

Key Issues in Enrolments, Equity and Access
Annex E in Independent Completion Report
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A critical issue for stakeholders in the education sector in Fiji is the question of access for children from the poorer families, especially in remote and disadvantaged communities.

Access to Primary Schools

A crude examination of gross enrolment data indicates that primary school enrolments have decreased significantly from 1996 levels (a decline of 13% to 2009) but also in the last three years.

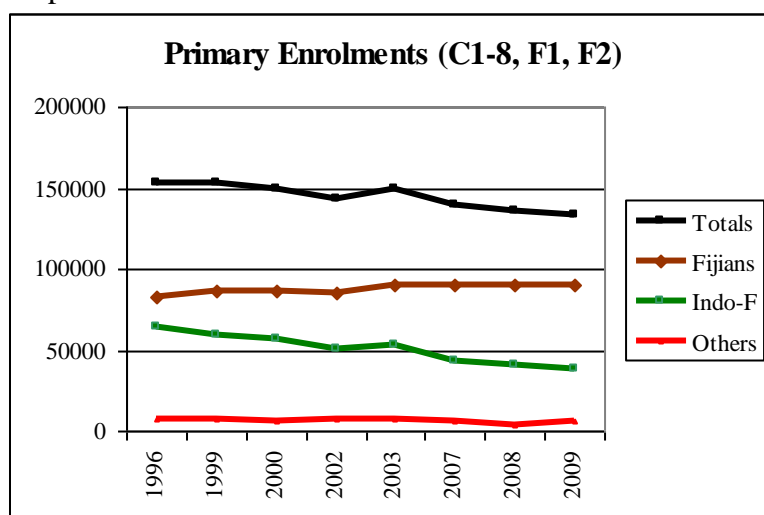
While it might be thought that some of this decline could be the result of the post-coup economic crisis faced by the Fiji economy and poorer families, a large part of the decline in enrolments probably due to demographic changes.¹

In particular, there has been a large decline in Indo-Fijian primary enrolments – a decline of some 40% between 1996 and 2009 (Table 1). The indigenous Fijian primary enrolments grew by 9% over this period, although the growth has slowed down in the last few years.

	1996	1999	2000	2002	2003	2007	2008	2009	Ch 96/09	% Ch.
Fijians	82120	86748	86306	85561	89516	90298	90434	89854	7734	9
Indo-F	63749	58902	56835	50504	52900	42682	40998	37938	-25811	-40
Others	6933	6960	6670	7437	6830	6122	4,311	5,844	-1089	-16
Totals	152802	152610	149811	143502	149246	139102	135,743	133,636	-19166	-13

Source: MoE data.

Graph 1



¹ All population projections for this paper were done by the author.

These changes have been largely a mirror of demographic changes taking place. Indigenous Fijian children aged 6 to 13 is estimated to have grown by 7% between 1996 and 2009, while the Indo-Fijian children in that age group declined by 7% (Table 2).

Table 2 Population 6 to 13 (Fijians and Indo-Fijians)					% Change
	1996 census	2007 census	2008 proj.	2009 proj.	96 to 09
Fijians	76149	80550	81044	81537	7
Indo-F	60871	40562	38319	36077	-41

Source: Census and ICR population projections.

Graph 2 Population Ages 6 to 13 (Fijians and Indo-Fijians)

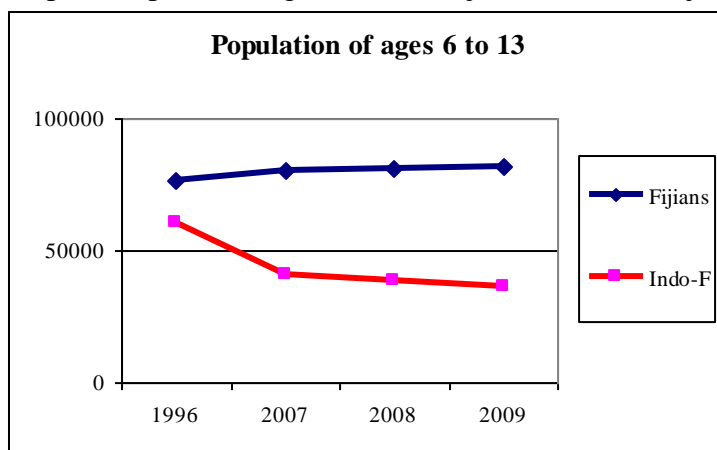
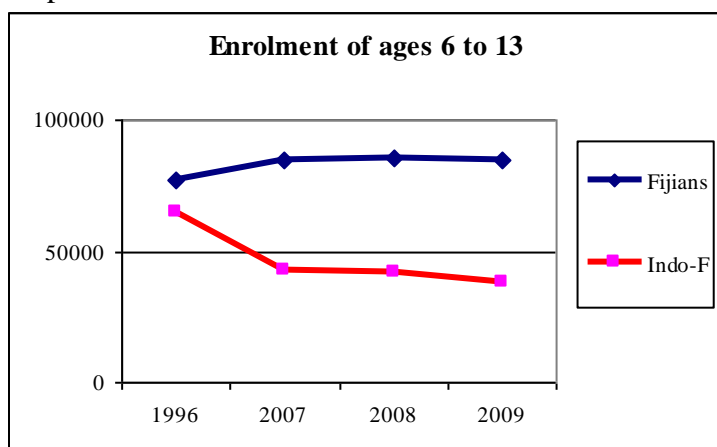


Table 3 Enrolment of Ages 6 to 13 (Fijians and Indo-Fijians)

	1996	2007	2008	2009
Fijians	77270	84865	85184	84674
Indo-F	65112	42699	42198	37928

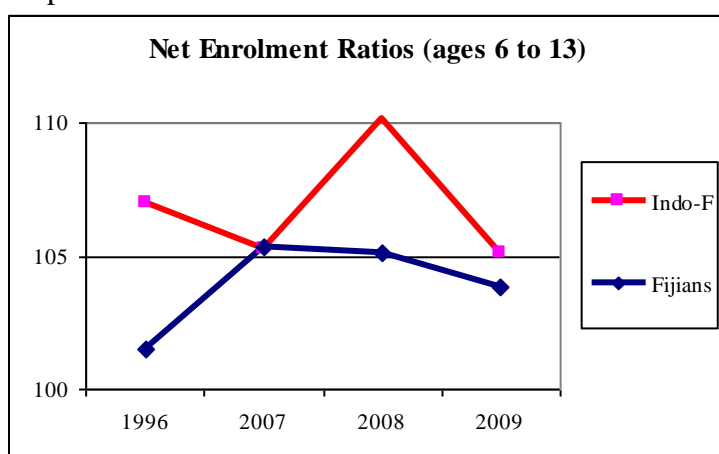
Graph 3



Thus estimates of net enrolment ratios of this age group suggests that while there was a major improvement from 1996 to 2007 for Fijians, there seems to have been a small decline to 2009 for both Fijians and Indo-Fijians. This is probably associated with the harsher economic climate over the last three years.

	1996	2007	2008	2009
Fijians	101.5	105.4	105.1	103.8
Indo-F	107.0	105.3	110.1	105.1

Graph 4



Nevertheless, despite the small decline, there would seem to be close to optimal enrolments of primary age children (see section below).²

Ethnic Mix of Enrolments at Primary School Level

One of the characteristics of Fiji's education system is that the majority of schools are owned and managed by private education authorities which are associated with cultural, ethnic or religious groups, attempting primarily to serve their sectarian interests.

Thus there are school authorities associated with Methodists, Catholics, SDA, Latter Day Saints, Hindus (Sanatan Dharm, Arya Samaj, Sangam, Sikh), Muslim, Chinese, Gujrati and others. There are major demographic changes taking place (due largely to emigration and lower fertility of non-Fijian groups), however, which are dramatically changing the ethnic, cultural and religious mix of the enrolment at these schools.

Thus the indigenous Fijian share of primary schools has risen from 54% in 1996 to 67% in 2009, while the Indo-Fijian share has fallen from 42% to 28%. At Class 1, the share of Indo-Fijians is around 19% currently. Schools which were previously Indo-Fijian in character are now either ethnically mixed, or have become largely Fijian.

² Percentages over 100 being enrolment would be largely due to five years olds enrolled at primary school.

Table 5 Ethnic shares of Primary School Enrolments (Classes 1 to 8, Forms 1 and 2)

	1996	1999	2000	2002	2003	2007	2008	2009
Perc. Fij.	54	57	58	60	60	65	67	67
Perc. Ind.	42	39	38	35	35	31	30	28

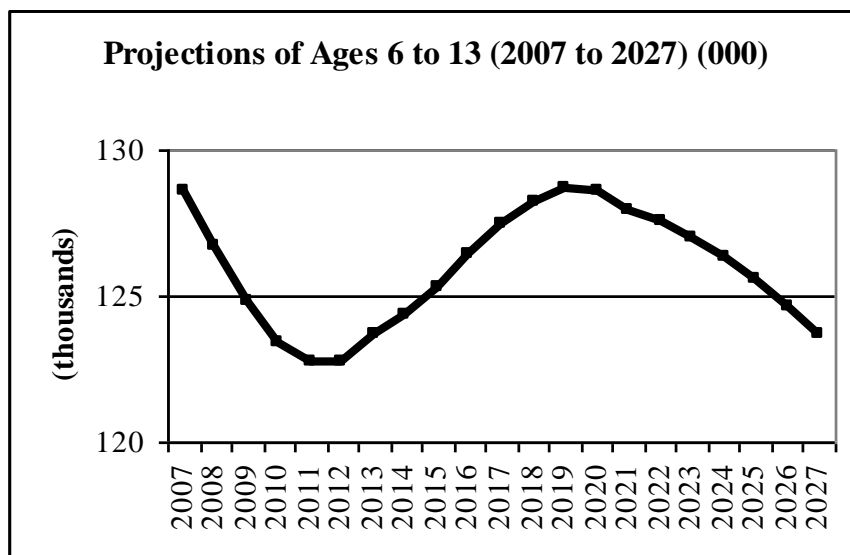
There is also a slow but steady depopulation of the rural areas, as both Fijians and Indo-Fijians migrate to the urban areas. These changes pose major challenges to MoE in terms of school rationalization, and drastic redeployment of teachers.

Demographic transition impacts

Nevertheless, future plans for assistance to the education sector need to take into account a demographic peculiarity that Fiji is currently going through. The emigration and the very powerful demographic transition of the Indo-Fijian community has meant that the overall numbers of primary age children (ages 6 to 13) has been falling for some eight years, despite the moderate increases in Fijian numbers.

Graph 5 based on rough³ population projections using the 2007 census data, indicate that the pressure on primary school places should still be declining till 2011, after which the MoE can expect increasing demand for another eight years, before the demographic transition for indigenous Fijians begins to bite, and enrolments decline again. Thus the next 8 years will see increased pressure for enrolments in primary schools, with most of the increases being felt in the urban schools.

Graph 5 Population projections of Ages 6 to 13 (2007 to 2027) (000)



Enrolments and Access at Secondary

Similar, but less dramatic changes have been taking place at the secondary school levels. While total enrolments have increased by 13% between 1996 and 2009, this is a composite of 46% increase in indigenous Fijian secondary enrolments, and a 17% decline in Indo-Fijian

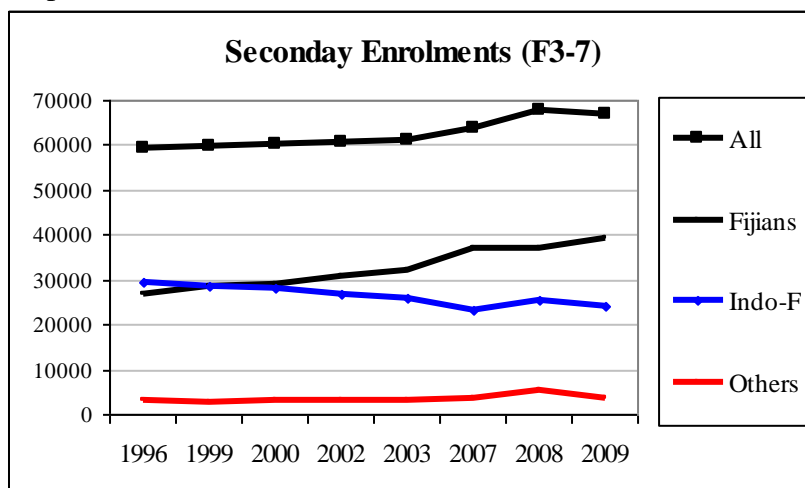
³ The detailed demographic parameters such as survivorship ratios and age specific fertility rates from Census 2007 data have not been released by the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics

enrolments. While the indigenous Fijian secondary enrolments are still slowly rising, the major decline in Indo-Fijian numbers is serious enough to lead to a slight decline in total enrolments for 2009, of about 600 in total..

Table 6 Secondary Enrolments (Forms 3 to 7)

	1996	1999	2000	2002	2003	2007	2008	2009	Ch.96/09	% Ch.
Fijians	26912	28507	28845	30750	32032	37105	36866	39317	12405	46
Indo-F	29236	28564	28248	26766	26019	23178	25391	24244	-4992	-17
Others	3087	2832	2913	2930	3029	3354	5421	3511	424	14
All	59235	59903	60006	60446	61080	63637	67678	67072	7837	13

Graph 6

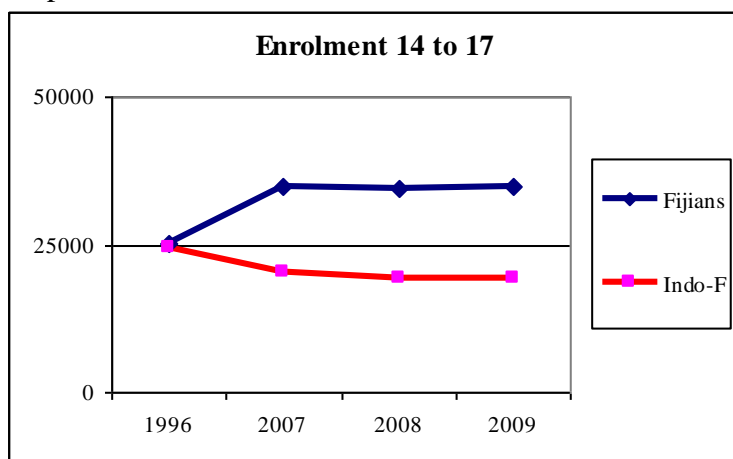


At secondary school levels, both the enrolment of those aged 14 to 17 (corresponding roughly to Forms 3 to 6) and the census and estimated number of those aged 14 to 17 have leveled off in the last few years.

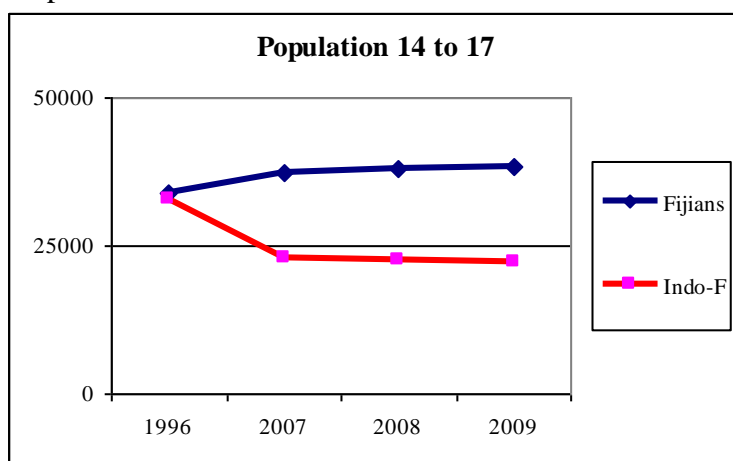
Table 7 Enrolment of ages 14 to 17

	1996	2007	2008	2009
Fijians	25222	34723	34465	34811
Indo-F	24372	20310	19254	19400

Graph 8



Graph 9



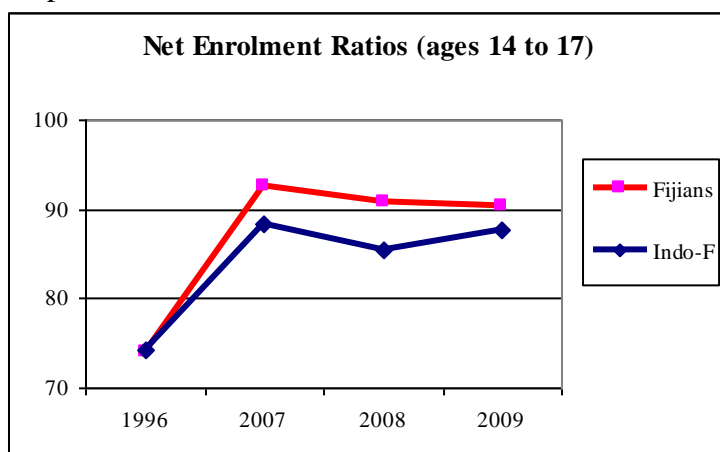
Compared to 74% in 1996, the net enrolment ratios had risen to 93% for indigenous Fijians in 2007 and 88% for Indo-Fijians. This reversal of ethnic relativity in enrolment ratios may well have been a result of the Affirmative Action policies in education, for indigenous Fijians, in a situation, where the incidence of poverty has been somewhat higher for Indo-Fijians, and especially for rural Indo-Fijians.

	1996	2007	2008	2009
Fijians	74.0	92.6	90.7	90.4
Indo-F	74.2	88.4	85.5	87.7

The above estimates indicate that the net enrolment ratio for indigenous Fijians has gone down slightly from 92.6% in 2007 to 90.4% in 2009.

That for Indo-Fijians also went down from 88.4% in 2007 to 85.5% in 2008, but increased again to 87.7% in 2009. The latter may seem odd, but one explanatory factor may be that the extremely high rural:urban drift of Indo-Fijians in recent years has also given formerly poor rural Indo-Fijians, better access to regular cash incomes in the urban areas, which may have enabled more of their children to be kept in school.

Graph 10



Changing ethnic mix

As with primary enrolments and schools, secondary enrolments and schools are also seeing a dramatic change in ethnic mix, with the percentage Fijian rising from 45% in 1996 to 59% in 2009. The Indo-Fijian share has correspondingly fallen from 49% to 36% in 2009. This latter share will decline to 22% by 2019. While the changes are not as dramatic as with primary schools, nevertheless, the challenges for school management authorities and MoE are significant.⁴

Table 9 Ethnic mix of Secondary School Enrolments (1996 to 2009)

	1996	1999	2000	2002	2003	2007	2008	2009
Perc. Fij.	45	48	48	51	52	58	54	59
Perc. Ind.	49	48	47	44	43	36	38	36

Demographic transitions at secondary age groups

As with the primary age cohorts, there are similarly significant and unusual demographic changes taking place at the secondary age groups (ages 14 to 18) which education planners must take into account.

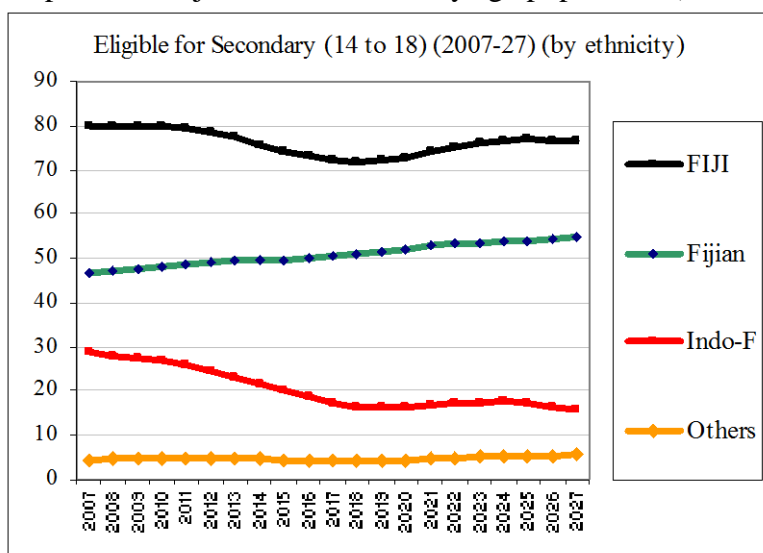
In contrast to the trends for primary age groups, that for secondary age groups are taking place later some ten years later.

Enrolment demand may be expected to keep reducing from the current levels to 2018 (a decline in potential demand of some 10%) before the demand begins to rise again, to peak around 2024.

This next eight years therefore should give MoE and donors in education a “one off” valuable opportunity to improve access for those who are currently not in school, while improving quality for those at school.

⁴ The current Interim Government has come out with statements that in future, schools will not be known by their ethnic tags.

Graph 11 Projections of secondary age population (14 to 18) 2007 to 2027

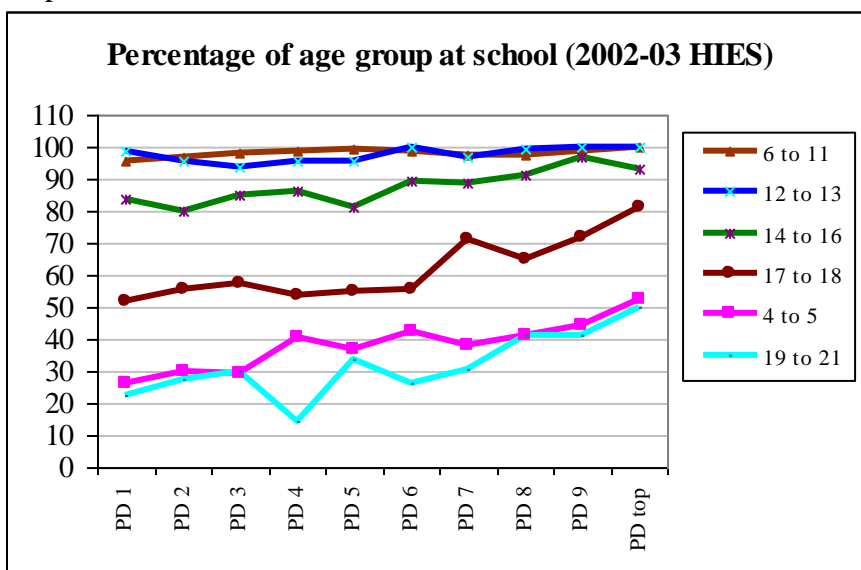


The Poor and School Attendance: evidence from the 2002-03 HIES

To put the above statistics derived from MoE enrolments data into context, it is useful to examine some relevant statistics derived from the Fiji 2002-03 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.⁵ This data pertains to the situation as at 2002-03- not the current situation.

Graph 12 gives the net enrolment ratios for population deciles (PD1 being the lowest 10 percent of population and PD top being the highest 10 percent of population). Table 12 gives the results for the Bottom 3 deciles, the Top 3 deciles and the gap between them.

Graph 12



Of those 6 to 11 (first six years of primary school) and 12 to 13 (years 7 and 8 or Forms 1 and 2), close to 100 percent were at school in 2002-03 at all decile levels.

⁵ Estimated by consultant for ICR 2010.

It is clear that access for the poor does become an issue at ages 14 to 16 (corresponding to Forms 3 to 5) when the percentages at school for the poor (Bottom 3 deciles) drops to around 83 percent compared to 94 percent for the top 3 deciles.

School level	Age group	Bottom 3 Deciles	Top 3 Deciles	% Gap
Pre-school	4 to 5	28	45	-37
Primary 1-6	6 to 11	97	99	-2
Primary 7-8/F1-F2	12 to 13	96	100	-4
Secondary 3 – 5	14 to 16	83	94	-11
Secondary 6 – 7	17 to 18	55	72	-24
Tertiary	19 to 21	27	44	-39
Working age	22 to 40	2	4	-53

Then for the higher levels of secondary school (Forms 6 and Forms 7) the percentages at school drop to a much lower 55 percent for the lowest three deciles, contrasting with around 72 percent for the top three deciles.

For those aged 19 to 21 (usually associated with tertiary education), the percentage at school is an extremely low 27 percent for the children of the families in the bottom 3 deciles, compared to around 44% for those in the top 3 deciles.

What Table 10 also makes clear is that the Percentage Gap between the Bottom 3 deciles and the Top 3 deciles, increases, as one goes up the school levels, from -2% at primary levels to 39% at tertiary levels.

Interventions to improve access for the poor at secondary and tertiary levels will need to examine why students are dropping at the higher levels- whether it is purely a case of inability to pay fees, the need to support families, or just inadequate academic performance preventing progression to higher levels.

At the tertiary level, anecdotal evidence indicates that many of the poorest Indo-Fijian children, despite obtaining adequate marks at Form 7 level (but not at the higher levels), are not able to receive scholarships from Government (through the Multi-ethnic Affairs Ministry). Donor interventions may consider scholarships at this level.

Issue of access for Early Childhood Education

Of critical importance to MoE and donor policy for Early Childhood Education is that pre-school attendance (ages 4 to 5 in the graph) followed the patterns for access to tertiary education. A mere 28% of those in the bottom 3 deciles were in school, compared to the 45% at the top three deciles, and 37% in aggregate. A major explanatory factor is that pre-schools charge extremely high fees, which deter the children of poorer families.

While government is forthright about making primary education “free for all”, there is no such guarantee at pre-school ages.

Paradoxically, the 2008 Annual Report of the MoE does not even give statistics on ECE enrolments or staffing.

However 2008 data suggested that pre-school enrolments were only around 40% of Class 1 enrolments in aggregate, with rural areas having much lower ratios of around 20%.⁶

The arguments for the MoE and donors to treat ECE on par with universal primary education, is supported by a previous case study of basic education⁷. Survey evidence showed that while "preschoolers" do subsequently perform better academically, relative to those who did not attend pre-school (as would be expected), the differences are far more significant for children from poorer families, than for children from average or well-to-do families.

The evidence also suggested that the improvements in performance for those who attended pre-schools, persisted over time. If the differentials and biases in enrolments at the ECE level is not addressed, then this would undermine efforts to ensure universal education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

It is therefore essential that the children from lower income backgrounds be assisted by government and donors to enjoy early childhood education, on par with the services enjoyed by those from more privileged backgrounds.

Such interventions can also have a major impact on poverty alleviation and women's employment. Many pre-schools also perform the function of day-care for children much younger than 5, many as young as 2. Ensuring that the children of the poor are able to attend pre-schools also would encourage more mothers to take on employment and income generating opportunities.

Available data indicates that were Government to take full financial responsibility for staffing of early childhood education (as they currently have in primary schools), provision of class-rooms, and full teacher-training, this would result in a fairly large blow-out of the Education budget. This would not be tenable given the current depressed economic climate and the budgetary constraints on the MoE.

Early Childhood Education with a focus on improving access for the children of the poor and investment in the required class-rooms and teacher training, could well therefore be an excellent activity in any future donor programme of assistance to the education sector in Fiji.

⁶ 2008 Situation Analysis and associated data.

⁷ Narsey, Wadan (2004). Academic Outcomes and Resources for Basic Education in Fiji: Disparities by Region, Ethnicity, Gender and Economic Background. Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific and Vanuavou Publications. Suva, Fiji.