

FNU hosts Small to Medium Enterprise Forum

Small to Medium Enterprise (SMEs) operators play a pivotal role in creating employment and contributes towards national economic growth.

Speaking at a recent forum organised for the SME operators, the Fiji National University (FNU), Head of Department Economics and Customs, Dr Asaeli Tuibeqa said SME policy makers and support providers need a thorough understanding of the business environment if the SME sector is going to make valuable contribution towards fueling Fiji's economic progress.

"In present day, establishment of a SME is very important, since they involve in job creation. Globally, entrepreneurship have been associated with job creation, poverty alleviation, better utilization of resources and economic development," said Dr Tuibeqa.



Chief guest, Josua Mateiwai, Business Advisor, Market Development Facility (MDF).

The forum which was held at FNU's Namaka Campus, Nadi was FNU's College of Business Hospitality and Tourism Studies' (CBHTS) response to requests from SMEs in the western division needing guidance in terms of source of funding, where to get business advice, who are the local service providers, what is available in the market, how can SMEs access grants, building networks, mentoring and business management.

"It was evident that more industry consultations and information sessions are required to support SMEs in the face of changing business conditions. As such, CBHTS via the School of Management and School of Hotel and Catering agreed to take the lead role given its status as a learning and teaching institution and provide information on SME support services and assistance programs," he said.

The senior academic highlighted that SME's has the potential to grow, if they adequately supported with appropriate policies, assistance programs and support services.

Chief guest, Josua Mateiwai, Business Advisor, Market Development Facility (MDF) emphasized that SME's need to re-focus on the management of their enterprise to be successful.

"Most small business owners spend a lot of time at the bottom of the ship which is the engine room handling operations rather than standing on the bridge steering the ship safely to reach its' destination as a manager or owner," he said.

Early Child Hood Teacher at Nasekula District School, Asenaca Raogo who travelled all the way from Labasa was thankful to FNU for organising the SME forum, which allowed her to learn and network with experts in the field of SME's.

"I braved the bad weather and travelled via boat to attend the forum and I'm happy my paid dividends are paid, as I was able to link with the Ministry of Agriculture and MDF and get the much needed support and advice," said the budding livestock farmer.

Following the panel discussion participants had an opportunity to have a one-one sessions with Dr Tuibeqa who has over 30 years of experience in small business and entrepreneurship.

"The one-one session was an excellent follow up to the panel discussion and topics covered in the one-one sessions included cash flow, marketing, access to finance, competition, tax compliance, upgrading skills, licensing among others," said Dr Tuibeqa.

The forum had representatives from National Centre for Small and Micro Enterprise Development (NCSMED), Ministry of Agriculture and the Australian sponsored Market Development Facility (MDF).

Plans are now underway to have another panel discussion in Nadi and a similar one for SME's in Suva.



Participants at the SME forum at FNU Namaka.