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Many dimensions of poverty

Poverty Alleviation Affirmative Action should be based on location, not ethnicity, FNU workshops in Suva, Labasa and Lautoka on the Fiji Poverty Report was told.

The report was collated after Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics under the leadership of the Acting Government Statistician, Epeli Waqavonvono.

Independent economist Professor Wadan Narsey analysed the data and produced a book, *Poverty in Fiji: Changes 2002-03 to 3008-09 and policy implications*.

He said some 71 percent of the poverty alleviation resources should go to the rural sector.

“The Affirmative Action policies should not be hand-outs but reward Fijian entrepreneurship,” he said.

He emphasised the multidimensional nature of poverty and the need to examine it from all perspectives, including productive employment, food security, education and health.

Professor Narsey also examined poverty gaps, income sources and distribution issues, the impact of household size and need for family planning, narcotics including alcohol and kava, health insurance, employment and gender, and household assets and services.

Recommendations derived from the data included the need for tertiary training institutions to be encouraged to increase the output of skills in demand in the international labour markets, and trainees to recognise that they also needed to share the costs of their training, which would be generously rewarded by higher incomes abroad.

Other education recommendations included greater budget allocations for rural preschools, an investigation of causes of poor academic performance that result in school drop outs and opportunities to repeat.

Health recommendations included a ban on advertising non-nutritious snack foods on radio and television, health taxes on nutritionally poor quality foods, some form of health insurance for the poorest households, and campaigns to discourage excessive consumption of yaqona at gatherings.

Another recommendation emphasised the importance of female gainful employment for money as an important part of poverty reduction strategies, a government investigation of duty policies to encourage poor households to purchase basic washing machines to reduce the burden on women, and a campaign to encourage the poorest households to prioritise the purchase of computers rather than less necessary household assets.

There was a recommendation seeking a public inquiry into all aspects of mobile phone use by children and marketing campaigns to find out if they result in excessive expenditure on unnecessary phone use.

The workshop participants heard from the Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority, Fiji Commerce Commission, National Food and Nutrition Centre, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Health and FNU.