

Barry Whiteside: Financial literacy

Speaking notes for Mr Barry Whiteside, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, at the Launch of the Financial Literacy Mascot, Suva, 19 August 2011.

* * *

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, members of the media and fellow staff of the Bank, Tomorrow marks the opening of the Hibiscus festival, and the beginning of the school holidays for our students and teachers around Fiji. An enjoyable time for many!

This Saturday at the RBF Hibiscus Microfinance Village, the official mascot for financial literacy will be making his debut in Suva. We have invited you here this afternoon to get a sneak preview, and to seek your support for a very important initiative that is aimed at lifting financial literacy levels in our communities in Fiji.

Financial literacy, ladies and gentlemen, is a life skill that is needed by everyone – some of us may be better at it than others. Financial literacy is the ability and understanding that we all need so that we make the best decisions when it comes to managing our money. We believe that if everyone has access to some form of financial education, they are more likely to make better financial choices.

Developing this a little further, we need to share and talk more often with our children, our families and friends and get a better understanding of the little things we can do to improve our own money management skills. These include such things as planning and budgeting, saving and investing for the medium and longer term, retirement planning and last, but by no means the least, managing our debts.

This year the Financial Literacy Working Group has once again taken the opportunity to raise public awareness on the importance and need for financial literacy for all our people. The Financial Literacy Working Group, ladies and gentlemen, is one of three Working Groups that report to the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce. These Groups, working under the banner of the Taskforce, are made up of representatives from the public and private sectors, NGOs and various donor agencies. They represent stakeholders working in partnership to ensure that everyone in Fiji has access to appropriate financial services and products that they need.

Coming back to the Financial Literacy Working Group, I must say they are all a passionate lot, ably led by Mr. Narasimhan Krishnan. The Group has been tasked with three important goals over the next few years. These are:

1. *To develop a National Strategy towards financial literacy* – This would first require a stock-take and assessment of current financial literacy programs out there and includes a national financial literacy survey;
2. *To develop and implement a financial education curriculum to be offered in all schools at both the primary and secondary levels; and*
3. *To develop financial competencies at the household level.*

I am pleased to say that significant progress is being made in all three areas and I am quite sure that we are on target towards achieving these goals.

May I add, ladies and gentlemen, that these goals form part the Money Pacific 2020 goals which were agreed by Pacific Island leaders and Central Bank Governors back in November 2009.

It is not an easy task, but it has been recognized that by lifting the financial capability of our communities in the region, positive spin offs are created. These often generate a greater

demand for financial services and products, create new jobs, and enable people to buy assets, grow their wealth and improve living standards.

We sincerely hope that, over time, people will really appreciate the necessity for financial literacy for all, and support these initiatives by Government, the Reserve Bank and other stakeholders, to foster greater economic development and growth in Fiji.

Ladies and gentlemen, with these remarks I have now great pleasure in introducing our Financial Literacy Mascot, “Vuli the Vonu”.

Vinaka