

**COMMUNITY SUBMISSION TO THE
MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND NATIONAL PLANNING
FOR THE 2009 BUDGET**



Compiled by the
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Introduction

This budget submission is based on the concerns and recommendations raised at a Grassroots Budgetary Workshop conducted by the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) at the Levuka Parish Hall in Levuka, Ovalau, from 7-8 July 2008. A list of the organizations and villages represented at this workshop is in Appendix I. 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.

Levuka town is the old capital of Fiji and bears many monuments and buildings that have historical significance for Fiji. While this is good for history, it also reflects the sad fact that the island Ovalau itself, has not developed as much as would be expected of a former capital. The road from the airport to town is a dirt and gravel road – which turns what should be a 30 minute journey into a one-hour journey!! Further inland, the roads to all villages are bad. Mode of transport is mainly through vans and carriers outside town, although within the town, some taxis are available.

Levuka, however, is special. People from all racial groups live there who speak in both vernacular languages – Hindi and Fijian. People are proud of their island and are hospitable. Ovalau is a volcanic island surrounded by the ocean. The island is covered with mountains and cliffs meaning that all villages and settlements are around the coast. The island has rich natural vegetation and soil – however, due to poor infrastructure, transportation problems and distance from markets, agriculture is produced mainly for subsistence consumption only. People feel discouraged to venture into commercial farming and many are unaware of a suitable commercial crop for their island.

Since the capital moved away, Levuka went into a slow decline. Once the hub of Fiji, now it is a sleepy town. The main employment opportunity is through the Pacific Fishing Corporation (PAFCO) company, where locals are employed to unload, process and prepare tuna for export. The Levuka harbour has made it possible for PAFCO to establish its fishing operations there.

The major problem for Levuka is infrastructure, education facilities, access to jobs and markets. These restrict economic activity and development. Infrastructure concerns include roads, water supply, access to health services, lack of availability of doctors or nurses and even medicine, sanitation, and proper houses.

The people from Ovalau have highlighted their concerns and recommended solutions. As they are aware that Fiji's government has limited resources, participants suggested solutions where they could assist the government in achieving their needs.

Lastly, many of the problems highlighted for Ovalau are synonymous of similar problems in rural areas around Fiji. We request the government to treat the problems highlighted in this submission as problems that are generally present in the rural areas and outer islands in Fiji.

About the CCF and the Grassroots Budgetary Workshops

The CCF is a non government organization and has been working in Fiji for the past 17 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.

The CCF conducted two Grassroots Budgetary Workshops in the North in May 2007 including one at the Scouts Hall in Labasa from 24-25 May 2007 and one at the Hot Springs Hotel in Savusavu from 29-30 May 2007. The CCF prepared a submission from the outcomes of this workshop and submitted it to the Ministry of Finance & National Planning in June 2007. Basically, the submission advocated for a 'Look North' policy.

Planning for the July 2008 Grassroots Budgetary Workshops in Levuka began in May 2008. Letters of invitation were sent to the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Social Welfare, for them to send representatives. Although the Ministry of Finance had confirmed that they would send a representative to speak at the workshop, CCF is disappointed that at the last minute, the representative advised us he won't come to make the presentation because his transportation had not been organised. We are grateful that the Ministry of Social Welfare was able to send a senior representative – the Acting Assistant Director of the Department of Social Welfare Mr Inoke Loganimoce whose comprehensive presentation on the budget, projects and activities of the social welfare department was well received by participants. Due to bad weather, the morning flight to Levuka on 7 July was cancelled – as such, a key speaker, Mrs Suliana Siwatibau from Transparency International Fiji, could not come to give her presentation on the topic 'Monitoring the Government Budget'.

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

About the workshop participants

The Workshop attracted enthusiastic participants from Levuka town and from the communities living in villages on Ovalau. Due to bad weather, 26 people attended the workshop on the first day. The weather was better on the second day and 35 participants came to the workshop. The participants came from mainly village organisations, and also from the government and non-government sector.

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. 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.

Special Concern by CCF

While making this submission, the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) acknowledges that a military coup occurred on 5 December 2006 and currently, there is an un-elected government leading the country. CCF expresses its concern that without a parliamentary democracy, some mechanisms of accountability and transparency in the government budget process are disabled. For instance, the budget is not tabled in Parliament (as there is no parliament!!) so there is no opportunity for a scrutiny of the draft budget by opposition parliament members, and there is no opportunity for the public to hear about the draft budget in the media before it is passed. Secondly, the budget does not go through a parliamentary approval process, and thirdly, parliamentary approval and scrutiny of government expenditure does not take place.

CCF strongly recommends the holding of democratic elections as soon as practicable so that an elected government can run the country, and so that the parliamentary processes of accountability and transparency can be operational again.

Content of Submission

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

1. Water
2. Infrastructure – Roads, sea walls
3. Health and Sanitation
4. Education and Good Leaders
5. Jobs, Income Generation and Land Utilisation

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

Grassroots Concerns and Budget Recommendations

1. Water

The participants from Ovalau proclaimed that water is the most important necessity in a person's life. However, it is currently not being treated as an important issue. They feel that their needs regarding water are being neglected by relevant authorities.

Concerns

- a) Water is a basic necessity to life and also to maintain basic health of people. Poor water supply or a lack of water supply has contributed to the affliction of diseases such as typhoid. In some cases, the lack of access to water has contributed to circumstances leading to the death of people.
- b) Villages on Ovalau are expanding. The current water dam is not big enough to cater for the increasing number of the population – especially children. This is creating low pressure on the village water system.
- c) The Public Works Department water supply staff should not concentrate only on town areas, just because the people in towns are paying for water for their daily use.

Recommendations

A solution was proposed whereby the villagers could assist the government in resolving the water problems. The solution was that the government could send a water expert to visit the villages who could conduct individual surveys and prepare recommendations on the best way of upgrading water supply – described as the most important issue.

The recommendations could be implemented through a partnership deal where the villages could provide labour and the government could provide finance and water tanks.

2. Infrastructure

Concerns

- a) Roads.
- b) Electricity
- c) Sea walls.
- d) Telecommunications.

Recommendations

- a) The roads on Ovalau should be upgraded.
- b) Assistance should be sought from the Roads Supervisor to upgrade the roads in Ovalau because roads are necessary for children to go to school, roads are also necessary for people to go to work and for members of the community to travel and access services.
- c) Assistance should be sought from the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) to provide electricity supply in the communities. Electricity is necessary for children to study. Electricity is also necessary because without it, electrical appliances cannot be used. Without electricity:-
 - irons cannot be used to iron school uniforms and other clothes.
 - fridges cannot be used to safely keep food for the family.
 - radios or televisions cannot be played to listen to news or weather updates.
 - lights cannot be put on for children to study at night.
- d) The participants present gave assurance that the villagers will pay for the installation costs (normal charges) of electricity in their villages, same as people in other parts of Fiji do.
- e) Assistance should be sought from the regional development office to upgrade the seawalls in Levuka town and other parts of Ovalau. Currently, water from sea waves drench some roads, especially during high tides and rough weather. Sea walls are also necessary to prevent soil erosion and also to prevent the erosion of the main roads which are on the coasts.
- f) Assistance should be sought from Telecom to provide telecommunications services in rural areas in Ovalau. Telephones are necessary to access education and health facilities and to keep in touch with family members. Without telephones, parents cannot keep in touch with teachers at school regarding any problems relating to their children. Without telephones, they also cannot make emergency calls to the hospital, police, fire authority or the FEA.

3. Health and Sanitation

Concerns

- a) Villages do not have a proper dispensary.
- b) Too much consumption of canned food – this is leading to illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

- c) Mental health problems.
- d) Houses do not have proper toilets.
- e) Burning and burying of rubbish.
- f) Village sanitation.

Recommendations

- a) Each village should be provided with proper guidelines and advise to build a proper dispensary for the village community.
- b) More awareness should be provided by health authorities on healthy eating and healthy living. The agriculture department should encourage planting of local food crops.
- c) Awareness should be provided by the drugs department and the police force on the harmful effects of abuse of drugs and narcotic substances, which includes mental health problems.
- d) Village laws should be created to enforce the requirement that proper toilets need to be built before the occupants move into a house.
- e) The community needs to take on the responsibility for waste management. This includes separation of rubbish – separating garden wastes from cans and other non-decomposable wastes. Wastes should be disposed off properly and advise should be sought and provided on this where necessary.
- f) The health department and the provincial office should provide quarterly awards to encourage the villagers to implement proper sanitation, because prevention is better than cure.

4. Education and Good Leaders

Concerns:

Education :-

- a) Lack of teachers.
- b) No schools fees.
- c) Family and spiritual life.
- d) Peer pressure – resulting in the abuse of drugs and alcohol, glue sniffing, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- e) Lack of vocational schools.
- f) Health and safety in schools – building standards, toilets and water supply.
- g) Transport.

Good Leaders:-

- a) Corruption.
- b) Culture and traditions.
- c) Education.
- d) Spiritual and social Life.

Recommendations

Education:-

- a) Government should provide more quality teachers.

- b) Villages could fund-raise for school fees or seek assistance from the Social Welfare Department.
- c) Information on scholarships should be made available and assistance from organizations such as Save the Children Fund should be sought where necessary.
- d) Counseling services should be made available to children to deal with peer pressure and associated social and substance abuse problems. Education workshops should also be made available to parents, students and teachers.
- e) Vocational schools and facilities should be provided. Participants said that currently, there were none in Ovalau.
- f) Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA), school committees and the health department, should work together to address the problems of health and safety in schools including: building standards, toilets and water supply.
- g) Government should assist in providing proper bus services for schools.

Good Leaders:-

- a) Corrupt people are bad leaders and should not be appointed to government positions. Corruption should be dealt with severely.
- b) Government officials should be accountable for their actions and activities with regards to their official work and use of government properties and facilities.
- c) If funding is available, leadership training on good governance concepts should be provided from village level upwards.
- d) Leaders should be well educated.
- e) Leaders should socialise with the ordinary people to know and understand their problems.
- f) Knowledge of culture and traditions, and spiritual life can contribute to good leadership as well.

5. Jobs, Income Generation and Land Utilisation

Concerns:

- a) Farmers:-
 - seedlings.
 - tools.
 - farm roads.
 - markets.
- b) Fisheries:-
 - fishing equipment.
 - transport (boats).
 - illegal use of qoliqoli.
 - sea pollution.
 - markets.
- c) Housing facilities to rent for workers coming from outside Ovalau.

Recommendations

- a) Farmers:-
 - government could supply the seedlings and farmers could purchase it.

- Government and farmers could form a partnership where the government could provide tools to farmers to purchase at a subsidised cost.
 - A partnership could be created for building farm roads whereby the government could provide the machinery and the community could provide labour.
 - Government could provide assistance in finding markets for agricultural produce.
- b) Fisheries:-
- fishing equipment and boats could be provided through a self-help scheme where a portion of the cost is paid by the government and a portion of the cost is paid by the community member.
 - Proper fishing licenses should be issued to prevent illegal use of the qoliqoli by relevant provincial and government authorities.
 - Sea pollution should be addressed through a community clean-up campaign on creeks and foreshore areas. The Health Department could assist in this activity by providing gloves, t-shirts and waste bags.
 - Government should assist in finding markets for fisheries.
- c) Government should provide advice to landowners so they can build housing facilities to rent out to workers coming from outside Ovalau.

Conclusion

CCF noted that issues to do with crime, law and order were not raised as a major problem on the island of Ovalau by the participants present. We remain optimistic that the island of Ovalau will get opportunities to develop, so that it will be able to remain as a place in Fiji where crime is not regarded as a major problem.

Appendix 1

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

1. Draiba Village
2. Navuloa Village
3. Vagadaci Village
4. Tikina Levuka
5. Lomaiviti Provincial Office
6. Waitovu
7. Naikorokoro
8. All Nations Women
9. Levuka Town Council
10. Tokou Village
11. Nasinu Village
12. Ministry for Women
13. Vatukalo Village
14. National Trust of Fiji Islands
15. Catholic Women's League
16. Levuka Parish
17. Red Cross Society
18. Visoto Village
19. Viro Village
20. Nawowo Village
21. Draiba Women's Club
22. PAFCO Employees Union