



# RESERVE BANK OF FIJI

*“Leading Fiji to Economic Success”*



---

**ADDRESS BY MR BARRY WHITESIDE,  
GOVERNOR OF THE RESERVE BANK OF FIJI  
AT THE JOINT SESSION OF THE AFI PACIFIC ISLAND WORKING  
GROUP AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY PEER LEARNING  
GROUP ON WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2014 AT THE SHERATON FIJI  
RESORT**

---

## **Salutations**

Mr Gane Simbe, Chair of the Pacific Islands Financial Inclusion Working Group (PIWG)

Mrs Eden Dema, Interim Chairperson of the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning Group (FISPLG)

Mr Robin Yarrow, Chair of our National Financial Inclusion Taskforce

The G20 Presidency team from Australia

Distinguished Governors, Deputy Governors & Delegates

Representatives from the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI), Asian Development Bank, World Bank, International Finance Corporation, UN Capital Development Fund and the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to you all! And as we say in Fiji, BULA VINAKA !

## **Introductory Remarks**

I am delighted to speak this morning at this first ever joint session of two important AFI working groups, the Pacific Island Working Group and the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning Working Group. It is certainly a golden opportunity for us all to mingle and establish new contacts and friendships, and most importantly to exchange ideas on financial inclusion – the topic that has brought us all together here to Denarau Island.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji is indeed honoured to co-host the meetings of both Working Groups, along with the Alliance for Financial Inclusion.

---

Our colleagues from PIWG have been with us for several days now so I would like to take this time to specifically welcome our special friends and members of the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning Working Group who have put in some serious mileage to get here. Welcome to beautiful Fiji!

This will be your 4<sup>th</sup> such Working Group meeting and I trust that you will enjoy your stay here with us.

This joint session of the two Working Groups brings immediate synergies for us all. As it is aptly named, the Financial Inclusion Strategy Peer Learning Group (FISPLG) has two key functions and these are Financial Inclusion Strategy and Peer Learning. We all know the importance of both strategy and learning from others in our drive and endeavour to improve the lives of people in our countries, particularly the vulnerable. We will surely benefit from this amalgamation into a greater network of experts and practitioners.

I believe that the Pacific Island Working Group is also an excellent model for the work of the FISPLG. Most of the Pacific Working Group members have endorsed National Strategies and being the only regional working group in AFI, we have for a while now been showcasing peer learning. As a regional working group we have constantly shared and learned from each other. We work together on projects and develop templates that can be replicated within our region. There have been times when we have also hosted delegates from within the region, updating them on how we went about setting our national strategies and highlighting obstacles and pitfalls and how we worked around them. This is what peer learning is all about.

### **Financial Inclusion journey in Fiji – The Fiji model**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I see from the program that later this morning, there is a panel discussion to cover various aspects of financial inclusion in the Pacific. Let me, however, share briefly Fiji's experience in setting a National Financial Inclusion Strategy and some of our achievements to date.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji is committed to, and has taken the strategic lead in driving financial inclusion in Fiji. This journey began with a National Microfinance Workshop in November, 2009 to

take stock, consult and strategize on a way forward. This forum included representatives from Private and Public Sector entities, Civil Society Groups, NGOs, Micro Finance Institutions, Donor Agencies and Development Partners. This collaborative approach has been the corner stone to the success of our efforts in driving financial inclusion. Getting the buy-in from all stakeholders was the very first step in the process.

A National Financial Inclusion Taskforce (NFIT) was set up as our apex body to formulate, implement and monitor financial inclusion initiatives in the country. Under the Taskforce there are three Working Groups that serve as the engine room for financial inclusion. This model has provided the national platform for effective collaboration between stakeholders from all sectors.

In 2011, the Reserve Bank of Fiji committed to the Maya Declaration in Cancun as part of our pledge towards financial inclusion. Our commitment was made in four key areas:

- (1) Supporting the Fiji National Financial Inclusion Taskforce in achieving its goal set in 2010 of reaching at least 150,000 unbanked citizens by 2014;
- (2) Taking financial education to all schools and all classes;
- (3) Undertaking a comprehensive data upgrade on financial inclusion; and
- (4) Providing an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for payment systems and microfinance.

### **2013 – Maya Declaration Award**

At the inaugural AFI awards that were held at the Global Policy Forum in Kuala Lumpur in 2013, I was pleasantly surprised when the initial Maya Declaration Award was presented to the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Personally, it was an overwhelming moment for me to receive this award on behalf of our Taskforce, the Bank and the people of Fiji. Many member countries of AFI have wondered how a small country like ours can be considered for such an award and what was our secret? Our answer lies in the collaborative and cooperative partnership Financial Inclusion model we have developed, the hard work, passion and commitment of our partner stakeholders and the importance of measuring our performance.

## **Key Achievements**

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to touch very quickly on some of our achievements which can be checked off against the original strategies from 2009.

- Fiji has, from 2013, successfully integrated financial education into the school curriculum of 907 schools in Fiji, which means nearly 200,000 students are currently learning about basic financial skills in their classrooms; a national Financial Literacy Strategy has also been approved recently by Government.
- We completed a National Financial Competency Survey in 2011 and were able to successfully report on the AFI core set of indicators;
- We provided enabling policies and approvals to mobile network operators to commence mobile financial services from 2010. MNOs also now provide international inward remittance transfers.
- We have issued guidelines for agent banking to encourage more financial access points in rural and remote areas; and
- We are also on the verge of finalising our Payments Systems Decree which is designed as the umbrella legislation that guides all payment systems infrastructure, channels and players in the financial system.

## **Announcement of Achievement of Goal and review of Financial Inclusion Strategy**

Friends, earlier this week I shared a milestone achievement with our colleagues in the Pacific Island Working Group. At the end of February 2014, we successfully achieved our goal of reaching 150,000 unbanked citizens. This goal would not have been achieved without the collaborative effort of all our stakeholders in Fiji and we are extremely proud of the result.

The Working Group meetings this week could not have come at a better time, given that our own initial medium term National Financial Inclusion Strategy is coming to an end.

In this regard we now need to take stock and carry out an impact assessment of the status of financial inclusion initiatives that have been implemented in the country. This will be done at a summit that is being organised for the first week in June this year, where all stakeholders from the

public and private sector and other supporting agencies will converge to decide and agree on the next set of strategies and targets to carry us through from 2015 to 2020. We look forward to learning from you all during the upcoming sessions in the next few days.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In closing, I would just like to recommit to the idea that financial inclusion is at the heart of our efforts to level the playing field and assist the poor and disadvantaged to work themselves out of poverty and contribute to economic growth.

In Fiji, we have adopted a collaborative or partnership model in addressing financial inclusion. Let's continue to be passionate and committed in our vision of providing appropriate, affordable and accessible financial products and services to all, and particularly the low income households. I am sure that this week will be one of learning and sharing of each other's experiences as there is still much to learn.

On a lighter note, for our friends who have come from afar, you are in Fiji! I hope that you will take time to explore and enjoy our country. While you enjoy the serenity of our beaches and local cuisine, we also invite you to take time to visit our micro-entrepreneurs in the vicinity. I am certain they will impress you with what they have to offer.

Dear friends, I need to apologise to you as I will not be able to stay for the sessions after today as I need to return to the capital for our Board meeting. I am comforted, however, that my colleagues will look after you and continue to show you our true Fijian hospitality.

I wish you all the best for this meeting and a safe stay in Fiji. For our friends from the Pacific who may be leaving us soon after today, I wish you a safe trip home.

Thank you, or as we say in the Fijian language, VINAKA VAKALEVU !