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Purpose of this report

In Fiji, there are more unemployed women than men; women also tend to participate less in entrepreneurial activities and manage fewer businesses. While the number of women in the economy is increasing,¹ mainly in the tourism sector, the traditional perceptions of gender roles, careers and responsibilities have remained unchanged. These perceptions limit women's opportunities in the labour market to positions that fit traditional gender occupations, such as housekeeping and care jobs. The lack of additional career pathways and assistance with household duties often results in women reducing their working hours, becoming inactive in the labour market or finding it difficult to achieve a work-home balance. Global research has shown that a higher percentage of women in the workforce directly links to an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.²

This paper presents three case studies that highlight how MDF Fiji seeks to empower women through a comparative analysis of the absorption and retention of women in the workforce in Fiji. It also investigates how an increased number of women in the workforce impacts the six dimensions of WEE.³

The case studies focus on interventions where MDF assisted companies in putting policies and practices in place to benefit women who play a notable role in the economic activity of the household. This analysis aims to understand how these benefits affect women and impact household income.

The case studies provide a further argument for programs that aim to increase the number of women in the private sector through development initiatives. They also explore how the increased participation of women in the workforce impacts female agency, predominantly concerning decision-making power and well-being.

This analysis is based on in-depth interviews with businesses and beneficiaries, as well as MDF's institutional knowledge from Business Advisers regarding industries, business operations and the

¹ Prasad B. C., Chen H. and Singh B. (2013). An Analysis of Employment Prospects in Fiji's Urban Area. *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, Volume 33, Issue 2. Obtained from: www.repository.usp.ac.fj/7648/1/An_Analysis_of_Employment_prospects_in_Fiji's_Urban_Area.pdf.

² The White House (2019). *Relationship Between Female Labour Force Participation and GDP*. Obtained from: www.whitehouse.gov/articles/relationship-female-labor-force-participation-rates-gdp/.

³ Market Development Facility (2018). *Beyond Income: A Critical Analysis of Agency Measurement in Economic Programming*. Obtained from: www.marketdevelopmentfacility.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Beyond-Income-FINAL.pdf.

types of workforces in various sectors. MDF's robust results measurement policy and measurement exercises completed for these interventions over the past two years support the results of this paper.

These case studies intend to inform development practitioners, implementers, programs and any individuals interested in understanding the challenges of and possible solutions to increasing the involvement of women in Fiji's workforce.

MDF encourages interested parties to provide feedback and further ideas to promote discussion on this theme.

Methodology

The information used in the development of this paper includes a mix of historical data gathered by MDF Fiji over the years, during intervention implementation and management, as well as thorough, in-depth interviews with businesses and beneficiaries conducted during the last quarter of 2019. The three case studies presented highlight the most significant changes achieved during 2019.

A key aim of this paper is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative changes and benefits experienced by women through higher engagement and retention in the private sector. To achieve this goal, rather than performing extensive sampling, the team conducted 25 in-depth interviews to collect information across the three interventions.

To measure the impact of the changes, MDF used an existing conceptual framework on measuring agency in economic programming³ and analysed qualitative and quantitative data to identify the dimensions and changes in access and agency.

Agency and access in WEE

Access in WEE is typically defined as a woman's ability to access opportunities, information, networks or other goods and services.

Agency in WEE is typically defined as a woman's power to make and act on economic decisions.

Introduction

Over the last ten years, Fiji has undergone a significant social and demographic change. The rural-urban shift has become more prominent, with 56 per cent of Fiji's population now residing in urban areas (compared to 51 per cent in 2007) and unemployment at its lowest rate in 20 years, at 4.5 per cent.⁴ The average unemployment rate is higher for women than men: at 8 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively.⁵ The number of women in business is also comparatively lower, with only 19 per cent of registered businesses listed to women and most being micro or small.⁶ Gender-based segregation is still pronounced, with large numbers of women employed in low-income jobs in agriculture, handicrafts, garments, retail and tourism. The number of inactive women in the market is 193,959, compared to 74,351 men.

The private sector is currently leading economic growth in Fiji. The increased inclusion of women in the workforce can further boost the growth of the Fijian economy by offering new perspectives, exposing biases and meeting consumer needs. However, the participation of women in the workforce is dependent on several factors, such as education levels, social norms, type of job and access to childcare. In addition to creating employment opportunities, MDF found it crucial to develop different business cases for hiring and retaining women in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

SMEs in Fiji generally lack dedicated human resources policies and processes that encourage staff absorption and retention. Instead, they primarily focus on keeping the business financially stable. However, SMEs have small, tight-knit workplaces where the staff and management collaborate and understand each other. While there are few formal support services for women, these businesses undertake several small-scale practices to support women in the workplace, such as providing upskilling and career development opportunities. There are also a number of formal, informal and secondary support systems that SMEs rely on, such as childcare provision, community approvals and sharing of household responsibilities.

Over the last few years, MDF has supported businesses in putting policies into practice, such as offering dedicated childcare services on the premises and reassessing the companies' hiring policies to attract more women. During this time, MDF has identified practices that SMEs can easily incorporate to both benefit the business and help female employees to succeed. The three case studies selected for this paper present examples of companies that have brought about significant shifts in the market through such practices. The intention of this report is to inspire other practitioners and companies to adopt these initiatives or adapt their own practices and policies to ensure that more women enter and remain in the workforce.

⁴ Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2018). *2017 Population and Housing Census*. Obtained from www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/census-2017.

⁵ Fiji Women's Rights Movement (2018). *Balance*. Obtained from: www.fwrm.org.fj/images/fwrm2017/balance/Balance-Dec-2018-PRINT-1.pdf.

⁶ Kumar V. (2018). *Report: Only 19 per cent of Fiji businesses registered to women*. The Fiji Times. Obtained from: www.fijitimes.com.fj/report-only-19-per-cent-of-fiji-businesses-registered-to-women/.

The bold move from male- to female-led workforce: DHL Fiji

Background

The migration from rural to urban centres in Fiji has resulted in an increasing demand for urban employment. Traditionally, the employment of women in urban areas centred around the garment industry, tourism and retail. However, Fiji's exposure to international markets and information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure opened the door to women working in outsourcing services (OSs). OSs started gaining prominence in the early 2000s, offering women employment, upskilling and income opportunities that the garment industry was not able to support.