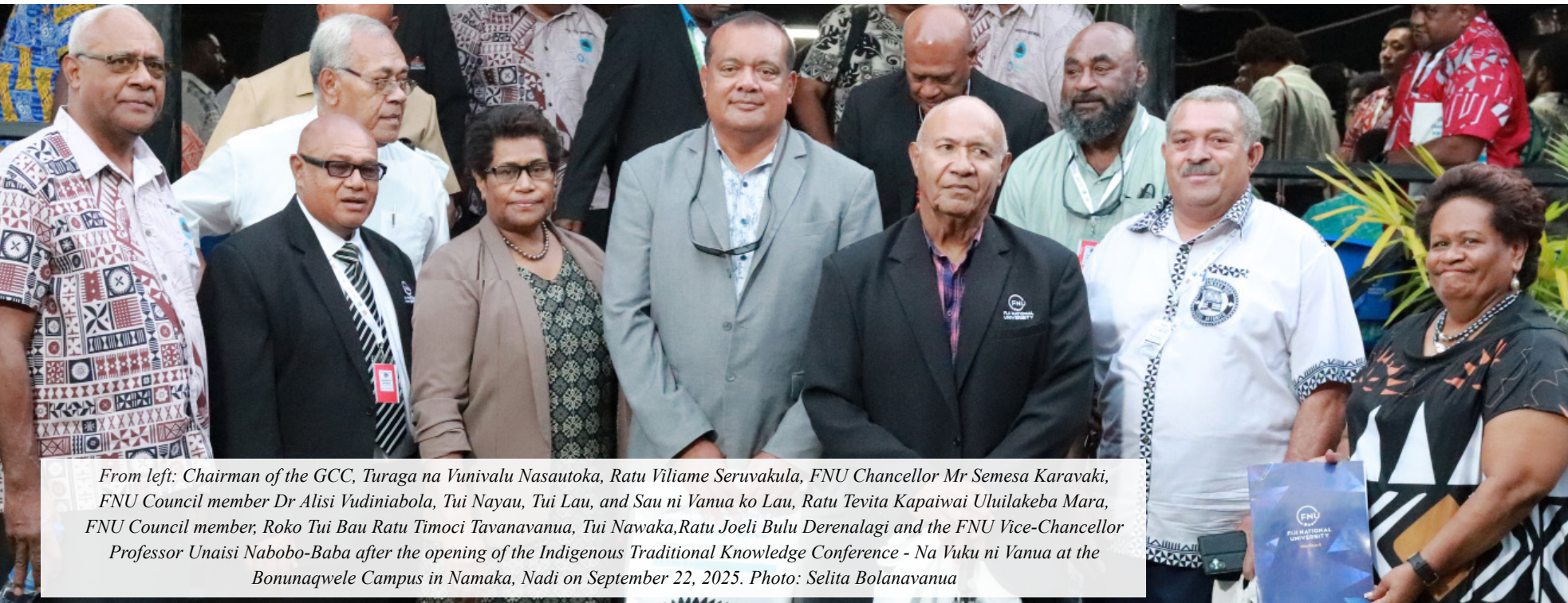


Celebrating our Past, Present & Future

Vanua Leaders Take Centre Stage at Conference

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) - *Na Vuku ni Vanua*



From left: Chairman of the GCC, Turaga na Vunivalu Nasautoka, Ratu Viliame Seruvakula, FNU Chancellor Mr Semesa Karavaki, FNU Council member Dr Alisi Vudiniabola, Tui Nayau, Tui Lau, and Sau ni Vanua ko Lau, Ratu Tevita Kapaiwai Uhuilakeba Mara, FNU Council member, Roko Tui Bau Ratu Timoci Tavanavanua, Tui Nawaka, Ratu Joeli Bulu Derenalagi and the FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba after the opening of the Indigenous Traditional Knowledge Conference - *Na Vuku ni Vanua* at the Bonunaqwele Campus in Namaka, Nadi on September 22, 2025. Photo: Selita Bolanavanua

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By **SELITA BOLANAVANUA**

A group of 28 aspiring chiefs and traditional leaders took centre stage at Fiji's first-ever Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge (ITK) Conference, *Na Vuku ni Vanua*, which concluded this week after four days of dialogue, cultural exchange, and policy-building.

The participants are enrolled in the Vanua Leadership Diploma Course, a joint initiative of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and the Fiji National University (FNU).

The programme is the first of its kind in Fiji, the first time an institute has formally undertaken the responsibility of training chiefs and upcoming leaders to guide their *vanua* with wisdom, cultural pride, and resilience.

Chairman of the GCC, *Turaga na Vunivalu Nasautoka*, Ratu Viliame Seruvakula, said their participation in the conference was both symbolic and significant.

"To the members of the course, your participation in this conference is an important part of your development to better understand the need to protect our language and culture."

He also delivered a stirring keynote address that resonated with all participants: "Our languages are not dying, they are

waiting. Waiting to be spoken in classrooms, sung in lullabies, and written into the curriculum of every school across the Pacific. But before we take this beyond our shores, we must teach our children not just how to succeed in the world, but how to know who they are.

"We must tell our stories, not as folklore, but as foundational knowledge.

"To be iTaukei is not a label, it is a legacy. And our education systems must reflect that legacy with pride."

'The world needs our knowledge'

The conference, a partnership between FNU, the Pacific Community (SPC), and the World Bank and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs gathered traditional leaders, academics, policymakers, artists, and community representatives from across the Pacific.

Together they explored how Indigenous knowledge can inform education systems, shape climate action, and strengthen cultural resilience.

FNU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, reminded participants that traditional knowledge is inseparable from the land, people, and leadership that sustain it.

"What is traditional knowledge without the *vanua* that sustains it, without the leaders who carry it, and without the space

to pass it on? We look to all leaderships today for Indigenous people to resuscitate and carry their traditional knowledge to the future. It's not just for us, it's for the world. The world needs our knowledges."

SPC's Team Leader for Culture for Development, Professor Frances Koya Vaka'uta, echoed this sentiment and stressed the role of culture in resilience-building.

"Culture must be a critical priority for resilience and sustainable development in Fiji and the wider Pacific. We need to harness the positive expressions of culture and enrich our Indigenous and cultural communities so they may not only survive but thrive in an increasingly complex and challenging environment."

The four-day programme featured keynote addresses, panels, exhibitions of traditional arts, and *Veitalanoa* (collective dialogue).

The conference concluded with a strong call for governments and development partners to embed Indigenous and traditional knowledge into education, climate planning, and cultural preservation.

For the 28 young leaders, the conference was more than an academic exercise, it was a rite of passage.

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FNU Hosts First-Ever Internship Job Fair for Hospitality and Tourism Students



Team Radisson at the CBHTS Internship Fair. **Photo:** Navinesh Kumar

By Navinesh Kumar

The Fiji National University (FNU) made history by hosting its first-ever Internship Job Fair for students at the College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS).

Held at the Namaka Campus on 29 August, the Fair brought together 57 final-year students from the Hospitality, Culinary Arts, and Baking & Patisserie programmes, including students who travelled from the Nasese Campus in Suva. They met with 19 industry partners representing over 30 hotels, resorts, and organisations.

The Fair offered students a chance to participate in speed interviews, one-on-one sessions, and networking opportunities while gaining invaluable exposure to the professional recruitment process. Employers praised the calibre of FNU students, highlighting their confidence, passion, and readiness for the workforce.

Behind the buzz and busy interview rooms were powerful human stories of determination, hope, and achievement.

Fellisa's First Step into the Industry with Big Dreams

For Fellisa Marafono, originally from Rotuma, the Internship Job Fair was more than just an event, it was the start of her professional journey.

A final-year Diploma in Hospitality & Hotel Management student, Fellisa admitted she was both nervous and excited. "I believe in myself. I'm passionate and confident, and I feel so blessed that this is the first time such an opportunity is being presented to us," she said.

This was Fellisa's first-ever job interview, and it gave her a taste of what to expect as she prepares to enter the hospitality industry. Her advice to her peers? "If you fail, get up and never give up."

Her story symbolises the resilience and determination of FNU students eager to contribute to Fiji's thriving tourism sector.

Confidence Pays Off for Shahil at Internship Fair

For Mohammed Shahil Shameer, a Bachelor of Hospitality & Hotel Management student at FNU's Namaka Campus, the Internship Job Fair was a turning point.

After confidently presenting himself to industry employers, Shahil walked away with more than just advice, he was offered a job opportunity. His vibrant personality and openness made him stand out from the crowd.

"I'm really excited about the job opportunity presented to me after the interviews. It was great to connect with professionals and strengthen my networks further. I'm very proud to have been offered this opportunity," he said.

For Shahil, the Fair was not just about employment but also about building networks and gaining confidence, two traits that will carry him forward in his career.

How Industry and Students Connect at FNU

Employers also praised the Internship Fair as a milestone event that strengthens the bridge between academia and industry.

Vasiti Waqaniburotu, Cluster Training Manager at Hilton Fiji Resort & Spa/DoubleTree by Hilton, said: "We have always partnered with industry to create a pathway for students to secure meaningful jobs. For us, the main criteria in selecting candidates are attitude and passion for tourism and hospitality. Once onboard, our students embark on a 90-day training journey through our learning and development platform. At Hilton, we believe no one should be left behind."

Janet Vakalutukali, Learning & Development Manager at InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa, added: "In my 11 years of hospitality experience, this is the first time I've seen such a Fair take place. I'm very impressed with how well FNU has organised this important event. At IHG, we have many opportunities to develop local talent, and this Fair makes recruitment easier, especially when identifying the right attributes we're looking for."



Team Sofitel at the CBHTS Internship Fair
Photo: Navinesh Kumar



CBHTS Seini Vueti at the internship fair
Photo: Navinesh Kumar

A Connected Pacific through NCIT 2025



Participants-of-the-6th-National-Conference-on-Information-Technology. **Photo:** Adi Elenoa Cagi

By **CHRISTAL KAPOOR**

At Warwick Fiji, against the backdrop of waves crashing on the Coral Coast, the 6th National Conference on Information Technology (NCIT) brought together visionaries, leaders, and dreamers determined to reimagine the Pacific’s digital future.

With the theme “Leveraging Digital Transformation to Innovate the Business Landscape for a Connected Pacific”, the gathering was not just about IT systems and strategy. It was about people, their stories, their struggles, their futures.

Pro Vice-Chancellor TVET & NTPC, Dr Isimeli Tagicakiverata, reminded participants that digital change is already happening in the Pacific:

“Digital transformation is not a distant aspiration—it is a reality we are already building. Together, we can ensure the Pacific remains connected, resilient, and empowered,” he said.

Dr Tagicakiverata celebrated FNU’s leadership, from expanding TVET Pasifika programmes into Rotuma, Nauru, and the Marshall Islands, to hosting the first-

ever STEMtastic Young Pacific Leaders Symposium. He also challenged the region to bring more women into IT, insisting that inclusivity is the key to innovation.

Officially opening the conference, Honourable Siromi Turaga, Acting Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, spoke with heartfelt conviction.

“This is where knowledge meets policy. This is where real transformation begins,” he told delegates.

For him, technology is not abstract, it is already transforming lives. He spoke of a student in Gau now able to attend classes online, a grandmother in Bua sending money through her phone for the first time, and a small shop owner in Labasa selling handicrafts to customers overseas.

“These are the lives touched when we talk about digital progress. They are the reason this conference truly matters,” Turaga said.

Over two days, participants will explore how AI, e-commerce, cyber resilience, Green ICT, and disruptive technologies can serve Pacific realities. Yet the deeper message was clear: technology must be guided by values of good governance, inclusivity, and sustainability.

As Turaga concluded:

“Digital transformation is not about technology for its own sake. It is about a young person finding a job online. It is about parents dreaming of bigger futures for their children.”

NCIT 2025 was a reminder that the Pacific is not waiting for the world to lead. It is ready to shape its own digital destiny—with heart, courage, and vision.



L to R: NTPC Director Industry Training, Salaseini Ligamamada, Acting AG, Honourable Siromi Turaga, Head of Training, Department of IT Praneel Chand and PVC TVET Dr Isimeli Tagicakiverata. **Photo:** Adi Elenoa Cagi

Reviving Pacific Heritage through Digital Storytelling



Theresa Tupuola at the Pacific Kids Learning booth. **Photo:** Adi Elenoa Cagi

By **CHRISTAL KAPOOR**

Pacific folklore, stories, dances, and songs are among the most endangered cultural treasures in the world today, increasingly overshadowed by the rising influence of Western cultures brought about by globalisation and rapid technological advancement.

In response, three Pacific Island mothers have combined intergenerational storytelling with innovative technology to produce authentic, engaging animations that help young people reconnect with their cultural heritage.

One of them, Theresa Tupuola, co-founder and Education Director of Pacific Kids’ Learning, home to the Pacific Digital Library, attended and presented at the recent STEMtastic Adventures Symposium with Young Pacific Leaders hosted at the Fiji National University’s Namaka Campus.

Tupuola explained that the Pacific Digital Library is more than a digital archive—it is a living, evolving platform powered by Pacific communities, telling stories through professional 2D, 3D, and VR animations.

“Pacific Kids’ Learning is a mother-founded, Pasifika-led social enterprise. We create animations for children and, last year, we launched the Pacific Digital Library. We currently have around 300 cartoons and animations available in 12 Pacific languages,” she said.

“As mothers, we want to ensure that our children are nurtured through storytelling, which is such an important part of how we grow up. We also want them

to remain connected to the wisdom and knowledge embedded in our stories.”

The library contains stories, songs, dances, and animations because, as Tupuola explained, Pacific people share knowledge not only through words but also through movement and song.

“Animating our stories makes them highly engaging for children in schools and also for the wider Pasifika community,” she added.

Although Pacific Kids’ Learning was founded by three women, Tupuola highlighted that the initiative has since expanded to include a growing team of Pacific creatives.

“We have a creative team working tirelessly behind the scenes—artists from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and across the Pacific. We are also creating pathways into STEM, especially for those interested in creative technology.”

Reflecting on the symposium, Tupuola said the experience far exceeded her expectations.

“We’ve really enjoyed the conference—the people, the collective energy over the three days. We’ve learnt so much, not only through the workshops but also in the lunchtime conversations and the talanoa during breaks.

“These unstructured conversations are happening because the people here are deeply passionate about their work. They are organically sparking new ideas, collaborations, and ways of supporting one another.”

Pacific Kids’ Learning and the Pacific Digital Library can be explored at www.pacifickidslearning.com.

E-Book Marks FSM's 140-Year Journey

By Wati Talebula

The *Fiji School of Medicine 140th Anniversary Memorial E-Book*, a legacy project capturing milestones, leadership, and alumni contributions, was launched during the 140th Anniversary Ball held on 12 September.

The Chief Guest, Minister for Health and Medical Services, Honourable Dr Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, reflected on the challenges faced by generations of FSM students and the enduring values that continue to guide graduates today.

“This e-book is a valuable record that will inspire current and future generations of medical students, health professionals, educators, and researchers,” Honourable Dr Ratu Lalabalavu said.

“Student life was never easy, but it was in those years that we discovered our purpose. We learned that medicine and health sciences are not merely professions, but callings—callings that require sacrifice, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to serve our people and our region. The Fiji School of Medicine, now CMNHS, gave us more than academic knowledge; it gave us values—discipline, humility, respect, and above all, service.

“As we celebrate 140 years, let us not only honour the history of this great institution but also look to the future with hope and pride. May the next generations of students carry forward the legacy we were privileged to be part of.”

Acting Dean of CMNHS, Dr Amelia Turagabeci, described the anniversary as both a celebration and a challenge to do more.

“This history is not simply about an institution; it is about lives saved, communities healed, and futures transformed through the dedication of



Minister for Health and Medical Services Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, The Hot Bread Kitchen Managing Director Vanessa Charters, Profesor Eddie McCaig, Dr William May and Dean CMNHS Dr Amelia Turagabeci

those who studied and taught here,” Dr Turagabeci said.

“Our alumni embody the true spirit of service and leadership, carrying their skills and compassion into hospitals, clinics, and public health systems across the region. The next 140 years must be marked by even greater achievements, stronger innovations, and a lasting impact on our communities.”

Keynote speaker Ahorangi Sir Professor Collin Tukuitonga highlighted FSM’s legacy of regional service and global influence.

“From a handful of graduates to thousands of accomplished professionals serving across the Pacific and beyond, FSM alumni embody diversity, resilience, and excellence,” Ahorangi Sir Professor Tukuitonga said.

“This Ball is a celebration of public health leaders and their contributions from islands to urban centres. It comes from, but on the boundaries of, our region.

He added that CMNHS is a hub of innovation in health education, communicable diseases, digital learning, and global health.

The evening closed with a reflection by staff, and students reflected on their commitment to shaping the future of health.

FNU Students Explore Healthcare S

By Wati Talebula

A group of Bachelor of Health Services Management (BHSM) students from the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences recently returned from a one-week study visit to Griffith University (GU) in Queensland, Australia, where they gained invaluable insights into health system management and leadership.

The students described their first impressions of Griffith University as “welcoming, vibrant, and multicultural,” commending its modern facilities and tranquil campus environment.

Throughout the visit, they participated in lectures, discussions, and practical observations at hospitals and aged-care institutions, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world healthcare management.

The immersive experience enabled them to explore operational management, patient flow, and interdepartmental coordination, offering a deeper understanding of healthcare systems within a developed context.

“Observing the management and patient-centred design of facilities such as Queensland Children’s Hospital was eye-opening,” said Zobia Nuzhat Nur.

“It highlighted the role of the environment in patient care and recovery. Similarly, seeing how aged-care institutions balance public and private funding gave us ideas for improving services in Fiji,” added Elina Rokovono.

The students also observed key differences between Fiji’s and Australia’s health systems, particularly in funding models, infrastructure, and resource distribution. Australia’s universal public healthcare system, Medicare, operates alongside a strong private sector, offering a range of services and funding options – in sharp contrast to the challenges Fiji faces in

resource allocation and specialised service delivery.

Highlights of the trip included a breakfast forum with the Queensland Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Mr Tim Nicholls, and collaborative sessions with Griffith University’s Master of Health Services Management (MHSM) students.

Guest lectures, featuring real-world case studies, inspired the students to critically examine healthcare leadership and management practices.

Dr Ledua Tamani, Associate Professor in Health Services Management, and Mrs Shiva Singh, Lecturer in HSM, emphasised that the visit reinforced the importance of international exposure in developing leadership, governance, and healthcare delivery competencies.

The trip also strengthened institutional partnerships, marked by the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between FNU and Griffith University, and created opportunities for curriculum development, academic exchanges, joint research, and postgraduate supervision.

“The primary objective was to provide students with structured international exposure, benchmark FNU’s curriculum against global standards, and inspire them to become future leaders in healthcare,” said Dr Tamani.

The students returned motivated to pursue postgraduate studies, enhance their leadership skills, and contribute to the advancement of Fiji’s healthcare system. They unanimously recommended such international study visits for other students, emphasising the value of practical, real-world experiences that complement classroom learning.

Building on the success of this initiative, there are plans to continue and expand study visits for BHSM students, offering exposure to diverse health system models and equipping graduates for leadership roles in both local and global healthcare settings.



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tion of that reach—from doctors and nurses to educators uplifting communities from remote is a moment to reflect not only on where we have endless horizons ahead.”
S continues to strengthen its position as a hub education, citing advances in research on non-community health initiatives, policy leadership, partnerships.
a profound sense of pride and purpose, as alumni, d on FSM’s enduring impact and reaffirmed their althier futures for Fiji and the Pacific.

Systems



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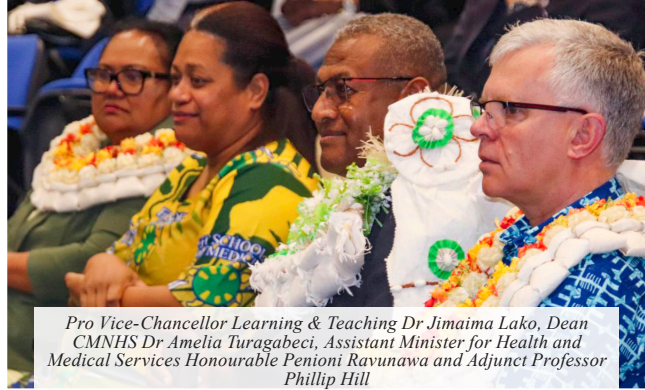
Researchers Gather in Fiji to Advance Pacific Health



Watershed Interventions for Systems Health (WISH) Team during the 2025 Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium



2025 Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium



Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning & Teaching Dr Jimaima Lako, Dean CMNHS Dr Amelia Turagabeci, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services Honourable Penioni Ravunawa and Adjunct Professor Phillip Hill

By Wati Talebula

The Fiji National University (FNU) Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, Associate Professor Jimaima Lako, reminded participants at the Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium (PIHRS) that the event should be more than an exchange of data.

This year’s symposium theme is “Celebrating Research Excellence in the Pacific.”

Associate Professor Lako encouraged participants to ensure that the networks formed, and ideas shared at the symposium translate into tangible actions to improve the health and wellbeing of communities across generations.

“These conversations are not just academic; they are about shaping policies, guiding practice, and preparing our region for the challenges and opportunities ahead. I wish to extend special recognition to our partners—the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, regional organisations, technical agencies, and our academic collaborators in Australia, New Zealand, and beyond. Your support, alongside the tireless efforts of our organising committee, makes this symposium possible,” Dr Lako said.

Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services, Honourable Penioni Ravunawa, said the timing of the symposium was fitting as Fiji and the Pacific continue to face ongoing, re-emerging, and new health challenges.

“This year’s theme promises to showcase not only the existing high-calibre research expertise but also the new generation of researchers who are being nurtured and mentored to become health research leaders for Fiji and the region,” Honourable Ravunawa said.

“There is a need to increase the volume of health research and expertise as we reconsider our performance as individual countries and as a region in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 3—Good Health and Wellbeing. Our collective national and regional performance can, and must, be improved.”

Adjunct Professor Phillip Hill of the CMNHS Communicable Diseases Research Centre said FNU’s research initiatives are beginning to show significant results.

“This year’s theme is very timely because research initiatives that FNU has taken across its institutions are starting to bear fruit,” Professor Hill said.

“Without recognition and investment in Pacific researchers,

research—whatever the field or discipline—will always be driven and dominated by outsiders. Outsiders should not be excluded but rather guided by Pacific relationality that builds trust and mutual respect.”

Head of the School of Health Sciences, Assistant Professor Raymond Keshwan, said the symposium has evolved significantly, both in organisation and in the relevance of topics discussed.

“There has been a big change in the scientific work that we are doing. We are talking about the Pacific and facing Pacific realities. And if we have the problems, then obviously we need to be leaders in solving those problems,” he said.

He added that while technical discussions were important, the symposium also emphasised the need to address fundamental issues.

“At the crux of it all, we are still struggling with basic infrastructure and the need to improve at the ground level if we want to start making real changes,” he noted.

Assistant Professor Keshwan praised PIHRS as an important platform for knowledge-sharing.

Among the participants was Dr Jauncy Robert Hakwa from Vanuatu, who attended PIHRS for the first time. He said the experience exceeded his expectations.

“I didn’t know what to expect, but I don’t regret coming to Fiji to attend the symposium. I’ve learned a lot. The session I enjoyed most was Dr Joseph Kado’s talk on rheumatic heart disease. I find it relevant to my setting and to my village, because we have children with rheumatic heart disease. It will certainly influence how I practise medicine,” Dr Hakwa said.

He added that the concise format of the presentations kept the sessions engaging and impactful.

Dr Hakwa said he hopes to attend future symposiums and would encourage colleagues from Vanuatu and across the Pacific to do the same.

PIHRS is an annual conference of Pacific health researchers, providing a platform to present their research on health issues and challenges facing the region. It was first launched in 2011 to enable staff and students to showcase their work.

This year’s symposium featured more than 90 presentations and five major panel discussions on issues of critical importance to the Pacific, including HIV and communicable diseases, antimicrobial resistance, planetary health, non-communicable diseases, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and the strengthening of health systems.

From Farm to Film

By Romeka Kumari

Iosefo Narova Biroki’s journey back to university has been nothing short of inspiring, as he pursues his passion for film and television after a decade away from formal education.

His remarkable story gained recognition when his short film *Lutunasobasoba* was screened at Damodar Cinemas—one of only five films from the Fiji National University (FNU) ever to achieve this milestone.

Originally from Vakativa, Cakaudrove in Savusavu, Biroki first enrolled in software engineering at the University of the South Pacific in 2014. However, financial challenges forced him to withdraw before completing his studies.

After ten years of working as a farmer, he made the bold decision to return to education and this year enrolled in a Certificate in Film and Television (Level IV) at FNU.

His passion for the craft was ignited while farming, inspired by production crews he observed working on popular series such as *Love Island* and *Survivor*.

“I saw the work carried out by the crews of *Love Island* and *Survivor*, and I felt that it was my calling,” Biroki said.

“I was fortunate to be involved in the production of both series, assisting behind the scenes, which further convinced me of my potential as a producer.”

Biroki’s journey took a significant turn when he attended a masterclass led by renowned South African filmmaker



Iosefo Narova Biroki while shooting his short film titled “*Lutunasobasoba*”. **Photo:** Romeka Kumari

Uga Carlini at FNU in December last year.

“The masterclass was incredible, it allowed me to act in different roles,” he shared. “Although the short rehearsal

time was challenging, Uga helped us bring out the best in ourselves.”

Earlier this year, Biroki and his classmates produced six short films, five of which were selected as finalists for screening at Damodar Cinemas, following their success at the Suva International Film Festival.

“At first, I thought our films were just assignments,” he recalled.

“But our coordinator, Ms Maneesha, guided us through scriptwriting and production, making us realise the potential of our work.”

Biroki’s short film, inspired by *Lutunasobasoba*, a legendary ancestor of the itaukei people — aims to educate children about their cultural heritage.

“In this digital era, few children read about our ancestors,” he explained. “I wanted to create a film that children can watch and learn from.”

He also relates his personal journey of perseverance, from years on the farm to returning to university, to the story of *Lutunasobasoba*’s voyage.

Currently working on a Hallmark movie being filmed in Deuba, Navua, Biroki is relishing the opportunity to learn all aspects of production.

“Fiji’s film industry is still developing and now is a great time to start producing movies,” he said.

Loss and Damage Symposium Concludes with Call for Action in Vunisavisavi Village



2025 Loss and Damage Sympossium participants at Vunisavisavi Village.



Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education Mr Navin Raj at Vunisavisavi Village.

By Selita Bolanavanua

The Fiji National University (FNU), in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) and Monash University, last week concluded its Loss and Damage Symposium with a powerful reminder of what is at stake for Pacific communities on the frontlines of climate change.

More than 150 participants from across the region and the globe gathered in Suva for the week-long event, which ended with a field visit to Vunisavisavi Village in Cakaudrove—one of many coastal communities in Fiji already experiencing the harsh realities of rising sea levels.

When high tides coincide with heavy rain, seawater flows directly into the village. Despite attempts to build sandbag sea walls, waves continue to break through, eroding homes and threatening livelihoods. For participants, walking through the village was a poignant experience—a human story of resilience in the face of a crisis that is no longer abstract but lived daily.

During the visit, participants joined villagers in planting mangroves, a natural defence against coastal erosion, and carried out community-based studies to better understand local adaptation practices.

FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba emphasised the urgency of collective action:

“Our islands resist their future under water, and our people persist to survive the impacts of climate change. At FNU, we are committed to strengthening partnerships on loss and damage, and to finding solutions together.”

Professor Paul Dargush of Monash University reflected on the symposium’s success in bringing diverse voices together:

“We had people here from many countries in the Pacific, alongside regional organisations like SPC and SPREP, as well as global partners. There were cutting-edge presentations, including Dr Chris Bartlett’s award-winning work on accessing loss and damage funding. The symposium was a resounding success in the way it brought

people together, shared knowledge, and strengthened collaboration.”

Permanent Secretary for Education, Mr Navin Raj, reminded participants that action must go beyond dialogue:

“This symposium really highlights the urgent need for collective action on climate change. It’s one thing to discuss the consequences, but the real impact comes when we all come together, share knowledge, and take tangible steps in our communities. Let’s turn these conversations into action.”

The symposium reinforced the need to weave together scientific research, traditional knowledge, and community experience into practical responses. For the people of Vunisavisavi—and countless other coastal communities across the Pacific—the impacts of climate change are not a distant threat but an immediate reality.

Through partnerships between institutions such as FNU, SPC, and Monash University, the Pacific is sending a clear message to the world: the time for climate action is now.



Loss and Damage Symposium participants planting mangroves at Vunisavisavi Village

Tamani Seeks Discipline through Vanua Leadership Programme



By Romeka Kumari

At just 21 years old, Rupeni Vesukuru Tamani is confident the Vanua Leadership programme will help him develop discipline and leadership qualities.

As the youngest of the 30 participants, Tamani hails from Tavia village in Levuka, Lomaiviti Province, and is eager to embrace the responsibilities that come with his chiefly background.

“I am here to learn discipline and how I can practice it in the future because discipline is the most important thing in life,” Tamani explained.

“If a person from a chiefly background is disciplined, he will be able to make the right decisions without depending on anyone.”

“I also want to improve my leadership qualities because we are the custodians of the iTaukei cultural heritage and agents of change for our communities.”

Tamani, whose father is the current chief of Tavia village, sees the programme as an

opportunity to empowering the indigenous Fijian community and reinforce the vital role of chiefs in the country.

“I am confident this programme will equip me with necessary traditional skills and knowledge to enhance the chiefly role while preserving the cultural, social, and spiritual values that are central to the indigenous Fijian way of life,” he said.

The former Saint John’s College student expressed concern about the declining connection between traditional practices and modern life, especially among younger generations.

“We are living in a digital age, and many young people are disconnected from our traditional and cultural practices,” he said.

“Children are more influenced by Western lifestyles, often forgetting their roots. This course is vital for reconnecting us with our heritage.”

Tamani believes that through this programme, he will be able to adapt and thrive in a changing world while maintaining the integrity of his culture.

Vanua Leadership Programme: A Hope for Social Change

By Romeka Kumari

Joji Koroilagilagi Kabakoro believes the newly launched Vanua Leadership Programme holds the key to addressing Fiji’s pressing social issues.

The 69-year-old from Naweni Village in Savusavu, Cakaudrove, is the oldest participant in the initiative currently underway at Nadave.

“My father was the Tui Naweni, and after his passing, the title was passed on to my older brother, the current Tui Naweni,” Kabakoro shared.

“Coming from a chiefly background, I believe it is vital to learn and preserve our traditions and cultures, which can help us solve the growing social problems we face today.”

After spending 24 years working in a factory in Australia, Kabakoro has returned to his village where he now farms. He is eager to develop skills in conflict resolution.

“There’s a lot of violence, criminal activity, and drug abuse affecting our communities,” he said.

“I believe traditional ways can provide solutions, and I want to be part of that change.”

Since the programme began, he has gained insights into the history, customs, and spiritual practices of Fijian chiefs.

“This course is an eye-opener. It’s helping me understand how our traditions can be used to bring peace and stability to our society,” he reflected.

Kabakoro also emphasised the value of formal recognition.

“Until now, I had no recognised qualification. Once I complete this programme, I will receive a certificate that confirms my skills and knowledge. It’s a step forward for me and my community.”



69-year-old Joji Koroilagilagi Kabakoro is the oldest participant in the programme.

Joji Balances Books & Boots

By Selita Bolanavanua

At Naduna Campus in Labasa, every student carries a story. Some are about survival, others about sacrifice, but all reflect the determination shaping the next generation of leaders.

Among these stories is that of Joji Civoniceva, a young man from Salia, Tunuloa, with maternal links to Buca, Natewa, Cakaudrove. His journey blends education, passion, and service, a path that is sure to inspire many.

Joji is in his final year of a Bachelor of Education (Primary), but his story does not end with academics. Beyond the lecture halls, Joji has pursued another passion: rugby. Not as a player, but as a referee.

Through dedication, he has worked his way up to become a Level 2 rugby referee, earning the honour of officiating at the prestigious Coca-Cola Deans Trophy, Fiji's largest secondary school rugby competition.

Standing in the middle of the field, with thousands of

eyes upon him, Joji represents more than rules and whistles. He embodies discipline, leadership, and fairness, values that mirror his own personal journey.

The Labasa Campus community takes pride in seeing one of their own balance the rigours of study with the pressures of national-level rugby refereeing.

For Joji, education is more than just a degree. It is about building character and resilience — qualities he applies both in the classroom and on the rugby field.

His message to fellow students is simple yet powerful:

“Never give up on your studies. Do not set aside your passions. Instead, learn to balance them — that is how you discover your unique path.”

As Joji prepares to step into the classroom as a teacher, he also carries forward his role as a rugby referee. In both arenas, he will continue to inspire — teaching children in school and modelling teamwork and discipline on the rugby field.



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NASINU CAMPUS **02 - 04**
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NADUNA CAMPUS **02 - 03**
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NAMAKA CAMPUS **03**
October 2025

NATABUA CAMPUS **03**
October 2025

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HEAR FROM YOU

INSIDE FNU welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj

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