

**Report on the 2002-03 Household Income and Expenditure Survey,  
Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics**

by Wadan Narsey

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This report compiled by Prof. Wadan Narsey for the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS) presents findings of the 2002-03 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). This report is the 11<sup>th</sup> in the series of HIES reports in Fiji since 1943 when the first survey of 23 European families were done. The 2002-03 survey was one of the most comprehensive surveys conducted in Fiji so far. This was a nationally stratified survey of households in both rural and urban areas conducted by the Household Survey Unit of the FIBOS.

The urban area survey was conducted from March 2002 to February 2003 and the rural part of the survey was conducted from May 2003 to April 2004. Rural areas were defined according to distance from urban areas. The urban and rural areas were then further classified into various categories of 'classes' based on the physical geographical location and characteristics of the overall area occupied by households. For example, for the urban survey there were 14 socio-economic classes whereas for the rural survey there were 13 classes based on remoteness from urban areas.

The report by Professor Narsey is quite detailed on the distribution of income and expenditure of households. There are six major sections in the report that discuss various aspects of income and expenditure of households. Section A is a one page brief introduction of the report and the HIES survey. Section B of the report discusses the demography and income of households. The labour market characteristics of households are analyzed in Section C while Section D analyzes the major sources of income. Section E provides analysis of the minor incomes received from a wide variety of sources. Expenditure issues of households are analyzed in Section F while the asset holdings and access to services such as electricity and communications of households are analyzed in Section G. The details provided in the tables are based on deciles, ethnic groups and urban and rural grouping of the population. These tabulated data in the report would be quite useful to researchers in all fields of social science and

policy analysis. However, the report also has a number of limitations that needs to be pointed out so that steps can be taken to fill in those gaps. The FIBOS which is the prime institutions responsible for the HIES and the report, needs to acknowledge and rectify those problems in the future reports.

In the next section of this review, some of the basic weaknesses are pointed out and solutions forwarded. The points raised here however are not exhaustive and while much of the arguments forwarded here equally apply to other reports and surveys done by the FIBOS, the ones discussed here are confined to the HIES.

Despite its details and adoption of good presentation techniques, the report has some weaknesses. The main weakness of the report is its silence on the methodology used by the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics (FIBOS) for the survey. A 1-page introduction to the survey and the report is grossly inadequate. This is one major weakness of the report, which this review points out so that future reports on HIES take adequate steps to cover some grounds on basic methodology of the survey. It is argued here that instead of a one-page introduction, there should have been a separate report on methodology of the survey, which clearly outlines how the sampling and the enumeration process conforms to the UN and ILO guidelines on the HIES data collection and reporting. Such methodological reports have a number of advantages. First, that it becomes a guideline for the interpretation of incomes and expenditures at various levels and second, that it forms a basis for future surveys. With the current approach neither any credible expertise is developed within the FIBOS nor is any yardstick established to improve the future surveys.

There are a number of reasons for this to be the case in FIBOS. Firstly, there is no existing expertise within the institution to build on such capacities and second, there is lack of resources and commitment from the government to establish and build such capacities within the institution. Thirdly, aid money provided by regional and global institutions like AUSAID, ADB, ILO, NZAID and the UN are on one-off basis and experts are normally brought in from abroad. However, such problems can only be overcome if reasonable amount of expertise can be established within the FIBOS in the next three to four years if appropriate skills are acquired by the practicing statisticians through institutions such as the University of the South Pacific where an Official Statistics program has been mounted since 2006 and the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific (UN-SIAP), which provided training through modules. Unfortunately, while many workshops and seminars are being at-

tended by the personnel at the FIBOS, real capacity building does not seem to occur for such task as report writing and statistical analysis.

There are two organizational precursors to methodological documentation of HIES. Firstly, there is a need for an institutional structure and a process for the smooth flow of information and knowledge. Secondly, there is a need for certain degree of will to open up the system where discussions on such issues can be facilitated. With this kind of approach, local and regional level workshops can be conducted to firm up methodological issues. Hence, these workshops and seminars become the necessary institutional framework for documentation on methodological issues. There are enough examples of these around the region.

One of main objective of the HIES is to establish consumption profile of the society and the communities that live in the country. This kind of data helps in policy design for poverty alleviation and development. Section F of the report attempts to provide the consumption data for the households but the disaggregation provided in the report is not enough for thorough policy analysis. Apart from the deciles, ethnic and rural-urban analysis, commodity and services consumption profile of the groups and the country as a whole needs to be provided. This form of dataset however, may be provided in another separate report. The ILO and UN practice is clear in this regard where consumption or expenditure data is provided in Household Expenditure Survey reports.

Commodity and services consumption data also needs to be based on the National Accounting system (aggregation) so that the National account data can be reconciled in a systematic manner. This task is long overdue at the FIBOS. While the current format of the HIES report is quite useful, more effort is needed to integrate the information with other censuses and survey data in such as way that national accounts system can be established in the near future based on the 1993 SNA and many recent revisions.

Institutional capacity and human skill development at the FIBOS is definitely necessary to achieve this task in the near future.

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