

MFL Hosts Its First Women's Empower Meet



23rd January 2026 marked a milestone for Merchant Finance as we held our very first Women's Empower Meet – a dedicated space for the women of Merchant Finance Pte Limited (MFL) to step away from the busyness of work, connect, and reflect on what truly matters to us as colleagues and leaders. While we couldn't gather every woman this time, the energy and commitment in the room made it clear that this will become a full team event in the near future.

Now you may be asking why this space is needed?

Women's empowerment is not only a social imperative but also a strategic economic opportunity. According to the RBF's Gender Inclusive Finance Report (2025), women remain underserved as individuals and business owners and one of the reasons is the lack of awareness and buy-in from financial institutions about gender inclusive finance. To put things in perspective, in Fiji, women-owned "MSMEs represent only 30% of enterprises yet face an unmet credit demand (amount of financing that women owned MSMEs need and are eligible for, but cannot obtain from financial institutions) of US\$111 million". Studies also show that empowering women has a greater community impact as women reinvest more earnings in families, creating multiplier effects in education, health and social stability. Empowering women—both within MFL and among our customers—will directly contribute to national economic growth, strengthen community resilience, and help MFL become a leader in inclusive finance.

According to an article by ADB on Women-Owned Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Fiji - Opportunities and Challenges for Private Sector Financial Institutions)

Learnings & Outcomes

Twenty five vibrant women gathered at The Pearl for a day of inspiration, learning, and honest conversation. We were honoured to be joined by Hon. Minister Alitia Bainivalu, a female cabinet minister in Fiji. She opened the workshop with powerful reminders to own our potential, recognise that influence is not a title, and release the guilt of chasing the myth of perfect balance.

MFL CEO, Veilawa, also shared insights on confidence, sponsorship, and influence. We heard heartfelt reflections from senior staff — Betty, Seema, and Preeti — who spoke openly about their journeys and lessons learned. We then had sessions in between such as Esther (Finance) talking about how sales and interest flows into the books.

After lunch, participants worked in groups to discuss challenges, roadblocks, and bold ideas for 2026 — not just for women, but for the betterment of the entire organisation. These ideas classed under 3 key areas of Culture, Career and Business will form the foundation of initiatives and plans for the year.

A Momentum Worth Building

The success of MFL's first Women's Empower Meet signals the beginning of something bigger. The enthusiasm and openness shared during the event highlight the need for more structured spaces where women can lead, learn, and support one another.

This is more than a workshop — it is the start of a movement within MFL to champion women's leadership, advance gender-inclusive finance, and position ourselves as a forward thinking institution committed to equitable growth.

A Home of Their Own, Sooner Than They Ever Imagined



For many young couples, owning a home feels like a distant dream, something to work toward slowly, often pushed to the end of life's long to-do list. For 28-year-old, Aseli Tuicolo, a Quarry Manager at Basic Industries Pte Ltd (a subsidiary of Fijian Holdings Limited) and his wife Jean Rose Tuicolo, a 27-year-old Software Engineer, that dream became a reality far earlier than they ever expected.

To them, owning a home means independence. It means freedom. After getting married, the idea of having their own space, where they could decide how to decorate, how to live, and how to truly make it their own, became deeply important.

The thought of homeownership had been with them for years. In fact, it started as early as age 21 for Mr. Tuicolo, when he began planning for marriage. Like many working professionals, he had always believed that buying a home was something reserved for later in life, often closer to retirement, once you had finally saved enough for a deposit.

That belief, however, began to change.

When Merchant Finance introduced its zero-deposit home loan product, it presented an opportunity to fast-track a goal that some people place at the very end of their financial journey.



“Most people see purchasing a home as the last thing to do because of how expensive it can be,” Mr. Tuicolo explains. “But once you can achieve it earlier, it opens up so many other opportunities, like starting a business or investing in other goals.”

A brief conversation with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Merchant Finance reinforced this shift in thinking. During that exchange, the CEO shared an interesting insight: many people are able to meet home loan repayments but the deposit remains the biggest barrier to homeownership.

Alongside this, the young couple also learned that age plays a critical role in loan calculations. The longer one waits to enter the housing market, the more expensive homeownership can become over time. This realization put their own situation into a sharp perspective and strengthened their resolve to act sooner rather than later.

Mr. Tuicolo first came across the home loan product on Facebook during the lead-up to the official product launch in late January. Intrigued by the opportunity and ready to take the next step, he reached out to Merchant Finance.

“The turnaround time was impressive,” he recalls. “From start to finish, everything was handled efficiently. Within a month and a half, we had purchased our first home in Natabua Heights, Lautoka.”

That moment, walking into their home for the very first time, was unforgettable.

“It was a huge feeling of accomplishment,” said Mrs. Tuicolo. “We have seen so many people only manage to buy a home close to retirement age. We feel incredibly fortunate to own a home while we are still young.”

Grateful for the initiative behind the zero-deposit home loan product, they now find themselves sharing the opportunity with others quite often. While some express concerns about the interest rates, Mr. Tuicolo's response is always grounded in perspective.



“If you don't start now, you'll end up paying more later anyway,” he explains. “Either way, there's a cost. And when the time is right, refinancing is always an option.”

For the Tuicolo's, the decision to act early has already paid off, not just financially, but emotionally. Their home represents security, independence, and the confidence to build the rest of their future from a solid foundation.

Sometimes, the biggest step forward is simply realizing that a dream does not have to wait.

From the Market Stall to the Driver's Seat: How Imeri Marama Turned Daily Hustle into Lasting Independence



For nearly a decade, 51-year-old Imeri Marama has built her livelihood one day at a time. A single mother and full-time market vendor, Imeri made the bold decision over ten years ago to leave formal employment and focus entirely on her market business. While many questioned the move, she saw something others did not, a daily income, flexibility, and control over her future.

As a Suva City based market vendor, Imeri did not just sell produce, she invested in herself. Through the years, she actively participated in market vendor workshops, where financial literacy became a turning point. Learning the importance of budgeting, saving, and investing transformed how she managed her earnings. That knowledge ignited a long-held dream: owning a car.

For Imeri, a car was not a luxury. It was a business tool. Every day, she spent nearly \$20 on taxi fares, transporting goods between her home in Tacirua and the market. Eventually, she realised that her taxi fare expenses could be redirected towards something far more powerful and that was ownership.

Imeri's journey to car ownership did not happen instantly. She started by applying for her driver's licence and once approved, she began exploring financing options.

Like many informal workers, Imeri found that certain financial institutions often overlooked market vendors due to the lack of payslips or formal employment records. But everything changed when she walked into Merchant Finance and visited our Marama Finance team.

Instead of turning her away, the Marama Finance team took the time to understand her reality. They guided her through what was required, helped her strengthen her financial records, and supported her in improving how she tracked her income and savings.

In addition to the support, Imeri took on her own initiative and went a step further. She opened three separate bank accounts, dedicated to different savings goals, and tapped into additional financial awareness programmes to improve how she made deposits and maintained statements. Today, Imeri runs a single stall selling fresh coconut water, cooked dalo, and cassava, a business that consistently sells out. With her sights set on the future, she now plans to expand her business in 2026 by opening a second stall supplied with root crops from her village in Sigatoka.

But even before that, in 2025, her months of disciplined saving, proper financial tracking, and steady income led her to achieve what many once thought was impossible. She bought her first-ever dream car through the assistance and support of the Marama Finance team and financing from Merchant Finance Limited. Now, she makes two trips a day: delivering her morning batch of goods, then heading home at lunchtime to prepare for the afternoon rush. What once was a challenge in terms of taxi, costs and time is now replaced by independence, comfort and efficiency. When Imeri drove her car to the Suva market for the very first time, disbelief followed.



“*“People didn't believe it was mine,” she says. “There is this idea that market vendors, especially single mum market vendors, cannot own something like this.”*”

But that perception is changing.

Today, fellow vendors regularly approach Imeri, asking how they too can achieve the same and own their dream car. She now mentors three other women vendors, helping them improve their bookkeeping, financial tracking, and savings, paying forward the knowledge she gained.

Her leadership extends beyond her own success. Imeri is also the Secretary of the Suva Market Inspiring Women's Cooperative, a group of women vendors working together to build a shared future. The cooperative is currently planning to open a restaurant and a bakery, both fully owned by the women members themselves. For Imeri, her proudest moment isn't just owning a car, it is redefining success.



“*“People look down on market vendors,” she reflects. “But I earn every day. I am my own boss. I earn good money and I support my family. That makes me proud.”*”

A message to other Women

Imeri's advice is simple and powerful:

“Learn to save, invest in things that help you grow and don't be afraid to ask for help.”

Today, her journey stands as proof that women in informal sectors are more than capable of building assets, growing businesses, and inspiring communities.

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Merchant Finance at FICA Technical Workshop



Merchant Finance is proud to participate in this year's FICA Technical Workshop, held from 13–14 March 2026 at Shangri-La Yanuca Island Resort.

Representing the company, Ms. Esther (Manager Finance) and Ms. Swastika (Accountant) attended the two-day program, which explored the evolving role of accountants in today's dynamic business environment. The workshop offered a valuable blend of strategic insights and technical refreshers, with plenary sessions covering performance measurement, strategy and technology, AI applications, presentation skills, and compliance. Breakout sessions focused on key standards such as International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) 15, IAS 1, and IAS 8—providing practical guidance directly relevant to day-to-day operations.

The central theme of the workshop was the shift towards broader performance indicators beyond traditional financial metrics. Speakers highlighted the importance of integrated performance reporting, encouraging accountants to link financial results with strategic outcomes, sustainability measures, and overall stakeholder value.

Another key focus was the impact of technology, collaboration, and global trends on the accounting profession. A strong takeaway was the need to automate routine tasks, allowing more time for analysis and advisory roles, while embracing scalable technology solutions that deliver measurable efficiencies.

Sessions on artificial intelligence (AI) positioned it as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, the role of accountants. Meanwhile, the presentation skills workshop emphasized the importance of clear communication, structured messaging, and building confidence through preparation and practice.

The IFRS breakout sessions reinforced critical judgement areas in revenue recognition and financial



In addition, discussions on money laundering risks underscored the importance of robust client due diligence, transaction monitoring, and clear escalation protocols. Strengthening awareness of red flags and ensuring clarity in reporting lines were highlighted as essential to maintaining a strong compliance framework.

Both participants expressed their gratitude to Merchant Finance for the opportunity to attend the workshop and look forward to applying the insights gained to enhance their daily work and contribute to the organization's continued success.



Celebrating International Women's Day

Merchant Finance proudly celebrated International Women's Day under the theme "Give to Gain."

This meaningful theme highlights the importance of supporting and empowering women and girls to create a brighter, more inclusive, and equal future for all.



Merchant Finance Supports WIN Convention 2026 as Silver Sponsor

Merchant Finance was proud to join on board as a Silver Sponsor for the highly anticipated WIN Convention 2026, led by the Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC). This year's convention centered around the powerful theme: "Give to Gain: Investing in Women, Transform Our Future."

The theme strongly aligned with Merchant Finance's dedication to empowering women entrepreneurs across Fiji. Through our Marama Finance team, we continue to create meaningful opportunities by providing inclusive and flexible financing solutions tailored to the unique journeys of women in business.



The convention brought together a diverse and inspiring group of speakers, including Honourable Ministers, legal professionals, entrepreneurs, and influencers. Discussions focused on policies, leadership, and the growing role of women in business, offering meaningful feedback and viewpoints.

Our Marama Finance team was actively present at the event, engaging directly with women entrepreneurs and key stakeholders. These interactions provided practical insights, helping us better understand how we can continue to enhance our services and support our customers more effectively.

Participating in and sponsoring events like the WIN Convention reflects Merchant Finance's clear focus on advancing Fiji's National Financial Inclusion Strategy. As a proud We-Fi signatory, we remain dedicated to supporting women not only through financial solutions but also by creating opportunities for growth and success.

FHRI 2026: Advancing HR Skills for a Future-Ready Workplace



In this year's Fiji Human Resources Institute (FHRI) Convention, the theme was "SUPERCHARGE YOUR HR SKILLS."

Representatives at the annual event included Ms. Nazia Lal (HR Business Partner), Mr. Veilawa Rereiwasaliwa (CEO), and Mr. Finau Mateyawa (HR Officer). The event was held over two (2) days, on Friday, 20th March 2026, and Saturday, 21st March 2026, at the Sofitel Hotel in Nadi.

The convention featured a range of influential speakers who covered key topics such as the importance of "networking like a pro," which focused on building social capital—trusted relationships that enhance collaboration, create opportunities, drive innovation, and help prevent conflicts. Another important discussion topic was "supercharging your skills through pay transparency," which emphasized the importance of communication and how it can either be a bridge or a breaking point between a healthy and unhealthy work environment.

The discussion on "mental wellbeing in the workplace" was particularly engaging for the audience, as this is an area often overlooked. It highlighted that employees are the greatest assets of any organization and should be continuously invested in to ensure quality outcomes and improved performance.

There was also a session on "empowering employee experience," which emphasized the importance of making employees feel heard, valued, and recognized. It explored the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into current processes and procedures while maintaining a human touch to ensure that emotions and perspectives are respected. The session compared the contributions of AI with those of human capabilities in meeting business needs. Key realities discussed included skilled worker migration (brain drain), untapped talent pools, flexibility as a strategy, and meaningful recognition.

A presentation by John Apted focused on the importance of "staying up to speed on compliance." This session covered the Employment Relations Bill 2025 (Bill 27 of 2025), including workplace laws related to the duty to provide work, termination with notice, summary dismissal, foreign contracts, wages, and breaches of wage regulation orders.

Time was also allocated for panel discussions and participant contributions at the end of each presentation. The two-day event provided HR professionals with the opportunity to review and refine their existing processes and procedures, encouraging new approaches to both business operations and employee engagement.

Loan Puzzle Question



Maria takes out a loan of \$10,000 at a simple interest rate of 8% per year for 3 years.

How much total amount will Maria have to repay at the end of 3 years?

- A.** \$12,400 **B.** \$12,000 **C.** \$11,800 **D.** \$10,800

Community Engagement



Merchant Finance Western Division Branch at the Carpenters Motors Roadshows



A throwback to a delivery moment from our Zero Deposit Campaign with Carpenters Motors.



Merchant Finance Nakasi Branch at the Asco Motors Nakasi Roadshow



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