



Welcome to the Reserve Bank of Fiji's Public Awareness column. Over the next few weeks we will cover a series of articles on financial inclusion, as a lead up to the Reserve Bank of Fiji co-hosting the annual Alliance for Financial Inclusion Global Policy Forum in September.

Fiji hosts Alliance for Financial Inclusion 8th Global Policy Forum

8th AFI Global Policy Forum

Fiji will become the financial inclusion capital of the world from the 5-9 of September 2016, when representatives from approximately 94 countries and 116 member institutions of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI) converge on *Denarau, Nadi* for the 8th AFI Global Policy Forum (GPF). Fiji is the first country in the South Pacific to host such a landmark event for financial inclusion policy makers.

Around 400-500 representatives from policy making and regulatory institutions, international organisations, academia, Government agencies and the private sector will attend the Forum. The GPF is co-hosted by AFI each year with a different member institution in a different region of the world. The Reserve Bank of Fiji was awarded the rights to host the 8th Global Policy Forum at the last meeting that was held in Maputo, Mozambique in September 2015.

The previous host countries of the AFI GPF were as follows:

- 2009: Nairobi, Kenya
- 2010: Bali, Indonesia
- 2011: Maya, Rivera, Mexico
- 2012: Cape Town, South Africa
- 2013: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2014: Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago
- 2015: Maputo, Mozambique

This year's Global Policy Forum theme is "*Building the Pillars of Sustainable Inclusion*". Fiji will showcase the achievement of its first Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan (2011-2015) as well as the recent implementation of its second Plan (2016-2020). In addition, Fiji will make new commitments to the *Maya Declaration*, the first global set of measurable commitments to unlock the economic and social potential of the poor through financial inclusion. One of the highlights of this year's annual meeting will be the launch the *Denarau Accord*, making *Gender* a priority area for financial inclusion across the globe.

Financial inclusion has become a key topic of discussion in many conferences and events around the world. The concern of closing the gap between the rich and the poor continues to be a challenge for policy makers. This initiative has been seen as a means to bridge this gap. It has been proven that financial inclusion has greatly



RESERVE BANK OF FIJI



impacted the lives of many underserved people around the world and elevated their living standards. Fiji is no different in that we are also trying to narrow this gap through our own national financial inclusion efforts.

Fiji's financial inclusion journey began in August 2008 at the Pacific Islands policy makers meeting in Coombs, Sydney, Australia. The leaders recognised the financial capabilities of low income households in promoting fair and sustainable growth and pledged to advance financial education, consumer protection and for more Pacific islanders to have access to formal financial services. A separate article in the coming weeks will take us through Fiji's Financial Inclusion journey since then.

Alliance for Financial Inclusion

The Alliance for Financial Inclusion is the world's first peer learning network of policy makers from developing and emerging countries. It was established in September 2008 through funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

AFI assists its members with tools and resources and knowledge sharing to implement financial inclusion regulatory reforms and to develop and implement evidence-based, cutting-edge financial inclusion policies. The ultimate goal is to improve the access, usage, and quality of appropriate financial services to the unbanked and underserved through more effective policies.

On 27 January 2016, AFI became an independent, member-owned policy driving network and its members now contribute annual membership subscriptions. Funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation helped finance AFI's core operations and many member services and offerings. AFI's partners also include the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Omidyar Network and the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP), who have contributed towards enhancing member services and peer-learning platforms.

Joining the AFI family was a major milestone for the Reserve Bank of Fiji. This happened at the first AFI Global Policy Forum held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2009. Since then, the Reserve Bank of Fiji has benefited immensely from this network, its partnership and its information sharing platform.

As a member of the AFI family, the Reserve Bank of Fiji participates at a global level in four of the AFI working groups - the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning; Global Standards and Proportionality; SME Finance and Financial Inclusion Data. Fiji has benefitted immensely and has also contributed to capacity building, peer reviews and knowledge sharing in the design and development of appropriate financial inclusion policies. For example, on the one hand, Fiji was at the forefront in introducing simplified guidelines for institutions to enable them to meet legal requirements in identifying and knowing your customer when opening new accounts, and also integrating financial education into the primary and secondary school curriculum. On the other hand, we have gained a lot from an AFI sponsored knowledge exchange visit to Malaysia's to study their SME industry and from Mexico and Brazil to learn more about their agent banking activities.



RESERVE BANK OF FIJI



Pacific Islands Regional Initiative

Fiji is also a member of the Pacific Islands Regional Initiative (PIRI), the successor body to the AFI Pacific Islands Working Group, which was initially the only regional peer sharing arrangement in the whole Alliance. This arrangement, which includes Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, has been extremely beneficial in sharing knowledge and our financial inclusion experiences across our Pacific region.

This network and knowledge exchange has enabled the Reserve Bank of Fiji and the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce and its working groups to put in place new innovations to further advance Fiji's financial inclusion agenda. The AFI network is an integral part of Fiji's financial inclusion story.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji has attended all of the seven Global Policy Forums and hosted two AFI working group meetings back to back in 2014, namely the Pacific Islands Working Group and the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning Working Group.