



42ND SESSION OF IFAD GOVERNING COUNCIL
COUNTRY STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

14 - 15 February 2019 - Rome, ITALY

Mr. Chairman,
The President of IFAD, Mr. Gilbert Hounqbo,
Distinguished Governors and Heads of Delegation,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka!

It is my privilege to address this august gathering on the occasion of the 42nd Session of the Governing Council of IFAD. At the outset, please allow me to convey to you the warm greetings of the Government and the people of the Republic of Fiji.

Fiji has shared a warm and fruitful relationship with IFAD over the past 40 years. We have witnessed the evolution of IFAD these past decades, who despite its size, has become a valued partner not only in Fiji, but amongst other Pacific Island states also. Indeed, our partnership with IFAD is built upon our shared values and ethos to ensure 'no one is left behind' and to ensure the rural and remote sections of our community also share the benefits of prosperity and growth. Indeed, this is a key pillar of the Fijian

Government's development agenda and we are keen to continue to partner with IFAD in pursuit of this goal.

Mr. Chairman, Fiji held its second truly democratic elections in November last year, at which the Government led by Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama was again entrusted by the people's mandate to continue the transformational path it has set the country on. The past decade has seen unprecedented investment to modernize the country's infrastructure, easing the burden of educational costs for parents, strengthening social protection systems and reforming the public sector. These changes have translated into nine years of consecutive growth, which is unprecedented in Fiji's history.

The buoyance in Fiji's economy has allowed Government to increase investment in rural infrastructure, which has benefited about 44% of the Fiji's population which reside in the rural and outer islands.

Mr. Chairman, this focus on investing in our rural and remote communities remains a key priority for Government. Indeed, the current IFAD funded project, the Fiji Agricultural Partnership Project, complements this focus by assisting smallholder farmers residing in the highlands to increase their incomes and also improve food and nutrition security.

In this regard, I would like to acknowledge IFAD, amongst other development partners, for the proactive engagement with the Government in support of its development objectives. We look forward to continuing to build upon our partnership in the decades ahead.

Mr Chairman, we find a lot of relevance with the chosen theme of this 42nd session, "Rural innovation and entrepreneurial spirit". We have found that investing in our people is the most rewarding investment that can be made. The Fijian Government has therefore pursued this with renewed vigor to nurture the young minds of today, who will steer the nation towards a more

prosperous and resilient tomorrow. This has seen unprecedented investment in education as well as community empowerment initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, Fiji, like other small island developing states, is at the forefront of the impact of climate change. As you may be well aware, through the leadership of the Prime Minister, Fiji has been a strong advocate for greater climate action. At the local level, the ability of our communities to continue to prosper in the face of the impact of climate change will rely a lot on innovation and harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit to find sustainable local solutions. This has also been the focus of Government.

In this regard, we welcome this focus on innovation and are keen to learn how investing in technology, innovation and small enterprise development can address many of these challenges.

Agriculture is central to Fiji's economic development agenda. Over the years there have been some positive progress experienced in Sector as a result of new initiatives undertaken by government and continuous interventions from our global partners such as EU, FAO, and IFAD etc. Government through the Ministry of Agriculture is currently finalising a Strategic Development Plan for the Sector that focuses on five [5] Strategic Priorities which should form the basis of Agriculture Development in the next 5 years [2019-2023].

The five strategic priorities covers these broad areas:

1. Food and Nutrition Security
2. Sustainable Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation
3. Climate Risk Resilience and Sustainable Land Management
4. Commercial Agriculture Development
5. Quality Public service Performance and Service Delivery.

However, average contribution to GDP has declined from 16% in the 1990s to 9%. The sector employs close to two-thirds of the labour force. Recent challenges have included the decline in the sugar industry, inability to cope

with trade liberalization, natural disasters, pest and disease outbreaks, export trade restrictions and inconsistent public sector support. Agriculture, forestry and marine ecosystems are under threat from increasing population pressure and the adverse effects of climate change.

To improve the nation's foreign trade balance and ensure food security for the whole population, the Republic of Fiji recently formulated the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Policy Agenda with the vision to build sustainable community livelihood through competitive exports and food security. This policy lays out the Government's 21st-century vision for Fiji's agriculture sector, a 5-year development plan to modernize the industry and make our farmers the most competitive and successful in the region. We look forward to working closely with partners such as IFAD in the implementation of this national policy agenda.]

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate Fiji's commitment to IFAD. We believe that IFAD is fulfilling a unique role in addressing the problems of rural poverty for Fiji and the Pacific Island countries. As a testimony of our commitment, I wish to pledge US\$100,000 on behalf of the Republic of Fiji to the 11th Replenishment of IFAD resources.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.