

**COMMUNITY SUBMISSION TO THE
MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND NATIONAL PLANNING
FOR THE 2008 BUDGET**



Compiled by the
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Introduction

This budget submission is based on the concerns and recommendations raised at two Grassroots Budgetary Workshops conducted by the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) at the Scouts Hall in Labasa from 24-25 May 2007 and at the Hot Springs Hotel in Savusavu from 29-30 May 2007. A full list of the organizations represented at this workshop is in Appendix 1. The CCF is responsible for the compilation of these concerns and recommendations for presentation to the Ministry of Finance & National Planning and to the relevant line ministries referred to in this submission.

The Northern division of Fiji faces a peculiar predicament. Peculiar because the North – according to its constituents – is endowed with natural resources in terms of the best fertile soils in Fiji to grow fruits, staple crops and timber. Many top academics and professionals from Fiji have grown up in Labasa and have gone on to contribute to the development of Fiji's economy. However, the North itself has remained under-developed.

The 'Look North' policy has been proposed by successive governments, but so far, no concrete implementation has occurred. Problems of infrastructure have existed from the time of Fiji's independence and have resulted in a feeling of helplessness by people on how to engage in economic activity. Problems of infrastructure dominate the list of major concerns for the North including roads, water supply and access to good health services.

For Labasa, an added concern is that the sugar industry has been declining and there is a fear that the imminent closure of the sugar industry may lead to a further decline in the economy of Labasa.

The grassroots people of the North, through this submission are saying that they have self-respect like everyone else. They do not want handouts, instead, they want infrastructural and institutional changes that would allow them the opportunity to engage in economic activity by improving their access to education, employment, health facilities and life's many opportunities. Government however, is encouraged to improve the living conditions of the very poor and vulnerable so they too can live their lives in dignity as proud and equal citizens of Fiji.

The grassroots would not like to be spoon-fed at all times. If their concerns and recommendations are considered, the resulting creation of employment and economic activities would improve their living standards. Through this submission, it is hoped the government will re-look at the issues of concern of the North and make it a priority to allocate resources in the 2008 Budget, to address these issues.

Lastly, the recent poverty survey by Prof Wadan Narsey revealed that the Western Division of Fiji has also been neglected in terms of development. We request that the government in addition to looking more to develop the North, should also look more towards developing the Western areas as well.

About the CCF and the Grassroots Budgetary Workshops

The CCF is a non government organization and has been working in Fiji for the past 16 years to advocate and educate for the Constitution, democracy, human rights and multiculturalism in Fiji. The CCF assists communities, groups and individuals to understand and exercise their constitutional and democratic rights. This democratic right includes the rights of citizens to understand the processes and content of the government's national budget, and why it is important for citizens' to scrutinise and participate in the national budget process. The CCF is grateful to the German-based organization Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) for funding these workshops.

The first set of Grassroots Budgetary Workshops were conducted by CCF in June 2006 in Suva and Lautoka. The outcomes of these workshops were presented in a submission to the government. Following the December 5 2006 military takeover of government, the CCF conducted Post-Budget Analysis Workshops in Suva and Lautoka in January 2007. The CCF's 2006 submission was revised and re-submitted to the government for consideration in the 2007 Mini Budget.

Planning for the May 2007 Grassroots Budgetary Workshops in the North began in March 2007. Letters of invitation were sent to the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Social Welfare, for them to send representatives. The Ministry of Finance were unable to send a representative, however, it was fortunate that the Ministry of Social Welfare were able to send a representative – the Ministry's Divisional Officer Northern Mr Mateo Naiveli – whose presentation on the Ministry's projects and activities in relation to the government's budget was well received by participants. At the Labasa workshop, another key speaker was Professor Biman Prasad, Head of the School of Economics at the University of the South Pacific. A presentation was also made by a representative of the Consumer Council, Labasa on Household budgets. In Savusavu, key guest speakers were former Minister for Public Utilities Mr Robin Urwin, and Mr Mateo Naiveli. A presentation was also made by Joela Cama from the Ministry of Finance and National Planning Office.

The workshops were facilitated by Mosmi Bhim and Ponipate Ravula, who are staff of CCF, through presentations, discussions and group work activities.

More about the workshop participants who contributed to this submission

The Grassroots Budgetary Workshops in the North attracted genuine participants from the grassroots communities in Labasa and Savusavu. Almost all the participants have lived in the North for their life-time. Most of the participants travelled long distances from rural areas to attend the workshops. In Labasa, the workshop attracted 39 participants on the first day; out of these, 34 participants returned to complete participation in the workshop on the second day. The Labasa participants came from a range of grassroots, religious and non-government organisations. In Savusavu, 39 participants attended the workshop on both days. Participants came from Savudrodoro, Nadamole, Kasavu, Dreketi, Vakativa and Savusavu town. The Savusavu participants were predominantly from agrarian rural backgrounds, a bulk of whom were women.

Content of Submission

The concerns and recommendations in this submission are broadly categorised under the following headings:

1. Infrastructure - roads, water, electricity
2. Education, employment and poverty
3. Agriculture - Land, Marketing, Sugar and other crops
4. Social welfare - Housing, health and sanitation
5. Leadership – corruption, inefficiency, poor performance
6. Democracy, Law and Order

Relevant line ministries are encouraged to consider separately the recommendations relating to their own departments.

Justifications for the Submission

Budgets are formulated by policy planners and budget officials based in the Ministry of Finance and National Planning in government. This means that on most occasions, the concerns of grassroots people do not manage to reach the right office in government, for them to be considered. The tight process of formulating the budget and liaising with all the different departments within government means that little time or resources may be left for the government to hold consultations with the grassroots communities.

The government has been calling for submissions from the public. However, the reality is that the majority of people at the grassroots level do not have the necessary skills and resources to put their concerns in a written submission to the government. The CCF has prepared this submission after having workshops with grassroots communities, so that we can relay their needs and concerns directly to the government. This submission provides a window to policy and decision makers to gain an insight into the concerns and suggested ways of addressing these concerns, by the grassroots people themselves.

We believe that Government should listen to the views and recommendations of grassroots communities during its budget formulation process for the following reasons.

(a) Poverty statistics – the recent poverty study by Prof Wadan Narsey revealed that poverty is more widespread in rural areas. The study revealed that in 2002-2003, 34 % of people were below the poverty line. Of the rural poor, the Indo-Fijians were poorer and had worse living standards compared to the Fijians. 47% of rural Indians were below the poverty line, compared to 45% of others, and 39% of Fijians. In terms of standards of living, 90% of Fijians are better off than Indo-Fijians. For many decades, people have been saying that the poverty gap between Fijians and Indians should be closed to prevent instability. This has led to higher levels of poverty in Indo-Fijians. However, chances of instability are still very higher as the Fijian population overall is higher and the figures for Fijian poor is still high.

(b) Current levels of poverty and unemployment are unhealthy both economically and in terms of long term political stability. With an estimated 34 percent (and growing) of the

population living below the poverty line and one tenth of the people living in squatter settlements, the government should be seriously concerned. Government needs to listen to the concerns and recommendations of the poor and grassroots communities in eradicating poverty and related social ills.

(c) Grassroots communities have a good idea of what their major concerns are, as they have been living in that situation for their entire lives. Majority of grassroots people know how their problems can be resolved and what minimal assistance they would need from government in order to solve their problems. Listening to grassroots communities recommendations could entail a faster resolution of problems by the government.

Grassroots Concerns and Budget Recommendations

1. Infrastructure - roads, water, electricity, telecommunications

People from the North have identified the lack of infrastructure as the root cause of all their problems. If the infrastructural facilities are available, they will be able to access the resources needed to generate economic activities, provide tourism services, and get easy access to markets. Good roads and regular transport are also needed for people to access education and health facilities and government departments. Telecommunications and electricity are essential for establishing links and source services, markets and business opportunities. Water is essential to maintain standards of life, basic living and hygiene.

Concerns

- a) Water is a basic necessity to life and without water people would not be able to survive. Northern people have been living without full access to water supplies due to inefficiencies, unskilled engineers and faulty meter readings. Inefficiencies does not only affect urban areas but also affects the farmers in rural areas. Unskilled engineers in the North have contributed to problems of access to water supply. Faulty meter readings is another problem as officers estimate the cost of water usage through their computers rather than doing the reading from individual meters.
- b) Health facilities not being accessible to the rural areas means that sick people's lives are at risk and women end up giving birth in unsanitary conditions (such as in taxis and vans while trying to reach health facilities located far away).
- c) The roads in Vanua Levu have been in a very poor condition for the past 15 years. Rivers and streams do not have proper bridges. Proper drainage is also needed to avoid landslides that are damaging and spoiling the roads in the North. These problems are affecting access to: education, marketing, health services and communication. For example, the Suweni, Korotari, Vunicuicui and Qelewaqa areas for the past 30 years, have not had bridges for school children to access education. People also have problems accessing health services and markets due to irregular bus services.
- d) A Port of Entry is needed in Labasa since it is the main centre of Vanua Levu. Also needed is an extension of the Labasa Airport so it can accommodate international flights.

- e) Communication – People in rural areas do not have access to telephone for networking. A communication centres is needed so that the people in rural areas can be served properly.

Recommendations

- a) Roads – participants recommended that the government and the community should work in partnership to build roads. The community could provide unskilled labour, gravel and sand. The government could conduct surveys, deal with legislations and contracts, and provide machines, engineers and experts.
- b) Water – participants recommended that the government and community should work together to solve the problem of water. The community could provide labour, gravel and sand and government could provide machines, engineers, skilled labour and other materials needed for setting up of water supply facilities.
- c) Electricity – the community can provide one-third contribution and government can provide two-thirds contribution to make electricity services available in all Northern area.
- d) Government should introduce modern technology for water supply in urban areas whereas in rural areas, they should supply water tanks and bore holes.
- e) Government should allocate resources to train skilled engineers for water works.
- f) Officials should go out to the field and carry out the meter readings for water. Government should allocate resources to cater for the officers' transportations and create incentives for them to perform better.

2. Education, employment

Concerns

- a) Education is not accessible to all children. Infrastructural problems like bad roads, washed away bridges and deplorable local shipping conditions severely undermine access to education.
- b) Government is not providing building grants and financial support to schools.
- c) Washed away roads and bridges and shipping severely undermine access to education.
- d) Poverty report by Prof Wadan Narsey revealed that women work more than 15 hours a day and so don't get a chance to improve themselves in life.
- e) Families give priority to boys for education.
- f) People who are not educated are more difficult to communicate with and find it harder to cope with life. A few weeks ago, 80 people from one village in Wailevu suffered from typhoid. People were not educated, therefore ignorant about how to take precaution from typhoid.
- g) There is very few training or employment opportunities available to school drop-outs, unemployed youths and ex-prisoners.

Recommendations

- a) Education - Families should be encouraged to give education to their girls to create equal opportunity in life. Where a girl is not receiving the same opportunities for education as the boy in the family, the government should cater for the education needs of the girl.

- b) Education should be compulsory and free. The education for all policy needs to be implemented.
- c) Schools need to be provided with building funds. Teachers and other civil servants at the age of 55 years old to be retired because by that age, they are worn out and develop stress related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. This would create employment for the younger generation.
- d) Government should increase building grants and financial support to schools and should supply school materials to children.
- e) Employment – Government should encourage people to make use of the land they have. School drop-outs and ex-prisoners could be employed through farming.
- f) Government should provide free vocational training to school drop-outs, designed to enhance their employment opportunities and income generating capacities.
- g) Lease money and royalties – a portion should be kept aside to invest in education and other services.
- h) More facilities should be created in the North to encourage investments such as building hotels which would create more jobs. Proper roads, airports and port of entry in the North will encourage investors.
- i) Improve in conditions for garment factories to create more employment for women.
- j) Tax free zones should be created in the North to encourage industries to invest.
- k) Skilled teachers with proper counselling knowledge should be available in schools to give career advice to students.
- l) Government should increase provision of vocational studies.
- m) Men should be encouraged to share the work load at home so that women do not end up being overworked, and also to enable women to gain some free time to improve themselves.

3. Agriculture, Land, Marketing and Sugar

Concerns

- a) Agriculture – agriculture officers had been visiting villages to encourage planting of dalo and other crops. The crops were planted but there was no access to markets. Villagers planting yaqona and dalo face a problem of markets as the only local are in Savusavu and Labasa. People have to deal with a middle man.
- b) There is only two markets and the markets become flooded with crops. Middlemen offer very low prices meaning that farmers make very little money. When middlemen want to buy produce for very cheap prices, farmers lose out on their produce.
- c) A lot of land is lying idle in the North. Land is expensive for sugar farmers who have to pay for cane cutters and costs of farming. There is not enough land available for cash crop farmers such as those farming vegetables.
- d) Lack of supply of equipment by the government to the farmers.
- e) No proper roads for sugar transportation.
- f) Deforestation through flooding is decreasing the productivity of farmers crop. There is a lack of proper drainage facilities, leading to soil erosion.
- g) Copra prices have been stable (not increasing) for the past five years and thus not meeting the rising costs of everyday living. People don't make enough money from copra for self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

- a) Government should provide a scheme where dalo and other crops can be bought directly from villagers to avoid middlemen sponging off money from farmers. Maybe government can provide direct buying with better prices.
- b) Government should promote a scheme to employ youth in agriculture so remain in their villages as they would have something useful to do.
- c) Government should increase prices for copra and explore making of copra products such as producing coconut fuel. In the Solomon Islands, copra fuel is being utilised. Government should subsidise coconut oil for use as fuel.
- e) Government should provide proper assistance to farmers through financial support, farming tools and seedlings.
- f) Government needs to provide subsidies for cane access roads.
- g) Government should negotiate with the landowners, NLTB, and the mataqali for the renewal of leases.
- h) All expiring leases should be sorted out within a time-frame of five years. Master lease should be organised where the government would lease a major piece of land and sub-lease smaller portions of this land to farmers.
- i) Forests should not be over-cut and logs should not be over-harvested because the minerals in the soil will be lost through deforestation.

4. Social welfare - Housing, health, sanitation

Problems of health and sanitation were highlighted in both Labasa and Savusavu. These are linked to lack of access to clean and safe water. The recent outbreak of typhoid in the North resulted in a few deaths which participants felt could have been avoided if there had been awareness of water safety issues and availability of clean and safe water to drink. In Wailevu, 80 people from one village suffered from typhoid. Another health issue is the incomplete sanitation (provision of proper toilets) works in the North. The increasing number of squatters in Labasa and the poor housing conditions of some residents is another area of concern.

Concerns:

- a) Clean water is not accessible to everyone and there is a problem of water shortage.
- b) Unsafe housing conditions and poor sanitation is causing serious health problems.
- c) Medical institutions in the North are understaffed.
- d) There is poor service delivery.
- e) There is a lack of awareness about diseases, hygiene and healthy living.
- f) Cost of goods and services are very expensive.
- g) Labasa to Suva immigrants end up as squatters due to lack of employment opportunities and non-renewal of leases in the North. Immigration is also happening to access better education facilities in Suva.

Recommendations

- a) Replace old water pipes and introduce better technology to improve water supply.
- b) Complete the unfinished sanitation works (provision of proper toilets) that were begun in the North.

- c) Government is requested to not increase VAT as this would place a bigger burden on the grassroots people.
- d) More affordable and low cost housing schemes should be made available. Use of natural resources such as timber, should be encouraged to construct more houses.
- e) Regularisation of tenancy – NLTB and the Social Welfare department should work together to obtain lease titles for those with no access to land.
- f) Upgrade squatter settlements to improve living standards – upgrading can be done through provision of access to clean water, health facilities, better roads and education.
- g) Labasa to Suva immigration – Government should facilitate the construction of more hotels, businesses, and commercial investments and industries in the North, which will provide employment opportunities and curb the migration from Labasa to Suva.
- h) Review education system so that more scholarships are made available for the less fortunate.

5. Leadership – corruption, inefficiency, poor performance

The people from the North remain concerned that successive governments after independence have promised them free education, access to better services and development. This has so far not materialised. The people are further concerned about the increasing rate of corruption, abuse of office and misuse of resources in government departments. Wastage of resources through these activities has meant that there has been less resources left to be utilised for development.

Concerns:

- a) Corruption - government departments, NGOs, communities (leaders), churches
- b) Inefficiency – for example, in Dreketi, households paid \$6000 each in 1999 to government officials on the promise that electricity would be installed in their houses. But to date, villagers have been waiting and government has not yet provided them electricity.
- c) Gift giving and *magiti*
- d) Code of conduct for government officials
- e) Leaders don't know their roles and duties
- f) The Auditor General's report had highlighted so much corruption and mismanagement in the government over the past few years. However, the questions participants ask is why has there been no prosecution?

Recommendations

- a) A good leader has to be accountable. If government officials are not performing and are not accountable, they should be investigated and replaced. Government is encouraged to set up a body to investigate complaints received by citizens on misconduct by government officials.
- b) Government should go ahead and put in place reforms to improve the performance of its departments.
- c) Government officials should not receive gifts when visiting villages, provinces and other gatherings. They should bear the costs of meals prepared for them from their

catering allowances. Instead of feasting during village visits, they should listen to people's concerns.

- d) Government should prepare appropriate Code of Conduct legislation.
- e) Government officials should be accountable for their actions and activities with regards to their official work and use of government properties and facilities.
- f) If funding is available, leadership training on good governance concepts should be provided from village level upwards.
- g) There should be an independent body where people can lodge complains about government officials who are not doing their jobs.
- h) The Auditor-General's office should be given powers to prosecute civil servants and government officials who misuse government funds and resources.

6. Law and Order, Democracy

Concerns

- a) Robberies, vandalism
- b) Domestic violence – child and sexual abuse
- c) Drug, alcohol and substance abuse – marijuana, glue, yaqona, polish
- d) Pornography, blue movies, prostitution
- e) Coups – return to democratic elections.
- f) Independent information about the performance of past governments is not available to rural people to help them decide who to vote for in the next elections.

Recommendations

- a) Government should allocate resources for civic education, for transparency in use of donor funds and to meet its commitments to the donor communities for free and fair elections.
- b) Community policing should be continued and extended to a wider geographical area to deal with increasing robberies and vandalism. Police and the community need to work together.
- c) Village participants requested for a re-establishment of village courts (Vanua-based) and village police posts as a way of reducing crime.
- d) Awareness programs should be held on the negative impacts of criminal activities to discourage people from going in that direction in life.
- e) Heavy fines and censorship to decrease illegal activities such as pornography, blue movies and prostitution.
- f) Improve judiciary system to make it more effective and efficient in dealing with cases.
- g) Return to democratic rule by parliamentary elections as soon as practicable to regain confidence in the economy and so that citizens can enjoy the benefits of living in a democracy.
- h) More job opportunities to be created to discourage people from engaging in crime.

Conclusion

- ? The people of the North have been waiting in vain for the government's very own promised "Look North Policy". Through this submission, they are humbly requesting for the government's kind consideration for the materialization of the "Look North Policy".
- ? Poor people do not want to live on handouts, they have self respect like everyone else. They want infrastructural and institutional changes that will enhance and improve their education, employment, and life opportunities.
- ? The poor and vulnerable need greater government assistance. Government policy and projects should be directed at improving the living conditions of the poor and the vulnerable so they too can live their lives in dignity as proud and equal citizens of Fiji.
- ? The poor and the vulnerable are equal citizens of this country. Their interests and concerns should not be subservient to the interests of big business and international finance.

Appendix 1

Names of Organisations whose nominees attended the workshop (This list does not include names of people who attended as individuals)

1. Labasa Arya
2. Naduna Primary School
3. Korotari Primary
4. Labasa S.D.A
5. Catholic Women's League
6. Holy Family Convent
7. ECREA/Femlink'
8. Save the Children Fund, Labasa
9. Youth workers and Advisory Councillors
10. Macuata Provincial Council/ Macuata Provincial Youth
11. World Harvest Institute
12. Red Cross Society, Labasa
13. Women's Crisis Centre
14. Labasa Women's Forum
15. Vanua Levu Association of Grassroots Organisations
16. Fiji Cane Growers Association
17. Northern Multicultural Community Initiative
18. Vuni Bau Youth Club
19. Vunibelaha Arya Mandal
20. Nabavatu Youth
21. Soqosoqo Vakamarama
22. Naduri Youth/Naduri Women's Club
23. Labasa Women's Forum
24. Savusavu Town Council
25. Kasavu Mothers' Club
26. St. Andrews' Mothers' Club
27. Dorcas Society