



PRESS RELEASE

Integrated Public Service Delivery Combats COVID-19 Crisis

Residents of Jittu Estate, one of Suva's largest informal settlements and home to over 3,000 people, made good use of the delivery of public information and services which support their daily lives - particularly crucial in the current COVID-19 crisis.

Members of the community were able to access information and services such as health protection and screening, prevention and reporting of violence against women and children, stress and counselling, social protection, support for women's groups, economic, employment and landlord-tenant rights and obligations, and specialised support for the unique needs of persons living with disabilities.

"I came to this community service this morning as I live close by. I spoke to an officer about my employment situation as I was laid off. I was advised to make a complaint so here I am. I would not have been able to move forward without this service coming here, and I've found it very helpful because it is often difficult for us to go into town and visit different government offices for many reasons," Ms Ilisapeci Radradra, one of Jittu Estate residents said.

The information and services were made accessible to doorsteps of residents at Jittu Estate over four days by a team of multi-sectoral, government-civil society collaboration, led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Having it delivered in the community alleviates major mobility challenges being faced not only because of official restrictions on movements, but also from having children at home while schools are closed for prolonged periods to combat COVID-19.

The integrated service delivery aimed to address multiple layers of the crises caused by the COVID-19 that are impacting people, particularly in regards to public health, economic and livelihoods, and social dislocation and insecurity concerns.

Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Mereseini Vuniwaqa said, "With the global trends reporting a surge in gender-based violence due to restrictive measures taken to combat COVID-19, especially in China and the United States, the Ministry is raising people's awareness to ensure that there are protection mechanisms for women and girls to seek support from and that perpetrators cannot use COVID-19 as an excuse to limit women from seeking help."

The mobile office consists of a custom-designed bus and marquee setup, with mobile communication tools including laptops and internet packages which were newly provided by UNDP, allowing the officers to operate their service provision right from the communities they visit.

The team strictly adhered to the regulations imposed as government response measures to the COVID-19 and followed the recommended hygiene practice, including mandatory hand-washing and temperature screening on entry, adherence to maximum group sizes and physical distancing requirements.

The Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) which protects the rights of Fijian communities by monitoring the market for unscrupulous traders, as well as constantly monitoring the availability of food stocks, played an integral part in the dissemination of information to improve consumer awareness on their rights and help Fijians protect themselves from COVID-19.

“Fijian consumers’ rights include the right to basic needs. The availability and accessibility of basic and primary items at affordable prices and good quality,” said FCCC CEO, Joel Abraham.

“The Fijian government has a vision of leaving no one behind and FCCC is a strong proponent of this. This is why, for the first time, we have established multiple avenues for Fijians who wish to access FCCC services. They can call us, message us on Facebook and go to FCCC.APP on any web browser to instantly connect with the Commission to ask questions, raise issues and report traders who are breaking the law.

“We are particularly interested in reaching out to vulnerable groups such as elderly citizens, women and those staying in informal settlements to ensure they are protected and aware.,” Abraham added.

The mobile approach to raising people’s awareness and delivering public services, making them accessible at people’s doorstep, has been implemented across Fiji since 2015, in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the Legal Aid Commission and UNDP, with the initial focus on social welfare schemes and legal aid services.

The initiative, called Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion (REACH) for Rural and Urban Fijians Project or REACH Project has evolved ever since by integrating more interrelated services such as civil registrations, human rights, security and law enforcement, and banking.

UNDP has worked with the Ministry for Women Children and Poverty Alleviation in Fiji to support sharing a REACH mobile integrated public service delivery model in neighbouring countries, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu in 2019 in cooperation with UN Women.

The initiative took off with support from the Government of Japan and UNDP in 2015, which is now fully integrated and operated by the Ministry of Women, Children and

Poverty Alleviation with current support provided by the Government of Australia and UNDP.

The Australian High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency John Feakes said, “We are pleased to support community outreach initiatives taken by the Fiji Government such as the ‘REACH’ project particularly in this critical time.”

UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji Resident Representative Levan Bouadze said, “The threats of COVID-19 has urged us all to invest in crucial public services as the UN Secretary-General reminded us. I believe the multi-sectoral effort to strengthen public service delivery will assist people in Fiji to strengthen their resilience. I appreciate the support generously given by multiple donors including the Government of Australia in this critical moment.”

The REACH initiative, this year in Fiji, aims to reach out to the communities which particularly face the challenging sanitation conditions, and adverse economic impact caused by the response measures taken to protect people’s health from the COVID19.

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