

Fiji: Government allocates \$6m for flood protection

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Government has allocated \$6 million from its 2010 Budget towards flood protection works in a bid to reduce flood damage to agricultural crops, buildings, towns and villages.

Major projects that will be implemented through these funds are the third phase dredging of the Nadi River, the maintenance dredging of the Labasa and Wailevu Rivers in Vanua Levu and the Rewa River in the Central Division, rehabilitation of the Mulomulo Dam and construction of a new dam in the Nadi Watershed, and repair of the river bank protection works at Nawaqarua Village in Ba.

Ministry of Primary Industries Director for Land and Water Resources Management Division Mr Lakshman Mudaliar said tackling flooding in the Nadi River basin is an immediate issue due to its social, economic and environmental impacts.

"Nadi is one of the two largest population centres in Fiji with thriving economic activities that revolve around agriculture, tourism and sugar," Mr Mudaliar said.

"The January floods of last year caused significant damages to property and infrastructure as well as disrupting economic activity and affecting lives of communities in the area."

"Government's commitment is to provide investor confidence and to improve the socio-economic status of the area and this is heavily dependent on reducing the risk and vulnerability to floods."

Threats of floods are always a concern to those living on river flats and low lying areas whenever there is a continuous heavy downpour or a cyclone.

"The objective of the flood mitigation program is to provide protective measures that will reduce the incidence of floods and its damaging impact."

"The cause of floods is usually related to the heavy sedimentations of our river system that was usually associated with torrential rainfall and cyclones."

Mr Mudaliar said Government had completed the first and second phase dredging of the Nadi River and the aim this year is to complete phase three.

"The first phase of the project was implemented in 2008 where a total of 1.8 kilometres of the river mouth was excavated to remove 365,000 cubic metres of sediment."

"The second phase of inland works was carried out last year which involved the dredging of 1.5 kilometres from Moala Village upstream and removed 410,000 cubic metres of sediment."

Mr Mudaliar said the third phase will involve the dredging of 3.5 kilometres to remove 450,000 cubic metres of sediment.

"The work will be outsourced to a private contractor and the villages along the riverbanks will benefit from improved and additional land made available for development and employment opportunities."

On the maintenance dredging of the Rewa, Labasa and Wailevu rivers, Mr Mudaliar said this will be carried out to improve the flow capacity of the rivers and also reduce the risk of flooding.

"The dredging of the Qawa, Labasa and Wailevu Rivers started in 1998 and was completed in 2003."

"There is a need to continue with the maintenance dredging of these rivers to maintain their flood discharge capacities and improve navigation for ships to the township of Labasa."

Mr Mudaliar said frequent flooding of the Rewa River has damaged properties, agricultural crops, affected livestock, disrupted business, communication, transportation, and water supply and adversely impacted rural dwellers.

"Rural development plans to improve the quality of life in this area are dependent on the dredging of the river to provide protection against the risk and impact of floods."

"The use of dredged materials for rural roads, land reclamation and village embankments against rising sea levels are in demand."

Referring to dam rehabilitation works in the Nadi watershed, Mr Mudaliar said this was damaged by the floods during Cyclone Mick. The construction of such dams is to regulate and control the flow of waters during periods of intense rainfall to reduce the impact of flooding in the lower river basin and complements the river dredging works in the Nadi River.

In regards to the repair of the Nawaqarua Village bank protections, Mr Mudaliar said the village's bank protection was constructed in 1997 during the Ba Dredging Project. It was damaged during the floods of 2009, placing the villagers and about 650 metres of reclaimed land at risk of being washed away.

"This will severely impact on the villagers' livelihood as rural housing and roads were constructed as a result of the increased security provided by the river bank protection works."

The construction of the riverbank protection at Nawaqarua will be similar to the one carried out at Narewa Village in the Nadi River."

Other activities that will be carried out under the Flood Protection Programme will include the investigation and design works to address the problems of flooding in the Deuba, Nasivi and Penang Rivers. Survey works will also continue on the realignment of the Nadi River, dredging the mouth of the Ba River and the Labasa flood by-pass channel.