

# International Women's Day 2021



## Temo Trusts Her Capabilities to Get Where She Wants

**LAISEANA NASIGA**  
SUVA

Watching workers carry out road works along Kings Road in Suva while travelling to and from school, sparked an interest for civil engineering for Alitia Temo.

It is now a reality for the 33 year-old Ms Temo, a civil engineer with Fiji Roads Authority (FRA).

Her role includes supervising construction work from specific sites on roads, footpaths, and bridges to office-based works entailing stakeholder interactions; design reviews and contractors claim evaluations.

The mother of two is one of three female engineers in FRA's delivery department and the only female engineer in the capital projects team.

### How she started

After completing her Year 13 education, she took a year off, to reflect and do some volunteer work.

With the help of her uncle a lecturer at the time at Fiji Institute of Technology then (now Fiji National University (FNU)), she enrolled to study civil engineering.

"At first it was intimidating, a class of 120 students, of which only seven were girls.

"I quickly adjusted and found my way through the four-stages of the diploma programme, started my attachment with the then Department of National Roads (DNR) which turned out to be a three-year engagement with the department prior to the reform.

"In 2012 I returned to FNU to complete my Advance Diploma studies and later pursued my degree graduating in 2017 just months before starting with FRA," she said.

### Women empowerment

As a trainee engineer with DNR and with not many women doing engineering there were times when she felt she was not heard or her input considered on certain aspects of site activities.

However, she did not feel like throw-

ing in the towel, but rather, throwing the towel at people, because she trusted her capabilities to deliver and contribute.

Fortunately for Ms Temo, women empowerment programmes were developed over the years encouraging equal work ethics and opportunities in the workplace.

"Since joining FRA, there has always been equal work opportunities, and this has taught me to be bold and strong during difficult situations on site or when negotiating with stakeholders.

"It does not mean, just because I am a woman, I will always be compassionate toward any situation. It is about finding the balance between being compassionate and fair to any situation.

**The mother of two is one of three female engineers in FRA's delivery department and the only female engineer in the capital projects team.**

### International Women's Day (IWD)

In her message for IWD, she encourages women to applaud the achievements of other women over the years as it is a time taken to reflect and celebrate the contributions of women in all aspects of life.

"From my experience, everything starts with believing in yourself and capabilities.

"When you find that self-belief within yourself, you will be driven to achieve more, push boundaries and work outside comfort zones.

"The first step is self-belief, second is finding your passion, and third is pushing boundaries."

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Alitia Temo at one of her work sites.

## No dream is too big or too small for road manager

**LAISEANA NASIGA**  
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No dream is too big or too small to achieve for Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) works manager Karishma Sharma.

Pursuing a career in a male dominant field was no easy road for Ms Sharma as her days include juggling work with her male counterparts.

But with the will to thrive in the industry, Ms Sharma trusts her skills and abilities, and most importantly she will never give up.

"Engineering is a very challenging field, and I will admit that there were times in my career where I felt like just giving up and rethinking about my future. But eventually I just ended up clearing my mind of these irrational thoughts and decided not to give up," Ms Sharma said.

Originally from Lautoka she was brought up in a sugar cane farming community.

Her parents are both marine diesel engineers.

"That inspired me to get where I am now, making a mark in a male dominant field," she said.

"Education has always been paramount, and my parents made sure that we got the best. Growing up I have always tried to follow my sister's footsteps and her words of encouragement and support has got me to be where I am right now," she said.

### Education accomplishments

She completed her Diploma in Civil Engineering in 2008 at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) now Fiji National University (FNU). She then went on to pursue her Advance Diploma in 2009 which was the highest qualification back then and was in demand.

"I saw it as an advantage to start off my career in the civil engineering discipline.

"With moral, physical, and financial support from my family, I managed to start with my Bachelors in 2011 Semester Two.

Ms Sharma was one of the four pioneers to start off the Bachelor of Civil Engineering programme at



Karishma Sharma.

FNU.

Her interest to further her studies had her receiving a New Zealand Aid scholarship in 2020 to pursue her Master of Engineering Studies (Transportation Studies) at the University of Auckland.

She is also heavily involved in mentoring youths not just women, an interactive learning method to develop one's intuition.

"Empowering women is first by telling them that they can achieve anything they set their mind on. They should become assertive at their workplaces.

### Leadership

With this year's theme focusing on women in leadership, Ms Sharma said more women have taken the reins of leadership in these tough times not only at home but in the society, community and work.

"Alongside with the overview of gender equality in other countries during the pandemic; it is crystal clear that having women at the helm of effective participation and decision making is an advantage and is working well so far in managing COVID-19.

"It is important for women to have

**"The pathway to success for women has more twists and turns with professional and family life entangled closely."**

a seat in the decision-making process as women tend to have a much higher social sensitivity and core values.

"These traits assist women to make better decisions and novel solutions," she said.

As the world commemorates the International Women's Day today, Ms Sharma honours the achievements of women across the globe throughout history.

"It speaks of the successes women have faced in all areas of work, be it male dominated or female dominated.

"The pathway to success for women has more twists and turns with professional and family life entangled closely."

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