Case Study

Fostering Sustainable Growth and Catalyzing Women's Economic Entrepreneurship

Name of the Organization
Investment Fiji

Country
Republic of Fiji

SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

This case study highlights how Investment Fiji (IF) has integrated gender equality into its core functions of investment promotion, facilitation, and aftercare. The approach focused on three key areas: strengthening internal systems and capacity, embedding gender considerations into investor-facing processes, and supporting women entrepreneurs through increased visibility and access to opportunities.

CONTEXT & CATALYST

As a small island developing state (SIDS), Fiji operates within a unique economic environment shaped by geographic constraints, limited market size, and vulnerability to external shocks. At the same time, it holds significant potential in key sectors such as tourism, agribusiness, renewable energy, and services. These opportunities are supported by a young workforce and an increasingly strengthened policy and investment climate.

Women make important contributions across Fiji's economy, including in the informal sector, service industries, and through unpaid care work such as childcare, eldercare, and household responsibilities. This unpaid work supports the overall functioning of the economy and social systems. At the same time, many women continue to face barriers to full economic participation, including limited access to finance, underrepresentation in formal entrepreneurship, and limited participation in decision-making. Addressing these challenges is essential to realizing women's economic potential and advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

Recognizing these constraints and opportunities, Investment Fiji (IF) undertook a range of voluntary initiatives to enhance the gender-sensitivity of its investment promotion activities. These efforts aim to ensure that women are actively supported as economic actors, contributing to national development priorities and reinforcing Fiji's position as a sustainable and inclusive investment destination.

IF's initiatives can be categorized into three areas: 1) strengthening internal systems and capacity (e.g. updating HR policies and internal coordination), 2) integrating gender into investor-facing processes (e.g. aftercare surveys, data collection tools), and 3) supporting women entrepreneurs through visibility and access to opportunities (e.g. participation in trade missions and provision of targeted training).

Individual initiatives will be described in more detail in the sections that follow. IF pursued this work to enhance its institutional impact and contribute to national goals on gender equality and inclusive growth.

RELEVANT NATIONAL STRATEGIES/AGENDA

IF operates under the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, which is responsible for formulating and implementing policies and strategies to foster growth in industry, investment, trade, tourism, transport, co-operative businesses, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and to enhance metrology, standards, and consumer protection. While there is no formal whole-of-government approach to gender mainstreaming within Fiji's investment ecosystem, Investment Fiji has proactively aligned its work with national development priorities, most notably the 5-Year National Development Plan (2025–2029) and Vision 2050. These national plans emphasize the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming across all levels of development planning, sectoral policy, and public budgeting, with specific attention to supporting women-led businesses and addressing gender bias in recruitment, compensation, and workplace practices. Although IF's gender initiatives are internally driven, they complement and reinforce the direction set by these national strategies, demonstrating how a specialized agency can independently advance inclusive development through practical, gender-responsive investment promotion. Signing on to the Pledge Amongst Investment Promotion Agencies, Economic Development Boards, and Ministries of Investment to Advance Gender Equity in Foreign Direct Investment Gender and FDI further reinforced this commitment.

WHAT THEY DID

IF undertook a series of targeted initiatives to embed gender equality across its institutional functions and external engagements. Each initiative was initiated voluntarily without any formal legal requirement. These efforts can be grouped into three thematic areas: strengthening internal systems and capacity; integrating gender into investor-facing processes; and supporting women entrepreneurs through improved visibility and access to opportunities.

1. Mainstreaming gender in internal systems and capacity

In practice, gender mainstreaming within IPAs tends to take two complementary forms: one focused internally on institutional policies, systems, and staff capacity; the other directed outward, targeting service delivery and engagement with investors and other stakeholders. IF began by strengthening its internal foundation, recognizing that inclusive policies, coordinated structures, and a gender-responsive work environment not only advance equality within the organization but also enhances credibility when promoting investment that contributes to inclusivity. To operationalize this, IF launched internal initiatives, including:

- **The establishment of a cross-functional gender committee and appointed a gender focal point:** Investment Fiji formed an informal internal gender committee, initially comprising three voluntary members from different departments. The committee facilitates internal coordination on gender-related matters, raises awareness among employees, and identifies opportunities to integrate gender considerations across the agency's work. The committee shared its initial efforts with all staff and continues to operate on a voluntary basis, with regular updates submitted to the IPA's senior leadership for strategic guidance.

- **The revision of HR policies:** IF has made several updates to its HR policies as part of its commitment to fostering a more inclusive work environment. Key changes include the integration of gender equality principles into the recruitment and onboarding process. For example, all new employees now receive information on the organization's sexual harassment policy during induction, and all staff are subject to updated grievance procedures, which include confidential mechanisms for reporting misconduct. Notably, IF has introduced five days of paid paternity leave, recognizing the importance of shared caregiving responsibilities. While paternity leave was previously mandated under Section 101A of the Employment Relations Act, this entitlement has been suspended since April 2022. IF's decision to continue offering paternity leave on a voluntary basis reflects a strong institutional commitment to supporting unpaid care responsibilities, a key barrier to women's full participation in the Fijian workforce. In addition, the organization's medical benefits now explicitly include maternity care and coverage for employees' children, without requiring staff to pay additional premiums. These measures signal a growing institutional focus on gender-responsive workplace policies.

2. Integrating gender into investor-facing processes

Building on internal efforts, IF also focused on the external dimension of gender mainstreaming by targeting investor-facing processes. This external dimension allows IPAs to shape how investments contribute to gender equality goals. For IF, this meant embedding gender considerations into tools and decision-making frameworks that interact directly with investors. This approach was operationalized through the following initiatives:

- **Revision of investor aftercare surveys and site visit forms:** IF revised its investor engagement tools to systematically collect gender-disaggregated employment data. Such data was previously unavailable. Site visit templates and aftercare surveys now include fields to capture the number of male and female employees across project timelines, enabling IF to build a clearer picture of how investments impact women and men differently. This data also contributes to IF's reporting to the government on how its activities align with and support progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While there is currently no formal reporting obligation for IF, the data is used internally to support sector profiling and to inform tailored value propositions-particularly in sectors such as Business Process Outsourcing, where employment outcomes are critical. IF maintains strong relationships with investors which has enabled them to ensure high response rates to their surveys. Surveys are conducted annually, and the information collected helps identify companies relevant for recognition, promotion, or inclusion in events. The investor aftercare survey includes a dedicated section on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), asking companies to indicate how their activities contribute to all 17 goals. The survey data helps IF identify companies engaged in SDG-aligned initiatives. These companies may then be featured in IF's promotional activities and can be recommended for recognition in national platforms. For example, data from the tourism sector has supported IF in identifying and recommending businesses for recognition under the Prime Minister's International Business Awards, including the Best Sustainability Initiative Award category. In addition, IF has integrated SDG and gender-related categories into its HubSpot CRM system, which is already being used to track relevant investor data and inform strategic reporting and outreach.

3. Supporting women entrepreneurs through visibility and access

IF's investor-facing efforts are complemented by its recognition that attracting investment also involves ensuring that its benefits are shared inclusively. In Fiji, women entrepreneurs often face systemic barriers to accessing markets, networks, and investor engagement opportunities. To help address this, IF introduced targeted measures aimed at increasing the visibility of women-led businesses and strengthening their readiness to participate in trade and investment activities. IF implemented the following initiatives:

- **Commitment to showcasing women-led businesses at international events and providing a platform to women-led businesses**: IF committed to ensuring that at least two women-led businesses are included in each trade or investment mission abroad. This decision helped expand visibility and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs and sent a strong signal to investors and partners about Fiji's dedication to gender equality.

- **Development of a training manual for women entrepreneurs:** As part of its commitment to inclusive economic participation, IF collaborated with ESCAP to develop a training manual aimed at building the investor-readiness of women entrepreneurs. While designed for direct use by entrepreneurs, key elements from the manual have also been adapted into pre-event briefing materials used by IF to prepare delegations for trade and investment missions. These materials cover practical guidance such as product presentation, sample preparation, and pitching techniques, and are shared during preparatory meetings and roundtable sessions with designated delegates.

Collectively, these voluntary initiatives reflect Investment Fiji's growing institutional commitment to gender equality and inclusive development. They demonstrate how investment promotion agencies can take proactive steps to mainstream gender considerations within their operations, even in the absence of formal policy mandates.





Photo: UN Women Fiji MCO/Maryann Lockington

WHAT IS NEEDED

Implementing these initiatives required distinct resources and enabling conditions across different areas of work. While financial costs were minimal, success relied on strong internal leadership, coordinated staff efforts, and targeted external support. Senior management endorsement established gender as a strategic priority, while a cross-departmental working group oversaw implementation and accountability.

External partners such as ESCAP and the FDI Center provided technical guidance and capacity-building support, helping ensure that activities were contextually relevant and practically feasible. The following sections outline the specific conditions that enable progress in each area.

Mainstreaming gender in internal systems and capacity

- **Demonstrated leadership commitment** is essential to drive gender mainstreaming from within. When senior management champions gender equality as a strategic priority, it can create an informal institutional mandate and momentum needed to initiate action.

- **Clear roles and structured coordination mechanisms**, such as designated gender focal points or cross-departmental working groups, are useful to ensure consistency and accountability across teams and functions.

- **Adequate staff time and capacity-building** are required to embed gender considerations meaningfully. This includes basic gender awareness training and practical guidance tailored to the agency's operational context.

- Flexibility and openness to adapting internal systems, such as HR procedures, planning tools, and reporting mechanisms, enable the integration of gender considerations into existing workflows rather than treating them as add-ons.



Photo: UN Women Fiji MCO/Meraz Potoi

Integrating gender into investor-facing processes

- **Technical capacity and strategic use of data:** To integrate gender considerations into investor-facing processes, IPAs need the technical capacity to adapt tools, such as forms, surveys, and data systems, to collect gender-disaggregated data, as well as the knowledge to interpret and apply this data meaningfully. This includes the ability to analyze gender-related insights and use them to inform investor engagement, refine aftercare services, and guide sector strategies. Strategic use of the data can also support the development of targeted incentives and promotional efforts, helping IPAs prioritize gender-responsive investors, strengthen sector profiling, and increase the visibility of inclusive and sustainable business models.

- **Incentives for investor engagement:** To encourage investors to share gender-related or SDG-related data, a clear and convincing value proposition is essential. Investors must understand that the purpose of data collection is not to create barriers or discourage investment, but to better understand their needs, offer more tailored support, and improve sector profiling. In some contexts, reporting may be a compliance requirement tied to annual disclosures. In others, as in the case of IF, reporting relies on strong relationships with investors and the incentive of being part of promotional materials, events, or award nominations. Framing data collection as a tool for mutual benefit can help build trust and encourage participation.

Supporting women entrepreneurs through visibility and access

- **Institutional mechanisms to ensure visibility:** To effectively promote women-led businesses, IPAs need internal systems to identify, track, and showcase women entrepreneurs. This includes maintaining updated databases, setting inclusion targets for trade and investment missions, and integrating women-led enterprises into promotional materials. Staff must be equipped to advocate for inclusive representation across all outreach activities.

- **Capacity-building tools and coordination:** Ensuring access to trade and investment opportunities requires IPAs to provide targeted preparation for women entrepreneurs. This involves developing practical training materials, delivering pre-departure briefings, and assigning staff to offer tailored support. Coordination across teams is essential to embed this support into mission planning and ensure women-led businesses are investment-ready.

RESULTS

Since 2022, IF has achieved several early outcomes that reflect a shift toward more gender-responsive institutional practices.

- **Mainstreaming gender in internal systems and capacity:** In the short term, IF revised internal policies and operational tools to reflect gender considerations, including updates to HR policies and internal coordination mechanisms. These changes have helped embed gender awareness into daily operations, enabling a stronger, organization-wide understanding of gender inclusion.

- **Integrating gender into investor-facing processes:** Modifications to investor-facing tools, such as data collection forms and aftercare surveys, have made gender a visible aspect of investor engagement. For the first time, gender-disaggregated data is being systematically collected and strategically used to inform sector profiling and investment promotion efforts.

- **Supporting women entrepreneurs through visibility and access:** One of the most tangible early outcomes has been the increased participation of women-led businesses in investment missions. The commitment to ensure their inclusion has improved visibility and access to networking opportunities. These steps have contributed to more inclusive representation in IF's external-facing initiatives. In several cases, participation in these missions has led to concrete business outcomes, including new leads and export deals secured by women entrepreneurs. This reflects the growing impact of targeted visibility and access efforts on real market opportunities.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

Pleass Global Limited is a woman-led Fijian water bottling company. With support from Investment Fiji, the company's director participated in an investment roadshow to China, where she secured a new export contract. This demonstrates how targeted visibility, and access can help women entrepreneurs achieve concrete business outcomes. In addition to its export growth, Pleass Global is recognized for inclusive practices, ranging from reforesting land, supporting biodiversity, and providing farming opportunities for marginalized women. The company shows how enabling access for women-led businesses can generate both commercial success and meaningful community impact.

In addition to its export growth, Pleass Global is recognized for inclusive practices, ranging from reforesting land, supporting biodiversity, and providing farming opportunities for marginalized women. The company shows how enabling access for women-led businesses can generate both commercial success and meaningful community impact. Through its internal as well as investor facing gender initiatives, IF is looking to increase the attraction of FDI projects with a comparable impact on local social inclusion and sustainable development. Internal policies, awareness raising and the amendment of investment promotion activities in line with data collected, allows for a more specific investor targeting approach, increasing the projects that best contribute to Fiji's development objectives when it comes to gender equality.



Photo: Pleass Global Limited

Kavalicious Taveuni is a woman-led Fijian business. With guidance and connections provided by Investment Fiji, founder Ana Malumuvatu was able to confidently seek business advice, expand her market reach, and begin exporting her products. The company now produces a growing line of value-added goods such as Kava cookies, Kava chocolate, Kava popsicles, and has recently launched Kava-based soap and moisturizer for overseas markets.



Ana Malumuvatu, Owner and Founder of Kavalicious Taveuni

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Currently, IF is not required to report on any of these initiatives to any external stakeholders. Internally, IF monitors progress through CRM-integrated data systems that capture relevant gender-related metrics. This includes tracking the number of women-led businesses participating in trade shows and other promotional events. Where available, IF also monitors the number of leads and deals generated by these businesses, as well as employment data. Performance is measured by the successful implementation of planned activities and early indicators such as the quality, completeness, and use of gender-disaggregated data to inform programming and sector engagement.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND SUCCESS FACTORS

Fiji's experience shows that gender mainstreaming in investment promotion is achievable with modest resources when supported by strong institutional commitment. Success was driven by internal leadership. Collaboration with ESCAP and FDI Center helped shape a practical, phased approach aligned with IF's mandate. The scope of gender mainstreaming is expected to continue to evolve over time.

APPLICABILITY TO OTHER IPAS

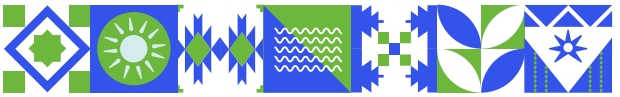
The approach taken by IF offers a flexible model adaptable to IPAs in small economies, both in SIDS and non-SIDS contexts. Initiatives can be implemented as standalone actions or tailored to align with national development priorities. IF's approach has focused on three interconnected areas 1) internal systems and processes 2) investor-facing processes, and 3) support to women entrepreneurs. This demonstrates the value of implementing both inward-facing institutional changes and outward-facing engagement processes.

Ensuring initiatives span across these components allows agencies to build momentum over time. This is not a one-off exercise but an ongoing process that can be deepened, expanded, and adjusted as capacity and context evolve. This case study demonstrates that formal mandates are not required; leadership support and institutional commitment are, however, essential to drive progress on gender-responsive investment promotion.

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This case study was compiled based on interviews with staff and review of documentation. It represents an evolving initiative, with outcomes and methodologies continuing to develop.



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