



Economic Development, Democracy and Ethnic Conflict in the Fiji Islands

Executive summary

Debates about the protection and advancement of group and minority rights have shaped post-independence political development in the Fiji Islands. This study examines how the debates about minority and majority communities or group rights have been affected by the development processes, and how they have shaped the contours of political development. It traces the origins of economic inequalities and social separateness between indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians and smaller minority groups, under a colonial construction that emphasized 'race' as the basis for organizing politics and the economy.

The study discusses a complex situation whereby a numerically-dominant indigenous community asserts that it is vulnerable and therefore demands a dominant role in governance. The reasons for such claims are explored, as is the indigenous Fijians' real and perceived sense of exclusion from the mainstream commercial economy.

Indo-Fijians, however, also perceive themselves to be vulnerable – and are arguably more so – because of their diluted political rights, their precarious access to lands leased from indigenous landowners, the scars of two military coups, and ethnic violence associated with the overthrow of the democratically-elected government in 2000.

Smaller minority groups, such as the Banabans and the Melanesian community, also face economic exclusion. Their plight is often overshadowed by the overriding focus, both inside and outside Fiji, on the rights and interests of the two larger groups.

With dominant and minority communities experiencing deep anxieties, and real and perceived uncertainties, policy-makers need to understand the underlying causes, as well as the prevailing group psychology. This calls for a far clearer understanding of the nature of development processes, and of their social and economic consequences for relations between communities where conflict has often proved intractable.

By assessing the provisions of Fiji's 1997 Constitution in the light of key developments both prior to and since 1997, including the 2000 coup and subsequent political crisis, this study provides some pointers for Fiji's future. The proper constitutional protection of group rights and interests, and a human and minority rights-based approach to development, can provide options for mitigating some of the adverse impacts of globalization and market-based economic development upon vulnerable groups and communities.



Indigenous and Indo-Fijian schoolchildren

by Satendra Prasad, Jone Dakuvula and Darryn Snell



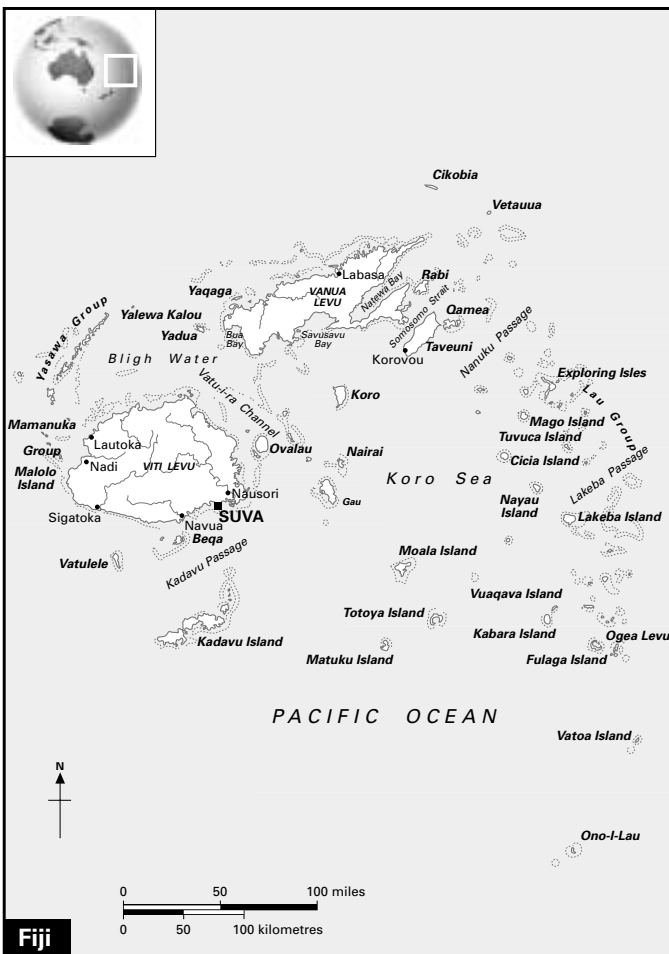
Preface

Minority Rights Group International is very pleased to publish its first Macro Study, on Fiji, under our programme on Minority Rights & Development. This action-research programme, covering some 19 countries across the world, examines how minorities and indigenous peoples are excluded in – or indeed by – the development process.

This text has been a long time in the making. Our Fijian partner organization, Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF), of Suva, began research and consultations over two years ago, including a country-wide consultation meeting held in December 1999, with MRG's participation, when the concerns of all Fiji's ethnic groups were carefully heard. But the project experienced serious setbacks when the May 2000 coup led by George Speight – based on a distortion of the concept of indigenous peoples' rights as protected by international law – plunged Fiji into political crisis. The following months brought violence and intimidation to the Indo-Fijian community, threats against CCF staff for their championing of the principles of constitutional law and human rights, and a slow movement back towards democracy. It remains to be seen whether a lasting and equitable political settlement will be achieved under the current arrangements.

Analysing minority rights and development in the context of these upheavals, this authoritative study reveals the causes and consequences of inter-ethnic tensions in Fiji. Backed by political will, its challenging recommendations would go far towards assuring a just and peaceful future for all communities in Fiji. These recommendations embody key principles for the social, economic, cultural and political inclusion of minorities whose application is so urgently needed around the world today.

Mark Lattimer
Director



Introduction

The negotiation and accommodation of group interests are often defining features of the development of multi-ethnic societies. The accommodation of competing claims to political, economic and social rights by different ethnic groups – and the tensions they present for constitutionality and democracy – has been one of the great challenges faced by societies characterized by pervasive ethnic division and conflict.

The articulation and accommodation of competing ethnic group rights have shaped Fiji's political and constitutional parameters. Throughout its colonial and post-independence period, economic development processes have adversely affected ethnic relations. Groups and communities have experienced social and economic vulnerabilities and marginalization, as an intended or unintended consequence of economic development. The uneven impacts that ethnic groups experience, or perceive that they experience, from developmental processes have inflamed ethnic conflict.

For the past two decades, Fiji's developmental achievements have been severely set back by ethnic conflict. The armed takeover of Parliament, the subsequent removal of the government in 2000 and the military coups of 1987, not only harmed political institutions, but also adversely affected Fiji's developmental prospects. These crises have impacted on ethnic groups and minority communities in terms of their political status, inter-ethnic group relations, relations with a range of developmental institutions and, more broadly, it has affected their economic and social wellbeing.

This study examines some of these impacts and evaluates their consequences for Fiji's political and economic development. An improved appreciation of how Fiji's developmental processes impact upon communities may assist political and constitutional agencies to manage ethnic group competition and conflict, and reduce political outsiders' ability to manipulate inequalities between groups as the basis for ethno-nationalistic political mobilization. The management of conflict in Fiji requires a greater coherence between developmental and constitutional interventions. But such a coherence requires an understanding of the links between ethnic group conflict and the developmental processes; and an appreciation of how constitutional provisions may open possibilities for better protection and advancement of group rights and interests, especially minority rights.

The initial research and consultations for this Macro Study were carried out in 1999 – a time of general optimism in Fiji. The aims were to examine how social justice and other provisions of the 1997 Constitution could be used to deal with the various forms of exclusion and marginality that were being experienced by the Indo-Fijian, indigenous Fijian and smaller communities. However, there was a rapid turn of events in 2000. These developments included:

- The armed takeover of Fiji's Parliament in May 2000 by the Fijian indigenous ethno-nationalist George Speight and his supporters, with the hostage-taking of almost the entire People's Coalition government, and demands for the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution and the setting up of an indigenous Fijian government.
- The imposition of emergency rule first by President Ratu Mara and later by the Fiji Military Forces (FMF), and the purported abrogation of the 1997 Constitution by the FMF as they negotiated for the release of the government, which was held hostage throughout May and June 2000.
- The dismissal of President Mara and the appointment of President Ratu Iloilo by the FMF on the advice of the indigenous Fijian Great Council of Chiefs.
- President Iloilo's dismissal of Indo-Fijian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudry of the People's Coalition government.

- The appointment of an almost exclusively indigenous Fijian Interim Administration led by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, and the subsequent release of the People's Coalition government.
- A human rights challenge by an individual, Chandrika Prasad, in the High Court and the Fiji Court of Appeal, which resulted in the reinstatement of the 1997 Constitution and directives by the Fiji Court of Appeal for a return to constitutionality.
- A further case brought before the High Court by the Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF), a non-governmental civil society advocate organization, asking the High Court to direct the President to reconvene the 1999 Parliament, rather than order fresh elections.
- The High Court's controversial rejection of this challenge and its support of President Iloilo's plans for a return to constitutionality via a fresh general election under the 1997 Constitution, held in August and September 2001, and under the scrutiny of the Commonwealth and the United Nations (UN).
- The transition to a new government in September 2001 following the general election.

These developments clearly affected minority and group rights. This study was therefore revised to provide a clearer understanding of how the developmental processes impacted upon ethnic competition and conflict in Fiji. It also examines constitutional and policy measures that could assist political parties and communities to break out of the cycle of conflict, witnessed so dramatically after 19 May 2000, and to provide a policy platform for the post-crisis reconstruction that is urgently needed.

This study's field research was carried out by Jone Dakuvula, Audra Glavas and Satendra Prasad. It included visits to local communities, and meetings with community leaders and organizations, as well as a national-level consultation workshop held in December 1999. The study's recommendations were refined through consultations at the regional level and via another national-level workshop with community leaders and organizations in mid-2001. CCF has also consulted representatives of political parties in this study. Therefore, the recommendations have broad ownership, and should assist in promoting greater social cohesion in Fijian society, and enhancing the prospects for sustainable democratization.

Development, group rights and the colonial legacy

Fiji's economic development process has generated inequalities and grievances that have readily acquired an ethnic characteristic. Ethnic group leaders have often used the language of group rights to respond to their communities' seemingly divergent interests. Groups rights have therefore been acknowledged in successive constitutional and policy frameworks adopted after Fiji's independence in 1970. Group and community rights debates in Fiji rarely make reference to provisions in international law and conventions. Group rights and interests refer to the general category of cultural, economic, social and political rights as identified by specific 'ethnic' groups in Fiji. These are often defined in relation to real or perceived threats or challenges posed by 'other' groups, and are often fluid – changing in response to economic and political circumstances. Such formulations are firmly rooted in Fiji's colonial history that emphasized racial separateness.

From the 1920s, the British colonial administration articulated administrative definitions of groups along racial and ethnic lines. These were 'Fijian' – the term that referred to indigenous

inhabitants. The second category was 'Indian'. Between 1879 and 1916, over 40,000 indentured labourers were recruited from colonial India (including modern-day Bangladesh and Pakistan). Most remained in Fiji at the end of the indenture period in 1920. The term 'European' was used to refer to all 'white people' who resided in the colony. As the numbers of residents of other groups increased (e.g. Banabans, Chinese and other South Pacific Islanders), they were given similar ethnic labels for administrative purposes, or grouped as the 'Other' category.

The colonial administration encouraged the separate economic development of the different communities. A 'protective labour policy' ensured that the indigenous Fijians did not have to engage in arduous labour. This was to be the work of the Indo-Fijians and other minority groups. There were exceptions to this policy however. The colonial government encouraged a restricted recruitment of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans (see later) to work in the mining, military and other selected sectors.

Therefore, while the stated policy during the colonial era was to protect indigenous Fijians from commercial employment, their selective recruitment had the opposite effect. An ethnically-stratified colonial labour force developed with indigenous Fijians being concentrated in some of the lowest income and low-skilled occupations. However, most indigenous Fijians remained outside the wage-labour sectors until the Second World War.

The separation of ethnic groups was even more pronounced in the agricultural and farming sectors. The terms of the 1874 Deed of Cession divided land into three different groups of land ownership. These were: freehold land, property which became privately owned by Europeans and other foreigners, comprising about 7 per cent of Fiji's total land area; crown land, which included land not yet claimed by Fijian landowners as well as land used for public purposes, comprising about 10 per cent of Fiji's total land; and native land, claimed by indigenous Fijian chiefs, which was communally owned and comprised about 83 per cent of Fiji's total land area. Native land was protected and could not be sold except to the Crown for public purposes. The concept of leasing native lands emerged with the increasing demands for colonial agricultural production, especially sugar cane. In 1880, the Native Lands Ordinance allowed Fijian landowning units to grant leases. By the 1940s, the Native Land Trust Board was established to improve administration of the native lands for economic development.

Colonialists discouraged Fijians from engaging in commercial agricultural production and relied upon the Indian labourers. In Fiji's sugar industry, for example, the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) maintained a monopoly control with Europeans dominating company management. CSR owned and operated sugar plantations on freehold lands, and also relied upon sugar cane produced by tenant farmers. Indo-Fijians served as labourers for CSR's plantations and also became tenant farmers.

The net effect of these policies was that economic activity and disparities acquired an ethnic character. Income from sugar farming on smallholder farms became a source of cash-income disparity between the tenant Indo-Fijian farmers and indigenous Fijian landowning communities. Following the government's takeover of CSR in 1973, it tried to increase indigenous Fijians' participation in this commercial activity, but with limited success. Today, indigenous Fijians constitute less than a quarter of sugar cane growers. The industry continues to generate conflict between the communities, with many indigenous Fijian groups and leaders claiming that their community has derived a disproportionately low income by leasing lands for sugar cane farming. Such claims have frustrated recent efforts to resolve land lease disputes.¹

Land-related economic development has also generated grievances in other ways. Recently, several landowning communities on whose land Fiji's government constructed a large hydroelectric dam in the mid-1970s, demanded increased

compensation from the government. The local communities feel that they have not been adequately compensated for the flooding of their lands, destruction of natural resources and environmental damage, even though they had made claims for adequate compensation in the late 1970s. This grievance, like many others, turned into open conflict during the May 2000 political crisis; local landowners took over the dam, shut down the generators and plunged the capital Suva into darkness.

Policies that promoted racial separateness ensured that an ethnically-stratified labour market developed in Fiji during the colonial period. These policies discouraged the emergence of multi-ethnic interest groups. Although trade unions developed soon after the Second World War, they assumed an ethnic dimension – reflecting the composition of the labour force in different areas of employment. Therefore multi-ethnic interest groups had only a marginal effect in shaping an alternative course of politics.

Under British rule, indigenous Fijians were governed by a system of indirect rule through their chiefs. The Bose Levu Vakaturaga (BLV), commonly known as the Great Council of Chiefs, was instituted in 1875. The BLV, consisting of high chiefs from Fiji's confederacies, served as a mechanism to address leadership challenges and customary rights, especially rights to land, and developed appropriate laws to govern indigenous Fijians in accordance with their customs. As Fiji headed towards independence, the BLV existed alongside a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy.

The privileged position of Europeans and part-Europeans in the colonial economy and administration shaped the approach of the European communities' leaders to independence during the 1960s. They advanced claims for special constitutional provisions and lent support to the Alliance Party – a party that largely was backed by the indigenous Fijian population and was led by their chiefs before independence. Indo-Fijians generally rallied behind the National Federation Party (NFP). The principal focus of the political and constitutional debates and conflicts during this period was upon the rights and interests of the two larger groups and the European/part European communities. Smaller communities were given secondary attention in the constitutional talks and debates of the 1960s – a trend that continued in the post-independence period.

The constitutional framework that was adopted at the time of

independence came to closely mirror the primacy of 'race' and 'racial separateness' as the key organizing principle of Fijian society and politics. The 1970 Constitution provided for 52 seats in the House of Representatives of which 27 were 'communal', i.e. 12 reserved for indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians respectively, and three for 'general electors'. The other seats were national seats of which 10 were for Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians and five for 'general electors' (a category that at the time of independence was dominated by Europeans and part-Europeans). The net effect of this was the political separation of the communities. At the best of times the indigenous Fijian-dominated Alliance Party and the Indo-Fijian National Federation Party (NFP) attracted no more than 18 per cent of the votes of the other communities. The 1970 Constitution also recognized the traditional authority of the BLV, and made specific provisions for the protection of Fijian rights and interests.

The two main communities generally stayed with the Alliance and the NFP during the 1972, 1977, and 1982 general elections. In 1987, the Alliance Party's hold on power was brought to an end with the election victory of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP)-led coalition government. The FLP, founded just two years earlier, not only represented the first truly multi-ethnic political party but also sought to challenge the economic and political order. With the appointment of Dr Timoci Bavadra as the Prime Minister of the FLP coalition government, Fiji, for the first time in its history, was ruled by a 'commoner' and not a chief. The FLP coalition aimed to introduce policies which addressed the needs of the country's workers and poor, including proposals to strengthen the trade union movement (which helped bring them to power); to nationalize sectors of the economy; and to introduce progressive taxation measures. Sitiveni Rabuka's bloodless military coup in May 1987, a month after the general election, however, prevented the FLP coalition from implementing any policy changes.

Ethnic and group interests

The 1987 election, the military coups and the inter-ethnic tensions that followed, illustrated just how divided Fiji's society had become both between and within ethnic groups. Group rights and interests were powerfully asserted by all the ethnic groups. The assertion of group rights continues.

Fiji's population by ethnic category: 1891–1996

Year	Ethnic Origin								TOTAL
	Chinese	European	Fijian	Indian ²	Part-European	Rotuman	Other Pacific Islanders	All Other	
1891 No.	-	2,036	105,800	7,468	1,076	2,219	2,267	314	121,180
%	-	2	87	6	1	2	2	<1	
1911 No.	305	3,707	87,096	40,286	2,401	2,176	2,758	812	139,541
%	<1	3	62	28.8	2	2	2	1	
1936 No.	1,751	4,028	97,651	85,002	4,574	2,816	2,353	204	198,379
%	1	2	49	43	2	1	1	<1	
1966 No.	5,149	6,590	202,176	240,960	9,687	5,797	6,095	273	476,727
%	1	1	42	51	2	1	1	<1	
1976 No.	4,652	4,929	259,932	292,896	10,276	7,291	6,822	1,270	588,068
%	1	1	44	50	2	1	1	<1	
1986 No.	4,784	4,196	329,305	384,704	10,297	8,652	8,627	810	715,375
%	1	1	46	49	1	1	1	<1	
1996 No.	4,939	3,103	393,357	338,818	11,685	9,727	10,463	2,767	774,859
%	1	<1	51	44	2	1	1	<1	

(Source: Bureau of Statistics, 1996.)

The articulation of these rights is not always clear. The sections that follow reflect upon specific ethnic group rights and interests, and their association with the political and economic development processes.

Larger groups

Indigenous Fijians

Indigenous Fijians are the largest ethnic groups in Fiji and currently make up just over 50 per cent of the population. The community, however, is far from homogeneous. It comprises a number of distinct ethno-linguistic groupings divided into numerous communities, groups and clans. Uneven development between rural and urban areas, and central and remote islands, has also led to large economic disparities within the indigenous community. Periodically, indigenous Fijians from different regions have asserted claims for greater autonomy on the basis of these separate histories and economic conditions. These conditions have proven to be quite challenging for those indigenous political leaders appealing for ethnic solidarity.

Many Fijian leaders have argued that as a group indigenous Fijians are the poorest in the country. In many areas, including educational performance, and representation in commercial and certain economic sectors of the economy, indigenous Fijians are under-represented. However, indigenous Fijians also maintain privileges in Fijian society. In addition to owning over 80 per cent of Fiji's land, they make up over 99 per cent of Fiji's military (FMF), 75 per cent of Fiji's police, 90 per cent of Permanent Secretaries, 75 per cent of Fiji's nurses, and hold the most senior positions in the justice system, military and police force. The focus of most recent policy initiatives has been on addressing indigenous Fijians' disadvantaged positions in business and education.

Indigenous nationalist leaders believe that Fijian dominance of government is necessary to ensure that state resources are allocated preferentially to enable indigenous Fijians to escape their disadvantaged position. The 1990 Constitution, which was imposed through presidential decree by the unelected government that took office following the coups of 1987, sought to entrench indigenous Fijian dominance of both Houses of Parliament. It introduced an entirely communal voting structure that guaranteed 37 of the 70 seats in the Lower House for indigenous Fijians. This voting system, used in the 1992 and 1994 general elections, unleashed a wave of intra-ethnic rivalry and competition between indigenous Fijian chiefs and provinces.

The Rabuka-led Soqosoqo Ni Vakavulewa Ni Taukei (SVT) government, which ruled the country from 1988 to 1999, introduced several schemes to promote indigenous Fijians in business. Among these 'positive discrimination' policies were tax breaks and the reservation of sectors of commercial activities for Fijians. One of the most visible results of these policies was the expansion of the Fijian Holding Company (FHC). The FHC, an investment company specifically established to increase Fijian participation in business, obtained substantial shareholdings in major enterprises under the SVT government.

However, this policy did little to increase the Fijian participation in commerce and came at considerable economic cost. For example, the Fiji Development Bank provided concessionary loans worth slightly more than F \$192 million to indigenous Fijians between 1975 and 1999. By 1999, its annual loan portfolio for this purpose was reduced to \$3.3 million, mainly due to the bad debts associated with business failures. Further, the scheme has tended to benefit only a small number of well-connected individuals and families.

It is clear that indigenous Fijians' under-representation in business is closely linked to their underachievement in education.

The SVT government promoted preferential schemes aimed at improving the educational performance of indigenous Fijians, including F \$2.6 million for indigenous Fijian education through the Fijian Affairs Board and special scholarships reserved for indigenous Fijians.

As noted by the Fiji Education Commission of 2000 these programmes were only marginally successful in improving the relative underachievement of indigenous Fijians in education. Most indigenous Fijian primary and secondary school students continue to attend schools in rural areas where resources and infrastructure are inadequate. Very little attention has been given to community attitudes; curriculum design; parental support; and teacher training, especially in subjects such as mathematics and sciences with high dropout rates.

Indo-Fijians

Indo-Fijians constitute the second largest ethnic community. Like the indigenous community, the Indo-Fijian community is far from uniform. The first Indians to arrive in Fiji came under the indenture system. Following the indenture period, many remained as tenant cane farmers while those who could afford it left farming and became wage labourers, ran small businesses or trained to become professionals. During the inter-war years, a new monied class of Gujarati Indians in search of economic opportunities arrived in Fiji. By the 1960s, the Gujarati Indians had come to rival Europeans for dominance of the economy. Indo-Fijians currently living in Fiji tend to identify themselves as part of the Gujarati community or as individuals whose families arrived during the indenture period; in some cases, the two groups have little regard for each other. Religion plays an additional role in the divisions within the Indo-Fijian community. While the majority of Indo-Fijians are Hindus, the community also includes Christians and Muslims. The numerical dominance of people of Indian Hindu origins has been a source of some tension. There have been periodic claims for separate political representation by Muslims of colonial Indian origin.

As a group, however, there has been a high degree of anxiety since the coups of 1987. Indo-Fijians have been subject to violent attacks both after the 1987 coups and the May 2000 takeover of Parliament. Such violence included the systematic looting and burning of Indo-Fijians' homes, temples and businesses in Suva and in neighbouring provinces. In 1987 and during the 2000 upheavals the security forces failed to provide protection to members of the community. In some cases the military and police were either tacitly or directly responsible for some of the violence on Indo-Fijians.³

Indo-Fijians' anxieties also emanate from their marginal role in the governance of the country. Between 1970 and 1987, Fiji was continuously governed by the Alliance Party, which predominantly drew its support from the indigenous community. Both the NFP-FLP coalition government of 1987 and the FLP-led People's Coalition government that swept to power in 1999 were violently removed from office, the first through a military coup, and the second via the takeover of Parliament. On both of these occasions, the overthrow of the constitutional government was supported by a significant cross-section of the indigenous community. These events have left Indo-Fijians feeling an acute sense of alienation from the political system.

The use of racist policies by the SVT government, as well as the Qarase Interim Administration installed by the military in 2000, has added to this feeling of disenfranchisement. Indo-Fijians have been subject to systematic discrimination in appointments and promotion within the public services, and in various public policies – including the controversial Blueprint for Fijian Development introduced by the Qarase administration in 2000.

Indo-Fijians also believe that they have been denied a fair share of state resources for education and employment.⁴ In 1998,

for example, Indo-Fijian and smaller communities received around F \$2 million out of the \$7 million for scholarships for higher education. Such policies also mean that Indo-Fijians generally have less access to state support regarding poverty alleviation, rural development and social welfare.

Another element of their insecurity stems from the dependence of Indo-Fijian tenant farmers on leased agricultural lands. Smallholder farmers' land rentals have more than trebled in price between 1987 and 1999.⁵ Moreover, between 1999 and 2000, it is estimated that over 1,200 Indo-Fijians have not had their leases for sugar cane farming renewed. These households have moved to other parts of Fiji, many having to stay with their rural or urban relatives. The displacement of large numbers of Indo-Fijian tenants who have no other means of sustenance, and who already feel a real sense of political marginalization, is a source of acute anxiety and hardship.

Many indigenous Fijians believe that the Indo-Fijian community is a wealthy community, whose commercial success has either come at their expense or is retarding their entry into the commercial sphere. Only a small number of Indo-Fijians can be defined as wealthy or engaged in business enterprises, and the Indo-Fijian community contains some of Fiji's poorest citizens. The UNDP concluded in 1997 that Indo-Fijians constituted over 50 per cent of the households living below the poverty line.⁶ Indo-Fijian poverty compounded because both rural and urban Indo-Fijians generally have little access to land on which they could produce some subsistence crops. The result is the poor health, nutrition and social wellbeing of Indo-Fijian households living near or below the poverty line. The economic downturn following the political events of May 2000 has worsened the conditions for many of these households. Snell and Prasad⁷ estimate that some 9,000 people have either lost their jobs or were working on reduced hours and pay by the end of May 2001; they estimate that over 65 per cent of these were Indo-Fijians.

The 1987 coups and the May 2000 political crisis have left deep scars on the community. Many have lost faith in the democratic process and the security forces. In 1987, many decided to emigrate resulting in a decline in the Indo-Fijian population to around 44 per cent of the total population. In the current political environment it is difficult to make long-term projections about the emigration of Indo-Fijians. However, many Indo-Fijian community organizations are talking of mass emigration as the community's only option. This deep sense of alienation and hurt must be addressed if the energies and commitment of the community are to be harnessed for national development.

Smaller minorities

The overriding conflict and competition between the indigenous Fijian community and the Indo-Fijian community often masks and deflects attention from the plight of smaller communities. Issues confronting some of these communities are discussed below.

The Banaban community

The Banaban community owns Rabi Island, off the coast of Vanua Levu, where most of its members live. Banabans are originally from Ocean Island (Banaba) in the British Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. They first arrived as settlers (1,003 of them) in December 1945. The British Phosphate Commission, with funds from the Banaban Trust Fund, purchased Rabi from the British colonial government in Fiji, for the resettlement of Banabans. In the period 1945 to 1995, the population of Rabi grew from 1,003 to over 5,000.

The plight of Banabans in Fiji has its roots in one of the worst instances of colonial exploitation in the South Pacific. Phosphate

was discovered on Banaba in 1900. The Pacific Islands Company (PIC), which discovered the phosphate, persuaded the British government to annex Banaba. It acquired land for mining of phosphate at exorbitantly low prices in 1912. It also set up the Banaban Trust Fund into which it deposited royalties for use by the Banaban community.

In 1916 Banaba/Ocean Island was made part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony without consultation or the consent of its people. In 1920, the Australian, British and New Zealand governments acquired the interests of the PIC in Banaba; thereafter the phosphate industry was run on a commercial basis by the British Phosphate Commission. Over time, it increased its mining area, destroying the subsistence base for the community, and it paid extremely low rates of compensation.

In 1947, a Statement of Intention was signed between a team of British officials and Banaban leaders, which declared that the Banabans would live on Rabi in the Fiji Islands. As a result of this Statement, the Banaban Settlement Ordinance of 1945 was formulated – providing for the administration of Rabi through the Rabi Island Council. Banabans on Rabi became subject to Fijian tax and were entitled to the services provided by the Fijian government. The British Phosphate Commission extended its lease over the remaining land. While annuity payments, bonuses and royalties were modestly increased from 1965, they reinforced the culture of dependency upon the people of Rabi. The Ordinance also established the Banaban Trust Fund Board, which was replaced by the Banaban Settlement Act when Fiji became independent.

Failure to reach agreement on compensation led the Banaban community to initiate legal action against the British Phosphate Commission and the British government. The courts decided that the British government had been guilty of moral negligence. This ruling compelled the British government and the Phosphate Commission to negotiate a settlement. The Banabans were offered F \$10 million, which was placed in trust and regulated by the Banaban Settlement Act – this Act is entrenched under Fiji's 1997 Constitution.

In the late 1980s, leaders of the community were warned by their financial advisors that the Rabi Island Council could not sustain its spending on community services. By 1989, the Council had begun to draw illegally from the Trust Fund investments. A Commission of Inquiry concluded that between 1981 and 1988, some F \$5 million was lost through bad investment decisions and possible malpractice, making the remaining investment funds vulnerable. By 1992, the Council could not meet its debts having lost over F \$27 million. The Council was dissolved on the directives of Fiji's then Prime Minister.

Because of its access to its own developmental funds, this minority community was largely excluded from the mainstream developmental process. Since the 1980s all indicators for the social wellbeing of the community have shown a serious decline. The Banaban community is poor, and decades of dependency have harmed its morale and resourcefulness. This is further compounded because as a small minority with more recent roots in Fiji, they are often regarded as outsiders. The community's marginal political influence means that Banabans barely feature in government policies and programmes – for example, the community was excluded from the 'positive discrimination' programmes in 1990 and from the Blueprint announced by the Qarase administration in late 2000.

The Chinese community

The Chinese presence in Fiji dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when people from China travelled to the region in pursuit of *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) and sandalwood, much valued commodities in China. The number of Chinese in Fiji increased after the First World War. New settlers provided labour for the booming banana export industry in the 1920s and

1930s. Many of them went on to produce bananas and other products on leased lands. The 1930s and 1940s saw another Chinese migration to Fiji. For the first time, many Chinese began applying for citizenship.

The community gradually increased from the end of the Second World War. However, Fiji's independence had left many Chinese with a feeling of uncertainty and between 1968 and 1974 nearly 20 per cent of them left Fiji.⁸

Chinese began to enter the commercial sector, mainly as independent traders, as early as the 1940s. By the mid 1970s, the community was firmly established in retailing and other industries. Equally, members of the community have done well in paid employment. In 1996, over 40 per cent of its economically active members were employed as legislators, professionals, senior officials and technicians. This compared with 15 per cent for indigenous Fijians and 22 per cent for Indo-Fijians.

These achievements reflect the educational attainment of Chinese students in relation to the indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian populations. For example, 18.5 per cent of Chinese adults had attained post-secondary qualifications in 1996, compared with 6.5 per cent for Indo-Fijians and less than 5 per cent for indigenous Fijians.⁹ This reflects the premium paid by Chinese families to higher education.

Despite the Chinese community's general economic success, the community has remained politically marginal. This has been one of the reasons behind its extremely high emigration rates. But since the early 1990s, an estimated 2,500 Chinese have come to Fiji. There is talk that this may be due to the exploitation of loopholes in Fiji's immigration bureaucracy. The community has attracted unfair and at times racist criticism about its possible support for such immigration.

On the whole, the status of the community is different from the other smaller communities. Its success in education and business has opened opportunities for emigration. Although the Chinese community's political representation is marginal at best, it enjoys a higher income, and runs its own educational and cultural institutions. Its comparatively better economic position domestically, and a higher rate of emigration, have acted as safety valves during periods of political turbulence. If the energies and resources of this once vibrant community are to be harnessed for Fijian society as a whole, the Constitution and policies need to promote their sense of belonging as equal citizens.

The Rotuman community

Rotuma is a remote island approximately 500 km north of Viti Levu island and Suva. Rotuma was officially ceded to Britain in 1881 after religious 'wars' broke out between two different groups: Roman Catholics and Wesleyan Methodists. This led Rotuman's chiefs to ask Britain to annex the island. However, Britain decided in 1881 that Rotuma would be administered through the Colonial Office in Fiji.

Because of limited economic and educational opportunities, Rotumans sought education and employment on Viti Levu from the early colonial period. In 1981, the total population of Rotumans was 8,078; of these only 2,578, or 32 per cent were living on Rotuma island compared with 3,235 or 56 per cent in 1966. The proportion of the community living outside of Rotuma has been steadily increasing.

The patterns of migration have changed however. In the 1930s, Rotumans mostly left Rotuma to work in the gold mine. Recently, Rotumans have left their island to take up tertiary education in Viti Levu and for highly skilled occupations. In 1996, over 30 per cent of Rotumans were engaged in legislative, professional and technical occupations – a considerably higher rate than Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians. Significantly, a higher percentage of Rotuman students complete post-secondary education than indigenous Fijians.

Yet, Rotumans feel that successive governments have

neglected their community. They cite erratic shipping to the island, poor infrastructure, and the subsequent lack of economic and educational opportunities. Some of these outcomes are a consequence of the island's marginal influence over the national decision-making process.

The 1997 Constitution provide several mechanisms through which the community can broaden its political influence. It guarantees Rotumans a seat in Parliament and provides for the appointment of a Rotuman senator. Additionally, the open seats provide opportunities for the community on the mainland to influence election outcomes. Moreover, the Rotuma Act and the Rotuman Lands Act are entrenched in the Constitution. Finally, the Constitution's social justice provisions provide a basis to enhance the social and economic wellbeing of the most disadvantaged within the community – especially those on the island of Rotuma.

Other communities

Other smaller communities include Europeans, part-Europeans, Solomon Islanders, other Pacific Islanders, and tiny populations of other ethnic origins. There is little research on smaller minority groups in Fiji. Little is known about the income, occupations and social development of these communities. Fiji's official data simply lumps these minority communities under a generic 'Other' category, and therefore statistical indicators are difficult to establish except through primary surveys.

The European and part-European communities

Fiji's European and part-European communities trace their origin to the early 1800s when settlers began to establish a commercial presence. Following colonization, their numbers grew as trading opportunities expanded. Throughout the colonial period, the European and part-European communities enjoyed a relatively privileged position through their dominance of commerce and colonial administration. They also had enjoyed direct representation in the colonial legislature.

Under the 1970 Constitution, the European community was guaranteed a level of political representation that was disproportionately larger than its population. Since then, the Europeans have largely supported the Alliance Party, and its elected members were well represented in the Cabinet at senior levels. Europeans received reduced representation under the 1990 Constitution raising their concerns about their identity and sense of belonging. Many in the part-European community, who had strong kinship links with indigenous Fijians, felt hurt and betrayed when they were removed from the indigenous Fijian voting roll in 1990.

Overall, the European community continues to have the highest income. Just under 50 per cent of the economically active European and part-European population are in high wage legislative, professional and technical occupations. Europeans' emigration rates are the highest of all the minority communities, following similar trends to the Chinese and Indo-Fijian communities.

The Melanesian communities

Among the most excluded and vulnerable minority groups in Fiji are the Melanesian communities, comprised of the descendants of the Solomon Islands and Ni-Vanuatu, who were brought into Fiji effectively as slave labour in the early-nineteenth century. Most of their descendants live in relatively closed communities in Suva, Lautoka and Levuka. Several studies have found that on almost all economic and social indicators, these Melanesian communities fare among the worst. Over 60 per cent of all households belonging to these communities live

below the official poverty line. Only a tiny number are either in higher-paying occupations, or have professional or higher education qualifications. Further, only 12 students were in technical and tertiary institutes in 1999.

Until 1987, the Melanesian communities identified closely with indigenous Fijians with whom they had developed close ties through inter-marriage and cultural affinity. Melanesians were even included in the indigenous Fijian category. Racial politics following the 1987 coups, however, brought divisions between the Melanesian and Fijian communities. Under the 1990 Constitution, the Melanesian communities were re-classified into the 'Other' category and were denied access to the affirmative action programmes. There have been no changes to this policy since. One consequence of this relocation has been a more vigorous assertion of the Melanesian communities' group identity. Community-based groups are being established, and modest developmental grants have been provided over the past five years through the Ministry of Multi Ethnic Affairs.

The Tuvaluan community

A smaller long-established Tuvaluan community is also locked in a similar poverty and social exclusion trap. Approximately 55 per cent of all Tuvaluan households live below the official poverty line. Like the Melanesian communities, they are unable to influence national policy and are therefore largely denied access to developmental programmes. Unlike the European/part-European and Chinese communities in particular, the smaller communities do not have the option of emigration, although their sense of alienation is no less intense.

Gender inequalities

Policy-makers in Fiji over the years have focused overwhelmingly upon ethnic inequalities at the expense of other forms of discrimination. Gender inequalities, which have been largely overlooked and unaddressed, are just as serious as the disparities between ethnic groups. While women constitute just under 50 per cent of the population, they comprise only 33 per cent of the economically active population, and less than 25 per cent of those in formal paid employment.¹⁰

Women are found in some of Fiji's worst paid occupations. Many of these occupations were the product of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) put in place following the 1987 coups. The SAPs' export orientation, coupled with generous tax and other incentives, led to a rapid expansion of the clothing, footwear and textile industries in Fiji. In 1986, there were only 30 small enterprises employing 3,000 workers in this sector. By the beginning of 1999, there were over 100 enterprises employing just over 18,000 workers. Most of these are women working for some of the country's lowest wages. Between 1987 and 1993, they did not even enjoy the protection of minimum wage regulations. When these regulations were introduced in 1992, the base rate was around F \$1.00 per hour – which was half of the prevailing manufacturing sector wages. In 1998, women working in this sector earned a gross minimum wage income of around F \$40 per week.¹¹

Fiji's women workers were the main human resources for the economic reconstruction that occurred after the 1987 crisis. Ironically, following the crisis of 2000, many of the sector's enterprises were among the first to close and leave the country – often leaving secretly, and without paying outstanding wages and other employee entitlements. By July 2001, almost 4,000 jobs had been lost in the sector. As in 1987, women workers and women generally have borne the heaviest price for the economic downturn.

The marginalization of women is similar in all sectors of economic activity. In the public services, women constitute less

than 10 per cent of the top three levels of the public services, and only three women are at the top level of the public services.¹² Non-indigenous women are even worse off. There are no minority community women in the top two tiers of Fiji's public services, for example. Similarly, minority women are almost entirely absent from representation on public service boards and are extremely under-represented in commercial sectors. Development processes have therefore adversely affected Fiji's women in many ways – but the impact has been concentrated upon women from minority communities.

*[T]he majority of Fiji women are engaged in work that does not earn them money. Therefore only a minority of women are economically independent.'*¹³

Within the Indo-Fijian community, c. 30 per cent of the community's poorest households are run by women bringing up children on their own, or who are widows; for the poorest such indigenous Fijian households, the figure is just under 25 per cent. CCF consultations in 1999 and 2001 established that these poorer women have far less chance of accessing the minimal anti-poverty assistance or developmental grants provided via the Fiji Ministry for Social Welfare, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, than their male counterparts. The modest support provided via the state machinery often appears contingent upon support for assistance by village heads, Advisory Council members, and political parties. Poorer women are typically marginalized from these local power structures.

Mutual accommodation through the 1997 Constitution

This Macro Study shows that no one group in Fiji has a monopoly over hardship and suffering. However, the effects of increased discrimination through official policy, heightened racism and ethnically-directed violence are felt most acutely by the Indo-Fijian community. But all minority communities experience, to varying degrees, a real sense of political marginalization – a trend that was triggered after the coups of 1987 and with the exception of a brief interlude after 1997 – powerfully reasserted after May 2000. The reinstatement of the 1997 Constitution and the holding of the 2001 general election, however, are positive developments. The 1997 Constitution provides a number of important mechanisms aimed at reducing divisive ethnically-based politics. This section reviews some of the 1997 Constitution's important features.

The process of constitution-making in Fiji was significant. Sustained pressure upon the Rabuka-led SVT government from Fiji's civil society, the FLP, NFP and parts of the international community, resulted in an agreement to establish a high-powered three-member Constitution Review Commission (CRC) in 1995. The CRC sought the views of Fiji's civil society and political parties, and consulted widely in Fiji and internationally before making its recommendations to a parliamentary Joint Select Committee. The aims of this Committee were to develop a broad consensus on the new Constitution and to recommend a bill to amend the 1990 Constitution to both Houses of Parliament.

Following several months of consensus building and revisions of the CRC's recommendations by this Committee, the Constitution Amendment Act was presented to the Parliament and unanimously approved by both Houses in July 1997. The BLV also approved the Constitution. In both its approach and breadth, the 1997 Constitution is unprecedented, and the process helped Fiji move away from the tired politics of ethnic confrontation.

The difficulties and tensions that were a consequence of a divisive political economy and a product of the recent history of military coups and ethnic persecution, were acknowledged by

most groups during the Constitution review process. The process went some way in promoting reconciliation between the communities – though possibly not far enough. The new Constitution tried to overcome the demographic, economic and social constraints that were identified during the review process.

The 1997 Constitution attempts to balance the tensions between the protection of ethnic group interests and rights, and the individual human rights of equality and non-discrimination. This is reflected in the Constitution's Compact which states that the 'rights of all individuals, communities and groups are fully respected'. A key feature of the rights discourse was the need to secure a special position for the group rights and interests of indigenous Fijians. Efforts were made during the Constitution review process to identify more carefully what 'indigenous Fijian interests' meant. The CCF and the CRC concluded that the phrase generally reflected a genuine desire on the part of the mainstream of Fijian society to improve the performance of indigenous Fijians across the education system, broaden the participation of indigenous Fijians in business, and reduce the level of poverty faced by the community. These were distinct from the indigenous Fijian assertion of 'rights' however. The 'rights' discourse revolved around claims that as the indigenous people, Fijians had an inherent right to govern the state, and through that ensure the protection of indigenous Fijian land and administration.

The Constitution deals with all these issues adequately: through its Compact and Preamble, nomination and powers of BLV representatives to the Senate, protection of entrenched legislation, provisions for Fijian administration, provisions for the appointment of the President, and its social justice provisions. Under the 1997 Constitution, for example, veto powers are granted to the 14 BLV-nominated members of the Senate on legislation concerning the culture, customs and land rights of indigenous Fijians. The Constitution's Compact also requires that on matters of cross-community concern

'communities negotiate in good faith but where agreements cannot be resolved through dialogue then the principle of pre-eminence of indigenous Fijian rights be accepted so as to ensure that the interests of the Fijian community are not subordinated to the interests of other communities'.

This principle is generally accepted as the bedrock for Fiji's approach to national governance.

Under the Constitution's social justice provisions, Fiji's various ethnic communities, including the indigenous community, are provided with a legal basis to receive benefits designed to improve their disadvantaged positions. Directives for social justice provisions are spelt out in ch. 5 of the Constitution, requiring Parliament to make provision of special programmes for 'groups or categories of persons' who are disadvantaged. Such programmes had to provide

*'equality of access to education and training, land and housing, and participation in commerce and in all levels and branches of service of the State'.*¹⁵

These provisions authorize affirmative actions aimed at reducing disparities in a manner that both addresses the concerns of disadvantaged groups and communities, while retaining a non-discriminatory orientation.

However, the social justice provisions have yet to be turned into law. When introduced the social justice legislation will be among the most far-reaching pieces of legislation to be attempted by any Fijian government since independence. The legislation not only involves setting up programmes to address group disadvantage but also aspires to overcome the consequences of discrimination and exclusion, whether intentional or unintentional, that have evolved over a long period of time. Ironically, the People's Coalition government was ready to introduce draft social justice legislation when the takeover of Fiji's Parliament occurred on 19 May 2000. This legislation can

serve as a useful starting point for a programme of governance by the new government.

The 1997 Constitution also heralds significant changes to the election process. Prior to 1997, Fiji used the simple majority voting system of 'first past the post'. The 1997 Constitution introduces the 'alternative vote' system, modelled upon the system used in Australia for its House of Representatives. One of the key objectives of adopting this preferential voting system was to encourage the different ethnically-based political parties to cooperate with one another through preference deal-making. During the 1999 election, the preferential voting system helped further the cooperation of indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian parties. The FLP, for example, joined with coalition partners – consisting of two indigenous Fijian breakaway parties from the SVT and a party of 'general electors' – in a unified campaign.

Unresolved problems of exclusion

One central question, however, remains. If the Constitution ensures the protection and advancements of indigenous rights, and establishes certain mechanisms to reduce ethnic tensions, then how do we explain the resurgence of extreme nationalist groups following the May 2000 takeover of the Parliament? It is clear that sections of the indigenous community were made to feel that their entitlement to affirmative action programmes would be eroded by an Indo-Fijian-led People's Coalition government.¹⁶ However, this is insufficient to explain the political turmoil. Fiji's political problems have their roots in a combination of factors, including: anxieties about cultural and ethnic identity and values, the inability of communities and groups to manage and mitigate the uneven impacts of economic development, and a lack of understanding about democratic arrangements and procedures.

Economic development since independence has enhanced pre-existing anxieties. This process has generated a socially excluded underclass, especially among the growing urban populations. Disparities in income and access to state resources between rural and urban regions, and income differentials between and within communities and provinces, have also widened. Without safety nets and policies to ensure that developmental gains were distributed more evenly across regions, and between and within communities, new tensions have inevitably built up.

The ethnic violence and upheavals that Fiji experienced after the May 2000 takeover of Parliament are explained by the dangerous build up of such pressures, enabling political outsiders or 'outbidders' to exploit individuals and groups who belong to socially excluded groups. The large numbers of indigenous Fijians who rallied around the leaders of the parliamentary takeover came from the socially excluded underclasses of Fijian society – the urban unemployed and rural indigenous Fijians from the interior provinces – who neither benefited from the post-independence agricultural development; nor from the industrial and other developments occurring around the capital, or in other urban, tourism or sugar-producing regions. Many felt angered that not only Indo-Fijians, but also indigenous Fijians from other regions and provinces, had benefited disproportionately from this development process. Their anger was directed towards Indo-Fijians, whom they perceived as having derived unequal benefits from Fiji's economic development, but also towards indigenous Fijians from other provinces such as Lau, whom they felt were politically and economically better off. It was this pressure that led Speight's ultra-nationalists to ask the military to remove President Mara from office, barely a week after the takeover of the Parliament.

Paradoxically, Fiji's 1997 Constitution and the results of the 1999 election may have unintentionally bolstered the fortunes of the outbidders. Ethno-nationalist leaders lost electoral ground. The alternative vote system introduced by the Constitution provided strong incentives to political parties to build cross-ethnic alliances. This was a setback for extreme nationalist political parties with little or no cross-ethnic group appeal. The nationalist parties, who had until the 1999 election been able to secure a few of the seats in Parliament, were almost completely wiped out in this election. These factors encouraged such leaders to seek non-constitutional means to assert themselves. Historically, indigenous Fijian nationalist parties had enjoyed strong electoral support among indigenous Fijians in the interior provinces of Naitasiri and Tailevu. It was in these provinces that Speight and his group enjoyed the strongest and most public forms of support. Behind their support for extreme forms of nationalism, however, lies their sense of marginalization from the political and the economic mainstream of Fiji society. It is clear that unless the development processes are better managed, and the vulnerabilities of groups and provinces that have done poorly out of the development processes are reduced via state interventions, democratic processes and ethnic relations will continue to run the risk of becoming hostage to 'outbidder' political interests.

Conclusions

Colonial policies of racial separateness laid enduring structures of an ethnically-stratified labour force and political economy in the Fiji Islands. Economic development strategies adopted in the post-independence period intentionally and unintentionally reproduced and even widened ethnic segmentation in the labour markets. Such segmentation has often worsened the economic and social exclusion of the approximately 30 per cent of Fiji's households of all ethnic groups who live below the poverty line, and whose predicament is severely worsened by Fiji's present political crisis.

No single ethnic community in Fiji can lay exclusive claims to hardship and suffering. Most groups face an acute sense of economic marginalization. The real and perceived sense of marginalization and disadvantage were reflected in the policy commitments made by the different ethnically-based political parties during the 2001 election.¹⁶ While the environment of the 2001 general election was generally free and fair, the election itself has reaffirmed and highlighted inter-ethnic group differences. Clearly, the transition to a post-election government needs to be accompanied by inter- and intra-community consultations relating to ethnic group concerns that have been identified during and before the 2001 general election. Concerns of the indigenous community, in particular, must be addressed. As noted recently by Madraiwiwi¹⁷

'objectively the interests of indigenous Fijians appear adequately protected. However, inasmuch as a significant number of Fijians seem to consider their interests are insufficiently safeguarded, there is a problem. Perception is reality.'

The 1997 Constitution provides a framework through which 'racialized' negative development can be reversed. Through its Compact, directive principles, and social justice provisions, the Constitution provides an effective way of dealing with competing group rights and interests, including real and perceived concerns about unequal benefits from the post-independence developmental processes.

Over the longer term, Fiji must move towards a less ethnically-based political system – so that the association between political parties and ethnic identity are weakened. In the shorter term, however, all communities must also have some guaranteed access to resources to help promote groups' culture, identity and

languages. Issues surrounding culture and identity, especially with reference to part-Europeans and other minorities, are more difficult to deal with through constitutional and policy instruments. Ultimately, community identities are best protected within an overall framework of democracy and a real sense of inclusiveness in the political process. Measures to enhance the visibility of minority cultures need to be established. These may include: formulating consultation mechanisms; measures to guarantee access to all forms of the media; and recognition of minority cultures and contributions to national life through the educational curricula, symbols of the state and a variety of other means. Community-specific programmes and policies must have the prior endorsement of community groups and their representatives. Agreements on the mechanisms for community consultations regarding ethnic group interests and concerns may help to kickstart the parliamentary process.

The translation of the Constitutional framework into policy and delivery requires far greater political determination than has been shown to date. The return to democratic rule must also be backed up by the promotion of a more inclusive and broadened system of governance than that technically provided for under the Constitution. It is imperative that all political groups, including the winners and the losers, commit themselves to working within the constitutional means and to using the Constitution to find solutions to those concerns on which groups hold strongly divergent views. The approach and method of the 1997 Constitution review provides some guidelines that may be worth revisiting. A commitment to constitutionality must include a public commitment to participate in governance, and the acceptance of democratic values in the transition to and in the operation of a post-election coalition government.

If community leaders do not commit themselves to Fiji's 1997 Constitution and a new Constitution were to once again be imposed through a divisive constitution review process, ethnic relations will continue to deteriorate, the plight of vulnerable minorities worsen, and Fiji's economic and social development prospects will be harmed. Many of Fiji's perceived ethnic problems can only be redressed via a stable and expanding economy. Serious economic decline followed the armed takeover of the Parliament in May 2000, as was the case after the military coups of 1987. Associated with these declines have been intensified 'racialized' political competition for economic resources.

By early September 2001 Fiji had successfully conducted its general election, which gave the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL; also known as the United Fiji Party, UFP) 32 seats and the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) 27 seats in the 71-member Parliament. While further polarization of the main communities was inevitable given the circumstance leading to the election, the Constitution provides a clear framework for the establishment and operation of a multi-party government. Because both the main parties, representing the mainstream of indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian opinion, are in the Parliament, the environment is set for serious and continuous dialogue to resolve some of the underlying issues. Viewed this way, the prospects for Fiji to resolve inter-ethnic strife and conflict have not been better for a while. Fiji's NGOs must exert continuous pressure to make multi-party democracy work. A stable economic environment depends upon political stability. Fiji has hopefully broken out of the cycle of political and ethnic unrest, and now needs a careful balance between justice, healing and reconciliation. The recommendations that follow (see p. 12) provide parameters for developing a broad consensus among Fiji's ethnic groups and political leaders, and provide a platform for sustainable post-crisis reconstruction. The international community also has an important role to play in encouraging and supporting Fiji's newly-elected government, and other principal actors, to accept the viability and sustainability of this new route.

Notes

- 1 The issue of low land rentals has featured prominently in Fiji for the past five years or so. This has been used by ethno-nationalist leaders as a basis for demands for exclusive indigenous Fijian control of government in 2000 and 2001. Such leaders have argued that indigenous Fijians would be able to derive higher incomes from their land and other natural resources. Such claims are often based on data that is deliberately manipulated by some leaders. Regarding sugar land rentals see Davis, J. and Courtney, G., 'For a fair and equitable rent', *Sunday Times*, 27 August 1999; and Kurer, O., 'ALTA and rent: who exploits whom?' *Working Paper 2*, Department of Economics, University of the South Pacific, 2001.
- 2 The decline of the Indo-Fijian population as a proportion of the whole in recent decades, largely due to out-migration, indicates high levels of anxiety about their future in Fiji.
- 3 The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), 'Crisis in Fiji: democracy and human rights under threat in the South Pacific'. Submission by the CHRI to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration meeting, New York, 15 September 2000.
- 4 Fiji Islands Education Commission, 'Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji islands, Suva, Government Printer, 2000, p. 459.
- 5 Fiji Sugar Cane Growers Council, *Annual Report 2000*.
- 6 UNDP/Government of Fiji, *Fiji Poverty Report*, Suva, Government Printer, 1997.
- 7 Snell, D. and Prasad, S., 'Behind the Fiji crisis: politics of labour in an ethnically divided society', *Arena Journal*, no. 15, 2000.
- 8 Grief, S.W., *Overseas Chinese in Fiji*, Tapei, College of Chinese Culture, 1977, p. 44.
- 9 Census of Fiji, 1996.
- 10 Prasad, S. and Hince, K., *Industrial Relations in the South Pacific*, Suva, University of the South Pacific, 2000.
- 11 Prasad, S. and Snell, D., 'Fiji 2001 employment survey: preliminary results', *SSED Working Paper Series*, Suva, University of the South Pacific, 2001.
- 12 For a discussion of the different ways in which women have experienced the impacts of crisis and conflict in work, social life and other spheres, after the 1987 and 1999 upheavals, see Prasad, S. and Snell, D., 'Fiji 2001 employment survey: preliminary results', *SSED, University of the South Pacific, The Journal of Pacific Studies*, vol. 13, 2000, and Bain, A. (ed.), *Labouring Under the Law*, Suva, Marama Publications, 1996.
- 13 Jalal, I., 'Fiji women and the Constitution', in B. Lal and T. Vakatora (eds), *Fiji in Transition*, Suva, University of the South Pacific, 1997.
- 14 Fiji Islands Constitution, 1997, pp. 32–3.
- 15 Snell and Prasad, *op. cit.*
- 16 The manifestos of the main political party representing the smaller minority groups for the 2001 election had made a specific call for a neutral military, a reservation of at least 15 per cent for the annual allocation for scholarships and higher education, and a policy commitment that the ownership of all freehold lands would be maintained. The parties drawing their support from Indo-Fijian communities had emphasized law and order and have called for compensation for the victims of the 2000 upheavals. The more nationalist indigenous Fijian parties, including the SDL party formed by the leading members of the Interim Administration, had made firmer commitments to changing the 1997 Constitution, to further entrench the indigenous Fijian political dominance, and have committed themselves to pursuing policies to enhance preferential support for indigenous Fijians. These divergent policy commitments mean that policies after the 2001 election will continue to be torn by ethnic competition that is centred around competing claims about disadvantage and inequity.
- 17 Madraiwiwi, J., 'Fiji 2001: our country at the crossroads', paper presented in the Ray Parkinson Memorial Lecture Series, Suva, University of the South Pacific, 2001. See www.usp.ac.fj
- 18 Prasad, S., 'Beyond Fiji's 2001 general elections: constitutional options and mechanisms for governance in a divided society', paper presented in the School of Social and Economic Development (University of the South Pacific) Seminar Series, Suva, 2001, pp. 7–9, has provided some options for the development and operation of the committee system, including: that the chairs of the committees ought to be drawn from different political parties; the idea of proportionality in the composition of committees; and that cabinet ought to proceed on important legislation that requires cross-community support only after the relevant committees have developed a basic consensus on the policy or legislation. All parliamentary committees should seek to

include minority community representatives from either the Lower House or the Senate. On matters that have a particular interest to smaller communities, the committee ought to engage in a sustained dialogue with community groups, and invite submissions from individuals. Some budgetary allocations must be made to enable community groups to meaningfully contribute to, and participate in, this consultative process.

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Minority Rights & Development

The Minority Rights & Development programme addresses issues of the exclusion and marginalization of minority communities and indigenous peoples in and as a result of development interventions.

MRG works with partner organizations and with minority and indigenous communities to research and document minority experience of development at micro- and macro-levels and to disseminate the findings and advocate better practice at state, regional and international levels.

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This study is published as a contribution to public understanding. The text does not necessarily represent in every detail the collective view of MRG or its partners.

Citizens Constitutional Forum

CCF is a non-partisan civil society organization that has worked since 1992 to secure a democratic Constitution and to strengthen institutions of accountability, human rights and multiculturalism in Fiji.

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Recommendations

1. As a priority, Fiji's newly-elected government should complete work on the code of conduct, freedom of information and social justice legislation, through broad multi-party consensus-building, and consultation with civil society and community groups.
2. The government should establish a Reconstruction, Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address underlying issues that cannot be accommodated via social justice provisions. Such a Commission will have to assure all communities that violence, as an instrument for advancing political claims, cannot be tolerated. The Commission should concern itself with the victims of the upheavals of 2000, enabling them to restart their lives through sustainable economic activities; investigate those responsible for the overthrow of the People's Coalition government in 2000, and for the associated violence and harassment; and initiate meaningful cross-community dialogue to promote the healing of inter-ethnic hostility. This work should be supported by international development agencies with expertise in crisis prevention and peace-building.
3. Parliamentary committees should consult widely with all stakeholders before proposing policies for implementation, in order to enhance political participation. The formulation of social justice policies should emphasize means-testing; public accountability; a time limitation, periodic review and reporting to Parliament; training; and the use of quotas and targets.
4. The Fijian education sector needs well-researched interventions to improve its infrastructure, especially in rural and depressed urban zones; to enhance educational access at all levels, including professional education for members of disadvantaged communities; and to ensure that curricula fully reflect and foster Fiji's divergent languages and cultures, and the principles of democracy, human rights and mutual respect.
5. Policies are urgently needed to promote the economic participation of poorer indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians and the smaller minorities such as Banabans, Melanesian Fijians and Rotumans. Such policies should be cohesive and transparent, based upon accurate research, involve training, be time specific, and subject to public scrutiny and review.
6. The promotion of representation in public life by marginalized minorities should include increasing the number of Indo-Fijians and smaller minorities on public boards, public corporations and state services at all levels.
7. The promotion of minority languages and cultures through the public media, and a greater visibility of minority and smaller communities in all aspects of governance, must become a national priority. Minority communities should decide on who their representatives will be in institutions of governance. The Fijian government should ensure that public and private media provide outlets for minority languages.
8. The Fijian government, assisted by the international community, must build consensus through inclusive policy development involving Parliament, civil society, and multilateral and bilateral development institutions, in the formulation, implementation and review of policies and programmes. It should promote dialogue and understanding on the conflict dimensions of development, to ensure that development is equitable and inclusive across all of Fiji's regions, and among all of its communities.
9. The Fijian government, supported by the international community, must respond urgently to the large-scale displacement of Indo-Fijian and other tenant farmers in rural areas, and facilitate the establishment of new areas of economic activity in peripheral urban regions for displaced tenant households.
10. The gender composition of government, public services and state institutions must be improved within an acceptable period. The participation of women should be promoted in conflict prevention, poverty alleviation, the promotion and protection of human rights, and reconciliation.
11. Fiji needs to consolidate its multi-party system of government. Political parties must improve the participation of women and smaller minorities in the Cabinet, and in parliamentary committees, using their Senate appointments to achieve this in the short term. Parliamentary committees and the Cabinet must keep each other in check to ensure an effective diffusion of power across the political system.
12. Civil society and the Fijian government, working in partnership, should ensure that citizens, community groups and political parties are fully aware of the provisions of the Constitution, including its provisions for the protection and advancement of group rights and interests.