

RESERVE BANK OF FIJI



SPEECH TO THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2017 PACIFIC LEADERSHIP FORUM ON “ENHANCING THE PUBLIC VALUE OF STATISTICS IN THE PACIFIC REGION THROUGH ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP”

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1. A very good evening to you all.
2. I would like to thank the Australian Bureau of Statistics for inviting the Reserve Bank of Fiji to speak this evening and would like to commend the ABS and its donor partners for organising this 2017 Pacific Leadership Forum. I believe this forum is an important one, in terms of gaining further ground in our efforts to improve the access and use of statistics. In particular, the topic of Enhancing the Public Value of Statistics in the Pacific Region through adaptive leadership couldn't be more relevant and important for all of us, as providers or users of statistics, given the need to adapt to the constant and dynamic changes happening in the economy. The fact is that all need good quality, reliable and timely data in order to make better informed policy decisions.
3. At the Reserve Bank of Fiji, we provide monetary and financial data which we either produce ourselves such as exchange rates or we source directly from the financial institutions we supervise. However, we rely on our national statistics office – the Fiji Bureau of Statistics – to provide us with data on other major sectors of the economy - that is - the real sector, external sector and labour market and prices. Apart from this, we also conduct surveys to supplement and fill the information gaps we have. We rely on statistics daily to effectively monitor developments in the economy so we are able to correctly diagnose the needs of the economy and therefore appropriately set monetary policy. As Alexandre Lamfalussy, the first President of the European Monetary Institute – the predecessor to the European Central Bank said in a forward in 1996, “Nothing is more important for monetary policy than good statistics”.
4. This forum allows us to think a little deeper about the work we do as compilers of statistics - beyond understanding the need to disseminate quality and timely data, is to ensure that this data remains relevant and useful for our stakeholders. Many of our countries have made progress in terms of strengthening our national statistics institutions, modernized our statistical systems and adopted new technologies to improve data quality. However, we would agree that there is room to improve to better meet the ever increasing demand for data resulting from the constant changes in the macroeconomic environment around us – changes brought about by the changing structure of the economy, the impact of various shocks, and the modernisation and digitization of the economy. It is critical that we move in line with these changes so to better understand their statistical implications and be able to fully capture the gains from these developments.
5. How is statistics relevant to us as a central bank? At the Reserve Bank of Fiji, our work is driven by our vision of “LEADING FIJI TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS” and we fulfil this vision through 6 missions which include :

- Conducting monetary policy to foster economic growth
 - Enhancing our role in the development of the economy
 - Providing proactive and sound advice to Government
 - Developing an internationally reputable financial system
 - Disseminating timely and quality information
 - Recruiting, developing and retaining a professional team.
6. To effectively deliver on these missions and remain relevant to our stakeholders, we rely on the efficient and timely delivery of high quality statistics both by ourselves and by our national statistics bureau.
7. On a routine basis, we monitor and analyse all these data, to carry out key tasks and outputs that help us fulfil our policy objectives as required under our Act and others that support our broader role in the economy. We use these data to:
- analyze macroeconomic trends to determine how actual outcomes are tracking against our forecasts.
 - review the near term outlook of the economy to determine the stance of monetary policy
 - evaluate the impact of national budget policies
 - analyse the performance of major sectors of the economy and their impact on overall growth, prices and other macroeconomic indicators. We summarise these in simplified form and share with the public through the Bank’s monthly economic reviews and press releases, quarterly bulletins, and annual reports, and more recently, our bi-annual monetary policy statements.
 - review our medium term macroeconomic projections – to ensure they remain realistic and credible; these forecasts are discussed by a high-level macroeconomic committee comprising various heads of key government ministries and is chaired by the Governor of the Reserve Bank. With their approval, these projections are shared with the public twice a year around May and November. These projections form the basis for formulating medium term macroeconomic policies.
 - For research - to evaluate relevant models and theories that will deepen our understanding of how the economy works and how policies can work better.
 - Inform and educate the public and our internal stakeholders on the status of the economy and the macroeconomic impact of relevant policies. Last year, we made 85 presentations to various forums in response to stakeholder requests and in our efforts to raise awareness about the economy and our role in the economy.
8. The importance of statistics for policy analysis and development cannot be overstated. In recognising the key role played by our Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the RBF continues to partner closely with them and lends assistance as necessary to help meet their objectives. We commend the Bureau (FBOS) for improvements made in the release of more timely data – particularly GDP by expenditure and employment recently, the inclusion of more granular and detailed data in various releases making them more informative and useful. Also we appreciate the consultative approach adopted that allows feedback in regards to the release of key economic data/reports. We aim to further strengthen our engagement especially in the areas that will boost the quality and usefulness of macroeconomic data and importantly enhance the effectiveness of the Bureau. We note the Fiji Bureau of Statistics has worked on streamlining its functions, working closer with its stakeholders through MOUs for instance, to improve information sharing, and also building its capacity to better meet its stakeholder demands.

9. Internationally, institutions such as the BIS, ECB, OECD, UN, World Bank and the IMF continue their efforts towards improving the quality of their statistics particularly in the aftermath of the GFC. The global financial crisis, which highlighted important statistical shortcomings, was a wake-up call for statisticians. In response to this, these global institutions began self or joint initiatives to respond to the call to enhance the availability of global statistics.
10. Since 2013, the IMF has been organising annual statistical forums which create a medium for open discussion on cutting-edge statistical issues between data users, providers and policy makers, aimed at deepening understanding of different statistical perspectives and sharing information on data availability, usability and interpretation, and build a broader constituency for recent data initiatives.
11. Last year, the theme of the fourth IMF statistical forum was “Lifting the Small Boats: Statistics for Inclusive Growth” which centred on trying to answer the questions of :
 12. How do we measure the inclusiveness of growth?
 13. How can statistics bring people’s living conditions into focus?
 14. What do statistics show about financial inclusion?
 15. How well do statistics track rising inequality?
 16. What activities outside the boundary are we missing in this evolving digital world?
17. This year, the theme of the forum in November, is ”Measuring Digital Economy”, we would agree is very relevant. The forum aims to better understand the implications of digitization for macroeconomic and financial statistics and develop strategies to fill measurement gaps. Some of the questions that discussants will attempt to answer include:
 18. Does GDP still tell us what we need to know?
 19. How big is the digital economy?
20. Like the IMF Forum, I trust that this forum will provide us with a lot of room and food for thought on better understanding the significance and usefulness of statistics and how we can better meet the needs of our stakeholders.
21. The BIS itself has significantly expanded its statistical offering to support monetary and financial analysis in response to the 2007-09 crisis, by publishing additional data, revamping how these data are disseminated and strengthening their policy orientation.
22. On joint collaboration, the second phase of the Data Gaps Initiative led by the FSB and the IMF was recently endorsed in June this year by its founders the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. This conference marked the significant progress made in closing some of the information gaps identified during the GFC and supporting enhanced policy analysis. Looking ahead, participants recognize the need for strong cooperation among national statistical agencies and expressed strong continued commitment on agreed resolutions.
23. In line with the direction and efforts taken by these global institutions, we must also intensify our collaborative efforts towards enhancing our national statistics. We must fulfil the purpose of this forum by sharing ideas on ways to raise the effectiveness of our NSOs and better meet the demand for official statistics at the national and regional level.

24. We can do more and do better.
25. We should align with international best practices and adopt minimum standards that will ensure that our datasets are internationally comparable and we are meeting the evolving needs of users.
26. We can learn from each other. This forum provides the perfect platform for sharing our knowledge and experiences with each other in the region, given our countries are at varying stages of statistical development and all have something to offer in terms of what we can learn and what we can teach. We must not be complacent if we are doing better but ensure that improvements in our statistics are reflecting and measuring the constant changes happening around us.
27. A plan that sets out specific targets on the implementation of agreed actions, as I note is included in the program, is commendable. However, the plan will need to be realistic by taking into account our country circumstances, that is, our levels of development, national priorities and resource constraints. Given our limited resources, we must allocate them most efficiently and effectively, focusing on data that are most important for policy decision making.
28. Continued dialogue and collaboration on focused topics such as at this forum is useful as it allows for more practical discussions on the data needs and ways to narrow data gaps and improve statistics that are vital for policy.
29. I trust that this forum will help us all more deeply understand the importance of statistics and its public value and consolidate our efforts as partners to deliver MORE ACCURATE, TIMELY, INTERNATIONALLY COMPARABLE, AND PEOPLE ORIENTED STATISTICS.
30. I wish you all a successful continuation of your discussions and deliberations.
31. Vinaka vakalevu.

References

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