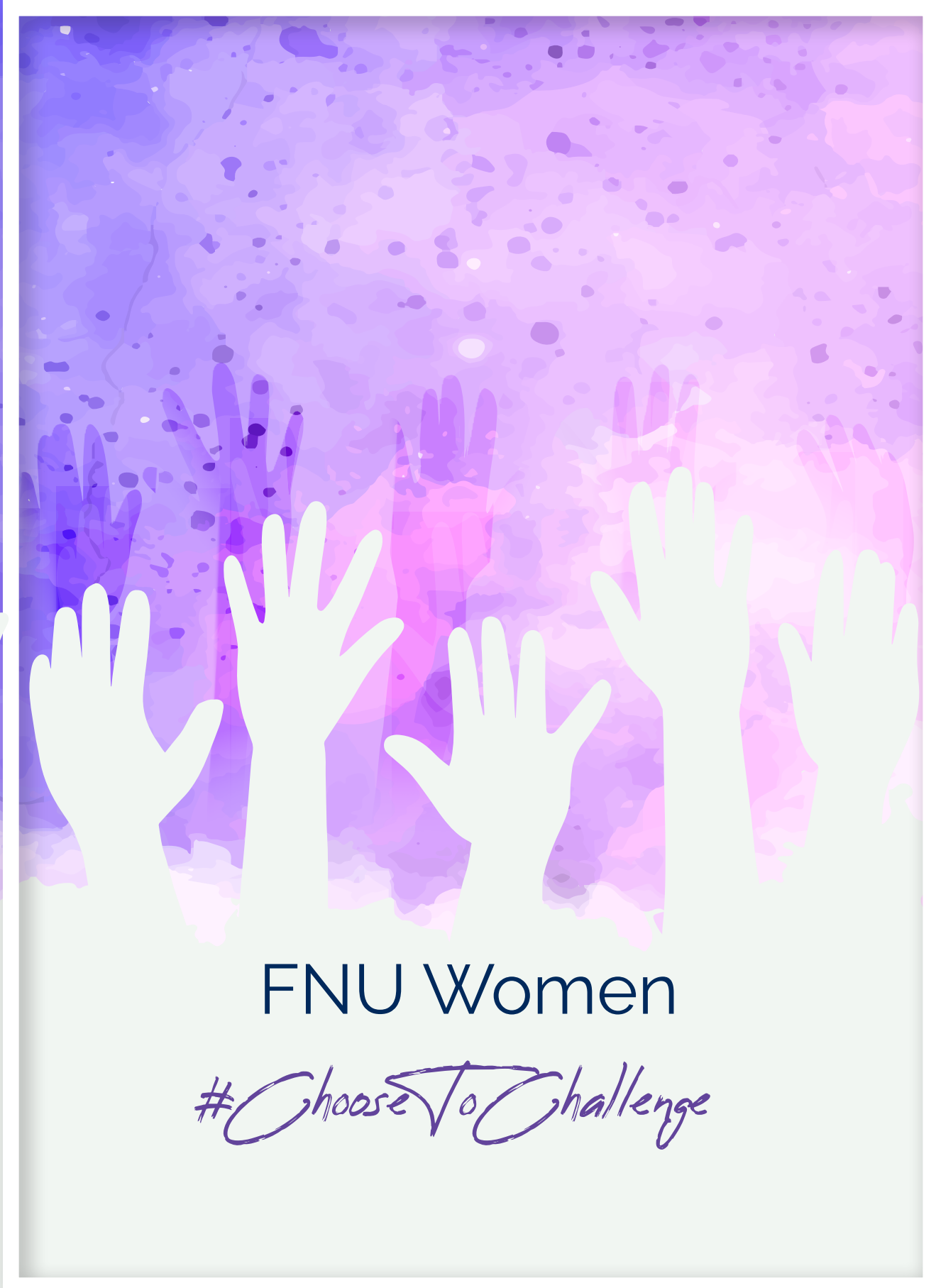




FIJI NATIONAL
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FNU UNIKUA



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FNU Women

#ChooseToChallenge

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

TEACH, LEAD AND INSPIRE

Women in Leadership



I am honoured to have been invited to deliver the keynote address at FNU's celebrations for International Women's Day 2021. It is right that our university marks this occasion, and uses it as an opportunity, not only to celebrate the achievements of women across FNU, but also to

highlight the continuing challenges faced by women in universities and other walks of life throughout Fiji.

It says a lot about the history of power relations and the state of the world in 2021 that we still need an International Women's Day; and it says a lot about the history of power relations and the state of the world in 2021 that we devote just one day out of 365 to celebrating and championing half the human race. Moreover, there is no getting over the fact that the Vice-Chancellor of the Fiji National University is a man. What can a man, what should a man, in a position of leadership say about the subject of women in leadership? My personal view is that the fight for women's empowerment requires men to stand up and be counted. If, having oppressed and suppressed women for countless generations, men expect women to fight alone for equality and justice, that is a double insult.

I am proud to be the Vice-Chancellor of a university where both the Chair and Deputy Chair of Council are women – successful, professional women in their own right. Indeed, the strength, experience, and diversity of the FNU Council are the reason I accepted the role of Vice-Chancellor. A VC has a lot of responsibility, and some authority, but not even the best VC can function effectively without a strong and supportive Council. In my opinion, the fact that the FNU Council is highly effective and the fact that its Chair and Deputy Chair are both women is no coincidence.

In the course of my career, I have learned about leadership from a small handful of visionary and inspiring leaders, with whom I have been privileged to work, and whom I have had the privilege to observe at close quarters. Of the four leaders I most admire, and from whom I have learned the most, three are women. Without betraying their confidence, let me tell you a little about each of them, by way of illustrating this year's IWD theme, Women in Leadership.

My first female role-model was a university Vice-Chancellor in the UK. She is small in stature, and in many gatherings was the shortest person in the room. But she was, and is, a colossus of leadership. Never confuse physical stature with moral authority. She filled every room she entered with her innate energy and dynamism. Wherever she was present, she immediately became the centre of gravity, around whom the rest of the room revolved. And she had that amazing ability, like so many leaders, of making the person she was talking to feel special. Her tenure as VC saw an ancient, traditional university embrace new ways of working in a whole host of areas. That was down to her sheer force of personality.

The second woman from whom I learned about leadership is a remarkable, multi-talented person. During her illustrious career, she has been a member of her country's Olympic swimming squad, trained as an opera singer, worked for one of the world's biggest energy companies, and led higher education institutions. But none of this list of achievements captures what makes her such an inspirational leader, nor why I consider her the most remarkable person for whom, and with whom, I have ever had the privilege of working. For the quality that she exemplifies most powerfully is humanity. Leadership is too often seen as the projection of power. That is a very macho, a very male view. The most important lesson I learned from my second female role-model is that leadership and kindness can co-exist – indeed, that they are mutually reinforcing. In our globally competitive world, kindness and compassion often seem in short supply. But they can be strategic assets for a leader

who is brave and confident enough to cultivate and share them. My third role model is another woman Vice-Chancellor, who has led her university from nowhere to global recognition in the space of 12 years. She demonstrates extraordinary resilience and determination. She is also terrifically hard-working, on top of every detail, and does not hesitate to follow up, often several times a week, to ensure that progress is maintained. Drive and persistence are the hallmarks of her leadership.

These three remarkable women have taught me three, further important lessons. First, be yourself. Leadership comes in different forms, but to be effective it has to be authentic. Don't try to be someone else's idea of a leader. People will find you out, and they won't respect you. Play to your own strengths, develop your own style, and people will appreciate your sincerity. Second, work hard. Leadership doesn't leave much time for other things, at least not during the working day. Third, be kind. Nobody wants to work for a robot or a tyrant. A little compassion goes a long way. Kindness is not weakness. Indeed, displaying kindness from a position of authority generates its own special power.

It is my hope that the world that emerges from COVID will be a more compassionate world, in which our personal relationships and common humanity are valued alongside economic benefit and financial gain. But if that world is to come into being, we need women leaders now more than ever. We need to show that a more humane and inclusive model of leadership is not only possible, but essential. That a time of great change demands a diversity of voices and experiences.

Women and men alike, let us commit ourselves to that better, kinder, more diverse and more inclusive future.

Professor Toby Wilkinson
Vice-Chancellor
Fiji National University

International Women's Day Q&A with FNU Acting Chancellor and ANZ Regional Executive for Pacific, Tessa Price



As we marked International Women's Day on the 8th of March, we are highlighting women at the Fiji National University (FNU) who continue to make a difference and are an inspiration for female leaders of the future.

On a special #choosetochallenge FNUNIKUA edition this month, we are thrilled to have a Q&A Session with our Acting Chancellor Tessa Price about her role as Regional Executive for the Pacific at ANZ Bank, her career, inclusion and diversity at the workplace, rising women leaders and promoting gender equality.

1. What advice would you give to women who want to be leaders in their specialised fields?

Develop genuine relationships with outstanding leaders who you respect. Great sponsors are those who are prepared to foster your learning and help create opportunities for you to grow and lead. Your relationship needs to be one of the concrete action. Sponsors can actively drive advancement by opening doors and recommending women for promotions.

Each of my own sponsors throughout my career has directly challenged me to make me a better person, a better marketer, a better strategist, a better leader.

When you have the opportunity to spend time with senior executives, make sure it counts. Ask for advice, test ideas and explore new ways to handle tough challenges.

2. Do you feel that you have achieved what you wanted to?

As I progress in life and my career, the goalposts change and who I am changes. Honestly, I don't think I will ever feel like I have achieved everything I wanted to!

You absolutely must stretch and challenge yourself - do not make your career path linear.

I've learnt to step outside the traditional remit and not be afraid of change, or failure.

When an opportunity comes up that's outside your current boundaries and will launch you into a different space, seize it with both hands and drive at it for all its worth.

If you hear a little voice

saying "I couldn't do that, it might not work" – banish those thoughts and push yourself to the limit to see how you could make it work. It's usually these experiences that create a quantum leap in your career.

3. How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

I see so many mothers, and fathers to some extent, of young children still trying to strike this balance.

All I can say is don't try to be Superwoman because she doesn't exist. So share the load – with your partner, your friends, your colleagues and family. Draw on those around you and outsource, outsource, outsource!

4. What are some of the challenges facing women in leadership?

Here in the Pacific, we have incredibly talented women working in so many different fields who are leading the way in their communities – but they need to be more visible and supported. The challenge is in being heard – putting our hands up to be on expert panels, being a vocal and respected member at the leadership table, being willing to front up and speak to media, and having the confidence to be an expert in your field.

I recently saw a fantastic quote from Ethele Falu Sigimanu, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Women, Youth and Children in the Solomon Islands:

"It's not that women are not strong in this country (Solomon Islands). They are strong. But we need to listen to them more. Because of what they have to offer".

I encourage all young female leaders to take every opportunity they can to lead from the front and be heard. And I encourage all-male leaders to make room for their female equals on the stage.

5. How can women better enable each other instead of competing?

First of all, I don't think we are competing and we need to put that myth to bed because it's not a competition. The strong and passionate female leaders I know spend a lot of their time with the next generation of leaders, giving advice and opportunities.

But there is still more opportunity for all of us, both male and female, to pave the way for others. Fostering the next generation of leaders was something we focussed on at ANZ this year to celebrate International Women's Day. How can we give that next generation the opportunity to test and learn in a supportive environment, so that they can go on to succeed in their field?

Second, we all need to speak up if we see something inappropriate. It's not easy at times, but it's important to lead.

If you are an expert in your field, you are a role model for everyone and it's up to you to call out bad behaviour when you see it.

In May 2016, Ms Price was the first woman to be appointed to lead ANZ's Pacific Business working across 11 countries in geographies as diverse as Guam, Kiribati and Timor.

She is a direct report to the CEO of ANZ New Zealand and currently serves on a number of ANZ Boards including ANZ Pacific Operations, ANZ Guam, ANZ Vanuatu and ANZ PNG.

Prior to this, Ms Price was Chief of Staff to former CEO of ANZ (Mike Smith) in 2015. In 2012, Ms Price was the first female to be appointed to the role of CEO UDC, an ANZ subsidiary and the largest finance company in New Zealand.

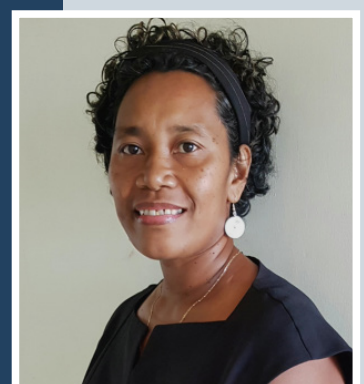
Prior to joining ANZ, Ms Price worked for the Commonwealth Bank for over eight years in Brand and Advertising, and she's had roles with Saatchi & Saatchi, American Express and Esanda.

Ms Price holds a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Commerce and a Masters of Business Administration (Executive) from the University of New South Wales / The University of Sydney. She has also completed the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Leadership Program in Boston.

International Women's Day means celebrating the existence of women. To appreciate, acknowledge the work and effort that women put in all fields of work. Women have significantly contributed to the success in their relevant field of work and they have also contributed to the economy of the country. I believe inferiority does not belong to any gender, therefore, leaders need to recognise and acknowledge the strengths each individual has.

For me, 'Choose to Challenge' means challenging the labels others put on you. Do not live the brand they put on you, do otherwise. Believe in yourself and focus on what God has destined for you.

Miliana Fong Savua
Assistant Lecturer – Mathematics
Labasa Campus



Coalala's crucial role at FNU



Divya Swamy (left) discussing her assignment with Sovaia Sisi Coalala.

At the Fiji National University (FNU), ensuring that the learning and teaching environment is suited to the different needs of students is paramount as this enables an inclusive learning environment. Through the Disability Centre at Nasinu Campus, FNU ensures that students with disabilities are also able to pursue tertiary education with the necessary support services and facilities provided.

As Disability Coordinator, one of Sovaia Sisi Coalala's primary role is to ensure the smooth transition of students with disabilities into FNU and be a liaison officer between the students and their lecturers, other departments and external stakeholders.

Coalala said she was proud of both the achievements and challenges she faced over the years until the establishment of the Centre in 2020.

"I have worked at FNU since 2016 and my priority was to establish this Centre," Coalala shared. "I came into higher education from a teaching background but did not have much experience in the administration field. This however did not stop me from my goal of ensuring students with disabilities can also undergo tertiary studies."

"I must admit though, that when I first came in, I was worried about how people would be receptive and responsive towards me, especially with my disability."

Coalala, who is visually impaired, said that after a few awareness sessions with her colleagues, they were able to work collectively without any issue.

"Sometimes, they themselves forget that I have a disability, the way they treat me," she said reflectively.

"That was a great step from where I was in the beginning, compared to now. I count that as a milestone."

One of Coalala's first task was to formulate the University's Disability Inclusive Policy and drew on the assistance of her local and international contacts. The policy was adopted in 2016 and includes the provision of support and reasonable adjustments to enable persons with disabilities to demonstrate their abilities, fully participate in University activities and realise their objectives and potential.

Five years later, Coalala now has an office at the Centre that is frequented by students with disabilities who seek her assistance with lecture notes and assignments and to use the computers and services provided.

"We have 15 new students who began studies at FNU this year and about nine continuing students. We have about two students in the West, two at Derrick Campus, one student at our Nasese Campus, two in Nabua and the rest are studying here at Nasinu Campus," she said.

"The university is very inclusive. The lecturers are quite responsive and as soon as we contact them regarding the students, they are willing to assist."

"We only request lecturers to come to the Centre for sessions with the students who may difficulty accessing the lecture and tutorial rooms. For the rest of the students, we encourage them to go to the classes."

Coalala could be described as a role model for students with disabilities. Having acquired a Bachelor of Education degree in Literature and Language from the University of the South Pacific (USP), Coalala then worked as an integration teacher at Fiji School for the Blind for eight years until 2012.

As an integration teacher, Coalala was responsible for visiting students with disabilities who were in mainstream secondary schools and provided support when needed.

In 2013, Coalala undertook postgraduate studies on a scholarship at the University of Wollongong and graduated the following year with a double Masters in Commerce and Strategic Human Resource Management.

She also had words of encouragement for women with disabilities who were undecided about tertiary studies.

"Choose to challenge what is deemed normal, and excel above this," she exclaimed.

"If the norm says that we can't do it, it is up to us to challenge ourselves and our colleagues to prove this otherwise and not be held back by societal standards."

"There may be females out there who are delaying or ignoring their interest to pursue higher education studies because they are worried about things such as accessibility and support services."

"Just challenge yourselves to pursue your passion and you will be amazed at what you can accomplish."

Without much thought, Coalala added that her inspiration stemmed from "any female who have defied the odds and has shown that we can also do it."

Coalala recently received the Senior Manager of the Year Award (2021) at the National Disability Awards held in Suva.

Swamy an inspiration to all



Like clockwork, Divya Swastika Swamy can be seen making her way to the Disability Centre at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Nasinu Campus every morning with an infectious smile and greeting people as they pass by her. Aided by her support walker, Swamy said she is always excited to begin another day of tertiary studies.

She is a testament to the fact that persons living with disabilities have no excuse to ignore or put their personal and academic ambitions on hold. Swamy is undertaking her second year of studies in the Certificate III in Office Assistance course offered by FNU's College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS).

Swamy said that she was grateful to be at FNU despite all her challenges.

"I am so happy, even though I sometimes thought I would never enter a university since I was just a Year 4 student," she said.

"After Year 4, I joined the Fiji Vocational Technical Training Centre for Persons with Disabilities and was encouraged to apply for studies at FNU."

"I applied and was so happy when I received my offer letter last year," she exclaimed.

When asked to describe her experiences so far in one sentence, Swamy said it was "challenging but very fun at the same time."



Teach, Lead and Inspire

International Women’s Day signifies a movement for women in all walks of life across the globe. Not only does it celebrate women and their achievements, it also highlights the gender disparity that still exists and advocates gender equality for every woman.

On the occasion of IWD this year, we are pleased to share the story of a strong and empowering female staff in a leadership role at the Fiji National University (FNU) Registrar, Sarita Devi.

Education and Career

Born and raised in Boubale Labasa, Devi (*pictured above*) attended Bulileka Sanatan Dharam Primary School and later progressed to Bulileka Secondary School. Reminiscing on her school days, Devi shared that her struggles did not dampen her spirit to keep studying.

“School was one of the best things that happened to us girls. The way it nurtured our minds, our interest to make a difference was boosted. Financial challenges were there, however, my parents believed in the value of education,” stated Devi.

Reflecting on the support she had from her parents, the FNU Registrar shared well-known American television producer Bob Keeshan’s sage words that “no other person or outside force has a greater influence on a child than the parent”. She said this perfectly described her parents as the ultimate role models of her life.

“I am amazed how both of them believed in the power of education. They motivated me and constantly told me ‘you will go to school, you will achieve greater things in life’ and that education transforms lives in a very positive manner.”

After completing secondary school, Devi joined the former Lautoka Teachers College and obtained a Teacher’s Certificate in 1986. She taught at various primary and secondary schools around Fiji for almost a decade.

The passionate teacher continued thriving academically. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Economics from the University of the South Pacific in 2002. Three years later, she completed her Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Following which she pursued a Masters in Teaching from Griffith University, Australia and graduated in 2008.

Devi previously worked for the Ministry of Education before joining FNU and worked in various projects and initiatives such as supervisor for Basic Education Management and Teacher Upgrading Program and consultant for the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education.

She served in various senior positions in the Academic Office, including Deputy and Assistant Registrar, before being appointed as the Registrar in 2015.

Life as the FNU Registrar

Devi said it was never too difficult for her to carry out her responsibility as the Registrar of Fiji’s national university. She added that she always used her position to inspire students into getting proper qualifications.

“I have a lot of administrative work under my role but it all sums up to raising awareness among the younger generation on the power of education and when they are enrolled into the University, their welfare and other needs become my responsibility.”

“I am also required to lead the design and delivery of excellent student academic services and support across the student life cycle from recruitment to graduation and this is benchmarked against best practices in service delivery. I also provide oversight in the development of the Universities Student Management System and am required to work with senior staff across the University to maximise the Universities external profile”.

“Some of my key roles at FNU includes leading the formulation of the Office of the Registrar strategy, staffing and structure and resources in support of the University’s strategic plan and ensuring that service objectives are met” explained the mother-of-two.

Special Achievements

Devi has many reasons to pride herself on her professional achievements at FNU. As University Registrar she is a member of the Senior Management Group, University Senate, Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC), Portfolio Oversight Group and Co-Chair of the Labor Management Consultation & Cooperation Committee (LMCC). The Registrar also serves as secretary to the FNU Council and Council sub committees.

Devi is also an Executive Member of the University Information Management System (UIMS) project

Steering Committee and she plays an important role in the initiation, planning and implementation of Banner Student Module. Part of this role is identifying and improving student processes in the University.

She has also played a key role in the implementation of a fully functional automated customer log in the Student Academic Services, which has been effective since July 2020.

“Through this new system, the students were able to log their queries whenever they visited any Student Academic Services office at any FNU Campuses. The log captured student details, services requested by students and it also stated whether the student issues were resolved or still in the pending list,” she explained.

The FNU Registrar has also designed a responsive ‘One-Stop Student Service Centre Plan’ for the benefit of staff and students.

“This plan provided one-stop service to students under one roof. The customer care services provided to students included checking the Minimum Entry Requirements (MER’s), admissions, enrolment, student ID card and academic counselling by the College staff.

Devi also played a key role in the Design and implementation of an effective response to changing admission and enrolment due to possible lockdown effects due to COVID 19. “Electronic editable forms were made available to students so that services could be provided to students without them physically coming to any Campus”

Words of Wisdom

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, Devi’s advise to females is ‘Keep Studying’.

“I was always passionate about education and the value of education in equalising society. Even after changing careers from teaching in primary/secondary schools to looking after the welfare of students at tertiary level, my biggest motivation has been the power of education,” she highlighted.

“Financial struggle was and is still one of the major challenges for some families and I always worry about which girl has to forgo further study of any sort because they do not have money.”

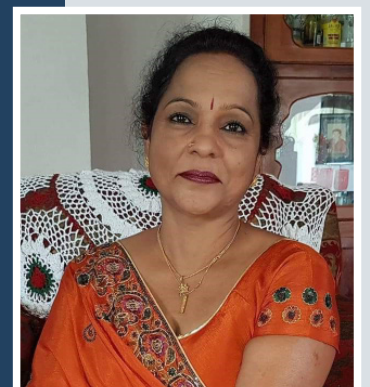
“However, this should not stop females from trying. There will always be a way to achieve your dreams.”

Let us choose to challenge by putting our hands up in salutation for all those women who have had an influence in Fiji. Let’s choose to challenge by empowering all those women and girls to become stronger and overcome any hurdles in their path to success.

We the women and girls of this country together with the men are each equal. The IWD celebration today is a team sport, problems, issues and challenges have to be filtered through dialogues. Men and women need to speak out together against inequality and bias through conversations.

We, women, are superpowers and we must not hesitate to use our powers, we ask questions to become smarter. Those questions generate greater learning in us and drive the desired change. Women make people think and they make their organisations and institutions smarter.

Basundra Kumar
Manager Monitoring and Compliance
Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor – Learning and Teaching



Women empowerment paramount, says Sister Ana



Sister Ana, 74, who has paternal links to Kadavu, attributes her success to her parents.

“My parents worked extremely hard to give each one of us a good education. I come from a family of ten siblings: seven brothers born consecutively and three of us girls at the tail end. I am the ninth child, and my parents never differentiated between us siblings. My parents were the most loving and accepting.”

“I attended St Anne’s Primary and St Joseph’s Secondary in Suva. After Senior Cambridge at St Joseph’s in 1966, I decided to enter the convent in 1967. I went to Auckland, New Zealand, to be trained as a St Joseph de Cluny Sister, an International Congregation which began in 1817 by a great French Woman Missionary called Anne Marie Javouhey,” she highlighted.

The soft-spoken sister Ana has been a Cluny Sister for 50 years.

“I celebrated my Golden Jubilee last year (2020) on February 14th Valentine’s Day when I first made my Vows to God,” she said.

Sister Ana’s advice to the next generation of female leaders is to work together and raise awareness and create systems that allow them to thrive and become who they want to be.

“I think if women want to be successful, we need to be ambitious and maintain discipline. Keep up with our dignity and self-respect and support other women even if they will do better than you. Let us help one another. Together we will stand and make a difference,” she highlighted.

While sharing her experiences, Sister Ana said that women go through so much pain and assume so many responsibilities without many complaints and take it in their stride to create a loving atmosphere. Yet, they are not given the rights they deserve.

“I remember my niece, statement: “Nei, after delivering a child, it is so painful to allow your body return to its former shape. The pain is

just excruciating as the muscles strive to return to their former shape. The nurturing of mothers is tirelessly endless and often unrecognised.

These experiences are undoubtedly heroic and demanding and calling for attention and recognition for their contribution to life,” she adds.

Sister Ana draws her inspiration from her parents and a few females who have been instrumental in her success as an educator.

“My role models have always been my parents. They were very virtuous, and they lived what they taught. My other sources of inspiration are Professor Unaisi Nabobo Baba, Dean CHE and Dr Vasiti Eferemi, former Head of School of Communication Language and Literature (SCLL) and my Foundress, Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey, a French woman and farmer’s daughter, who inspired thousands of women to join the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph de Cluny, who continue to serve the poor globally.”

“I also acknowledge the many women who have inspired and supported me in my journey by their friendship, values and sheer hard work to build a family life, despite everything,” she said.

Sister Ana will be retiring in April this year and has plans to complete her PhD.

“One task I want to accomplish is to complete my PhD. So I’m looking forward to achieving that. But my difficulty has always been financial help. It’s always challenging to teach and study, and I think women should be given a chance to study and released temporarily to accomplish their academic studies,” she said.

Sister Ana’s message to women is to break the traditional barriers and bonds that violate girls and women’s rights and form groups to discuss the problems to achieve dreams academically, socially, and spiritually.

There is a lot of talk about women’s empowerment in society but despite this and the positive contribution to nurturing life, females are still deprived of equal rights, according to Fiji National University’s College of Humanities and Education (CHE) Lecturer and Cluny Sister, Anaseini Rarasea.

Sister Ana, as she is fondly known, as an educator, prioritises girls’ education, which she believes is the key to empowering women everywhere.

“Despite women’s contribution to life, men have failed to recognise and appreciate their gifts and talents towards the building of humanity. They should be treated and respected for who they are (life-givers). This is truly a call to prudence and a challenge to administer women’s rights justly, which is well overdue,” she said.

Lata excels as a Network Security Engineer

Despite her demure nature, Ayesha Lata is tasked with being responsible for developing and supervising data and technology security systems for the Fiji National University (FNU) to help prevent breaches, taps, and leaks associated with cybercrime.

This is no easy feat for the Network Security Engineer, who is now in the technological field thanks to a university academic who encouraged her to venture into the field of Applied Computing.

“I took Computer Science in high school and since the number of students taking applied computing was low at that time, the School of Computing put my name down for the Diploma in Business majoring in Applied Computing course at the then Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT),” Lata explained.

“I did try to change my major in the first semester, however, the Head of School at the time encouraged me to just give it a try for one semester.”

“In the first semester, I was so fascinated by what we studied that I decided to continue and completed a Diploma in the same field.”

“My mother also had a hand in this. She made me realise that IT is the field for me, as I used to mend broken electrical items at home, including our old Pentium II. My mother is a strong lady with a firm conviction that all women should have economic independence because it gives them confidence, a sense of self-worth and also positively impacts the attitude of those around her.”

Lata’s decision to challenge herself, explore and study the field of information technology (IT) led her to enter a sector that was traditionally dominated by males.

“Our industry, at present, is dominated by males. The number of females joining the tech industry is increasing, but not rapidly,” Lata said.

“Throughout my journey in the IT field, I have gained enormous knowledge and the key highlight of it all is that I progressed from being the only female in the department to seeing an increase in female employees.”

“Although this is not happening as quickly as we’d like, it is still a cause of celebration to note that more women are breaking barriers and pursuing their career ambitions in this field.”

In her role as part of the University’s Division of Information Technology Services (ITS), Lata is also responsible for the provisioning, deploying, configuring, and administrating of many different pieces of network and security-related hardware and software.

These include firewalls, routers, switches, various network-monitoring tools, and virtual private networks (VPNs).

Lata is certainly a role model in her field and uses the opportunity to empower other females in her family.

“I have two nieces who are in primary school and they see their grandmother, mother and aunts hustling. We always have open conversations at home and talk to them about the importance of women empowerment and the things women can achieve.”

“We want to show them that women can be so many things, from being a policewoman controlling traffic on the road to even simply being a house maker if they wanted to.”

“I believe education from an early age on gender



Ayesha Lata (second from right) with colleagues.

equality is the key.”

She added that although women should not let gender bias and discrimination affect their ambitions, they should still speak out against it.

Lata is currently pursuing her Masters in Information Systems.

Fonorito serves the FNU community

Asinate Yaranamua Fonorito said watching her mother gracefully exude humility and compassion as a nurse instilled in her an interest in the noble profession and a deep desire to follow in her footsteps.

Fonorito said despite several false starts along the way, she was grateful to be serving in the same profession as her mentor and mother.

Her journey towards the Fiji School of Nursing (FSN), which is now part of Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), began in the late 90s.

"I applied at FSN but while waiting, I started my tertiary education at a Computer School in Suva," she explained.

"Unfortunately, this ended due to the political upheaval of 2000. The following year, I decided to enrol at the University of the South Pacific (USP) to undertake Foundation studies, but then I saw my name printed in the newspapers for the FSN intake of students. I was so excited to see this and it signalled the start to my dream career."

"I always admired my mum and her

line of work and was grateful to receive the opportunity to serve communities in the same manner."

"At home, she was the sole breadwinner and was always treated with the same respect as my father. She exhibited the values that I strived for and wished for my children to have, especially my daughter."

After graduating in 2004, Fonorito worked at various health centres in Kadavu and Lau for the next six years. In 2010, she was transferred to the Oxfam Clinic in Suva (now known as the Wellness Centre for Women), where she worked for four years.

She then operated the Adolescent Health Clinic in Suva town from 2014-2016. It was during this period that Fonorito would visit FNU to conduct the Annual Reproductive Health Screening for staff and students.

"It was during my visits to FNU that I became interested in joining the University as I believed I would be able to assist more students in regards to their reproductive health."

"As a nurse at the UniClinic at Nasinu Campus, I provide nursing care to staff and students and assist the doctors in clinical work."

"I also handle non-nursing administration work such as ordering clinical consumables and equipment and preparing the monthly bills, amongst other things."

Fonorito said she had a dynamic work environment, whereby work

is assigned according to roles and not gender. Although she is currently expecting her fourth child, Fonorito said she has never experienced being discriminated against based on her gender.

"You need to create a working environment where there is no discrimination, where people are aware of the differences amongst them, yet everyone is treated the same," she explained.

"The doctor and I are two professionals with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the same targets, which is to provide quality healthcare services to all FNU students and staff."

"I believe that the absence of gender bias will enable women to achieve great things for themselves, their families and their communities."

Fonorito said this belief is translated into her family life, where she has discussions about gender rights and equality issues with her daughter and two sons.

"It is important to have these sorts of conversations with our children because they are the future," she said.

"I make them aware of their rights in terms of equality, encourage them to speak out against any sort of discrimination and to be vocal about issues concerning them."

"I also motivate them to be relentless in pursuing their goals."



"You need to create a working environment where there is no discrimination, where people are aware of the differences amongst them, yet everyone is treated the same"

Waqaiivolavola encourages women to strive for excellence

Society needs to see the beauty in womanhood and empower them to achieve success, says Fiji National University's (FNU) National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) Quality Management Instructor Leona Waqaiivolavola.

This was her message for the 2021 International Women's Day, which was celebrated on March 8 worldwide to recognise women's contribution to society.

Waqaiivolavola, (pictured left) originally from Kadavu, said people need to support women's growth in their careers, homes, and society.

"We should clearly see the beauty in womanhood, their strength, resilience, and power. We should celebrate all the womenfolk in our lives by supporting them with inclusion and creating a safe space to grow and thrive," she said.

Waqaiivolavola attained her Master's Degree in Food

Science and Technology from the University of Queensland in Australia in 2013 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of the South Pacific in 1998.

The 42-year-old is innovative and hardworking meeting the challenges head-on since joining NTPC almost two years ago. She has been on top of her game at her work forefront, and she is also a mother of five beautiful children at home; two girls and three boys.

Undoubtedly, she has been a great source of motivation with her leadership qualities for her children. Waqaiivolavola devotes her time equally between her children and her work as no one is indispensable and she anticipates seeing her children develop into astounding professionals in the future.

"As much as I love my work, my children are my prized possession. My work ends when I leave the office every afternoon. When I get home, that is my family time, and I devote that time to my children, whether it be helping with homework, catching up on happenings at school or just

lending a listening ear and offering advice as we mom's do," she said.

"One of my most rewarding experiences here at FNU was having our first ever training program – Manage and Plan Projects at the Workplace accredited through South Pacific Community's (SPC) Educational Quality and Assessment Program. This accreditation is recognised regionally, and we can market this training program accordingly," she said.

"Joining the team at the NTPC's Department of Productivity and Innovation has been an exciting one with lots of learnings. We have a fantastic team experienced in their respective fields and are always ready to assist when needed. My manager (Amrish Narayan) has been supportive through my tenure at the department. I could not have asked for a better workplace."

Given her achievements, Waqaiivolavola has become a role model for many. As she strives for success, Waqaiivolavola encourages women to rise and choose to challenge.



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Breaking stereotypes – Shivani lives her dream

Fiji National University (FNU) alumnus, Sheetal Shivani always had a desire to serve her country by joining the discipline forces. Known for her positive mindset, commitment, and grit, Shivani envisioned joining the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF).

Her dream came true in 2015 after being shortlisted to undergo the Basic Recruitment Course with the RFMF. She was a final year student in the Trade Diploma in Office Administration programme at FNU at the time she had applied to undergo the training.

“It was a childhood dream of mine to serve in the army. I knew I had to get a university qualification to boost my chances. So I enrolled at FNU to study Office Administration and when I saw the advertisement about the recruitment I applied and was lucky to get a placement. The rest is history,” said Shivani.

Education

The youngest of three siblings, Shivani was born and raised in Tabucola, Labasa. She attended Tabucola Valibar Sangam Primary School and Labasa Muslim College.

After high school, she enrolled at FNU’s Labasa Campus to undertake Certificate IV in Office Administration.

“I chose FNU because it was both flexible and affordable. FNU also gave me the chance to complete my six months’ attachment with them at the Nasinu Campus,” Shivani said.

She graduated in 2013 and decided to continue her studies at FNU as a part-time student undertaking a Trade Diploma in Office Administration. Shivani secured employment as a Librarian at Jai Narayan College while continuing with her studies. It was around this time she saw the RFMF recruitment advertisement and decided to give it a shot.

After completing the three month Basic Recruitment Course, Shivani was stationed at the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in Vanua Levu. She served with her colleagues from the Army at the Commissioner Northen’s Office for three months.

“I served at the time when Cyclone Winston hit Fiji. There was a lot of relief and rehabilitation work being undertaken in Vanua Levu at that time. My role was to conduct site visits to affected areas, manage all the office admin work, prepare the daily ration demand, assist people who were affected during the disaster, update weather forecast for evacuation centres and plan with my seniors on delivery of ration to people,” she explained.

After completing her attachment, Shivani went back to complete her studies and graduated in 2016.

“After my graduation, I worked for Suva Funeral Directors Limited as an Accounts Assistant, while waiting for a mission with RFMF.”

Shivani gained further work experience as she undertook multiple roles related to administration, finance and human resources.

UN Mission

She worked for eight months before being called up to join an RFMF contingent to serve in a United Nations Mission in Iraq.

“It was a dream come true for me,” Shivani said.

“I served one year on this mission from July 2017 to July 2018. My roles included customer services, security, operating x-ray machine at the checkpoint at the UN Compound, handling complaints in regards to threat and customer or visitors and other administration work.”

“It was an interesting role that was also very risky as being in the war zone meant we had to be vigilant at all times and take the security measures very seriously.”

After returning from her mission, Shivani decided to take a break.

“I wanted to spend time with my family and I was also going to get married. My partner had been very supportive of my journey and was waiting for me to complete my mission before we started our life journey together.”

“After serving in Iraq and seeing what goes on in that part of the world, you realise that life is precious and what you have must be appreciated.”



After a brief break, Shivani worked at the Fijian Elections Office and Fiji National University before reattachment with the Army as a Medical Orderly at the George Mate Medical Centre in Suva. After a three month stint, she was offered a full-time contract as an Administrative Clerk.

“I’m happy to be back in the Army and expanding my work experience.”

In her current role, Shivani manages the administration, customer service and human resources tasks for the medical centre.

Words of Wisdom

Shivani credits her family, friends and her alma mater for her success.

“My family, especially my mum and husband, have been very supportive towards my work and studies and I sincerely thank them for their encouragement and guidance. Apart from them, FNU has played a large part in my career development. It has provided me with a strong foundation to excel and strive for excellence.”

Shivani’s advice to women is to believe in themselves and continue to strive for their goals in life.

“I feel that women should be empowered to do what they want. If they have their hearts set out to do something they should be supported. All they need to do is believe in themselves and continue to work hard to turn their dreams into a reality. Nothing is impossible.”