

DR LUVENI - THE TRENDSETTER

Sitting at the school assembly listening curiously to the words uttered by the Principal of Adi Cakabau School Ms Chaltone, a certain phrase 'carve your name in history' struck her and persisted in her life as she sat in classes ruminating over these words. No later had the school hosted a careers talk where a British Dental Officer relayed the message that there were no female dentists in Fiji. It was that moment this 15-year-old tossed away her plans on becoming a school teacher and aspired to beat the odds by becoming the first woman Dentist in Fiji.

Born in Nakuni Village on the island of Ono-I-Lau, she still reminisces how her father operated a small village store and used this income to educate his children on the main land of Viti Levu.

To depart the warmth of loved ones and to follow the path of education was her only hope to make something of her life. The six-year-old left to live with her uncle in Lautoka where she attended Lautoka Fijian School for five years, later joining Nabua Fijian School then to Adi Cakobau School - where it all began.

The journey to becoming the first female dentist was not an easy one but Dr Jiko Fatafehi Luveni was adamant to take up the challenge. She chanced herself into exploring and excelling in areas out of her comfort zone.

“She remembers her days at the Fiji School of Medicine as to be one of the trend setting ones. She explains that FSM had been a development institute for her since she had tutors who defined her life through the exposure of professionalism and hard work. The student body comprised of the many different cultures, lead to learning different ways of life. This experience at FSM created an opportunity to look outside the box and plan one's work life.”

One example was the collaborations of academia and sporting excellence as Dr Luveni participated in inter-college sports competitions and made a breakthrough into not only the national teams to the South Pacific Games but also winning Silver Medal in Table Tennis and Bronze Medal in Golf in the years 1966 and 1979 respectively.

Graduating as a Dentist at Fiji School of Medicine in 1967 and in Public Health Dentistry from the University of Sydney in 1982 did not suffice Dr Luveni's zest for more. During the course

of her career, she continued to undertake short courses in various disciplines of programme management nationally, regionally and internationally.

This was only the beginning of the lady referred as 'Women's Champion', who believed that women could accomplish what men could.

The explorer in her failed to restrict Dr Luveni to dental clinic and she ventured towards public health dentistry and programmes outside the clinic.

With strong interests towards public welfare, Dr Luveni introduced the National Tooth Brushing Competition and conducted a nationwide dental health survey. This further boosted her dentistry career, rewarding her position at the Primary and Preventive Health Unit at the Ministry of Health headquarters. In 1988, she joined the United Nations Population Fund where she worked for 15 years as a Programme Manager serving the Pacific region. She also worked for three years at the Ministry of Health as the HIV/AIDS Project Officer before setting up the NGO, Fiji Network for People Living with HIV and AIDS as its Executive Director.

She dearly clings onto a personal prophecy when she was 32 years of age. "I saw a dream. I saw that I was an MP and was working towards the government house" she says. This prophecy became true three

decades later in 2008 when Dr Luveni was invited to serve as the Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation.

She has continuously worked towards the betterment of women and established a network of more than 1,300 women groups to connect with government and receive development assistance. She declared violence free communities to enhance promotion of gender equality efforts through strengthened men-women partnership.

Her sacrifice and commitment towards women empowerment has been recognized with Women Empowerment Award by All China Women's Federation for which she humbly confides would have been impossible without her husband's continuous support.

However, fate had her name carved on history's larger plaque than Fiji's first female dentist when Dr Luveni was elected as the first female Speaker of the Parliament House in 2014. She was once again appointed as the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) High-Level Champion, serving in the Pacific Region.

Her advice to younger alumini is to aspire to be a leader in their chosen profession. "Look beyond the ceiling to be a national leader and strengthen your personal attributes and potential, and expand your global and national interest to be an active player within the broad concept of globalization."

Dr Jiko Fatafahi Luveni is happily married with five children and she promises to continue work towards the betterment of women in Fiji.



Dr Jiko Fatafahi Luveni

CLASS OF
1967

Fiji School of Medicine

Qualifications

- Diploma in Dental Surgery - Fiji School of Medicine, 1967
- Diploma in Public Health Dentistry - University of Sydney, 1982
- Certificate in Dental Epidemiology - World Health Organisation, Fiji, 1985