Creating an Enabling Environment for Indigenous Business in Fiji

Subhash Appana
Adjunct Fellow, Fiji National University

ABSTRACT
The ongoing strains of a sustained global economic downturn have forced a shift in focus to how individual countries can generate small-scale inward-focused economic activity while waiting for the global economy to regain its vibrancy. It is in this regard that SMEs have gravitated to centre stage, especially in isolated developing economies. In Fiji, recent government policy has prioritised ‘self-help’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ in a marked departure from the established outward-focus that characterised policies during the second half of the 1980s and much of the next 2 decades. A major concern that all of Fiji’s governments have had to grapple with has been an increasingly insistent ethnic-Fijian desire to participate in a more visible manner in the commercial sector. Given Fiji’s sociopolitical composition, this opens up promising avenues for mobilising hitherto dormant resources and encouraging indigenous business within the SME framework.

After providing a critical historical overview of indigenous business initiatives in Fiji, this paper contends that many of the reasons for past shortcomings had to do with a political reluctance to acknowledge openly the need for strict economic solutions to business problems. A major shortcoming in this regard was the trivialisation of the tenet of accountability in the interests of political expediency. This paper proposes an enabling framework for indigenous business management. It concludes by proposing a number of sectors that offer encouraging opportunities for indigenous business within the SME framework.