

# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT IN FIJI

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Landscape Assessment and  
Recommendations based on Global Evidence

FEBRUARY 2025

Supported by:



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# SUPPORT

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The Market Development Facility (MDF) is a multi-country Australian-Government-funded initiative, with locations in Fiji, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. MDF aims to stimulate economic growth – and hence employment and income-earning opportunities for the poor and underprivileged – by making selected sectors of the economy more competitive and stimulating business innovation. MDF is implemented by Palladium Group and Swisscontact and started operations in Fiji in July 2011. MDF has been supporting the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) segment in Fiji since 2017, with the aim to stimulate sustainable private-sector-led MSME business development services (BDSs). MDF's support included piloting business accelerator programmes and incorporating BDSs into co-working business models; it is committed to ensuring the sustainability of BDSs in Fiji.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) is established under the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act for the purposes of regulating the issue of currency and the supply, availability, and international exchange of money; promoting monetary stability; promoting a sound financial structure; and fostering credit and exchange conditions conducive to the orderly and balanced economic development of the country.

In 2022, the RBF launched Fiji's National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030 which included a commitment to promoting economic growth that is broad-based, inclusive and sustainable through improving access to finance for MSMEs and their financial resilience. RBF's strategic priorities include developing an enabling regulatory framework for MSMEs; establishing a specialised institution for MSMEs; developing value-chain financing programmes and initiatives; and developing suitable financial products and services to support start-ups and key target sectors.

The strategic focuses of MDF and RBF intersect around promoting a long-term inclusive and sustainable MSME segment for Fiji. As such, MDF and RBF commissioned the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) to undertake a landscape assessment of accelerators and incubators in Fiji and produce this report.

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## ABOUT ANDE

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The Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) is a global network of organisations that propel entrepreneurship in developing economies. ANDE members provide critical financial, educational, and business support services to small and growing businesses (SGBs) based on the conviction that SGBs create jobs, stimulate long-term economic growth, and produce environmental and social benefits.

As the leading global voice of the SGB sector, ANDE believes that SGBs are a powerful yet underleveraged tool in addressing social and environmental challenges. Since 2009, we have grown into a trusted network of more than 200 collaborative members that operate in nearly every developing economy. ANDE grows the body of knowledge, mobilises resources, and connects the institutions that support the small business entrepreneurs who build inclusive prosperity in the developing world. ANDE is part of the Aspen Institute, a global nonprofit organisation committed to realising a free, just, and equitable society.

ANDE's East and Southeast Asia chapter, based in Bangkok, Thailand, was launched in 2017 with the aim of creating a platform that supports all stakeholders in the local SGB ecosystem through training, knowledge sharing, facilitating introductions, and fostering collaboration.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Business development service (BDS) programmes, such as accelerators and incubators, are increasingly looked to as promising ways to help entrepreneurs enhance their business skills, expand their networks, and access investment. In Fiji, there is a small but quickly growing entrepreneurial ecosystem supported by over a dozen BDS programmes. This report seeks to characterize the BDS landscape and form recommendations for its continued growth based on international research and established best practices from other ecosystems across the globe.

In this report, the authors assess the practices of Fiji's BDS providers against the SCALE principles, a set of recommendations published in 2021 by the Argidius Foundation which reflect global best practices for BDS provision. This study identified a total of 21 BDS programmes in the Fijian ecosystem administered by 14 service providers, including eight accelerators, five incubators, and eight additional programmes such as co-working spaces, grant-making facilities, and technical assistance. Based on desk research and interviews with programme managers, the authors assessed Fiji's accelerator and incubator landscape as moderately applying the SCALE principles, which are described in detail on pages 20-21.

SCALE Element		Assessment of BDS in Fiji
<b>S</b>	Selecting the Right Enterprises	High
<b>C</b>	Charging Entrepreneurs	Low
<b>A</b>	Addressing Problems	Medium
<b>L</b>	Learn by Evaluating Enterprise Performance	High
<b>E</b>	Lead by Example	Medium



## KEY FINDING 1

**The BDS landscape in Fiji is heavily influenced by international donors.**

While this brings much-needed resources to the sector and has the potential to expand market access, it also can hinder the financial sustainability of programmes and incentivise short-term metrics (e.g., the number of entrepreneurs served) over long-term impact (e.g., measurable business growth and job creation). Furthermore, regardless of the funding source, programmes should aim to hire programme managers, coaches, and mentors who are either business leaders themselves or are otherwise deeply embedded in the private sector landscape in Fiji. While this is not the case with all programs, it is a common challenge.



### KEY FINDING 2

**Programmes are largely siloed and should collaborate for ecosystem-wide impact.**

Entrepreneurs are best served by a cohesive, collaborative ecosystem, which makes it easy for them to determine which programmes are a good fit for their needs. Ideally, accelerators and incubators should have referral programmes so that entrepreneurs “graduate” to the next level of support rather than “programme hopping” without exhibiting meaningful growth. Furthermore, there is room for greater collaboration between financiers, government, and BDS providers to ensure entrepreneurs can navigate regulatory processes and financial requirements with ease.



### KEY FINDING 3

**Increasing interest in BDS provision and government support creates an opportunity for accelerated impact.**

This report reflects significant levels of support for BDS provision in Fiji which, if informed by best practices, can establish the country as an example of a healthy, growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. This will require not only the adoption of best practices among more programmes but also an increase in available financing, perhaps through regional angel investment networks, to unlock new opportunities for entrepreneurial growth in Fiji.

This report delves into these topics in detail, leaning heavily on research from the Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI), SCALE, and other academic and practitioner publications to provide a global perspective on Fiji’s BDS landscape.

# KEY CONCEPTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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**Accelerators** are cohort-based, time-bound programmes that provide cohorts or “classes” of early-stage enterprises with training and mentorship to help them scale and secure investment.

**Business development service (BDS)** refers to services that aim to improve business performance by enhancing managerial and technical skills, increasing access to markets, introducing new or improved technologies, and advising on appropriate financing mechanisms. The term BDS is used interchangeably with business advisory service provider (BASP) and business development service provider (BDSP).

**Entrepreneur support organisation (ESO)** refers to a broad spectrum of entities that support entrepreneurs to establish and/or grow their businesses through training, mentorship, and in some cases funding. Such institutions encompass different organisation types including, but not limited to, capacity development providers, academic institutions, industry associations, chambers of commerce, and government agencies.

**Incubators** offer subsidised services and often office space to support idea and start-up stage enterprises as they refine and test their business ideas.

**Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** were defined in the Fijian context by the 2020 MSME Fiji-Policy Framework (MSME Policy) in relation to annual turnover as follows:

- **Micro enterprise** refers to ventures that have an annual turnover that falls under FJ\$ 50,000.
- **Small enterprise** refers to ventures that have an annual turnover that falls between FJ\$ 50,000 and 300,000.
- **Medium enterprise** refers to ventures that have an annual turnover that exceeds FJ\$ 300,000 but falls short of FJ\$ 1.25 million.<sup>1</sup>

## Venture Stages

- **Idea:** The business is little more than an unproven idea, so the focus is on testing the idea and identifying a product-market fit.
- **Start-up:** The business is in the early stages of operations.
- **Early:** The business may have initial market traction and early revenues but will likely not yet be generating profit.
- **Growth:** The business demonstrates steady growth or scaling and likely profitability.
- **Mature:** The business has likely reached stable profits; growth may have slowed.

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1. Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. 2020. [Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Fiji – Policy Framework](#)

# INTRODUCTION

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Fiji is the second-largest economy in the Pacific Islands, with a population of about 936,000.<sup>2</sup> An archipelago of 330 islands, it experienced an annual growth rate of 8% in 2023, which surpassed the regional average of 5.7% for the Pacific Islands in the same year.<sup>3</sup> While the country has outperformed its neighbours in terms of growth, Fiji's start-up landscape is only just budding. However, while the micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) sector accounts for only 18% of the upper-middle income country's<sup>4</sup> GDP, the sector provides employment to 60% of its total labour force.<sup>5</sup> Fiji's young population, with over 36% of its population under the age of 20, positions the country to receive demographic dividends through their invigorating ideas and innovations.<sup>6</sup>

Business development service (BDS) refers to a broad range of support mechanisms to help entrepreneurs start, sustain, and grow their businesses. As Fiji's entrepreneurial ecosystem continues to develop, BDS providers will play an important role in identifying and nurturing entrepreneurial talent and promising business models. Fiji's emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem is only just beginning to integrate BDS providers and has yet to conduct a thorough review of current BDS programmes and the extent to which these adhere to global best practices.

This report aims to fill that research gap by assessing the landscape of BDS provision in Fiji with a particular emphasis on accelerators and incubators. These insights are intended to inform policymakers, BDS providers, and broader entrepreneurial ecosystem stakeholders to encourage collaborative action and establish a more effective BDS landscape for Fijian enterprises. This report can also support the achievement of the National Development Plan's targets on sustainable and inclusive growth through improving the business environment and enhancing MSMEs' contributions to Fiji's economy.

This report aims to address three **key research questions**:

- ✔ **Key trends in Fiji's BDS environment:** What is the state of the BDS sector in Fiji, specifically accelerators and incubators in the country, and what are the challenges and opportunities associated with the consumer base, the regulatory environment, and the accessibility and sustainability of such ESOs?
- ✔ **Areas for growth and potential:** What potential do BDSs hold for Fiji's entrepreneurial ecosystem and what are the key growth drivers in this space?
- ✔ **Impact assessment:** What impact have BDS providers had in Fiji's MSME sector and its overall economy?

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2. World Bank Group. 2023. [Fiji](#)

3. World Bank Group. 2024. [Pacific Economic Update March 2024](#)

4. US Department of State. 2020. ["2020 Investment Climate Statements: Fiji"](#)

5. Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development & Statistics. n.d. [MSME Fact Sheet](#).

6. United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2024. [World Population Prospectus 2019, Total Population \(both sexes combined\) by five year age group - Fiji \(2024 Data\)](#)

To investigate these questions, ANDE used **three research methods**:

- ✓ **Desk research:** ANDE worked with a local consultant to identify accelerators, incubators, and other BDS providers in Fiji and collect information on the nature of support each of these organisations provided.
- ✓ **Stakeholder roundtable:** ANDE hosted a roundtable discussion with stakeholders in Fiji's MSME sector in October 2024 to deepen our understanding of local perspectives, identify key challenges, and crowdsource opportunities for the improvement and expansion of BDS provision.
- ✓ **Interviews with programme managers:** ANDE conducted 13 virtual and/or in-person interviews with representatives of various BDS providers in Fiji to gain an understanding of their organisational structures, programmatic approach, and perspectives regarding the effectiveness of their services. A list of interviewed ESOs and entrepreneurs is included in the Appendix.

The report begins with an overview of the types of BDS programmes, a synthesis of best practices for BDS provision based on global research, and a landscape assessment of BDS in the Fijian ecosystem. The report then investigates the specific challenges and opportunities relevant to each ecosystem actor, including government, donors, and BDS providers. Finally, the report concludes with a series of recommendations that tie together global best practices with the specific opportunities and growth levers identified in Fiji's entrepreneurial landscape.

# TYPES OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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Business development services (BDSs) have been operating for many decades, and their various forms have been defined and scrutinised over the years in both academic and practitioner circles. While there is no single agreed-upon taxonomy of BDS provision, a common understanding of programme types includes the following:

**Accelerators** emerged in the United States in the early 2000s, with well-known tech accelerators Y Combinator and Techstars drawing the blueprint for the investor-backed, highly competitive model focused on the rapid scaling of high-potential start-ups. While accelerators take slightly different approaches depending on the context, their defining characteristics include a highly competitive selection process, a cohort-based model of mentorship and training support, and an emphasis on scaling through connections with outside investment.<sup>7</sup> Accelerators typically serve early-stage, revenue-generating entrepreneurs to grow, secure investment, and expand market presence. In many cases, accelerators culminate in a demo day or other pitch event for investors.

**Incubators**, on the other hand, support idea-stage and start-up-stage entrepreneurs with subsidised support services and training as they develop or solidify their business models. Unlike accelerators, incubators accept entrepreneurs on a rolling basis, offer support for a longer period (more than one year), and help entrepreneurs in the earlier stages of development to create a prototype or minimum viable product. Incubators have been around much longer than accelerators, with sources estimating that they emerged in the United States in 1959.<sup>8</sup>

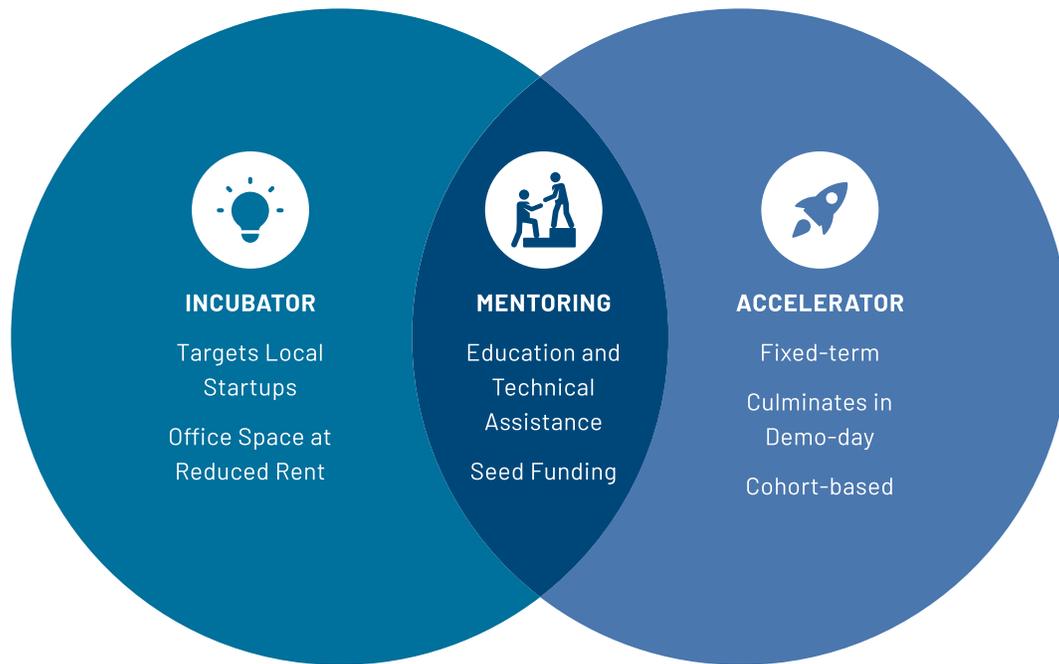
A **co-working space** may be an element of either an incubator or an accelerator or a stand-alone service. These relatively low-cost workspaces provide not only an option for entrepreneurs who are not yet ready for a stand-alone office location but also opportunities to network with like-minded peers and other business owners.

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7. Guttentag, M. and Davidson, A. 2021. [Does Acceleration Work? Five years of evidence from the Global Accelerator Learning Initiative](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Emory University.

8. Sohail, K. et al. 2023. [Developing business incubation process frameworks: A systematic literature review](#). Journal of Business Research.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Accelerators versus Incubators



Source: Dempwolf, C. and Auer, J.  
*Innovation Accelerators: Defining Characteristics Among Startup Assistance Organizations*. 2014.

There are, of course, many other programme structures available to entrepreneurs across the globe. Fellowships, training programmes, and mentorship programmes typically place more emphasis on the skills and leadership development of founders. Pitch competitions and hack-a-thons offer idea-stage entrepreneurs a chance to test the potential of a business idea and acquire small amounts of seed capital. Technical assistance is also a commonly used term which encompasses a range of business development services. In most cases, a technical assistance facility runs alongside or as a precursor to an investment fund to improve business practices and mitigate risk.

These programme types are often not clearly delineated in practice, with many BDS programmes having overlapping characteristics. While there may be good reasons for programmes to adopt various characteristics for their specific context, it is important for entrepreneurs to be able to understand exactly what services are available to them and which best fit their particular stage and growth ambitions.

# THE LANDSCAPE OF BDS IN FIJI

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in Fiji's economic growth. Recent statistics show that 90% of all registered businesses in Fiji are MSMEs.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, MSMEs contribute FJ\$ 380 million (almost US\$ 170 million) in tax revenue collected annually.<sup>10</sup> With such impressive numbers, there is no doubt that the approximately 29,000<sup>11</sup> and counting MSMEs in Fiji greatly support the country's economy not only by providing essential goods and services but also by sustaining the day-to-day lives of everyday Fijians. Three main sectors dominate Fiji's MSME ecosystem: transport and storage, wholesale/retail of motor vehicles and cycles, and agriculture. These three sectors account for 43% of the total number of MSMEs in the country; the manufacturing, administrative support, construction, real estate, and accommodation sectors make up the majority of the rest of Fiji's MSME sector.<sup>12</sup>

Despite MSMEs accounting for a significant portion of the Fijian economy, the country still has a nascent entrepreneurial ecosystem in many ways. The term "entrepreneurial ecosystem" commonly refers to the interconnected network of individuals and institutions that drive new venture development and growth-oriented entrepreneurship in a particular geographic area.<sup>13</sup> BDSs play an important role in entrepreneurial ecosystems by improving productivity, expanding market traction, and facilitating investment for new and/or growing enterprises.

A recent survey conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) surveyed 97 MSMEs and found that only 19% said they had used BDSs in the past. The survey further highlighted that nearly 60% of MSME founders reported that BDSs were not accessible to them.<sup>14</sup> This reflects the higher concentration of such services in more urban centres like Suva and Nadi, with little access to such facilities on the more remote islands of the archipelago.

The type, size, and location of programmes are described in more detail in the following sections, which are organised based on a series of questions.

## What types of BDS programmes are provided in Fiji?

This study identified a total of 21 business development programmes in the Fijian ecosystem administered by 14 service providers. The programmes included eight accelerators, six incubators/coworking spaces, five government grant schemes, and two other services (see Table 1 for a summary of BDS program characteristics and Appendix A for detailed program profiles).

9. Reserve Bank of Fiji. 2022. [Fiji National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2022-2030](#)

10. Ministry of Finance. 2024. ["Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Factsheet"](#)

11. Ministry of Finance. 2024. ["Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Factsheet"](#)

12. Fiji Revenue and Customs Service. 2020. [Small and Micro Enterprises \(SMEs\) benefit from incentives provided by the Fijian Government](#)

13. Hume, V. and Davidson, A. 2021. [What We Know About: Cultivating Entrepreneurial Ecosystems](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs.

14. UNESCAP. 2022. [Strengthening the competitiveness of Fiji's MSMEs](#)

Table 1: Snapshot of BDS Programmes in Fiji

Programme Type	Structure	Duration	Delivery
<b>Accelerator:</b> 8 <b>Incubator/coworking space:</b> 6 <b>Government grant scheme::</b> 5 <b>Other:</b> 2	<b>Cohort-based:</b> 11 <b>Rolling admission:</b> 10	<b>1 ≤ 3 months:</b> 1 <b>3 ≤ 6 months:</b> 6 <b>&gt; 6 months:</b> 3 <b>N/A (rolling admission):</b> 11	<b>In-person:</b> 14 <b>Virtual:</b> 4 <b>Hybrid:</b> 3
<b>Notes:</b> “Other” includes technical assistance and consulting.	<b>Notes:</b> Rolling admission includes grant schemes, co-working spaces, and technical assistance providers, among others.		<b>Notes:</b> Five of the in-person services are grant programmes by the government which may have some technical assistance.

Over half of BDS providers in Fiji offer cohort-based programmes which provide training and mentorship to entrepreneurs for a set period of time. Programme durations range from three to 20 months, but most cohort-based programmes last around six months. According to Palinda Kaituu, Business Accelerator Manager of the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) which runs the Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) Accelerator Programme, six months is a sweet spot for programme impact and engagement. “Programme length has been a process of trial and error, and from FCEF’s earlier attempts to run the accelerator for three or nine months, we have found that programmes less than six months are too short to do anything and any more than that, we find participants losing momentum,” said Kaituu.

While 11 out of 21 programmes are cohort-based accelerator or incubator programmes, the remaining ten are either structured as funding and mentoring programmes run by the Government of Fiji, co-working spaces, or technical assistance programmes that run on a rolling basis.

### What venture stages do BDS providers work with?

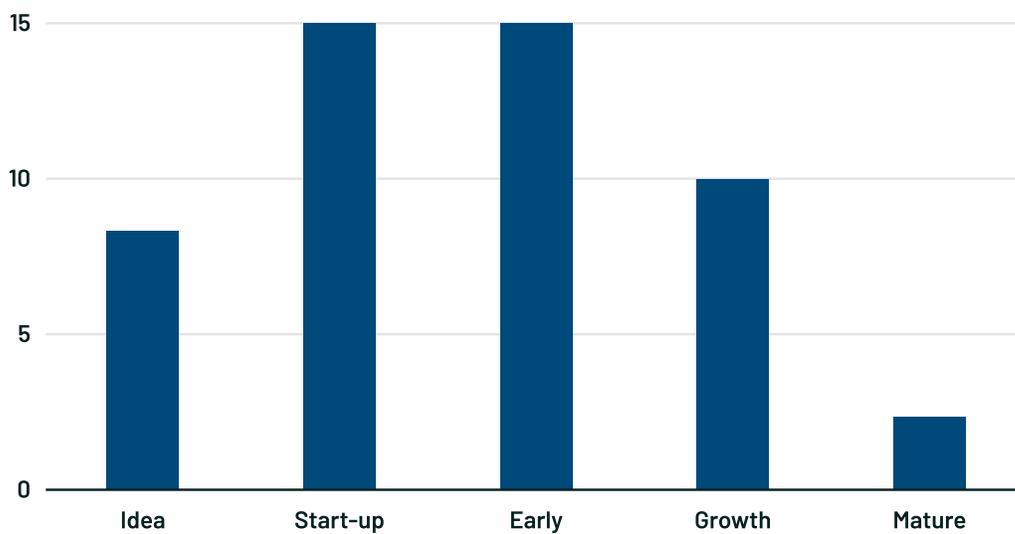
Of the 21 BDS programs identified, most cater to start-up and early-stage ventures, with fewer rendering assistance to idea or growth-stage ventures (Figure 2). Interviews with BDS providers indicate a stronger interest in supporting ventures that have progressed past the idea stage as they are perceived to be “serious about doing business” and possess the documentation and licensing needed to pass the due diligence requirements of BDS programmes supported by international organisations.<sup>15</sup> This trend falls in line with other entrepreneurial ecosystems ANDE has mapped over the past decade.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the lack of support for growth and mature-stage ventures is to be expected as these businesses are typically not in need of as much support given their market traction.

15. Pacific Digital Economy Programme (PDEP), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). 2021. [Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in the Pacific – Network Analysis and Mapping of Institutions Supporting Entrepreneurship](#)

16. Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE). n.d. [Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Snapshots](#)

Despite the limited support available for idea-stage entrepreneurs, many ventures have found these services highly valuable, particularly when linked to grant funding. A notable example is the Global Green Growth Institute's (GGGI) Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubation Programme, which provides USD 5,000 in funding to winners of its Incubator Business Plan Competition, assisting them advance their idea-stage ventures. Without sufficient support for idea-stage ventures, there is a limited pipeline of acceleration-ready enterprises to benefit from the programmes serving later-stage enterprises. A common approach to supporting idea-stage ventures is through university-based incubation programmes, which allow students, professors, and community members to utilise university resources and space to test prototypes.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 2: Venture Stages Supported by BDS Programmes in Fiji (N=21)**



### What kind of funding do BDS providers offer?

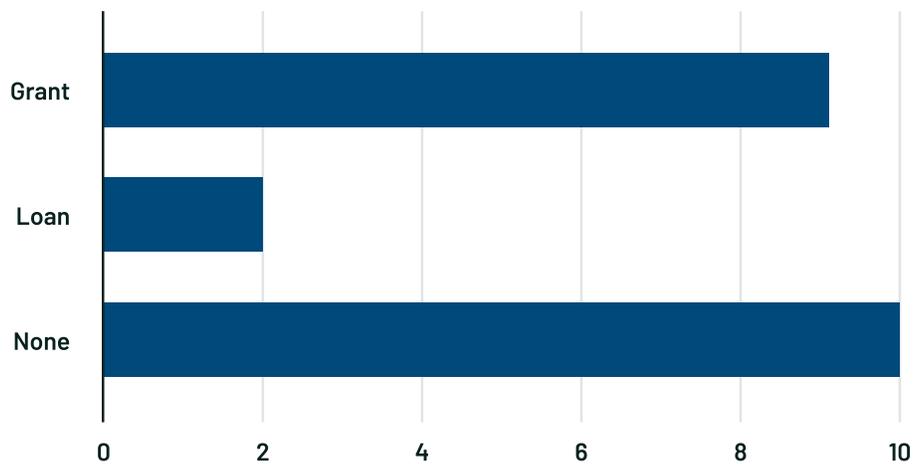
About half of the BDS providers identified offer some form of funding to entrepreneurs in Fiji, most commonly in the form of grants (Figure 3). However, interviewed stakeholders voiced the need for funding partners to focus on the quality, rather than the quantity, of funding disbursed. For example, rather than distributing a smaller amount amongst a larger number of entrepreneurs, the same amount should be used to support a few promising entrepreneurs to get maximum impact. UNDP stands out as a unique example as it offers performance-based grants (i.e., tranche-based grants) tied to the milestones of each business up to the point at which it is market-ready.

Several interviewees also noted that a demo/pitch day is not suitable for the Fijian culture, unlike other countries/regions in the world. This is reflected in the GALI research, which indicates that pitching events are not a useful tool in ecosystems without a strong base of early-stage investors. Such events set entrepreneurs up for disappointment and place too much emphasis on a single pitch rather than the curated introductions and relationship building between

17. Pellegrini, M. and Johnson-Sheehan, R. 2020. [The Evolution of University Business Incubators: Transnational Hubs for Entrepreneurship](#). Journal of Business and Technical Communication.

entrepreneurs and investors which are the more common ways in which businesses secure investment. This reflects a broader conversation happening at the global level about how pitch events tend to favour entrepreneurs who are skilled at pitching rather than those with the best business models. This in turn has implications for gender equality as well, with studies finding that men are assessed more positively than women even with the same business model.<sup>18</sup> Accelerators are experimenting with different approaches to identify investment-worthy enterprises. For example, Village Capital, a prominent international accelerator that provides seed funding to some of its participants, uses a peer selection model which has been found to be an effective means of not only identifying business potential but also fostering peer learning among entrepreneurs.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 3: Type of Funding Provided (N=21)**



The ticket sizes of grants provided by internationally backed programmes range between US\$ 900 and 150,000, while those provided by the government range between FJ\$ 1,000 and 150,000 (US\$ 450–67,500). However, these government-provided financing options have strict guidelines concerning how an entrepreneur may or may not use the funds, especially regarding the acquisition of capital goods. Most grant providers offer grants at the lower end of this range, with four of the eight grant providers offering US\$5,000 or less. One example is the GGGI Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme, which provided seed grants of US\$5,000 to 20 winners following a business plan competition. Building on this, the subsequent Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator Programme offered repayable grants of up to US\$50,000—interest-free. Several entrepreneurs we interviewed highlighted how these grants played a crucial role in helping them start and sustain their businesses, with one remarking that "a startup with no funding is just a dream." In addition to grants, some BDS providers in Fiji also offer zero or low-interest loans capped at US\$50,000. The government, through MSME Fiji, further extends financial support through various grant programmes targeting businesses at different stages and specific groups, including youth, women, entrepreneurs in the Northern region, and those aiming to export (see Appendix B for a full breakdown).

18. Brooks, A. et al. 2014. [Investors prefer entrepreneurial ventures pitched by attractive men](#). Psychological and Cognitive Sciences.

19. Burns, A. et al. 2019. [Flipping the Power Dynamic: Can Entrepreneurs Make Successful Investment Decisions?](#) Village Capital.

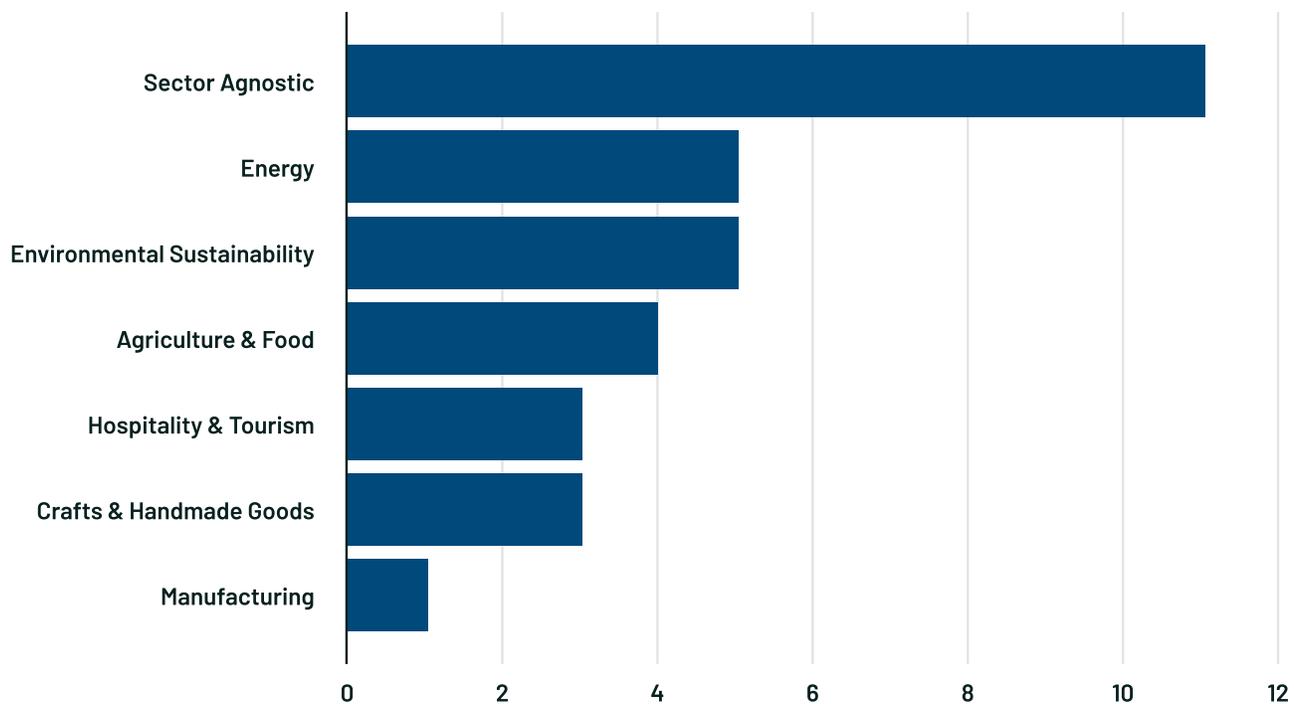
### What sectors do BDS providers focus on?

About half of the identified BDS providers offer sector-agnostic services in Fiji. However, there are a notable few that offer sector-specific support; five programmes offer assistance to MSMEs in the environmental sustainability and energy sectors; four provide assistance to agriculture and food sector MSMEs; while the hospitality and tourism and crafts and handmade goods sectors both receive support from three BDS providers each.

For a country like Fiji that relies on tourism directly or indirectly for 40% of its GDP and 36% of its employment, it is surprising that there are so few BDSs supporting entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.<sup>20</sup> Based on GALI data, tourism-focused BDS programmes are an under-leveraged opportunity, with such programmes only making up 3% of the accelerators identified.<sup>21</sup> Fiji could serve as an example for other ecosystems by building up its tools and resources for tourism enterprises. Programmes such as San Diego Tourism Authority’s Tourism Accelerator, Hackforge’s Tourism Innovation Lab, and Blue Startups could serve as examples.

Currently, the yher accelerator programme by YGAP is the only accelerator programme in Fiji that specialises in supporting female entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. More such support needs to be available in Fiji as entrepreneurs globally find that sector-specific support is the most helpful in terms of providing the right connections and unlocking access to finance.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 4: Type of Sectors Supported (N=21)



20. Ministry of Finance. 2024. [Fact Sheet - Tourism](#)

21. Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI). n.d. [“The Accelerator Landscape - Sectors of Focus”](#)

22. European Commission. n.d. [“The role of Incubators and Accelerators in knowledge valorisation”](#)

### Where do BDS providers in Fiji get their funding?

Most BDS providers in Fiji rely on grant funding from donors, international organisations, and the government for their operations. In fact, all the ESOs identified for the study were linked with either an international or a government entity. Thirteen of these programmes were linked with an international BDS provider or international non-governmental organisation (INGO), six were either funded or directly run by the Government of Fiji, and two were linked to both government and international funding sources.

While there are some notable examples of sustainable support for BDS provision from private sector-focused entities (e.g. the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation now operates Fiji Enterprise Engine), many programs still struggle with securing sustainable revenue sources. FEE stands out as a model for sustainability through its partnership approach. As a private sector-led initiative, FEE takes responsibility for program implementation while securing support from government agencies and other international partners, which provide scholarships or subsidies to reduce program fees and make participation more accessible for entrepreneurs. Additionally, FEE leverages its alumni network, with past participants giving back to the program in various ways, recognizing the value it has brought to their businesses. Notably, FEE is likely the only BDS program in Fiji that charges entrepreneurs a participation fee. This not only ensures that participants are committed—having some "skin in the game"—but also contributes to the long-term financial sustainability of the program. The issue of sustainability is one that has also been raised during ANDE's interviews with BDS providers. "Given the resources needed to run an acceleration or incubator programme, we are pivoting to many other directions to ensure that governance structures and capacity are developed for such services to exist on their own," said Vineil Narayan, Project Manager of the UNDP-funded Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme (BAGS).

Due to limited funding and high operational costs, many programmes in Fiji, such as BAGS and the Business Accelerator Programme for Creative Entrepreneurs by the International Labour Organization, are one-off programmes. Between 2021 and 2023, GGGI's Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme, funded by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), successfully completed three cohorts, while the Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator ran for one cohort. The programme concluded its first phase in March 2024. There are efforts currently underway to secure funding for Phase 2, ensuring continued support for green entrepreneurs across the Pacific region. Meanwhile, Fiji also lost the UNDP-funded Innovation Hub and Co-Working Space, which offered incubation services to ideation-stage ventures, citing logistical difficulties due to COVID-19.

### What impact have BDS services had on the MSME sector and the broader economy in Fiji?

While there is not sufficient data to quantify the financial impact of BDS providers on the economy in Fiji, interviews and roundtables with MSME sector stakeholders revealed a general consensus that BDSs have made meaningful progress towards supporting venture growth, particularly by unlocking capital, primarily grant funding. As an example, Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) has helped entrepreneurs achieve great strides in terms of revenue growth, employment growth and fundraising.

Between 2019 and 2023, FEE has helped its alumni:

- ✔ Boost sales revenue by a combined FJ\$ 2.18 million
- ✔ Create at least 30 additional jobs in the Fijian job market, which has raised additional income for these individuals totalling FJ\$ 825,366 (i.e. an average income increase of nearly FJ\$ 30,000 per person)
- ✔ Raise a total of FJ\$ 1.36 million in debt-based and grant financing

The full case study on FEE in Appendix D of this report offers an in-depth overview of this programme.

In interviews and a roundtable discussion, MSME sector stakeholders also reflected on the impact BDS programmes have had by delivering support services to entrepreneurs in rural communities and socially vulnerable populations, such as women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

# ASSESSMENT BASED ON GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

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In the past fifteen years, a considerable amount of research has been published about the efficacy of business development services. In 2015, ANDE and Emory University launched the Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI), which collected data from more than 23,000 ventures that applied to accelerators worldwide. This research concluded in more than 30 practitioner reports and more than a dozen academic publications examining the effectiveness of accelerators and trends in early-stage entrepreneurial activity.<sup>23</sup> ANDE and the International Growth Centre also launched the Small and Growing Business (SGB) Evidence Fund which has funded nineteen rigorous studies of growth-oriented entrepreneurship in developing economies.<sup>24</sup>

The many reports and studies that have emerged from these and similar research initiatives point to two important takeaways. First, business development services can be an effective means of private sector development. Businesses that participate in accelerator programmes increase their revenues, create jobs, and secure investment at a faster rate than those that do not access such programmes.<sup>25</sup> Second, an equally important conclusion is that these programmes are only effective on average and not across the board. Many programmes are ineffective or, in some cases, counterproductive, with participating enterprises showing very little growth.

In an attempt to synthesise these findings into an easily digestible set of best practices for both BDS providers and donors, the Argidius Foundation published its SCALE report in 2021. This exercise drew upon research initiatives, including GALI and the SGB Evidence Fund, and also analyzed data from the Argidius Foundation's own portfolio of entrepreneur support organisations. The resulting set of best practices, acronymised "SCALE", is described below and can be considered one of the most up-to-date attempts to understand best practices in BDS provision.<sup>26</sup>

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23. <https://www.galidata.org/publications/>

24. <https://www.theigc.org/initiatives/sgb-evidence-fund>

25. Guttentag, M. and Davidson, A. 2021. [Does Acceleration Work? Five years of evidence from the Global Accelerator Learning Initiative](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Emory University.

26. The Argidius Foundation. 2021. [How to Fulfill the Potential of Business Development Services using SCALE](#).

## S

### Select the Right Enterprises

Programmes are most effective when they clearly articulate both internally and externally not only what type of support they offer but also which profile of entrepreneur their services are designed to serve. Programmes that dedicate significant financial and human resources towards recruitment and selection, and only select those entrepreneurs most likely to benefit from their services, tend to have a greater impact on venture performance.

## C

### Charging Enterprises Improves Performance

In many of the countries in which the GALI research team interviewed accelerator programme managers, a common frustration was with the number of entrepreneurs “programme hopping” to receive small amounts of grant funding and in-kind support, rather than properly progressing into their next stage of growth.<sup>27</sup> This challenge is a reflection of two issues: one, that programmes are not clear enough about their specific value-add, and two, that the barrier to entry for entrepreneurs is not high enough. To ensure adequate buy-in and commitment, programmes should consider charging participants either through a programme fee or through a financial stake in the enterprise (such as a revenue share agreement or an equity stake).

## A

### Address Problems (we learn best by problem solving)

Training programmes that lean heavily on classroom-based curriculum have been proven ineffective at changing actual behaviour and therefore do not have a measurable impact on business success.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, programmes that lean heavily on masterclasses and classroom learning may draw entrepreneurs away from critical time spent running their businesses.<sup>29</sup> Rather, it is more productive for entrepreneurs to be able to work through the challenges they are facing in real-time with expert advice and mentorship to problem solve and pivot towards more productive approaches.

## L

### Learn by Evaluating Enterprise Performance

It is not uncommon for BDS programmes to have very rudimentary approaches to performance measurement. Common pitfalls include attempting impact measurement efforts that are overly complicated and difficult to execute, collecting and storing data in inconsistent formats, and lacking the human or financial resources to adequately analyse data to inform programme design.<sup>30</sup> Without an understanding of what is or is not working (commonly referred to as being “data-driven”), programmes cannot continually improve and will often repeat mistakes or continue to invest in ineffective activities.

27. GALI. 2019. [Acceleration in Mexico: Examining Why Entrepreneurs Attend Multiple Programs](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Emory University.

28. Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and the International Growth Centre. 2018. [A Research Agenda for the Small and Growing Business Sector: Summarizing the Current Evidence and Research Needs](#).

29. Roberts, P. W. et al. 2016. [What's Working in Startup Acceleration: Insights from Fifteen Village Capital Programs](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Emory University.

30. <https://imm.andeglobal.org/category/getting-started/>

## E

### Lead by **EXAMPLE** (improve your own organisation to better serve enterprises)

This component refers to the extent to which BDS programmes learn and improve their own internal operations. A few important considerations in this element include:

- ✓ Programmes should have a **clear and focused strategy**, with predetermined measures of success. For example, some programmes aim to marginally help many entrepreneurs, while others expect to see a minority of supported enterprises achieve significant growth. These are often either/or goals.
- ✓ Programmes should **include successful entrepreneurs in their governance structures**. Experienced members of the local business community can guide organisations to design programmes based on local context. Entrepreneurial ecosystems that lack commercial capital, for example, should avoid running an investment readiness programme as it will likely lead to disappointing outcomes for participating entrepreneurs. Rather, a programme could focus on securing grants and growing organically by acquiring new customers.
- ✓ Programmes should have **diversified funding streams** rather than being reliant on a single grant or donor. These short-lived programmes are unable to improve and adapt over time, leaving very few well-resourced, well-networked programmes that can serve as pillars for the ecosystem.

When assessing Fiji's BDS landscape against the SCALE principles, there are both success cases as well as opportunities for adoption of more evidence-informed best practices. Programmes already display high complexity in their selection process and monitoring and evaluation structures. Most programmes are quite comprehensive and offer supplementary support such as coaching, mentoring, ongoing support, as well as networking throughout their programs. However, some areas are tagged as "Medium" to indicate that while programmes are adopting these principles in part, there is still room for applying evidence and best practice to programme designs more completely. These include how programmes design mechanisms for behavior change, focusing on problem solving rather than classroom-based learning, as well as how BDS providers apply evidence to their own organizations (Table 2).

An area which has significant room for growth is how programmes encourage buy-in through charging participation fees, which is assessed as "Low" in Fiji. However, there are some notable exceptions of industry leaders trying innovative approaches to incentivize and equip entrepreneurs for accelerated growth through the provision of performance-based or staged grants. For example, the UNDP BAGS model utilizes a performance-based grant which keeps entrepreneurs focused on achieving milestones and deeply plugged into the programme which emphasizes real-time problem solving. This in turn unlocked financing from other financial institutions such as the Fiji Development Bank which provided de-risking, concessional loans, and more to their participants. Another example is the GGGI programme, which provides an up-front seed grant of \$5,000 to participants followed by a \$50,000 repayable grant further in the programme, allowing participants to kick-start their business at the start of the programme and then continually grow throughout.

Table 2: Assessing Fiji's BDS Practices Using the SCALE Principles

**High** = Most programmes apply best practices  
**Medium** = Some programmes apply best practices  
**Low** = Few programmes apply best practices

SCALE Framework Element		Assessment of BDS in Fiji	Notes
<b>S</b>	Selecting the Right Enterprises	High	Many BDS providers offer support based on business model and length of existence. Some select based on sector.
<b>C</b>	Charging Entrepreneurs	Low	Most programmes do not charge a participation fee, and most entrepreneurs expect programmes to be free. Stakeholders do not see charging as a viable approach in the immediate term but could consider a very nominal fee.
<b>A</b>	Addressing Problems	Medium	Programmes commonly utilise a combination of classroom-based learning and direct support such as mentorship, coaching, and networking. Evidence suggests that classroom-based learning is not effective compared to other forms of real-time problem solving, so emphasising the hands-on learning and peer learning mechanisms while reducing time in classrooms could lead to better outcomes.
<b>L</b>	Learn by Evaluating Enterprise Performance	High	Most programmes measure impact, including both quantitative and qualitative measurements, and some have published impact assessments. However, it is unclear how many programmes adjust their design based on these insights.
<b>E</b>	Lead by Example	Medium	Most programmes rely on a single source of funding from government or international donors, leaving them vulnerable to changing funding priorities. Additionally, some internationally run programmes fail to understand the cultural context of Fiji and offer recommendations based on their experience abroad.*  *Note: This SCALE component includes more detailed guidance regarding organizational structure and governance, which were not thoroughly discussed during interviews, which focused more on program design. Readers should therefore consider this conclusion preliminary.

# CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section consolidates findings from desk research, stakeholder interviews, and roundtables/feedback sessions into a set of challenges in the MSME landscape as it relates to BDS provision. Finally, we conclude with a series of recommendations for three primary stakeholder groups: BDS providers, donors, and policymakers.



## Challenges

- ❖ **Lack of sustainability and continuity among BDS programmes.** There is a distinct lack of funding not only for MSMEs but also for ESOs aiming to run sustainable consistent BDS programming. Fiji's BDS space thus lacks the sort of continuity apparent in other ecosystems that ANDE has mapped. Reliant on grant funding from international partners, five of the 21 identified programmes in Fiji have closed due to funds expiring or disruptions caused by COVID-19. BDS providers are also unable to hire a sufficient number of full-time staff to provide adequate support to participating entrepreneurs. For example, one entrepreneur interviewed noted that they were cut short in getting advice from a financial trainer as the trainer was too busy.
- ❖ **Limited private sector engagement.** Each of the 21 programmes identified for this study was reliant on either government funding or international organisations. In interviews, entrepreneurs stated that international trainers are not very well versed in the cultural context of Fiji and provide guidance that does not apply to that context. Fijian entrepreneurs lack exposure to successful entrepreneur role models from their own country, an important element of successful ecosystem development.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, financial institutions are largely uninvolved with programs, hindering MSME preparedness for investment and missing an opportunity to expose investors to MSME business models and investment opportunities. Greater involvement by local entrepreneurs, financial institutions, and corporate representatives, would be ideal for new entrepreneurs to gain the institutional and contextual expertise needed to more effectively navigate the ecosystem. These stakeholders can support programs either financially or in-kind through volunteering as mentors, coaching, and on selection committees.
- ❖ **Limited commercial capital available to MSMEs.** A common challenge across entrepreneurial ecosystems is the limited amount of commercial capital available to MSMEs. In the case of Fiji, not only are there no active venture capital funds or angel investment groups active locally but also available debt financing is either difficult to obtain (because of high collateral requirements) or is otherwise not ideal for enterprises (because of issues such as slow turnaround times).<sup>32</sup> Limited financial literacy among MSME owners exacerbates challenges in accessing debt financing (in 2022, Fiji had an 8.2% non-performing loan rate).<sup>33</sup> These barriers to financing also limit the efficacy of BDS provision, especially that of accelerators that aim to help ventures access investment in order to scale and accelerate their growth and economic contributions.

31. Morris, R. and Török, L. 2018. [Fostering Productive Entrepreneurship Communities: Key Lessons on Generating Jobs, Economic Growth, and Innovation](#). Endeavor Insight.

32. Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development & Statistics. n.d. [MSME Fact Sheet](#).

33. World Bank. 2022. [Bank nonperforming loans to total gross loans \(%\) - Fiji](#)

- ✔ **Brain drain and limited local talent.** Of Fiji's 593,000 working-age population in 2022,<sup>34</sup> 22,000 left the country in search of employment and educational opportunities abroad.<sup>35</sup> With almost 4% of the workforce departing the country, Fijian BDS providers have noted the lack of qualified individuals to lead training and mentorship programmes directed at promising entrepreneurs. These young talents might seek foreign employment due to limited scaling opportunities for their MSMEs. Programme managers have also emphasised the need for the standardisation of BDS trainers through certification programmes to ensure the quality of the services they deliver. Interviewees also emphasised the role that the education system could play in increasing entrepreneurial talent and interest in the country. Most educational curricula aim to build the workforce, but few develop entrepreneurial mindsets.
- ✔ **Cumbersome regulatory processes.** High levels of informality limit access to finance and participation in BDS programmes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that 43.6% of all employment in Fiji can be attributed to the informal economy.<sup>36</sup> Stakeholders also shared that tedious and burdensome government processes are time-consuming and difficult to navigate, disincentivising business formalisation and decreasing productivity. In addition to these regulatory barriers, there are also still few government incentives or schemes to support start-ups, such as targeted tax breaks or the establishment of public-private partnerships.



## Opportunities

- ✔ **Government support.** Even though the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Fiji is still nascent, there is progress being made with the support of the government. The Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, SMEs and Communications is supportive of MSMEs and the cooperative agenda, and donors have also been supporting entrepreneurial growth initiatives. Government programmes have also subsidized certain costs of BDS services to improve affordability for small and micro entrepreneurs, crucial for bringing informal businesses into the formal economy. Together, these sources of support can create new pathways for collaboration and ecosystem-wide initiatives.
- ✔ **Increasing demand for BDSs.** Interviewees noted that there is an increasing demand for BDSs, making a strong case for funding and potentially opening pathways to charge enterprises for participation. New programmes that support indigenous entrepreneurs or which focus on more rural areas outside Fiji's major urban centers of Suva and Nadi have also started, expanding access to support services. Given Fiji's location and natural resources, there are also increasing opportunities for activities in the green and blue economy.
- ✔ **More private sector stakeholders joining the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF).** Increased membership increases the federation's ability to leverage its networks to develop a larger pool of local trainers and mentors. FCEF also runs the Fiji Enterprise Engine programme, which has displayed its ability to spur entrepreneurial growth and serve as a leader in the field of BDS in Fiji. A key strength of FEE is its focus on building the capacity of local entrepreneurs to become effective business coaches. This approach not only strengthens the

34. International Labour Organization. 2024. [Fiji - Country Factsheet](#)

35. The Fiji Times. April 21, 2023. [2023 NES: 'Fiji facing brain drain crisis'](#)

36. International Labour Organization. 2024. [Fiji - Country Factsheet](#)

programme's sustainability but also expands the availability of locally rooted expertise, creating a valuable resource for other BDS initiatives in the country. This emphasis on localization—also reflected in programmes like yher—has been well-received by entrepreneurs, who find support from local mentors more relevant and practical. Furthermore, FEE's model, which integrates government-private sector collaboration and alumni engagement, provides a strong example of how public-private partnerships can drive sustainable and impactful BDS provision in Fiji.



## Recommendations for BDS Providers

- ✔ **Work collaboratively with other BDS programmes to build a pathway for enterprise growth.** BDS programmes should work together to clarify which services are best for entrepreneurs at different stages of growth, which will in turn enhance business productivity and lead to better outcomes for programmes. Practically, this should look like a tool or information source that clearly delineates which programmes are best for which venture stages. Similarly, a collaborative “hand-over” system could enable entrepreneurs graduating from an idea-stage programme, for example, to be recommended to a start-up or early-stage programme.
- ✔ **Integrate financiers into programming.** GALI research found that many accelerator programmes advertised “investment readiness” but rarely offered entrepreneurs a direct connection to investors. This leaves entrepreneurs without access to direct guidance from financiers and also fails to incorporate investor input into programme design. Programmes should learn what investors are looking for and invite them to participate as advisors and trainers, which will naturally create new relationships of trust between BDS providers and finance providers.<sup>37</sup>
- ✔ **Focus on quality over quantity.** A small number of successful entrepreneurs can have an exponential impact on the ecosystem compared to a large number of small, slow-growth businesses. Therefore, programmes should not only focus on the number of enterprises served but also the number of enterprises that have progressed to the next stage of growth and how many jobs they are creating. This also requires a nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial growth on the part of programme funders (see more in the Recommendations for Donors section).
- ✔ **Build regional partnerships to expand market access.** Regional BDS programmes may have advantages in terms of reaching more entrepreneurs, identifying new markets and customer segments, and accessing risk capital.
- ✔ **Adopt internationally recognised programme taxonomies and best practices.** Often accelerators and incubators do not use these names accurately, causing confusion among entrepreneurs regarding which programmes are a good fit for their needs. Programmers should align their naming and design to internationally recognised standards and reflect on the extent to which their programmes adhere to best practices.

37. Davidson, A. et al. 2024. [A Decade of Learnings on Gender-lens Acceleration: Case Studies from Asia](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Sasakawa Peace Foundation.



## Recommendations for Government

- ✓ **Make it easier to do business in Fiji.** Reducing the number of steps required to register a new business and simplifying the tax/accounting process would incentivise more formal, growth-oriented business activity. Furthermore, reducing the cost of registering as an e-commerce business would address another financial barrier hindering business activity. The Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, SMEs and Communication should also consider ways to partner with BDS providers to provide clear guidance on how to navigate these processes, for example through subsidised training or consultations to support enterprises that still need to register.
- ✓ **Support idea-stage venture development.** On the surface, support programmes for idea-stage ventures can seem low-return as this stage does not typically result in meaningful revenue growth or job creation. However, such support is essential for creating a pipeline of innovative business ideas and promising entrepreneurial talent for the programmes serving start-up and early-stage ventures. The government can sponsor these programmes and should consider partnerships with universities, which provide a natural convening space for students, professors, and community members to test out new ideas among peers.
- ✓ **Consider a formal registration and certification process for BDS providers.** The Ministry for Trade, Co-operatives, SMEs and Communication can support a more effective BDS landscape by creating a database of BDSs available in the country and certifying programmes that meet certain standards (SCALE could potentially be utilised for this purpose). The ministry could also put in place protections for MSMEs to reduce concerns about protecting their intellectual property, which could potentially be achieved by forming a local council.
- ✓ **Think long-term about programme impact.** As mentioned above, programmes are most effective when they prioritize quality over quantity regarding the number of businesses they impact through their programmes. However, this also requires funders, including the government, to adjust their requirements. BDS providers in Fiji largely display robust monitoring and evaluation capabilities, so the government and BDS providers should work together to identify impact targets that consider longer-term, larger impacts such as revenue growth, job creation, and investment secured.



## Recommendations for Donors

- ✔ **Fill gaps that traditional funders do not.** Grant funding plays a very important role in boosting the elements of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that are essential to its growth but do not provide an immediate return. For example, donors could support idea-stage incubation programmes that support prototyping and market research in order to boost the pipeline of investment-ready ventures. Once ventures are ready for investment, donors can also partner with BDS providers to de-risk MSMEs by providing guarantees.
- ✔ **Rethink how to define impact and reward learning.** While it seems logical to measure the number of ventures supported, a common frustration in developing economy ecosystems is that ventures cycle through multiple programmes without displaying meaningful growth. Donors should provide programmes with the flexibility to measure what is meaningful to their mission and what displays real growth as a result of participation. For example, a programme could instead measure the number of ventures that commercialised their business, “graduated” to a later-stage accelerator programme, hired new employees, or increased their revenues. While there is no one-size-fits-all measurement tool for BDS programmes, accelerators may find the GALI sample surveys and benchmarking tool useful.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, programmes should be given space to test new approaches, learn from mistakes, and improve without fear of losing funding.
- ✔ **Prioritise sustainability, localisation, and effectiveness.** Often, donors will support international BDS programmes, which in turn contract local BDS providers to support entrepreneurs in Fiji. By providing direct support to local BDS providers, donors can play an important role in driving localisation and the sustainability of Fiji's BDS landscape. Donors also have a role to play in directing funds to programmes that are adopting best practices, while maintaining flexibility so that ESOs can design their BDS programmes based on local demand and opportunities.

38. <https://www.galidata.org/tools>



## Ecosystem-wide Recommendations

- ✓ **Encourage greater participation in BDSs from successful entrepreneurs, investors, and corporates.** Research from GALI suggests that programmes should integrate successful entrepreneurs into every aspect of their delivery, including as mentors, advisors, selection committee members, etc. Programmes that are not led, or heavily influenced, by successful local entrepreneurs are unlikely to be sustainable or effective. By having established businesspeople serve as role models, advisors, and angel investors, entrepreneurs will gain access to expertise and markets that INGO and government-led BDS programmes are often unable to provide.
- ✓ **Create a more collaborative, connected ecosystem which celebrates peer learning, partnership, and failure.** High-growth entrepreneurial ecosystems are marked by each of these characteristics as opposed to isolationist tendencies. While there is no one “recipe” to achieve this,<sup>39</sup> these healthy ecosystems are characterised by strong individual and institutional relationships among ecosystem stakeholders, an emphasis on networking and collaborative endeavours, and entrepreneurs serving as the “nodes” of connectivity.<sup>40</sup> Networks of entrepreneur support providers, facilitated peer-learning engagements, and governmental support for such activities can amplify existing relationships and collaborations.
- ✓ **Make programmes and resources distinct, visible, and accountable.** Not only should programmes work more collaboratively but they should also find ways to clearly articulate their unique value propositions to entrepreneurs, clarify exactly who their programme is designed to support, and make their impact metrics publicly available. Entrepreneurs often make decisions with incomplete information, so improving their ability to navigate through an ecosystem’s various tools and resources can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service provision.

Finally, it is important that Fiji continues its learning journey by continuing to build evidence and commission research to better understand what is and is not working in supporting entrepreneurial growth. This may include the government funding academic research to better understand the efficacy of BDS efforts or the development of more practical tools such as an ecosystem mapping/directory to improve connectivity among ecosystem actors and expand access to information for entrepreneurs. Importantly, these research efforts should consider how entrepreneurs both contribute to and directly benefit from any new insights generated.

39. Hume, V. and Davidson, A. 2021. [What We Know About Cultivating Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Summarizing the Existing Evidence](#). Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs.

40. Rhett, M. and Török, L. 2018. [Fostering Productive Entrepreneurship Communities: Key Lessons on Generating Jobs, Economic Growth, and Innovation](#). Endeavor Insight.

APPENDIX A

# PROFILES OF ACCELERATORS AND INCUBATORS

## Accelerator Programmes

### Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme

#### ► Background

**Funded by:** UNDP

**Partners:** Drua Incubator of the Fijian Government, UNDP's Inclusive Growth team, the Accelerator Lab in the Pacific, other private sector partners

**Status:** Closed (ran one grant cycle, with announcement and selections in 2022)

#### ► Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Grant-funded projects ranging from eight to 20 months

**Programme Location:** National, no specific location

**Financing Offered:** Grants (US\$ 50,000–150,000)

#### ► Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Agriculture and food, energy, environmental sustainability

**Target Demographic:** All types (nondescript)

**Stage Focus:** Start-up, early, growth

The Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme opened a call in 2022 for any type of organisation (business, nonprofit, community-based organisation) to pilot, launch, or scale their blue economy project in alignment with the national government's development agenda. Selected projects were provided with performance-based impact grants alongside technical assistance support from programme partners. The aim was to connect successful programme graduates with commercial capital, for example, debt financing from the Blue Investment Fund, with first-loss de-risking financing provided by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) when possible.



## Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE)

### ► Background

**Programme Host:** Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF)

**Funded by:** International Labour Organization, Market Development Facility, Reserve Bank of Fiji, Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, SMEs and Communication, iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB), Capital Insurance, 25 different FEE alumni businesses

**Partners:** Market Development Facility (MDF)

**Status:** Ongoing

### ► Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Six months

**Programme Location:** Suva and Nadi, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** None

### ► Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** All types (nondescript), women (led by or benefitting women), youth (led by or benefitting youth), peri-urban, urban

**Stage Focus:** Early and growth

Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) was first run as a pilot business acceleration programme by the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) in partnership with the Australian-Government-funded Market Development Facility (MDF). The accelerator was created to help MSMEs move towards scalable and sustainable business models, improving their chances of succeeding in the Fijian economy.

FEE offers specialised training on strategic, human resource, accounting and financial management in addition to marketing skills that fit the local context of Fiji in collaboration with major stakeholders in the ecosystem.<sup>41</sup> The programme also provides personalised guidance from local and international business coaches and opportunities to network with like-minded individuals.<sup>42</sup>

41. Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF). 2024. [Supporting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises \(MSMEs\) for Economic Resilience](#)

42. Market Development Facility. 2019. [Creation of MDF Fiji Enterprise Engine helps Fijian MSMEs generate FJD1.2 million in additional revenue](#)



## yher Pacific Islands

### ► Background

**Programme Host:** YGAP

**Funded by:** Various philanthropic organisations

**Partners:** Various partners including international organisations, development finance institutions (DFIs) and local government and companies

**Status:** Ongoing

### ► Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Six months

**Programme Location:** National

**Financing Offered:** FJ\$ 2,000 per entrepreneur

### ► Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Hospitality and tourism (previously sector agnostic)

**Target Demographic:** Women

**Stage Focus:** Early

The yher programme under YGAP offers business acceleration service to female entrepreneurs in the Pacific Islands Region. The programme offers entrepreneurs the skills, knowledge, connections, funding and community needed to build sustainable and scalable ventures. Designed and delivered by women entrepreneurs, the programme leverages YGAP's proven model that has facilitated and developed over 69 programmes that have supported 752 impact ventures worldwide.<sup>43</sup> While the yher programme had been offering sector-agnostic acceleration to women entrepreneurs in the past, over the last three years, it has only offered acceleration to ventures in the tourism space under its Sustainable Tourism Accelerator. The 2024 rendition of the acceleration programme also welcomed male and LGBTQ entrepreneurs.<sup>44</sup>

43. YGAP. n.d. [What is yher Pacific Islands?](#)

44. yher Pacific Islands. n.d. [Sustainable Tourism Accelerator](#)



## South Pacific Business Development's BLOOM Accelerator

### ▶ Background

**Programme Host:** South Pacific Business Development

**Funded by:** Self-funded through microfinance business

**Partners:** Fiji Development Bank

**Status:** Ongoing

### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Ten months

**Programme Location:** In-person, national

**Financing Offered:** Debt of up to FJ\$ 30,000

### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** Women

**Stage Focus:** Idea, early, start-up

The South Pacific Business Development (SPBD) Microfinance Network has spread across several countries in the Pacific Islands. It primarily offers access to finance to female-led MSMEs in the region. After success in Samoa and Tonga, SPBD opened its doors in Fiji in 2010 to cater to the financial needs of low-income women, who represent 35% of the country's population. SPBD is the largest microfinance body in Fiji, rendering its services to over 9,500 households in an effort to help improve quality of life by enhancing people's capacity to earn and develop leadership qualities and skills in managing their businesses and finances. The Fiji BLOOM Accelerator offers acceleration to entrepreneurs on a cohort basis.



## Business Accelerator Programmes under the United Nations Informal Economies Recovery Project

### ► Background

**Programme Host:** International Labour Organization (ILO)

**Programme Partners:**

- Business Accelerator Programme for Creative Entrepreneurs: VOU Fiji, Greenhouse Coworking
- Business Accelerator Programme for Agricultural Sector: Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) and the Agri-Rugby Programme of the Fiji Rugby Academy

**Status:** One-off COVID-19 recovery project

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### ► Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** 2021–2022

**Programme Location:** Suva and Nadi, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** No

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### ► Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Creative industries (performance, crafts and handmade goods) and agriculture

**Target Demographic:** Artisans and performers (creative entrepreneurs), youth

**Stage Focus:** Early

The United Nations Informal Economies Recovery Project, led by the International Labour Organization (ILO), launched a series of business accelerator programmes to support the recovery of MSMEs affected by COVID-19. This initiative, implemented in partnership with the Fijian government and local service providers, focused on empowering MSMEs to leverage new opportunities as Fiji's economy rebounded.

The programmes targeted two sectors heavily impacted by the pandemic – creative industries and agriculture – offering a blend of online and face-to-face business training, advisory services, and mentorship. The ILO partnered with the Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE), Greenhouse Coworking, and Vou Fiji to build the capacity of MSMEs and enhance their resilience.



## Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator Programme

### ▶ Background

**Programme Host:** Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)

**Funded by:** Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD)

**Partners:** N/A

**Status:** 2021–2023

### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Unknown

**Programme Location:** Virtual

**Financing Offered:** Up to US\$ 50,000 in zero-interest loans<sup>45</sup>

### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** Priority given to women, youth, people in marginalised communities

**Stage Focus:** Growth

The Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator programme aimed to support incubator graduates and other high-potential green enterprises in the growth stage to develop towards investment readiness through a structured six-month programme providing links with investors, individualised technical assistance support, mentoring, investor pitch events, networking and learning opportunities. The programme consisted of a structured journey with technical assistance, series of regional masterclass webinars that addressed common topics related to finances, pitching, and proposal writing in addition to offering networking opportunities to create essential investor linkages for entrepreneurs.<sup>46</sup>

The Accelerator Programme has propelled 32 high-growth green MSMEs towards investment readiness, prioritizing women-led (44%) and youth-led (51%) enterprises. The programme provided over USD\$775,000 in grants awarded to 21 impactful green ventures.

45. GGGI Pacific. October 25, 2022. [Facebook Post](#)

46. Pacific Green Entrepreneurs Network, 2023. [Application Guidelines](#)



## Fiji THRIVE Programme

### ► Background

**Programme Host:** Australian Business Volunteers (ABV)

**Funded by:** BSP Financial Group Limited (BSP Fiji)

**Partners:** BSP Financial Group Limited (BSP Fiji), Kickstart funding from British High Commission Fiji (2023), Program collaboration with Investment Fiji.

**Status:** 2023–present

### ► Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Six months per cycle (thereafter participants join alumni network)

**Programme Location:** Various locations in Fiji across Central, Western and Northern Divisions, including rural areas

**Financing Offered:** No

### ► Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** Women-led businesses, rural entrepreneurs, iTaukei-led businesses

**Stage Focus:** Early and growth

The Fiji THRIVE programme, co-designed by the BSP Financial Group Limited (BSP) and Australian Business Volunteers (ABV), aims to empower locally owned businesses in Fiji, with a particular focus on women-led enterprises. Launched in 2023, the programme's acronym stands for "Together, Helping [to build a] Resilient, Inclusive [and] Vibrant Economy," reflecting its commitment to fostering sustainable economic growth within the Fijian community. The initiative provides training, network development and mentorship to 25 promising Fijian business leaders per cohort over a six-month period, equipping them with essential skills for future growth. The programme combines practical business management coaching with ongoing mentorship from ABV's network of skilled business professionals (SBPs), who bring extensive regional expertise and a track record of driving successful companies. ABV uses its unique Client Pathway Report to help track individual business progress across core business competencies, shaping tailored support and continually refining the THRIVE program. Now in its third year, THRIVE is demonstrating practical outcomes for businesses (including increased business planning and financial management capability as well as access to finance) and a growing alumni peer support network (reaching 140+ MSMEs in 2025).



## Academy of Women Entrepreneurs (AWE)

### ▶ Background

**Programme Host:** Women Entrepreneurs & Business Council (WEBC) of the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) and Makoi Women's Vocational Training Centre (MWVTC)

**Funded by:** United States State Department

**Partners:** WEBC and MWVTC

**Status:** 2019–present

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### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Seven months

**Programme Location:** Suva, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** No

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### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** Women-led

**Stage Focus:** Start-up

The Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) programme in Fiji, launched by the U.S. Embassy in partnership with the Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC) and Makoi Women's Vocational Training Centre, is dedicated to empowering Fijian women to build and grow their businesses. The programme provides women entrepreneurs with access to practical business education, mentorship, and networking opportunities, leveraging the DreamBuilder platform developed by Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management. By fostering entrepreneurial skills and confidence, AWE aims to enhance women's economic participation, promote financial independence, and contribute to Fiji's broader economic development.

# Incubator Programmes

## Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme

### ▶ Background

**Programme Host:** Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)

**Funded by:** Qatar Fund for Development

**Partners:** N/A

**Status:** 2021-2023

### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Four months

**Programme Location:** Virtual with orientation workshop in Suva

**Financing Offered:** FJ\$ 5,000 for 20 winners after business plan competition

### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Environmental sustainability, energy

**Target Demographic:** Priority given to women, youth, people in marginalised communities

**Stage Focus:** Early, idea, start-up

The Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme is a free, structured training and mentoring initiative designed to empower green entrepreneurs with the skills, tools, and confidence needed to build robust and sustainable business models. The programme supports early-stage micro and small-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with a strong focus on innovation, scalability, and long-term impact.

Between 2021 and 2023, the programme successfully delivered three cohorts, combining group and individual learning through a mix of virtual and in-person sessions. Over a structured four-month period, participants engaged in intensive training, coaching, and mentoring, culminating in a business plan competition, where selected enterprises received USD 5,000 seed grants to accelerate their growth.

The Incubator Programme has nurtured 214 early-stage green MSMEs, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity—61% of participants were women-led businesses, and 51% were youth-driven enterprises. In Fiji, the programme supported 58 green MSMEs, 60 seed grants amounting to USD 85,000 were awarded, providing critical financial support to ventures committed to sustainability, resilience, and positive environmental and social impact across the Pacific region.

Incubator participants have the opportunity to apply for the Accelerator Programme, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.



## Greenhouse Coworking

### ▶ Background

**Host Organisation:** Greenhouse Studio

**Funded by:** Seed money from the Market Development Facility (MDF), bootstrap from revenue from Greenhouse Studio, and membership fees from the co-working space

**Partners:** MDF, UNCDF, GSMA, International Labour Organization

**Status:** Ongoing

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### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Variable

**Programme Location:** Suva, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** No

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### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** Nondescript

**Stage Focus:** Idea, early, start-up

Primarily a co-working space that allows you to meet like-minded people, Greenhouse Coworking also offers an online community for entrepreneurs who are not based in Suva or not interested in using the co-working space. It also offers classes/workshops on various entrepreneurship-related topics regularly and provides aspiring entrepreneurs with resources on how to register a business and come up with a business model.



## Agro-Rugby Incubator

### ▶ Background

**Host Organisation:** Fiji Rugby Academy

**Funded by:** International Labour Organization (ILO), U.S. Embassy

**Partners:** Fiji Commerce and Employers Federations (FCEF)

**Status:** Ongoing

### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Three months

**Programme Location:** Suva, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** No

### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Agriculture and food

**Target Demographic:** Nondescript

**Stage Focus:** Idea

The Agro-Rugby incubator programme invites Fijian rugby players to launch or expand ventures that integrate agriculture with sports, aligning with local development goals. Selected participants receive impact-based grants and hands-on technical support from programme partners, aimed at empowering players with entrepreneurial skills. The programme provides training in strategic planning, financial management, and business continuity, with a focus on building commercial agricultural ventures that support the athletes' futures. Successful graduates are connected to further financial support, including potential funding through cooperative initiatives and partnerships with agricultural development funds.



## Innovation Hub and Co-working

### ▶ Background

**Host Organisation:** UNDP

**Funded by:** UNDP

**Partners:** University of South Pacific

**Status:** 2019–2021

### ▶ Programme Structure

**Programme Duration:** Three to six months

**Programme Location:** Suva, Fiji

**Financing Offered:** Grant US\$ 5,000

### ▶ Focus Areas

**Sector Focus:** Sector agnostic

**Target Demographic:** University students

**Stage Focus:** Idea

The Innovation Hub and Co-working was an incubator-like programme under UNDP at the University of South Pacific where students and aspiring entrepreneurs could come to ideate MSME development, work on proposals, and receive technical support from a private sector expert within UNDP to formulate business proposals and ensure that their business plans were financially viable. The programme was disrupted by COVID-19 and, due to logistical difficulties during the pandemic, has since closed.

APPENDIX B

# LIST OF IDENTIFIED BDS PROGRAMMES

Still Running?	Organisation	Programme/ Resource Name	Type	Stage of ventures supported	Funding Provisions
Yes	Bank South Pacific (BSP) and Australian Business Volunteers (ABV)	Fiji THRIVE	Six-month coaching and mentorship programme	Idea, start-up, early,	N/A
Yes	Business Assistance Fiji (BAF)	Business Link Pacific Programme	Business assessment tools + financial support + advisory service	Idea, start-up, early	N/A
Yes	Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation	Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE)	Accelerator	Early and growth	N/A
No	Global Green Growth Initiative (GGGI)	Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator Programme	Regional accelerator	Growth	Repayable grants, US\$ 0-50,000
No	Global Green Growth Initiative (GGGI)	Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme	Regional Incubator	Idea, start-up, early	Seed grants, US\$ 5,000
Yes	Greenhouse Coworking	-	Co-working + some business model / paperwork help	Idea, start-up, early, growth, mature	N/A

No	International Labour Organization	Business Accelerator Programme for Creative Entrepreneurs (VOU, FCEF, Greenhouse)	Accelerator	Start-up, early	Unknown
Yes	MSME Fiji	Department of Cooperatives	Incubator + business training	Idea, start-up, early	N/A
Yes	MSME Fiji	Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)	Government grant provider	Start-up, early	Grant, FJ\$ 0-30,000 (US\$ 0-13,500)
Yes	MSME Fiji	Northern Development Programme	Government grant provider	Start-up, early, growth	Grant funding on capital items, FJ\$ 0-50,000 (US\$ 0-22,500)
Yes	MSME Fiji	Integrated Human Resources Development Programme	Government grant provider	Start-up, early, growth	Grant on purchase and construction of capital goods, FJ\$ 0-150,000
Yes	MSME Fiji	Trade Enhancement Programme	Government grant provider	Start-up, early	Grant, FJ\$ 1,000 (US\$ 450)
Yes	MSME Fiji	National Export Strategy	Government grant provider for businesses / MSMEs that are on the verge of exporting	Growth	Grant, FJ\$ 100,000 (US\$ 45,000)

Yes	MyDesk Fiji	-	Co-working + plans on offering capacity development	Idea, start-up, early, growth, mature	N/A
Yes	Seremaia Bai	Agro Rugby Incubator	Incubator for athletes	Idea, start-up	N/A
Yes	South Pacific Business Development (SPBD)	SPBD BLOOM Accelerator	Accelerator	Idea, start-up, early	Micro-Loans, FJ\$ 0-30,000 (US\$ 0-13,500)
Yes	UN Women	Women's Markets for Change	Incubator	Start-up, growth	N/A
No	UNDP	Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme (BAGS)	Accelerator	Start-up, early, growth	Grants, US\$ 50,000-150,000
No	UNDP	Innovation Hub and Co-working	Co-working space + incubator	Idea	Grants, US\$ 5,000
Yes	US Department of State	Academy of Women Entrepreneurs	Seven-month programme to help build business	Start-up	N/A
Yes	YGAP	yher	Accelerator	Early	Grant, FJ\$ 2,000 (US\$ 900)

APPENDIX C

# LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Organisation	BDS Programme Name	Interviewee
Bank South Pacific (BSP) and Australian Business Volunteers (ABV)	Fiji THRIVE	ABV Programme Director Pacific and Senior Programme Manager
Business Assistance Fiji (BAF)	Business Link Pacific Programme	Programme Manager
Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation	Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE)	Programme Manager and Master Trainer
Global Green Growth Initiative (GGGI)	Pacific Greenpreneurs Accelerator Programme	Programme Manager
Global Green Growth Initiative (GGGI)	Pacific Greenpreneurs Incubator Programme	Programme Manager
Greenhouse Coworking	N/A	Programme Manager
International Labour Organization	Business Accelerator Programme for Creative Entrepreneurs (VOU, FCEF, Greenhouse)	Programme Manager

MSME Fiji	Department of Cooperatives	Programme Director and Business Advisor (single interview for all six programmes)
MSME Fiji	Integrated Human Resources Development Programme	
MSME Fiji	National Export Strategy	
MSME Fiji	Northern Development Programme	
MSME Fiji	Trade Enhancement Programme	
MSME Fiji	Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)	
MyDesk Fiji	N/A	Programme Manager
South Pacific Business Development (SPBD)	SPBD BLOOM Accelerator	Director
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme (BAGS)	Programme Manager
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Innovation Hub and Co-working	Programme Manager
YGAP	yher	Programme Manager

### Entrepreneurs

- **Chris Vanualailai**, Founder, ESP Fiji (Envirotech Solutions Pacific)
- **Cynthia Cebejano**, Founder, 8finity
- **Alex Reddaway**, Founder, Leaf Capital

### Other Stakeholders

- **Malcolm Bossley**, Pacific Senior Adviser, Market Development Facility (MDF)

## APPENDIX D

# CASE STUDY - FIJI ENTERPRISE ENGINE

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Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) is an accelerator in Fiji that supports ventures in their early and growth stages that have been in business for a minimum of two years.<sup>47</sup> The pilot phase of FEE was launched in 2019 under the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF), with support from partners like Australian Aid, the Market Development Facility (MDF), and the Reserve Bank of Fiji, among others. FEE recruits 15 promising ventures to its cohorts every year for an acceleration programme spanning six months. Most of the ventures have an average yearly turnover between FJ\$ 300,000 and FJ\$ 500,000 and thus are categorised as medium-sized enterprises based on the government's definitions of MSMEs.<sup>48</sup> FEE's cohorts receive classroom-based training in five thematic areas: accounting and finance, branding and marketing, human resources and industrial relations, strategic management, and business technology, which is the newest thematic addition to the programme.

FEE has hired trainers who are experts in each of these thematic areas, and each venture is allocated eight hours of one-to-one training in each area during the six-month programme. All of the FEE coaches are business owners, making the programme entirely entrepreneur-driven. "FEE has developed a unique culture as we (our coaches/trainers, and I) run our own businesses. It is entrepreneur-run, and it allows us to identify with the cohort as we have been through the challenges ourselves. This is more beneficial than having trainers who do not have the experience of running their own businesses. Our tagline is 'By Entrepreneurs for Entrepreneurs,'" said Palinda Kaituu, FEE's Business Accelerator Manager. Kaituu, who has been involved with FEE since 2022, runs two consultancies in Fiji. In addition to providing classroom-based instruction and mentorship, FEE also provides ample networking opportunities to its entrepreneurs with many training sessions run by prominent figures in the Fijian entrepreneurial landscape. In a recent development, FEE has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to partner with 25 of its own alumni to support the programme, a first for any Fijian BDS provider.

While many accelerators and incubators in Fiji, and the rest of the Pacific Islands region, are keen on providing free-of-charge services to a large number of entrepreneurs, FEE prides itself on providing more individualised support to a small, rigorously selected group of entrepreneurs who are willing to pay a fee for acceleration and have a strong desire to grow their business. "We sit down for face-to-face interviews with entrepreneurs, and when you are interacting with them for long enough, you get the idea of whether or not they really, really want this and if they are truly invested in scaling up," said Kaituu. While Fiji's entrepreneurial ecosystem is booming with new businesses, a lot of them do not get their foundations right, and they only realise that a few years down the line when they are trying to scale up. According to Kaituu, this is usually due to their lack of foundational skills in structuring their businesses and understanding the financial aspects of running a business. "FEE attempts to equip such businesses that have great ideas, and are already in operation in Fiji, but are unable to grow due to deficiencies in a few key areas," she added. Between the 2023 and 2024 acceleration cycles at the national level, FEE had 44 applicants who were interested in going through the accelerator, 29 of whom were accepted into the programme during the two cycles.

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47. Fiji Enterprise Engine. April 20, 2024. [Facebook Post](#)

48. Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. 2020. [Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Fiji - Policy Framework](#)

The programme is not only competitive in its selection process but also charges a fee for participation. "Participants pay 20% of the registration fee, and the other 80% is subsidised by partners. In FEE, we look at the commitment and drive to scale their businesses, and those who are really committed are the ones who are willing to pay a fee," said Kaituu. FEE does not offer grants to its participants, so the objective is to equip them for investment readiness, accessing finance and scaling their businesses through creativity, innovation and opportunities. "The programme's outcomes and the calibre of businesses that have gone through it have built FEE's profile into what it is today," Kaituu added.

FEE also has a history of tailoring its programme based on the performance of its ventures. For example, FCEF ran FEE as a pilot in its initial years. During this phase, the parent company ran the programme for different durations of time to deduce that the currently implemented six-month-long programme provided the right balance in terms of being able to cover all the required training areas without entrepreneurs losing momentum. In addition to programme duration, FCEF also realised it was futile to run a hybrid/virtual programme hoping to include participants from rural Fiji. Due to a lack of network connectivity and the technological gap between urban and rural areas, programmes run virtually only cater to those in urban centres. Although FEE facilitated a hybrid model up until 2022, it eventually became clear that the face-to-face mode of delivery was more effective than online delivery. FEE was always facilitated out of Suva until 2023 when the first cohort in Fiji's Western Division was facilitated in Nadi. This decision by FCEF enabled FEE to support a number of tourism MSMEs that had been greatly affected by COVID. Two cohorts now run each year, one in the Central Division (Suva) and one in the Western Division (Nadi). The goal is to eventually take FEE to the Northern Division, but doing so will be dependent on partner funding.

The assessment of FEE against the SCALE framework (see Table 3) shows its strengths and a potential area for improvement. That assessment may also serve as an example that encourages other BDS providers in Fiji to assess their own programmes using this lens.

Table 3: Assessing Fiji Enterprise Engine’s (FEE) BDS Practices Using the SCALE Framework

SCALE Framework Element		Assessment of FEE	Notes
<b>S</b>	<b>Selecting the Right Enterprises</b>	<b>High</b>	Has a set of clear selection criteria, including early and growth-stage ventures in operation for at least two years that display potential and ambition for growth.
<b>C</b>	<b>Charging Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>High</b>	Charges a subsidised fee of FJ\$ 900, which FEE has deemed effective for ensuring commitment and preventing “programme hopping”.
<b>A</b>	<b>Addressing Problems</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Utilises classroom-based learning coupled with mentorship delivered by thematic experts. The heavy emphasis on classroom-style learning and standard allocation of coaching hours across topics does not fully align with the SCALE principles, which emphasise real-time problem-solving and peer learning.
<b>L</b>	<b>Learn by Evaluating Enterprise Performance</b>	<b>High</b>	The programme is evaluated using a simple and effective methodology collecting data from entrepreneurs. Evaluation is conducted by funders or third parties, and FEE has used these insights to improve the programme based on evidence.
<b>E</b>	<b>Lead by Example</b>	<b>High</b>	Has a clear strategy and measures of success. The programme mostly applies internationally recognised best practices and has made attempts to work around some hurdles created by local factors.  FEE also has multiple funding streams, including participant fees and funding from multiple donors, including the Government of Fiji.

As of October 2024, 77 businesses have graduated from FEE’s acceleration programme, and there are a few notable success stories according to FEE’s business accelerator manager, Palinda Kaituu. Michael Mausio, the founder of the popular fashion line House of Mausio, was a part of FEE’s inaugural cohort in 2019. Mausio’s work is internationally recognised, and he was invited to represent Fiji at the Pacific London Fashion Week in 2019.<sup>49</sup> As his business has

49. Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE). August 1, 2019. [Facebook Post](#)

grown, Mausio has expanded into other industries like tourism and real estate. In a 2023 article in The Fiji Times, he stated, “I still use what I learned from the FEE programme. I still have my notebook from FEE, and I use it as my guide for developing business strategic plans and marketing ideas.”<sup>50</sup> Between pre-acceleration in 2018, and post-acceleration in 2022, Mausio saw a surge in business revenue by 140%.

Another success story is Samson Lee, another fashion designer in Fiji, who graduated from FEE’s 2018 pilot cohort.<sup>51</sup> Today, Lee’s brand is etched in the popular culture of Fiji. He was named the Fiji Fashion Week Best Designer at the National Fashion Awards in 2023<sup>52</sup> and has also garnered international attention, having featured in several fashion shows abroad. Lee, alongside other Fijian designers, founded the Wear Fiji Project which trains aspiring designers in the country. In 2023, the project partnered with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to conduct a masterclass for its students under NZ international designer Karen Walker.<sup>53</sup>

Between its 2019 and 2023 cohorts, MDF projects that FEE’s interventions have resulted in FJ\$ 2.18 million in additional sales revenue generated for businesses that partook in its acceleration programme. Since 2019, FEE alumni have been able to make at least 30 additional full-time hires that are directly attributable to their learning from the accelerator programme. This has resulted in a combined increased income for the newly hired staff of FJ\$ 825,366. Ventures that went through acceleration between 2019 and 2022 have raised FJ\$ 1.032 million in debt-based financing and received FJ\$ 327,500 in grant funding during and after acceleration.

FEE is one of the premiere BDS programmes in the Fijian landscape. Operating for over half a decade, the programme remains dedicated to its goal of making a significant contribution to promising, growth-oriented businesses in Fiji. Being entrepreneur-led, highly competitive, and dedicated to continual improvement, FEE is a prime example of a programme that has adapted international best practices to its local context.

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50. The Fiji Times. June 2, 2023. [“House of Mausio | A celebration of Pacific identity and fashion”](#)

51. Market Development Facility (MDF). June 25, 2018. [Facebook Post](#)

52. Fiji Fashion Week. 2023. [Facebook Post](#)

53. The Fiji Times. 2023. [“Fashion exchange program”](#)



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