



GWF President, Charlotte Taylor (fourth from left) and FNU Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor James Pounder with the staff of GWF and FNU.

## FNU inks partnership with GWF to encourage young girls to pursue STEM subjects

**A**t a time when technology is transforming the way we live, work and learn, the need to close the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) gender gap is more critical and it is more so for the Pacific Island countries says Graduate Women Fiji (GWF) President, Charlotte Taylor.

Speaking at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony between Fiji National University (FNU) and GWF last week, Taylor said the main barrier in Pacific Island countries is culture, where STEM is perceived as a male-dominated field.

According to Taylor, GWF aims to challenge the status quo by encouraging more women and girls to accept that if they have a passion for STEM then, by all means, they should pursue it.

“As women are dramatically underrepresented across all STEM studies and careers, the question that arises is how do we make strides to close these gender gaps and fuel the next generation of innovators,” said Taylor.

“Our goal is to ensure that STEM becomes a gender-neutral area so we no longer use the phrase male-dominated field, career or even male-dominated subjects,” said Taylor.

Taylor also called on the tertiary institutions to ensure women and girls from the marginalised sectors were empowered and encouraged to take up STEM subjects. She said it was important to customize the approaches while empowering this sector.

She acknowledged FNU for being actively involved in promoting STEM subjects and careers to women and girls from as young as those in primary schools.

“We are excited to partner with FNU and we would like to thank the University for this agreement with us.”

“GWF cannot achieve its vision alone, we need as many partners as possible and to partner with FNU, that has a wide outreach with campuses located in every part of Fiji, will certainly be fruitful in enabling this vision to be realised,” Taylor added.

FNU Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor James Pounder said the MoU commits the two organisations to work together more closely towards their common goal – to build up the confidence of girls in Fiji such that they feel able to exercise their skills, knowledge, capabilities, and aspirations in order to pursue studies and careers in the STEM field, a field where girls continue to lack confidence and, consequently, representation.

“Through this Memorandum of Understanding FNU will provide support to GWF to facilitate activities such as hosting future science camps, promoting STEM programmes during events at FNU, and allowing lecturers, staff and students to attend STEM Camp training days and STEM and Coding Camps,” said Prof Pounder.

“I commend GWF for embarking on this journey with FNU to break gender barriers and transform stereotypical perceptions, values, culture and traditions in Fiji with regards to girls’ competence in the STEM field.”

“I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that FNU will do whatever it can in order to provide successful implementation of this MoU,” Prof Pounder added.