

AGENDA ITEM 2: HARNESSING THE POWER OF DATA TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Chair,

Excellencies, Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka!

Fiji reiterates the collective vision and framework of the "Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One behind" and affirms that the realization for action, transcends the capabilities of national statistical systems and requires a whole-of-government approach adhering to the following three principles of

i) Linking policy with data;
ii) Investments in national statistical systems; and
iii) statistical offices to function as one integrated system upholding the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest and most diverse region, and leader in Statistics and home to some of the most advanced technologies. However for us in Fiji, like our Pacific and Small Islands Developing States could benefit from stronger commitment – via technical and financial support from Development Partners within the Asia Pacific region, to assist in achieving long-term development.

For us in Fiji, the re-evaluation has led to our re-engagment and political prioritization. This is evident in the multi-agency taskforce and identification of key challenges and the most viable approach that is Fijian-centric. Though the challenges of insufficient funding will continue to be a challenge, the more coordinated approach will enable us to unlock the potential of data, in support of decision-making for sustainable development.

i) Linking policy with data – linking policy starts with review and reform of the relevant legislation;

Fiji currently has the Statistics Act 1961 as the guiding Act for the Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Similarly, in the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics scope, the Births Deaths and Marriage Registration Act is also quite old as it was enacted in 1975. The need to review and reform the laws is a priority for our coalition government. The review will address current policy issues and to be in line with international best practices, be it registration or reporting.
Additionally the Fiji Bureau of Statistics is being tasked by government to coordinate the establishment of the National Population Policy.

ii) Investments in national statistical systems; and

Statistical systems require significant investments in legislation, human resources, technology, and infrastructure. Fiji, like many Small Island Developing States faces limited fiscal capacity and competing national priorities. We need the support of our partners to be able to complete this exercise systematically and in a timely manner.

iii) statistical offices to function as one integrated system upholding the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

Fiji has had its fair share of political challenges. Following the change in administration after the 2022 general elections, the government of the day is committed to ensure that the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics space achieves improvements in terms of registration and statistics, that is by collecting effective and efficient data for decision making. There needs to be improvements in terms of proper coordination between government ministries, such as from the hospital, place of birth, to the civil registrar's office. Additionally, data collection and reporting must be properly done, ensuring that there are no gaps.

Fiji is taking several important steps to protect citizen data while enabling effective data sharing across government departments. These initiatives focus on balancing data privacy, security, and accessibility within a whole-of-government approach.

Fiji is taking proactive steps to protect statistical data, while enabling more effective data sharing across government departments. The Fiji government has been developing legal, regulatory, and technical frameworks to ensure that data privacy and security are prioritized in the context of whole-of-government initiatives.

However, like many countries, the balance between enabling data use for governance and protecting privacy remains an ongoing effort, requiring continuous improvement in legislation, technology, and inter-agency collaboration.

Technical support from Development Partners is also key to assisting Fiji's efforts. Fully harnessing the power of data also requires investment in political support, partnerships

and leadership. A lack of investment in these areas may contribute to the declining financial investment in statistics, creating a vicious cycle in which underinvestment leads to the reduced use and relevance of Statistics.

For the Pacific, the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, highlights in the thematic area on Technology and Connectivity, the need for a well-connected region that ensures inclusive, affordable and accessible air, sea and land transport and ICT technology infrastructure and services. Technology and infrastructure are often unaffordable, inaccessible, and difficult to maintain. The adoption of new and emerging sustainable digital technologies requires effective partnerships and appropriate regional regulatory arrangements that respect the region's shared values. The thematic area also draws attention to the importance of disaggregated data and data sovereignty and more detailed information for improved decision-making while ensuring safeguard measures are in place.

To achieve our vision, strengthening institutions and governance is key. Institutional and governance reforms are being undertaken to increase transparency, integrity and accountability. Data gathering and analytics must also be strengthened to support effective delivery and monitoring of Government programmes.

I will conclude, with a reminder to all of you, from all of us as members of Pacific Small Islands Developing states, – that nothing about us, without us. Whilst we need and welcome technical and donor partners, legislative reform, policy development, data sets, data collection, data integrity, data security needs to be driven by us the Island states with your support.

Thank You.