



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 education in Fiji and how it contributes to financial inclusion.

Financial Education encourages student entrepreneurs

Learning about business in Year 9 sparked something in Ruci Lauvanua, now a Year 12 student at Adi Cakobau School in Sawani. A hands-on project in Commercial Studies class focused on setting up a business through the selling of Chinese lollies to fellow students. “We learned how to budget, how to calculate the value of each item, how much you should get, how much you should put aside and how much you actually used,” she says.

That was four years ago. Today, Ruci has a thriving little business selling Chinese lollies to her fellow students. And she's picked up other critical money management skills taught in class: saving and budgeting, which has helped her family during times of need such as meeting their cultural obligations that require a financial outlay. “Sometimes when we have financial difficulties, when we can't pay for some stuff that we are obligated to pay for, the savings that we have put aside is used to pay for those obligations,” she says.

All over Fiji, students like Ruci are reaping the benefits of a Financial Education programme (FinEd) funded by the Australian government and taught as part of English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Commercial Studies, Accounting and Economics. FinEd addresses learning around personal money management and investment. The main goal of the programme is financial competency: not just knowledge generation but behavioural change, which Ruci and many of her peers are already demonstrating. Rather than be taught as a stand alone subject, Financial Education has been integrated into existing school subjects (ensuring long-term uptake) and taught over consecutive years at both primary and secondary school level.

Thanks to FinEd, many primary and secondary school students are identifying potential income earning opportunities, transforming the resources around them to make extra income and to boost additional savings, setting and working towards financial goals and interestingly, starting small businesses.

Speaking at a Financial Inclusion Strategy Workshop in Suva last November, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Barry Whiteside said, “All our youth that leave school and tertiary institutions tend to come out with the view to getting a good job and working for someone else. There is no problem with that. I know I did this and my daughters did this as well. But, I would love to give my grandchildren an alternative mind-set when they complete their schooling and that is the ability and desire (if it is there), to establish their own businesses and work for themselves.”

He added, “Now, more than ever, we are seeing the importance of micro, small and medium enterprises across the world as extremely important contributors of jobs and economic growth. Fiji should be no different. I would like to see built into the



RESERVE BANK OF FIJI



education curriculum as we have done with our initial steps of Financial Education, some training in entrepreneurial skills and thinking. It would be nice to witness a portion of our youths developing the necessary skills to be able to work for themselves by setting up their own small businesses.”

Fifteen-year-old Daniel Bull, a Year 11 student at Labasa College started a grass cutting business to supplement the small weekly allowance he gets from his parents. He uses the family brush-cutter for his business and borrowed \$15 from his parents to buy fuel when he first started. Since then, he has paid them back and has managed to save \$70. Most of his grass cutting clients are in his neighbourhood. Daniel’s initial motivation was to earn and put aside enough money to buy headphones, but he is now building a “nest egg” to help with his expenses when he goes to university. “My advice to students out there is that you do not limit yourself,” he says. “You have to be creative and think of different ways in which you can earn an income.”

FinEd is an initiative under the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme, a regional effort helping low-income households gain access to sustainable financial services and to empower consumers through Financial Education. In Fiji, FinEd is led by the Reserve Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Education, who believe that through improved financial competency, young women and men will leave school with the necessary skills, knowledge and behaviours to enable them to interact confidently with the financial economy and to contribute positively to their families, the community and the country.

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