and providing universal access to reproductive health.

“Women’s empowerment is an engine of development. Equal political, economic, social and cultural rights can help unleash the productivity of women.”

NGO FIGHTS POVERTY

AS shown on its cover page in large font, D in the D book stands for Dreaming, Daring and Delivering which are the catch words for the NGO, Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development in short, FRIEND. Samisoni Pareti, the author has masterfully crafted the easy-to-read book so

the reader obtains a very good overall sense of the organisation, its leadership and vision, and the passion of its staff as well as the work it does together with a rich collection of pictures and stories of 25 beneficiaries who are a sample of scores of people at the local level in western Viti Levu assisted by FRIEND.

In the book's foreword, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, former vice president of the Republic of Fiji notes that a distressingly large proportion of Fijians of all ethnicities are poor and disadvantaged but with the practical assistance provided by FRIEND to individuals and families, their very understandable tendency to despair turns to hope for a better future.

"This prompts people to dream of possibilities that once seemed remote: better education for their children, improved accommodation, access to better medical facilities and surplus income for additional needs. This capacity to dream is an entitlement that ought to be the right of anyone who is part of a community that is both civil and humane."

According to the visionary founder of FRIEND, Sashi Kiran, the NGO's practical assistance to improve the lives of rural grassroots people is holistic so the multi-sided development needs of households and communities are more fully addressed. Ms Kiran recounts in the introduction of the book, the humble beginnings of the organisation 12 years ago in a small cubicle in a back street of Lautoka, and the difficulties encountered as FRIEND sought to build its own capacities, and find the necessary funds to engage with rural communities.

It's now well-known brand of chutneys and pickles, sold in leading supermarkets first started with chilli chutney made at her home, and tamarind chutney made with the assistance of the late Satya Bali of the Senior Citizens' Centre in Ba.

FRIEND through its integrated development activities with individuals and families has spread hope among rural

communities but it has itself built on an optimistic outlook about future prospects for itself and the people it serves. This is clearly seen in the book's epilogue entitled "Down yes but not out!" which tells the story with pictures of the very considerable devastation caused by Cyclone Evan in December last year to FRIEND's headquarters in Tuvu, Lautoka. The cyclone destroyed two of its three buildings, and the main office which remained upstanding lost half of its roof. In the midst of coping with this catastrophe, the NGO began working with communities on cyclone rehabilitation focusing on providing roofing irons for the dozens of homes that were made roofless by the might of nature.

According to the visionary founder of FRIEND, Sashi Kiran, the NGO's practical assistance to improve the lives of rural grassroots people is holistic so the multi-sided development needs of households and communities are more fully addressed

This extremely powerful capacity to stand up after a fall, dust oneself and get on with the work at hand is what FRIEND inspires among those who it assists.

Twenty-five beneficiaries from boys and girls in secondary schools, youth, men and women, the elderly and the chronically ill recount their stories about the assistance provided by the NGO. Under programs labelled "Governance (Backyard), Governance/Grow, Governance and Health, Governance/Food Security, Flood Rehabilitation, Health and Scholarship" a range of support is provided to individuals and families.

These include support and advice as well as providing farming implements (for example chicken mesh for poultry), cuttings, plants and seeds for gardening, building materials, and the provision of door-to-door health advice and medical treatment.

Many of the stories of the grassroot recipients are astonishing and inspiring as they show how FRIEND support transformed their lives. Boys and girls who otherwise may have had to leave schools have continued with their education with the scholarships they received. Raising chickens and ducks have added new sources of income to struggling families. Backyard gardening has contributed significantly to better nutrition for a many such families so they no longer need to travel to the local markets to buy vegetables, taro, sweet potatoes and cassava, as well as fruits. Surplus produce is sold bringing much needed income.

Gardening activities have created a new sense of togetherness in villages and settlements as people have another shared common interest which has encouraged both collaboration and competition (who can grow the largest sweet potatoes for instance).

Shared interests among communities have also been engendered by FRIEND's health team which has on a regular basis visited and advised rural people on health matters including nutrition, sanitation and exercise. They have become more aware about health matters, eat better and feel better. They have taken to regular exercising in groups and individually. Especially moving are stories by those who have been chronically sick, victims of stroke and diabetes.

Tale Male of Matawalu Village, reflects the sentiments of the latter when he declared that, "we can say that we owe our lives to FRIEND; they have given us a new lease of life" (p.52). "In this village, ambulance visits from the main Lautoka hospital, prevalent on a weekly basis in the past, is now a rarity."

The penultimate chapter, "Faces of

FRIEND" is about the staff of the NGO. A number of them have their own stories of hardship coming from poor families. They are indeed a talented and passionate lot who are firmly committed to the work that they do.

FRIEND is a locally grown organisation. The seed for it was planted following the work that its founder did with the internally displaced farmers and families during the political crisis in the country in 2000. By her sheer perseverance and ability to convince her supporters and staff as well as potential donors, Sashi Kiran has established an organisation that is now well known with an excellent record of effective poverty reduction and enhancement of health and wellbeing in rural communities in the West.

FRIEND having established a branch in Labasa will seek to address impoverishment and its consequences in the North where there is widespread poverty.

While from the outset FRIEND has sought to raise its own income through entrepreneurship by making and marketing chutney and pickles, and in this way also provided markets for the communities it served, it has also relied on support from partners and donors. The list of these partners include Fiji communities abroad who have provided funds for scholarships, Air Pacific, NZAID and AusAID, and most recently the European Union has provided \$F7million towards FRIEND's agricultural diversification program. FRIEND, most uniquely among NGOs has worked with the private sector to market its products. As a result several supermarkets retail FRIEND chutneys and pickles.

The D book is certainly worth a read and is especially useful for development NGOs, government officials working with rural people, youth and community workers and development scholars.

May FRIEND dream, dare and deliver for the coming years as the fight against the scourge of poverty has some distance to go.

WHEN CHILD LABOUR IS NOT LEGAL

CHILD labour is an issue which has been in Fiji for a long time but people are gradually becoming aware of its illegality and disadvantage to children who are forced to or involved in it.

Although it is hard to give a precise definition of child labour, the International Labour Organisation defines it as any kind of work which hinders a child from going to school to complete his or her education and work which prevents a child from his moral or spiritual development.

Some of the worst forms of child labour globally are drug trafficking, pornography and child prostitution.

Fiji is one of the countries where child labour has existed and one of the worst forms of child labour here is child prostitution, which is not to a great extent, but it does exist.

ILO director Abu Zakaria said there was a difference between a child working to earn his pocket money and a child working to earn an income for his family.

Mr Zakaria said children who worked after school at home or in the supermarket were not counted as child labourers but children who were not allowed to attend school and made to work when they were supposed to be in school are counted as child labourers.

“If children work to develop their skills or earn pocket-money after school and it doesn’t tamper their education, then it is not child labour,” said Mr Zakaria.

“The ILO is not against children working but they are against children working when they should be in school studying.”

Fiji has developed its laws against child labour along the conventions of the ILO where every child has a right to education and children above the age of 16 years are allowed to engage in the work force.

The ILO has organised a number of workshops and training for stakeholders where the issue of child labour was emphasised.

Mr Zakaria said the purpose of the training workshop was to equip the training of trainers with adequate information and tools to take the message of stopping child labour to the community level.

“The ILO is in the process of developing a system of following up the activities of training of trainers.

“It is also a bit early to assess the success of people who have participated in the workshop.

“We do not have any latest statistics on hand however, we are in the process of finalising a project proposal on child labour.

“Among other things, the project will conduct a nationwide survey to determine the extent and type of child labour in Fiji and Papua New Guinea.”

“ *The ILO is not against children working but they are against children working when they should be in school studying* ”

Save the Children Fiji is one organisation which is working closely with the ILO on the issue.

The executive director of Save the Children Fiji, Irshad Ali, said it was the responsibility of any parent to see that his or her child attended school and received an education.

“It is also a problem with our education system because there is no means of tracking students and monitor them to check whether they are getting an education,” said Mr Ali.

He said it was time to look seriously at legislation to enforce compulsory education so that children were able to receive an education.

Save the Children had released a report where it stated poverty was the main cause forcing children into child labour.

Mr Ali said there was a great need for parents to change their attitude regarding the importance of children going to school.

“Technology is catching up on us and things are becoming complex now. Even the Liquefied Pressure Gas taxis that are being used are creating some difficulties for local automotive mechanics to repair.”

He said every child had a right to education and it was the responsibility of every parent to see that his child received an education.

“By the time the child grows up, the whole mechanics of the automotive arena will have changed and because he does not have the basic education, he will find it hard to cope.”

He said the issue of child labour had to be looked at in unison with issues such as poverty, education and the enforcement of legislations which require children to receive an education.

Children are involved in the worst forms of child labour in Fiji, it has been revealed

He said the main problem was that people failed to see beyond the problem.

“We need to look at the magnitude of the problem in Fiji and work together to find solutions.

“There are people who are genuinely concerned for the welfare of their children but there are those who are exploiting their children and ruining their future.”

He said organisations such as the ILO were organising programs to create awareness of the issue of child labour but the issues never seemed to reach those at the grassroots level.

Mr Zakaria admitted there was a need to spread the message of how wrong it was to engage children in child labour to the grassroots level.

“But compared to last year and the year before, people have become aware of what

child labour is and the fact that it is illegal and their children have a right to have an education,” said Mr Zakaria.

He said the rate of school dropouts was also a factor which influenced the number of children who were involved in child labour in Fiji.

He said such issues had to be addressed first in order to curb the number of children being involved in child labour.

PROTECT CHILDREN

A CHILDREN’S organisation plans to carry out a survey within the next month to ascertain how many children are engaged as paid domestic workers.

Save the Children Fiji says it is not aware of any survey conducted so far to determine the exact number of children engaged in domestic work, which is a form of child labour.

However, SC Fiji chief executive officer Chandra Shekhar said the organisation was aware that children were involved in paid domestic work.

“They are used as babysitters, for cleaning jobs, gardening jobs and for other things in families to generate income,” he said.

“But I don’t think that a major survey has been carried out in Fiji to determine how many children are engaged in domestic work in exchange for money.”

“We intend to do a major survey within the next month on this particular form of child labour.

“But before embarking on the survey, we will meet with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Labour first to discuss a few things.”

His comments follow the International Labour Organisation’s adoption of the new Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers on June 16.

The convention will set standards on hours of work, pay and living conditions, and protection against abuse, harassment and violence.

It will require governments to set a minimum age of employment and recognise the right of young domestic workers to education. The convention will ask governments to pay special attention to the needs of domestic workers who are under 18 years and above the minimum age of employment by limiting hours of work, prohibiting night work, placing restrictions on tasks and strengthening monitoring mechanisms.

Save the Children (international body) has urged all countries to take specific measures to protect children engaged as domestic workers and implement the new convention.

PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CHILD LABOUR

MORE effort and commitment from Government is needed to strengthen and enforce legislation that protects children from child labour.

The International Labour Organisation called for child labour monitoring mechanisms and the allocation of rehabilitation resources for children stuck in the system.

The need for education and training for children in child labour and out-of-school youths was important, the ILO said.

The comments follows the launch of its findings on child labour in Fiji.

“Government must also lead the effort to determine the list of hazardous work for children in Fiji, in consultation with all stakeholders,” the ILO said.

Targeted programmes were required for families to improve their working conditions and income earning capacity to be able to send and keep children at school, it said.

The ILO recommended an improvement in work conditions for young workers and training and skills for out-of-school youths.

Children working on the streets participated in illicit activities including petty theft and drug trafficking, it said.



FWCC co-ordinator Shamima Ali

FIGHTING PROSTITUTION

A WOMEN'S organisation believes sound economic policies are needed to ensure women and children do not engage in prostitution.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre said stopping prostitution in the country was a very difficult task.

FWCC coordinator, Shamima Ali said prostitution and the involvement of children in the sex trade was not new.

“We have had the problem of sexual abuse of children from a very young age for a long, long time,” she said.

“Since the FWCC started 15 years ago, we have been aware of child prostitution and the involvement of children from nine years old onwards.

“We are aware of rackets by leading characters in the community who have utilised young girls for their sexual needs.”

Ms Ali said sex workers were offered counselling and support if they approached the centre for assistance.

She said the centre also carried out awareness in the community on prostitution, especially the involvement of children in the sex trade.

“If the child is brought to us, then we counsel the child and try and build self-esteem in her,” she said.

“We work with other non-government organisations to send them to school or engage them in some form of employment as an alternative.

“But it becomes very difficult, particularly if parents have been using their children in the sex trade to earn money.”

Ms Ali said an individual or a particular organisation could not do much alone to solve the problem of prostitution.

“The whole community has to get together and other non-government organisations also have to come on board to tackle the problem,” she said.

GO TO SCHOOL

KEEPING children in school rather than sending them to work until they are ready was one of the main reasons the Fiji Trades Union Congress became involved in addressing child labour issues in the country.

FTUC treasurer and general secretary of the Fiji Teachers Union Agni Deo Singh said the congress’ participation in the International Labour Organization’s Tackling Childhood Poverty Through Education program was also aimed at ensuring children from impoverished families and those on the verge of dropping out of school were assisted.

Speaking to parents, students and school staff members and management at a workshop, Mr Singh emphasised the importance of ensuring children went to school to end the cycle of poverty.

“When you return to your communities, please spread the message that children must

go to school and they must enjoy their right to education,” Mr Singh said.

“When children go to school, they are able to develop competencies and gain important skills, which will give them an opportunity to access a decent job and allow them to meaningfully contribute by earning an income.”

Mr Singh said with 35 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and 15 per cent in danger of becoming impoverished, the importance of education should be a priority.

“Through education, children from impoverished families could increase their chances of getting an income and assist in bringing their families and communities out of poverty

CHILDREN ADVOCATES WANT CARELESS PARENTS PUNISHED

LAWS are needed to charge parents for negligence resulting in the death of their children.

By having such a law in place, parents would “wake up” and be wary of the fact that they have the responsibility to protect their children. The comments were made by Save the Children Fiji chief executive Chandra Shekhar last week.

“From our point of view, parents are aware of their responsibilities and they know what is right and wrong for their children,” Mr Shekhar said.

“But the downfall is in the parents not seriously taking responsibility and they assume that children will look after themselves,” he said.

“Children are adventurous and they often try to do things that adults do, like lighting matches for instance,” he added.

Mr Shekhar said children also tried to cross the road on their own because they always saw adults crossing roads alone.

“When a child is involved in a road accident, drowns or dies through some other incidents, the authorities should thoroughly investigate the incident,” he said.

“And if parents are found guilty of being negligent, which resulted in the death of that particular child, there should be a law to charge them for negligence.

Police spokesman Inspector Atunaisa Sokomuri said he would check with the Fiji Police Force’s legal team if any laws existed to charge parents for negligence.

NETWORK RESCUES 187

AN impressive 187 children were successfully withdrawn from child labour and re-entered into the mainstream education system by a relatively new NGO, the Suva-based People’s Community Network.

Through funding provided by the International Labour Organisation’s European Union TACKLE project, PCN embarked on a two-year \$170,000 program to withdraw 250 children from child labour.

PCN project officer Ahmed Ali said a further 30 to 40 children were on a waiting list for withdrawal from child labour and to be processed and prepared for life back in school.

“What we are involved in at the moment is a pilot project under the ILO’s Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE) program,” Mr Ali said.

“Our project is currently focused on 12 informal settlements in the greater Suva-Nausori area and include Jittu, Wailea, Nanuku, Veidogo, Muanivatu, Nadonumai, Tamavua-i-wai, Muslim League, Caubati, Namadai and Veraisi.

“ILO through TACKLE has mandated that we own the project and once successfully established in the Central Division, look to implement it in other divisions as well.

“What we have found through preliminary surveys is that incidents are much higher in the Western Division than in Suva.”



For the children ... Ahmed Ali, second from left, from the People’s Community Network at the Fiji National Child Labour Forum.

FTUC, FTU JOIN HANDS TO BATTLE CHILD LABOUR

THE Fiji Trades Union Congress and Fiji Teachers Union mobilised schools and communities to prevent 300 at risk children from engaging in child labour.

Aged between six and 14, the children were retained in the formal education system through the provision of school fees and stationery and uniform grants.

According to FTU general secretary Agni Deo Singh, this assistance was made possible through the union’s scholarship fund

To fight the problem of child labour in the sugar industry, our ministry has trained a total of 347 teachers from the 197 rural agriculture-based schools on the issues of child labour

which has been in operation for more than 30 years. The scholarship funds are derived from member subscriptions.

“We identified 25 schools through field surveys and then students were identified through parent-teacher interviews,” he said.

Although several action plans for the prevention strategy were put in place, he said there was an immense need for assistance.

Mr Singh's presentation at the National Child Labour Forum held in Cuvu, Sigatoka over the past three days prompted participants to discuss ways in which the organisation could be used effectively in the fight against child labour.

Ministry of Education's principal education officer and human resources manager Apao Solomone said they would try to restore relations with the FTU to tackle child labour.

Mr Usamate acknowledged the assistance of the ILO and EU in helping Fiji address child labour issues through the project Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE)

FIJI CHILD LABOUR DVD TO BE LAUNCHED AT THE NATIONAL CHILD LABOUR FORUM

The plight of children in child labour in Fiji will be raised, through the launching of a DVD titled “Back to School- Tackling Child Labour in Fiji”

Suva, Fiji (ILO News) – Once again, the plight of children in child labour in Fiji will be raised, and this time through the launching of a DVD titled “Back to School- Tackling Child Labour in Fiji”. The DVD follows the progress and challenges of a child, withdrawn from hazardous work in Fiji and back in school.

Stakeholders involved in actions against child labour share their views on what has been done, and remains to be done to eliminate child labour in Fiji.

The child labour DVD, produced by the EU-Funded TACKLE (Tackling child labour through education) project, will be launched by the Hon. Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations, Mr. Jone Usamate at the Fiji National Child Labour Forum on the 25th February 2013. The Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations has a Child Labour Monitoring Unit that was established in 2011 with support from the European Union and International Labour Organization.

Following the first National Child Labour Forum in 2008, Fiji child labour research surveys found children in commercial sexual exploitation, working on the streets, in hazardous work in the agricultural and informal sectors and working below the minimum legal age of employment. This led to the implementation of strategies to withdraw children from child labour, prevent out-of-school children from engaging in child labour, and mobilise actions at the school and community level.

The National Child Labour Forum 2013, comprising of representatives from government, trade unions, employer organizations, civil society, academia and the media, will evaluate actions to tackle child labour in Fiji, identify emerging priorities, and develop an exit strategy for the TACKLE project.

The Forum will be held from the 25-27 February at the Shangri-La Fijian Resort.

FEDERATION FACES CHILD LABOUR CHALLENGES

REACHING out to rural areas to spread information on child labour issues has been a challenge for the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation.

Federation CEO Nesbitt Hazelman said such challenges led them to use existing mechanisms in rural areas.

“Reaching out to rural areas is a challenge at the moment for us to raise awareness about child labour when it comes to agricultural farm work like planting dalo and other crops,” Mr Hazelman said.

“But we are using mechanisms like provincial councils through village and district meetings. We are also using church groups to reach out for us.

“We don’t go directly to the rural areas but people who have direct contact with rural people are part of our outreach.”

The federation this week held an employers workshop in the Northern Division aimed at raising awareness on child labour issues.

Mr Hazelman said the workshop was the first to be organised by the federation in the North.

“The response has been overwhelming and we will organise more similar events for the North and have other activities as well,” he said.

The Crimes Decree with its trafficking provisions only came into effect in 2010, but Fiji already has seen two major convictions and two pending cases on domestic trafficking and debt bondage







CHAPTER TEN

GOVERNMENT

The Crimes Decree with its trafficking provisions only came into effect in 2010, but Fiji already has seen two major convictions and two pending cases on domestic trafficking and debt bondage

CHILD LABOUR LAWS UNDER SCRUTINY

CHILD labour laws and policies will be scrutinised by the Ministry of Labour in an effort to curb the existence of the act.

Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Taito Waqa said the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) and the Ministry would ensure laws existed to deal with child labour.

“Child labour issue is a priority area for the Ministry and thus are working closely with International Labour Organisation (ILO) to ensure on the laws and policies,” he said.

In a statement yesterday Mr Waqa said an ILO /EU project to research the extent of child labour in Fiji.

“It will also check whether the policy and laws are adequate in addressing the contemporary problems in Fiji.

He said ERAB is part of the research and fully supports the development of right policies and laws on child labour.

Mr Waqa said the essence of child labour is basically to alleviate poverty in families through education.

“Alleviating poverty through education is the thrust,” Mr Waqa said.

“Go away from child labour to school, basically that is our thrust and to ensure the policies and laws are there.

“Children should not be working when in fact their age is for education and learning,” Mr Waqa said.

He said a consultant had been hired to look at child labour policy and practise.

He added the findings of that would be tabled to the Board for discussion and endorsement and then to Cabinet for approval.

“The Child Labour law is already integrated in Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP), however we also need to re-visit the law,” Mr Waqa added.

LAWYER PINPOINTS 'DEFECTS'

THERE are many gaps in laws that deal with child labour and exploitation, says Lorraine Reiher, a lawyer from Siwatibau and Sloans Barristers and Solicitors.

Ms Reiher was part of the legal team tasked to make initial findings and recommendations from the review of our legislative and policy framework.

from left, Agni Deo Singh of the FTUC, David Lamotte, ILO Director Pacific, Jerome Pons, Head of Economics and Social Sector EU and Jone Usamate, Labour Minister.

She said the Penal Code and the Juvenile Act were two important legislation needing changes.

Ms Reiher said the 1999 Fiji Law Reform Commission's report recommended the widening definition of rape and to change the terminology of carnal knowledge in the Penal Code.

"In line with the Fiji Law Reform Commission Report, we recommend that certain sections of the Penal Code are repealed," she said.

"Especially on sections 155 to 160 and 171 of the Penal Code."

Ms Reiher said these legislation dealt with procuring girls and women for prostitution, and managers and owners of the hotels and premises where prostitution took place.

She said her team recommended that neutral language be used in the mentioned sections of the Penal Code to cover both girls and boys.

"The feedback we got from the Police Sexual Offence Unit is that there are gaps in the Penal Code and most of the time perpetrators, mostly men are being charged under different sections and getting lighter sentences.

Ms Reiher said Article 2 of the International Labour Organization's Convention 182 defined a child as a person aged 18 and below.

"But in the Juvenile Act, the definition of a young person in our juvenile jails is 17.

"This has been addressed and moved to the age of 18 in the Prisons and Corrections Act (2)," she said.

Ms Reiher said the Education Ministry also needed to look at its free education policy and how it was implemented, because some schools just introduced other levies.

"The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that there is a clear cut policy on such issues, as we can address child labour if more of our children are in the school system," she said.

Ms Reiher said another challenge faced by key State agencies like Education and Labour ministries was the lack of finance and human resources.



Minister for Labour Jone Usamate, left, with Jerome Pons, Head of Economics and Social Sector of the Delegation of the European Union during the Fiji National Child Labour Forum at Shangri-La's Fijian Resort and Spa.

WORK AGE REVIEW IN THE PIPELINE

RECOMMENDATIONS are being made to raise the minimum working age from 15 to 16 years.

This was revealed by Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Minister Jone Usamate at the Fiji National Child Labour Forum earlier this week.

The issue was raised as the ministry and government began finalising reforms to the Employment Relations Promulgation.

"Work on the revisions to the Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP) is nearing completion. There has been a recommendation made by the ERAB (Employment Relations Advisory Board) sub-committee to raise the minimum working age from 15 to 16 years old.

This will be considered by the full ERAB," he said. Mr Usamate said the recommendation was being made, taking into account the hardships and realities faced by the people of Fiji.

"In revising our laws, we have taken special cognizance of the importance of taking into account the realities that people in Fiji face on a day-to-day basis. This is always critical

because it is not possible to adopt idealistic solutions,” he said.

International Labour Organization’s South Pacific office director David Lamotte said the ERP was a good piece of legislation that needed improvements to make it better.

“Fiji has a very good employment law in the ERP and from our understanding the employer and employee organisations have said that it is the sound basis for industrial relations in the country,” he said.

“However, there are some areas that perhaps could be improved upon.”

FIRST LOCAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING CASE

FIJI’S first domestic human trafficking case was heard in the Suva Magistrates Court yesterday.

The pair — Inoke Raikadroka, 23, of Suva, and Mohammed Sheefaz Jameer Sagaitu, 24, of Rotuma — appeared before Chief Magistrate Usaia Ratuveli.

Mr Raikadroka is charged with nine counts of trafficking in children, living on earnings of prostitution and prostitution.

Mr Sagaitu, on the other hand, is charged with two counts of living on the earnings of prostitution and three counts of domestic trafficking in children.

It is alleged that the two, from May to December 12 last year, trafficked two girls aged 16, 17 and a 20-year-old woman between Suva and Nadi. Mr Ratuveli transferred the matter to the High Court citing the seriousness of the offence.

“Your charge is a serious charge and I am transferring it to the High Court,” he said.

Defence counsel Seremaia Waqainabete and the prosecution did not object to the decision made by Mr Ratuveli, saying the nature of the matter required it to be heard in the High Court.

He told both accused that they would be remanded in custody and that they should file their bail applications while in remand.

The matter will be called on March 1.



Mohammed Sheefaz Jameer Sagaitu (right) and Inoke Raikadroka, are escorted by police officers to court yesterday. Picture: JONE LUVENTOGA

PLANS TO END CHILD LABOUR IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

ERADICATING child labour in the sugar industry is one of the main targets of the government, says Labour Minister Jone Usamate.

He made this comment while opening the Stakeholders Training on Child Labour in the Sugar Industry, held at the Sugar Cane Growers Council building in Lautoka yesterday.

Mr Usamate said child labour kept children out of school and hampered the healthy development of their minds and bodies.

He said many rural children planted and harvested crops, sprayed pesticides and tended livestock.

“We must form a strong partnership to ensure that we act vigilantly in preventing our children from falling into these types of labour which hinder their development and prevent them from going to school,” Mr Usamate said.



Right: Peni Vuvuelala with other participants at the Stakeholders Training on Child Labour in the Sugar Industry workshop at the Sugar Cane Growers Council building in Lautoka. Picture: JAI PRASAD

“To fight the problem of child labour in the sugar industry, our ministry has trained a total of 347 teachers from the 197 rural agriculture-based schools on the issues of child labour.”

Sugar Ministry permanent secretary Lieutenant Colonel Manasa Vaniqi said the history of the industry showed that some children were actively involved in cane farming.

“The industry does not have any statistics to show the number of children being involved in child labour,” Lt-Col Vaniqi said.

“The ministry supported the idea of identifying these children and sending them back to the classrooms.

“Some children involved in cane farming have no future so the good thing about sending them to school is they can be productive through quality education.

“Children deserve the right to quality and better education as embedded in the People’s Charter, it is a government initiative and we will ensure to support other stakeholders in addressing the issue,” he said.

Lt-Col Vaniqi added social problems were

contributing factors that led to children being involved in child labour.

ALARMING

THE Ministry for Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment’s child labour unit has registered and investigated 121 cases of child labour so far.

In the process, the unit has recovered a total of \$8370 owed to the children concerned from employers nationwide.

This was revealed by Minister for Labour Jone Usamate at the Fiji National Child Labour Forum which began at Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort and Spa yesterday.

“Two employers have been charged for employing children against the provision of the Employment Regulations Promulgation 2007 and Regulation 2008 and the matter is before the Employment Relations Tribunal for adjudication,” he said.

“The unit is investigating two other cases of child labour and the charges to these employers will be laid very soon once the investigation concludes.”



Tripartite Partners at World Day Against Child Labour 2013.

“We must form a strong partnership to ensure that we act vigilantly in preventing our children from falling into these types of labour which hinder their development and prevent them from going to school”

Mr Usamate said the country's ability to effectively combat and address child labour would not have been possible without the assistance of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Union.

Mr Usamate acknowledged the assistance of the ILO in helping Fiji address child labour issues through the project Tackling Child Labour through Education (TACKLE).

“The TACKLE project led to the establishment of the Child Labour Unit within my ministry in June 2011,” he said.

DATABASE FOR CHILD LABOUR

FIJI will have a robust and active child labour database by the end of the first quarter of 2013, says Labour Minister Jone Usamate.

“It will benefit all stakeholders with research and assist in developing appropriate policy intervention towards the eradication of the worst forms of child labour,” he said.

“We realise that in order to be effective in dealing with child labour, we need to work in partnership with others,” said Mr Usamate.

“Nine district interagency committees have been trained on their roles and responsibilities in relation to child labour cases,” he said.

PORN ACCESS

GOVERNMENT is working towards placing restrictions on the types of websites that children can access on their mobile phones.

Deputy secretary at the Prime Minister's Office Naipote Katonitabua divulged this amid

discussions about children's unrestricted mobile access to pornographic websites.

He said the control measures would come through the Ministry of Information and relevant government departments.

“It could come in the form of sale of phones with restricted internet protocol addresses that could be issued to children. This has not been finalised but I can confirm that discussions are taking place on this issue because of the concerns that children have easy viewing of these types of adult sites.”

He also said in the meantime, parents and guardians should take some responsibility and monitor children's phone usage.

Mr Katonitabua was responding to concerns raised by participants at the National Child Labour Forum, currently in progress at Cuvu, Sigatoka.

Vodafone chief executive officer Aslam Khan said customers were given complete freedom of choice when it came to browsing the internet for legal reasons and confidentiality.

The company was aware and understood its corporate social responsibilities as a service provider.

“There is a degree of responsibility on the part of the parents to be aware of what their kids are up to. One cannot just shy away from these responsibilities blaming the service providers,” he said.

He also suggested that parents purchase internet monitoring tools to restrict sites children can and cannot access.

Discussions at the three-day forum were centred around the International Labour Organisation's TACKLE project that aims to reduce poverty in the least developed countries by providing access to basic education and skills development to the most disadvantaged in society.

POLICE TARGET CHILD LABOUR

THE Fiji Police Force is working closely with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organisations in the fight against child labour.

West Police Commander SSP Salacieli Naivilawasa said with the assistance of these organisations children were being given their basic right to education. “In a situation where the child is not willing to go back to school who is 15 years and above, these children can be registered and trained under the National Employment Centre,” said SSP Naivilawasa.

He said the legal framework under section 91 and 92 of the Employment Relations Promulgation 2007, labour officers and labour inspectors had the legal power to enforce the minimum age of employment which was 15 years. “Those who violate this law can face a fine from \$10,000 for individuals to a maximum of \$50,000 for corporations.”

SSP Naivilawasa was chief guest at the World Day Against Child Labour in Lautoka yesterday.

Addressing guests at the celebrations yesterday, west labour officer Lui Mario said parents played a big part in fighting child labour. “We can only work together as a team to eliminate child labour in the country.”

FIGHTING POVERTY

THE fight against poverty is a cross-cutting issue that should be dealt with by all.

Speaking at the ground-breaking ceremony of a new multi-purpose hall for women in Savusavu, Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation Doctor Jiko Luveni said it was the duty of all citizens to ensure such problems were controlled.

She said her ministry set in place a new policy to cover all family units around the country.



Minister for Women Doctor Jiko Luveni at the ground breaking ceremony of the new multi-purpose hall in Savusavu yesterday. Picture: LUKE RAWALAI

“We are on the road to visiting individual families and changing the idea of full support from our ministry to encourage them to become self-sufficient.

“Instead of encouraging people to be wholly dependent on the social welfare assistance scheme that we provide, we are encouraging families to be self-sufficient and involving them in projects or supporting the education of their young ones will ensure they have a sustainable source of income. Previously we were supporting 4 per cent of the population across the country but through this policy we are now supporting 10 per cent of the population and that is a good change.”

MINISTRY AIMS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOUR

AS the country marked World Day Against Child Labour yesterday, the focus now shifts towards achieving ways of putting a complete stop to the issue.

Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation Dr Jiko Luveni said the issue of child labour was a challenging one and needed to be addressed collaboratively by government, non-government organisations (NGOs), child advocates, schools, communities and individuals.

“National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC), is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Fiji’s laws and procedures and its role extends to providing advice, regulating and monitoring the protection and welfare of children in Fiji,” Dr Luveni said.

Dr Luveni has also called on parents to ensure their children were in school.

She said the government would raise awareness on the importance of education and the effects of child labour.

She said through government’s Care and Protection (C&P) program, the Social Welfare Department provided assistance in the form of monthly allowances to parents, guardians, single mothers who found it difficult to financially meet the needs of their children.

STATE TARGETS SCHOOL LEAVERS

AN inter-agency made up of Government officials has set its focus on solving the problem of school drop-outs in the province of Ra.

Consisting of Government and Ra Provincial Office staff, the team started the Tabutabuvuli operation last year in an effort to encourage school drop-outs to return to classes.

Team secretary Josai Kotobalavu said Ra has many school dropouts staying in villages and the team has targeted these students to

secure better education and to contribute positively to the wellbeing of the province.

Mr Kotobalavu said the team had been visiting villages encouraging parents to secure better education.

He said more than 10 school drop-outs were enrolled in schools last year and the target was to wipe out the problem in the next four years.

“This is part of the Government’s integrated policy of assisting grass root people,” said Mr Kotobalavu.

“Ra has the biggest number of school drop-outs and our team will make sure that this problem is eradicated.

“The operation has progressed well and we are confident of fulfilling our aim for all school dropouts to return to classes by 2014.”

Mr Kotobalavu said the team has received some positive feedbacks and the focus was also targeted on the up-skilling school leavers.

He said many villagers had completed high school education.

“We need to up-skill these villagers to best suit their skills and talents,” he said.

“For Ra to be fully developed, we need educated people,” he said.

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR DROP-OUTS

THE National Employment Centre has received a positive response from school dropouts in the Yasawa Group.

During the week-long tikina (dostrict) council meetings in the Yasawa Group, more than 60 drop-outs indicated their willingness to return to classrooms.

NEC Lautoka branch officer Paula Cavasiga said more than 60 forms have been distributed and a majority of tikina reps wanted the training to be held in separate villages.

“School leavers have stepped forward wanting to enroll in this program,” said Mr Cavasiga.

“More than 117 drop-outs in Yasawa are already in the system, many have now secured jobs in hotels.”

Viwa district rep Puliiasi Tunisau said the NEC program would benefit most school leavers in the island.

He said he had requested Mr Cavasiga to hold classes at Viwa Island since there were more than 15 drop-outs residing in the village.

“It’s difficult to send all our dropouts to Lautoka because of the high transportation cost,” said Mr Tunisau.

Naviti district rep Sikeli Mulase echoed similar sentiments wanting the program to be held on the island.

He said many hotel workers in Naviti dropped out of school without any qualifications.

“We would love to have the courses held in the islands to upgrade and upskill our school leavers.”

Mr Cavasiga said he would submit his reports to his bosses in Lautoka and one of the main issues to be highlighted will be the request from villagers to hold the NEC program in the Yasawas.

GOVT OFFERS DROP-OUT HELP

GOVERNMENT is willing to work closely with the community in the fight to address the issue of school drop-outs in the highlands of Navosa.

This offer was made by Commissioner Western Commander Joeli Cawaki during a talanoa session with the people of Nadrau on Thursday.

District representative Levi Naimawi said more than 20 children residing in the district were of school age and supposed to be in school. He said 10 children were of primary school age and this issue concerned the community greatly.

“Drop-out is a major sickness in the district,” Mr Naimawi said.

“Financial difficulties and negligence of parents also contribute to the problem.

“We are asking government to help by returning the students to classrooms.

Cdr Cawaki said the government through

the Tabutabuvuli Operation wanted all children to be in school. He said an integrated government team had been visiting villages, educating people on the significance of education.

“The government is also looking at decentralising services and there is a possibility of having vocational courses in the rural areas to upskill the drop-outs,” Cdr Cawaki said. Those who are supposed to be in primary school, they are required to return to the classroom.”

Cdr Cawaki told the district representative to identify all drop-outs in the area and compile a report on what courses would best suit them, and submit it to the district officer.

FOCUS ON CHILD LABOUR

YESTERDAY, stakeholders from the Ministry of Labour, teachers’ unions, Save the Children Fiji and People’s Community Network organised events — ranging from poster and oratory competitions to market awareness campaign — to observe World Day Against Child Labour, which falls on June 12 each year.

The program also included the launch of a joint Action Plan Against Child Labour by the Fiji Teachers Union and Fijian Teachers Association.



Schoolchildren from Ba admire the artwork on child labour posters.

The International Labour Organization launched the first World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 as a way to highlight the plight of these children.

The day provides an opportunity to gain further support of individual governments and ILO social partners, civil society, schools, youth and women's groups, as well as the media, in the campaign against child labour.

This year provides a spotlight on children in domestic child labour.

An estimated 10.5 million children worldwide — most of them underage — are working as domestic workers in people's homes, in hazardous and sometimes slavery-like conditions.

Six and a half million of these child labourers are aged between five and 14.

More than 71 per cent are girls.

According to the latest figures in a new ILO report Ending Child Labour in Domestic Work, they work in the homes of a third party or employer, carrying out tasks such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, gardening, collecting water, looking after other children and caring for the elderly.

Vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual violence and abusive working conditions, they are often isolated from their families, hidden from the public eye and become highly dependent on their employers.

Many might end up being commercially sexually exploited.

The report, launched to mark World Day Against Child Labour, calls for concerted and joint action at national and international levels to eliminate child labour in domestic work.

It is estimated that an additional five million children, who are above the minimum legal age of work in their countries, are involved in paid or unpaid domestic work globally.

Child domestic work is not recognised as a form of child labour in many countries because of the blurred relationship with employing family, the report says.

The child is “working, but is not considered

as a worker and although the child lives in a family setting, she or he is not treated like a family member”.

This familial and legal “care vacuum” disguises an “exploitative arrangement”, often characterised by long working hours, lack of personal freedom and sometimes hazardous working conditions.

The hidden nature of their situation makes them difficult to protect.

The report calls for improved data collection and statistical tools so that the true extent of the problem can be ascertained.

It also presses for governments to ratify and implement ILO Convention 138, concerning the minimum age for admission to employment and ILO Convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour.

***Some children involved
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quality education.***

However, it stresses that domestic work is an important source of employment, especially for millions of women.

This has been recognised in the landmark ILO Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers which, the report says, should also be promoted as part of the strategy to eliminate child labour in domestic work.

Domestic workers of all ages are increasingly performing a vital task in many economies.

We need to ensure a new respect for their rights and to empower domestic workers and their representative organisations.

An essential aspect of this new approach involves tackling child labour.

STATE STEPS UP FIGHT AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

FINDINGS from a survey that was conducted at 146 schools across the country last year will be used to effectively construct a national action plan to combat the worst forms of child labour in Fiji.



United in fighting child labour? Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh, fourth left, discusses issues with representatives from the Education Ministry at the National Child Labour Forum.

This was revealed by the Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Jone Usamate at the opening of the Fiji National Child Labour Forum on Monday.

“In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, our Child Labour Unit conducted training to 347 teachers in 146 schools in all divisions in 2012. At the same time a survey was conducted in these 146 schools to collect data on the number of children who are employed during and after school,” he said.

“The findings of this school-based survey will add value to drafting of the national plan of action for the elimination of worst forms of child labour which is scheduled for completion in March 2013 for stakeholder consultation

before implementation by the end of the second quarter of 2013,” he added.

Mr Usamate said through the national action plan, it was hoped that child labour would be more effectively monitored and addressed in the country. “Through the national plan of action, we need to create a synergy that will lead to action. It will lead to results. It must impact on our nation, our region and the world to remind everyone that our children deserve the very best choices in life, including employment.”

Heads and representatives from the European Union, government departments, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, Fiji Police Force, trade unions and non-government organisations involved in combatting child labour and the media participated in the three-day forum.

WELFARE RULES UNDER REVIEW

THE Social Welfare department is reviewing the criteria and conditions under which financial assistance is given out.

Welfare director Ilisapeci Rokotunidau said the department was looking at ways to help families who had children in school.

“We may need to move toward conditional cash grants that focus on keeping children in school,” she said. “There is no systematic approach or concern on the area of youths who are legally defined to be from 15 to 24 years old.

“Youths need more focus during assessments.

“Exposure to risk environment is higher with this age group 15 years to 18 years due because of their vulnerability.”

Ms Rokotunidau made the comments at the ILO’s Fiji national child labour forum which tackled child labour through education.

She said statistics showed that in 1999, 55 per cent of total enrolment in school had left by Form Six while in 2005, 5 per cent of children did not get enrolled in Class One

She said as young adults it was easier to

take the child out of school to work for a family income. She said peer pressure had an impact on the child with the want of “good life and good things” they think they should have.

Ms Rokotunidau said there was a need for the department to work across sectors on promoting the protection of children. She said the way to do this was carry out awareness, advocacy and educational programs and materials.

She said communication should include working with the community and families on the risks involved and the factors surrounding child labour and child trafficking.

“Even though data on child beggars and child prostitution is limited, it should not limit the scope of work of Welfare Officers in relation to the protection of children,” she said.

EDUCATION EMPHASIS

THE Labour Ministry has stressed the need for parents, guardians and teachers to understand that all school-aged children must attend classes.

Speaking at a workshop organised by the FTUC and the International Labour Organization in Nadi last week, district labour officer Akuila Tuleca warned parents and guardians that depriving a child of his or her right to education is now an offence that carries penalties.

“There are strict guidelines under the Employment Regulations Promulgation regarding the issue of child labour,” he said.

“It is each and everyone’s duty to assist in the eradication of child labour.

“The minimum age for any child to be employed is 15 years and there are very strict regulations embedded in the current labour laws regarding this issue.”

Mr Tuleca said while the government understood the importance of parents instilling the values of work in their children, it was equally important that parents understood the boundaries where some types of work could be classified as child labour.

“ *It will benefit all stakeholders with research and assist in developing appropriate policy intervention towards the eradication of the worst forms of child labour* ”

“It has to be very clear to each and everyone that we have to demarcate well the issue of child labour and child development.

“Child labour comes in when you hinder the process of a child’s education for example when children are forced not to go to school and made to tend to younger siblings so parents can attend to customary obligations which is of high importance.

“That is child labour because the development of the child is being hindered.

“It is not only inculcated under the law, it also carries very heavy penalties or fines when you prevent your child from going to school.”

COMBATING CHILD LABOUR IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

The Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment Mr Jone Usamate today opened the training on Child Labour in the Sugar Industry for Lautoka stakeholders.

The Minister highlighted that the purpose of this training is to combat child labour in the sugar industry and also to form a strong partnership in ensuring that stakeholders act vigilantly in preventing child labour which hinders children development and prevents them from going to school.

“My Ministry has conducted a Child Labour School Based Survey in 2012 and have discovered that there are many children being involved in various form of child labour in the agricultural industry and also in other sectors.

In the process, the unit has recovered a total of \$8370 owed to the children concerned from employers nationwide

“As the result of this survey, the Child Labour Unit of my Ministry has been working around the clock in ensuring that the stakeholders and our people are trained and made aware of the impact of child labour on our children.” said Mr Usamate.

“In combating child labour, my Ministry has trained a total of 347 teachers from the 197 rural agriculture based schools on child labour issues and also provided awareness on various assistance that can be provided to children in ensuing that they remain in schools”, said the Minister.

He adds that some of the ways that government has been assisting in this area is through the subsidies of school bus fare from Ministry of Education and through the care and protection allowance provided by the Social Welfare Department.

He said that there are also many existing non-governmental organizations also do provide assistance in terms of payment of school fees, providing of school books and uniforms.

The Minister said that this is indeed a collective effort by our government and its people in ensuring that our children are given the best possible assistance to complete their education.

He thanked the Ministry of Sugar, the Sugar Cane Growers Council, the Fiji Sugar Corporation and the Cane Producer Organization in working towards creating awareness to the industry stakeholders.

He concluded that about 215 million children worldwide are involved in child labour. Out of that, 115 million are engaged in hazardous work including that of cane farming and other agricultural activities.

MINISTER FOR LABOUR VISITS LABASA

THE Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment, Mr Jone Usamate held public consultations yesterday in Labasa. He also stressed the need to collectively address child labour which he pointed out affects the development of each child engaged in labour practices.

FIGHT AGAINST CHILD LABOUR CONTINUES

THE Fijian Government's efforts to eradicate child labour has seen the successful withdrawal of 24 children from the clutches of child labour in the first five months of this year.

This was revealed today at the World Day Against Child Labour celebrations at the Civic Centre in Suva.

The Ministry Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment has referred all these children to school with the assistance from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Education.

Speaking at the celebrations, ministry acting permanent secretary Samuela Namosimalua said the attention to the phenomenon of children working has probably never been greater than it is today.

“Children employed during school hours either in domestic work or any other duty deprive them of education and it infringes on their basic rights,” Mr Namosimalua said.

“Many people agree that some type of work done by children do not harm their lives and are considered as part of the moral development of the child. However, there are certain situations which our children should never be employed in where these types of situation destroy the future and the development of our children.”

Mr Namosimalua said the celebration signifies serious concerns and commitments to ensure that all stakeholders join hands in the fight against child labour.

The theme for this year's celebrations is 'No to Child Labour in Domestic Work' which throws light on the many children employed in domestic work who are deprived of the basic fundamental rights of education.

"In any situation at home where a child is deprived of education due to a family commitment, such as crop harvesting, looking after younger siblings, selling produce, attending to traditional and religious commitments to name a few, is child labour. These are examples of child labour in domestic work and is real in Fiji. These domestic activities deprive a child from attaining education," Mr Namosimalua stressed.

The preliminary findings of child labour school based survey conducted in 2012 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education that involved 79 schools, both primary and secondary in the four Divisions, confirmed the existence of child labour. The final report of that survey will be released soon. Mr Namosimalua said Government's commitment to eradicating child labour is enunciated in the provisions of The Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP) which came into effect on 2nd April, 2008.

"The ERP defines the issues of the worst forms of child labour, minimum age of employment, the rights of a child, condition on restriction of employment of children, hours and type of work that the child can perform if the child is above the age of 15 years which is the minimum employment age in Fiji," Mr Namosimalua said.

"It also sets out the conditions under which a child can be employed; taking into consideration that the employment should not in any way affect the child's educational participation."

Fiji has also recently gazetted a list of hazardous occupation prohibited to children below 18 years of age.

"This legal notice came into effect on 28th May 2013. This hazardous list basically defines that there are certain type of work children

The Ministry for Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment's child labour unit has registered and investigated 121 cases of child labour so far

cannot be employed in. This is the first list for Fiji and we are proud of our Government's commitment in ensuring that we work towards a goal of eradicating the problem of child Labour and ensuring that we provide the right environment for our children to grow and attain the necessary educational training, and competencies for their future employability and creativity," Mr Namosimalua said.

The ERP 2007 legal framework gives Labour officers and Labour inspectors the legal powers to enforce the minimum age of employment and other conditions of employment for children who are above 15 years.

"Those who violate this law can face a fine from \$10,000 for individuals to a maximum of \$50,000 for corporations."

EMPLOYERS PROHIBITED FROM EMPLOYING CHILDREN IN HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS

GOVERNMENT has announced that under the 'Hazardous Occupations Prohibited to Children Under 18 Years of Age Order 2013' employers are prohibited to employ children in hazardous working environments.

This extraordinary government gazette supplement number 18 (legal notice number 30) came into force on May 28.

The gazette reveals that all employers should adhere to laws under Section 95(2) of the Employment Relations Promulgation 2007 which prohibits any child to be employed in occupation or work which by its nature or circumstances in which it is carried out is

likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations, Jone Usamate said under this order children are prohibited to be employed in occupations of processing and preparation of drugs and chemical products involving exposure to dangerous chemicals.

“Under this order children are also prohibited to be employed in areas of mining, service sports and other related areas like farming fishing and logging,” Minister Usamate said.

“Other hazardous work includes but is not limited to bottle collecting and scrap metal collecting.”

Minister Usamate said an employer who, after being served with this Order, continues to employ a child in the prohibited occupation of workplace, commits an offence and is liable under provisions of the Employment Relations Promulgation 2007.

CHILD LABOUR AWARENESS FOR SCHOOLS

THE Child Labour Unit at the Labour Ministry in conjunction with officials from the Ministry of Education has started child labour awareness programmes for schools nationwide.

Targeting teachers and members of different communities in the country, the team conducted its first awareness programme for the third quarter in the Northern Division and covered a total of 47 Primary & Secondary schools as well as schools located in remote areas.

The Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment, Mr Usamate explained that the program is designed to raise awareness to ensure that children are not exploited for hard labour during school hours.

“This is to ensure that children have access to proper education which leads to better

welfare in their near future and at the same time it alleviates poverty,” Minister Usamate said.

“The Heads of Schools have also been trained on monitoring and addressing child labour issues in schools and following proper reporting procedures in terms of reporting child labour cases.”

He said that the Ministry has also extended awareness on child labour laws to the Fiji Principals Association Conference in Lautoka and also to the Fiji Head Teachers Association in Savusavu.

The Minister highlighted that government is committed to making Fiji a knowledge-based society as required under Pillar 8 as well as the reduction of poverty to a negligible level under Pillar 9 of the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress (PCCCP).

A total of 192 teachers have been trained so far.

MAXIMUM ADVOCACY ON CHILD PROTECTION

THE underlying vision for the Child Services Unit in the Department of Social Welfare is to increase awareness and advocacy on child protection in Fiji.

The Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation Dr Jiko Luveni said that children living in Residential Homes need good care and upbringing to ensure that they are reintegrated with their families and communities.

She made this comment following her visit to the Lomani Au Home in Savusavu last week. This Residential Home was opened last year and looks after underprivileged (orphans and children from broken families) in the northern division.

“Currently there are 124 children in the Residential Homes, all these children are under state care. Under the Care and Protection Program, the Ministry provides assistance to ensure that the education, health needs of the

children is well looked after. There is care plan for each of these children to ensure that they are reintegrated back with their families and communities,” she said.

She said the ministry would also provide capacity building training for the child protection officers to work closely with the Home managers to ensure that children are protected and cared for all the time.

“There is regular monitoring of all the Homes to ensure that they adhere to Standard Operating Procedures. This year, the Child Services Unit will work towards maximum advocacy on the protection of the children. Given the increase in the number of cases received on child abuse and neglect, I am hoping that every opportunity we get, we intent to increase the level of awareness on the Ministry’s role in Child Protection.

“In fact, we would like the public to be better informed of the legislative role of the Ministry, particularly in line with the Child Welfare Decree and mandatory reporting of all child welfare cases,” she said.

NEW MANUAL TO BOOST CHILD HEALTH CARE IN FIJI

THE launch of a new manual designed to boost the level care provided to infants and children in the country has been commended by authorities in the country.

The Ministry of Health in partnership with the AusAID today launched the 2013 Immunization Week and the Child health strategy Policy 2012-2015.

This document will outline the policy statements of the Ministry of Health in support of infant and child health and key activities of programs and services provided for children.

Fiji’s Ministry of Health deputy secretary for Public Health Una Bera pointed out that child health has been a priority for many years within the ministry especially the Paediatric and health divisions.

“In 2008 World Health Organisation estimated that 1.5million of deaths are among children under the age of 5years were due to



diseases that could have been prevented by routine vaccination,” Mrs Bera said.

She added that Fiji launched the 2011 health systems review that showed that the mortality rate for children under 5years old was noted to be 22.4 percent 100 live births. Diseases such as pneumococcus, rotavirus and Haemophilus remain a major concern among the children of our Fiji.

Mrs Bera adds what is more significant is the fact that diseases can be prevented through routine immunizations and the recent introduction of pneumococcal and HPV vaccines this year.

The vaccines will prevent diseases such as pneumonia, meningitis for children and cervical cancer among young women.

AusAID counsellor for Fiji and Tuvalu Joanne Chloe commended the health ministry for their efforts in designing such policies to ensure there are quality services provided for the betterment of children’s health.

Parents and expecting mothers present at the event were challenged to prioritise their children’s health and to seek medical assistance if their child is sick. Dr Luveni said.

WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE CHILD LABOUR IN FIJI





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About the ILO

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations agency devoted to promoting rights at work, encouraging decent employment opportunities for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, and enhancing social protection. It is unique in that it brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes and strengthen their dialogue.

The ILO develops international labour standards and works with members States to ensure they are respected in practice as well as principle.

The ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries based in Fiji, provides technical assistance to nine member States (Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu), as well as to non-member States in the region as required, on a wide range of areas including: labour migration; the elimination of child labour; promotion of gender equality; labour law reform; protecting seafarers; labour market statistics; occupational safety and health; HIV/AIDs in the workplace; youth employment; and entrepreneurship development.

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