

The increasing cost of living and low wages are the main causes of Anaemia emerging as a major health problem in Fiji. National Federation Party Government will introduce a living wage and make 15 basic food items VAT free to ensure all our people are able to afford nutritious food.

Revelation by the National Food and Nutrition Centre that anaemia has shown the highest increase of all medical variables surveys in the 2014-15 National Nutrition Survey is alarming.

Even more worrying is the fact that cases of anaemia amongst our toddlers as well as school students is extremely high. The fact that 43.5% of students between the ages of 15-17 years, who obviously attend secondary schools are anaemic is startling.

This shows that despite initiatives like tuition free education and free bus fares, parents and guardians cannot afford to provide their children decent meals.

On the face of this alarmingly increasing cases of anaemia the Minister of Health launched a mobile application known as "My Kana" to provide nutrition and dietary advice.

Under normal circumstances with affordable food prices, this application would provide timely advice to our people. But with astronomical food prices, this mobile application is meaningless.

Between 2006 and 2012: food prices went up by 54% while non-food prices increased by 32%.

Between 2006 and 2013: food prices increased by a massive 59%, heating and lighting increased by 60% and transportation went up by 50%.

How does Government expect families surviving on a meagre minimum wage of \$2.32 from July 2015 and now \$2.68 an hour, buy healthy and nutritious food, let alone meet other basic needs and rising cost of other services? In fact since January 2016 7 basic food items previously zero-rated had 9% VAT imposed on them by the current Government, in a clear betrayal of Fiji First's 2014 election promise.

The first step towards preventing any further rise in cases of anaemia amongst our people is to make food affordable. The recent wage and salary increases will provide little relief to people because the increases

are not commensurate with the cumulative rise in inflation over the last ten years.

An NFP government will replace the current meagre wage with a living wage of \$5 an hour and ensure 15 basic food items are zero-rated or VAT free.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pio Tikoduadua', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

Pio Tikoduadua
NFP President