



# Tabu Soro: Building Resilient Workplaces in Fiji

## Wormald Case Study

March 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



*Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities*

## ABOUT IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2020, we invested \$22 billion in private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity. For more information, visit [www.ifc.org](http://www.ifc.org).

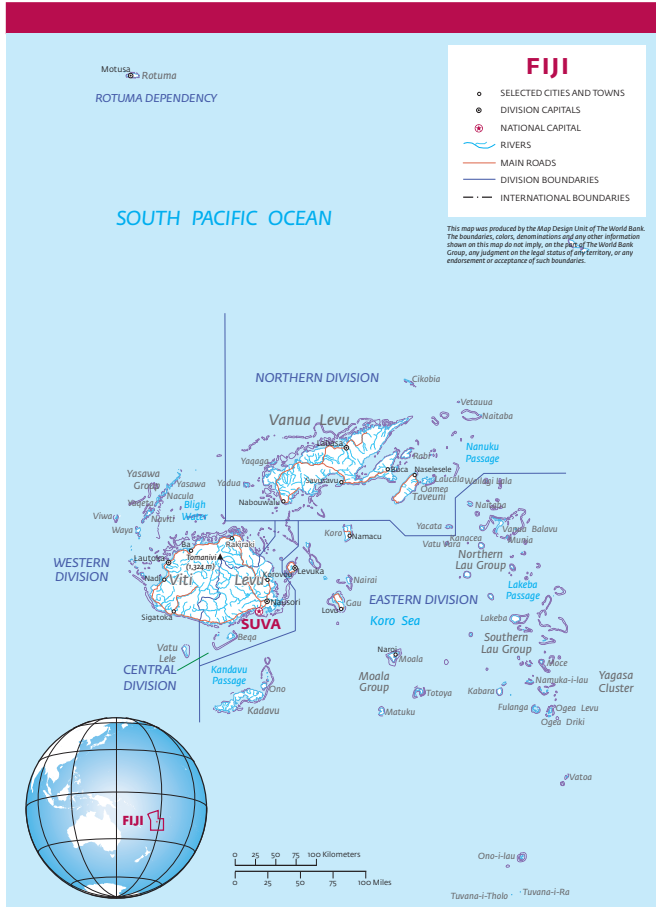
## COPYRIGHT NOTICE

© International Finance Corporation 2021. All rights reserved.  
2121 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20433  
Internet: [www.ifc.org](http://www.ifc.org) The material in this work is copyrighted. Copying and/or transmitting portions or all of this work without permission may be a violation of applicable law. IFC does not guarantee the accuracy, reliability or completeness of the content included in this work, or for the conclusions or judgments described herein, and accepts no responsibility or liability for any omissions or errors (including, without limitation, typographical errors and technical errors) in the content whatsoever or for reliance thereon.

## PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

IFC's work in Fiji is guided by the Fiji Partnership. Australia, New Zealand and IFC are working together through the Partnership to stimulate private sector investment and reduce poverty in Fiji.

# Tabu Soro: Building Resilient Workplaces in Fiji



**FIJI**

**Capital city:**  
Suva

**Region:**  
East Asia and Pacific

**Income level:**  
Upper middle income

**Male population (2019):**  
450,958<sup>1</sup>

**Female population (2019):**  
438,995<sup>1</sup>

**Labor force participation rate (female):**  
38 percent<sup>1</sup>

**Labor force participation rate (male):**  
76 percent<sup>1</sup>

72 percent of all women affected by a form of violence during their lifetime<sup>2</sup>

## OVERVIEW

Driven by the principle that by looking after staff, the staff will look after the company, Wormald embarked on a process to strengthen the organization’s resilience and build a culture of respect. The process included understanding the causes of staff absenteeism and turnover, participating in the RAKORAKO initiative, and implementing new workplace policies.

Wormald’s resilience was acutely tested in 2020 by the economic downturn in Fiji caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and four tropical cyclones in relatively short succession. Despite these challenges, no staff lost their jobs. Signs of change emerged, including a more resilient and respectful work culture, and reduced attrition.

Provides private security and protection services including fire protection systems, guards and patrols, cash in transit, monitoring services and digital security.

In 2020: 1,068 employees;  
32 percent women.

RAKORAKO was an initiative of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), offered in partnership with the Fiji Human Resources Institute (FHRI) and supported by the governments of Australia and New Zealand. It was launched in 2019 and ended in 2021. RAKORAKO aimed to help businesses in Fiji address childcare demands and workplace responses to domestic and sexual violence. The initiative included professional development workshops and technical support to companies.

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank (2021) Fiji, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/fiji>;

<sup>2</sup> The Fijian Government. (2020, October 16). Gender-Based Violence ‘A Global Pandemic’ [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/Feature-Stories/Gender-Based-Violence-%E2%80%99A-Global-Pandemic%E2%80%99>

## TABU SORO CASE STUDY SERIES

This case study is one in a series of case studies to highlight the resilience (tabu soro) of Fijian workplaces in times of crisis. The aim of the Tabu Soro case studies is to showcase good practice in managing the impact of COVID-19 and disasters such as tropical cyclones to foster safe and flexible workplaces for all employees.



Wormald management believes that if the company looks after its staff, staff will look after the company. With this in mind, Wormald's management team in Fiji improved its understanding of the needs of employees and of human resources issues, such as staff absenteeism and turnover and the costs of dealing with these issues. To do this, the company participated in the RAKORAKO initiative, consulting with staff, developing policies, redesigning rosters, and improving communication with employees and management. This case study provides an overview of these actions and the emerging signs of change.

## STAFF ABSENTEEISM AND TURNOVER – CAUSES AND IMPACT

Initially, Wormald's high turnover (an attrition rate of 75 percent in 2018) and staff absenteeism was seen as an ordinary part of doing business in the Fijian security sector. However, once they began to investigate these problems, a complex picture emerged. Staff absence and turnover arose from a number of causes including bullying and sexual harassment and family care responsibilities.

“From a financial perspective, attrition carries a significant cost. It costs us about FJD\$800 just to get somebody onto our roster before we start paying them; this includes the recruitment costs, complete with training, uniforms and licensing. Hence we needed to understand the root causes of high attrition and ensure our staff are engaged and looked after”.

- Rigamoto Taito, Wormald General Manager

### Bullying and sexual harassment

Bullying and sexual harassment, including inappropriate name-calling and trolling on social media, was an issue previously seen to be an unpleasant part of work culture but it is now increasingly understood as a key reason for employees feeling unsafe in the workplace or even quitting their job.

“I think bullying and harassment affects the employees of the company, but mainly in Fiji people take it a little bit lightly and not as seriously as they should.”

- Wormald employee



“ A prominent issue that comes up is having proper care arrangements for children so that staff can attend work. Often with female employees, when their children at home get sick, there’s no one else to look after them while they are at work. We also have males who are single parents and they don’t live in the cultural setting of a village environment, they are an independent family.”

- Pritika Chand, Wormald Human Resources Manager

## Family care responsibilities

A lack of affordable childcare services coupled with fewer traditional village and family support structures has put a strain on working parents and employers in Fiji. An IFC study into the *Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Fiji* found that over 12 days were lost per employee each year owing to parents being distracted, being late or absent due to childcare responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> For Wormald, a provider of private security in the aviation, tourism, hospitality, and government sectors, this issue was heightened by the need to roster guards on shifts every day over a 24-hour period. Shift timings affect parents and single parents more so. Women with children were found to especially struggle to meet both family and shift work obligations. World Bank data suggests that women in Fiji undertake three times the amount of unpaid domestic and care work compared to men (15.15 percent of a 24 hour period and 5.19 percent of a 24 hour period respectively).<sup>4</sup>

## COVID-19 AND TROPICAL CYCLONES ARE WORSENING EXISTING PROBLEMS

Like other businesses in Fiji, the resilience of Wormald and its staff was harshly tested by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and four severe tropical cyclones hitting the country between April 2020 and January 2021.

Compared with some other countries in the Pacific region and many globally, Fiji has avoided the major health impacts of COVID-19. This has largely been attributed to the government closing the country’s international borders in March 2020, requiring all incoming international travellers to undergo 14 days’ quarantine and effective contact tracing. As of December 2020, Fiji had counted a total of 46 COVID-19 cases and 2 COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

However, with tourism accounting for around one quarter of all Fijian employment, the country’s economy has been devastated by the international border closure. In 2020 Fiji’s Gross Domestic Product was expected to contract by 24.7 percent and the country’s outlook for 2021 remains uncertain.<sup>6</sup> The national airline, Fiji Airways, which is one of Wormald’s biggest clients, suspended 95 percent of its flights in March 2020, and to date is offering only limited repatriation flights. Other measures to limit the spread of the virus – a nationwide night-time curfew and a two-week lockdown of Fiji’s biggest cities, Lautoka and Suva – were introduced in April. Schools were closed for three months.

<sup>3</sup> International Finance Corporation (2019) *Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Fiji*. Available at <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/1b4a8a82-b335-4528-b6d2-c876cc449f3f/Fiji-TACKLING+CHILDCARE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mHY7FID>

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank (2021) *World Development Indicators*. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&type=metadata&series=SG.TIM.UWRK.MA#>

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (2020) *COVID-19 Joint Incident Management Team Health Sector Preparedness & Response, External Situation Report #31*. Available at [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/dps/outbreaks-and-emergencies/covid-19/jimt\\_covid-19\\_external\\_situation\\_report31.pdf?sfvrsn=2ca92d36\\_3&download=true](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/dps/outbreaks-and-emergencies/covid-19/jimt_covid-19_external_situation_report31.pdf?sfvrsn=2ca92d36_3&download=true)

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Group (2020) *Pacific Island Countries in the era of COVID-19: macroeconomic impacts and job prospects*. Available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/835131608739709618/pdf/Pacific-Island-Countries-in-the-Era-of-COVID-19-Macroeconomic-Impacts-and-Job-Prospect.pdf>



“ We had 300 plus staff at the airport and after COVID-19 hit us in March, all 300 of us were worried because we didn't have any flights coming in and there were only a few sites to look after. So, we thought maybe 50 or 100 will be employed and 200 will be laid off. And we thank our company, they have made a timetable, they have rostered in such a way that everybody has a chance to come and work.”

- Wormald employee

## BUILDING WORKPLACE RESILIENCE AND RESPECT

The company foresaw what the economic downturn and lockdowns could mean for its employees and in response developed a COVID-19 workforce strategy in order to retain all staff.

### COVID-19 workforce strategy

The strategy comprised a hiring freeze while asking existing staff to take any accumulated paid leave, reduce hours or redeploy from aviation and tourism sites to Wormald's wider business portfolio. For redeployed staff needing to relocate, the company provided accommodation if necessary.

“ With the COVID-19 impact, business has been hard hit in certain sectors of our portfolio such as aviation and tourism. Regardless we have worked hard to accommodate our staff, getting them working in other business areas, ensuring that they have at least the minimum hours to get through.”

- Rigamoto Taito, Wormald General Manager

## Managing increased family care demands

After learning about the root causes of absenteeism and turnover and prior to COVID-19, management redesigned the guard roster to prioritise scheduling women on morning shifts to help them manage family care responsibilities. The pandemic exacerbated countless social problems including gender disparities in caring for family and increased gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup> While schools were closed during the lockdown in Fiji, female employees were especially affected. The company responded to employees' need to care for their children by allowing them to nominate preferred shifts, approving unpaid leave and by rostering parents from the same family on alternate days.

“ Because the schools were closed for over three months, children were [at] home. We had to deal with cases where females [employees] had to request some time [off] to see that their children were taken care of.”

- Pritika Chand, Wormald Human Resources Manager

## Financial counselling

Managers observed employees experiencing financial stress, sometimes heightened by low levels of financial literacy. Many staff requested immediate access to their superannuation funds, despite the lengthy nature of the economic downturn. The company saw itself as responsible for providing financial counselling to staff.

“ Then the other thing that we noticed is financial stress because of reduced hours. The Fijian government assisted people by opening access to their superannuation but we had conversations with the employees to educate them to not use their funds unless there was an extreme need to because we don't know how soon this problem [COVID-19] is going to wrap up. We felt it was our duty of care to educate staff because we did see some of them trying to access what is meant to be their retirement fund just because it was made available.”

- Pritika Chand, Wormald Human Resources Manager

<sup>7</sup> International Finance Corporation (2020) COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence: Workplace Risks and Responses: A Guidance Note for Employers. Available at <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/42b50ce3-3867-48b2-9818-acfbc4080eaz/202007-IFC-GBV-COVID+D.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=ndOein3>



### Emergency planning and relief

At the same time as dealing with the impact of COVID-19, Wormald had to plan for the severe tropical cyclones hitting the country. Fortunately, damage to employees' homes was not as great as feared. In December 2020, Tropical Cyclone Yasa badly affected about 20 staff in Labasa, Northern Division. The company gave each of these employees an emergency relief payment of FJ\$500. Employees also supported each other by providing affected staff with donations of household items, food and school supplies.

### Respectful workplace measures

Through RAKORAKO, Wormald developed and implemented flexible work, reviewed and updated anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies. These measures were boosted by messaging on social media platforms to promote the company's policies and focus on workplace respect.

## SIGNS OF CHANGE

### Shift in company culture

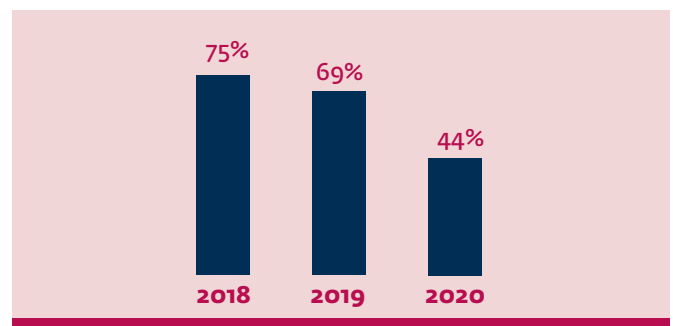
According to Wormald management, a culture of workplace respect is becoming the norm. This is evidenced by staff saying they know where to get help if they face a workplace issue such as bullying or sexual harassment and by staff feeling confident that their complaints will be treated seriously. Managers have spread the message among employees that behaviour such as sexual harassment will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to the new workplace policies and complaints procedure.

“The opportunity to be part of RAKORAKO has really lifted awareness and the understanding of what is not acceptable in the workplace - especially regarding bullying and sexual harassment. We now have a stronger work culture of respect and the confidence amongst staff to report instances of such abuse. This is done knowing that they will be taken seriously by the company and the concern will be promptly addressed.”

- Rigamoto Taito, Wormald General Manager

### Reduced staff attrition

The company is beginning to see the benefits of this culture shift through a lower attrition rate.



Wormald's attrition rate

In addition, there were no staff redundancies through COVID-19 and staff have said they feel grateful to be able to hold onto their jobs in the context of job losses and the economic downturn in the wider community.



“ RAKORAKO has provided contact details of counselling services, review of policies, and a fresh perspective of looking at things as to what we have been doing all this [time]. And I say that added a lot of value to the organization. We've become more flexible.”  
- Pritika Chand, Wormald Human Resources Manager

### Enhanced company reputation

Wormald was one of a handful of companies to have its good practices featured in an IFC guidance note on how the private sector can recover from the effects of COVID-19 in gender sensitive ways.

### LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

Through a process of strengthening its culture of respect and resilience, Wormald has learned that costly issues such as staff absenteeism and turnover are symptoms of deeper problems – in this instance, family care demands and the impacts of bullying and sexual harassment. The company also learned that these problems can be lessened by raising awareness about them and implementing relevant policies to foster a workplace that is respectful, flexible and able to support staff to meet family and work obligations.

Wormald sees maintaining a respectful and resilient workplace culture as a long-term project and plans to put in place more staff training and awareness raising sessions about available help and expectations of respectful behaviour.



## TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES

Wormald's work to build a respectful and resilient culture



2019

Conducted information and consultation sessions with staff to understand the needs of various staff groups including single parents, female employees, male employees

Signed on to the RAKORAKO IFC and FHRI Initiative and attended the first workshop on the business case for gender equality

Redesigned roster to prioritise women guards on morning shifts

Attended RAKORAKO workshops on childcare demand assessments and respectful workplaces

Developed a COVID-19 workforce strategy to retain all staff and attended RAKORAKO workshop on supporting employees through COVID-19

Conducted information and consultation sessions with staff to understand the needs of various staff groups including single parents, female employees, male employees

Attended RAKORAKO workshops on creating a caring workplace culture and childcare-flexible workplace policies, domestic and sexual violence workplace policies

2020

Reviewed, redrafted and implemented anti-sexual harassment and anti-bullying policies, with technical support from IFC

Participated in the RAKORAKO check-in sessions with IFC

Established an in-house committee to investigate and act on sexual harassment and bullying complaints

Prepared emergency plans for tropical cyclones

Issued emergency payments to staff in Vanua Levu affected by Tropical Cyclone Yasa

Developed and implemented a flexible work policy with technical support from IFC



*Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities*

**Contact Information**

IFC Fiji  
2nd Floor, FNPF Plaza  
Greig Street, Suva

📞 (+679) 322 8900

[ifc.org/gender/EAP](https://ifc.org/gender/EAP)

March 2021

