

Protection of Biodiversity in Development Pathways Critical



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with PS Waterways and Environment - Mr. Joshua Wycliffe and farmers during the handing over of fencing materials to livestock farmers at Legalega Research Station, Nadi.

The safeguarding and protection of Fiji's natural biodiversity must take precedence in all aspects of development.

This was reiterated by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while officiating at the handing over of fencing materials to livestock farmers at the Legalega Research Station on Wednesday 13th May 2020 as part of the Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) Protection of Biodiversity from Free Animals program.

He said achieving development objectives at the expense of our natural biodiversity was ill-advised as biodiversity was critical for sustainable development, adding that agricultural activity like livestock farming, as a contributing factor to the loss of biodiversity needed to be mitigated.

"We all know the critical importance of biodiversity to our sustenance and our development goals, it is important that we mainstream biodiversity into all aspects of our development, across areas such as

agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism, and waterways," said Minister Reddy.

"The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) indicates that livestock is among the sectors with the highest impact on the biodiversity-the second most important driver of global biodiversity loss, by releasing about 14.5% of global greenhouse gases (GHG)."

Minister Reddy added that as much as animals were a part of our diversity, at times they also altered biodiversity, as livestock farming

required much land and contributed towards the destroying of native plant, animal species, and their habitat. Livestock farmers received assistance to help fence their paddocks through the provision of fencing materials, funded by the GEF STAR Fiji R2R Project.

Through this initiative, the following GEF-7 investment focus and main objectives will be addressed;

- Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes;

- Address direct drivers to protect habitats and species;

Furthermore, this project suits and addresses the "Impact Programs" as outlined by GEF, and will address underlying drivers of global environmental degradation. It addresses the following programs which are most germane to the CBD;

- The Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program aim to transform lives and avoiding the potential resulting loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, overexploitation of resources, and inefficient practices that lead to GHG emissions.

Moreover, the project addresses the following outputs of the Fiji National R2R Project.

- Component 1: Conservation Of Terrestrial And Marine Biodiversity.
- Component 2: Conservation, Restoration And Enhancement Of Carbon Stocks Through Sustainable Forestry, and;
- Component 3: Integrated Natural Resources Management

Sunil Prasad's Path towards Pioneering AMA Contractual Farming



Mr. Sunil Prasad at his residence in Naboutini

It's a routine. A way of life for Sunil Prasad to toil the land.

His life has been intrinsically linked to farming, he has made a life out of it, and though there were challenges along the way, he has remained steadfast to his farming vocation.

Reality dawned on Mr. Prasad and his family in 2005 after the family's land lease expired. Their future was bleak as the family was displaced from Naboutini in Sabeto, he had to demolish his six-bedroom house worth an estimated \$200,000 and the family had to relocate elsewhere.

For some, that would have been the end of it, the towel would have been thrown in, but not for Sunil.

He was a full-time bus driver then and part-time sugar cane farmer; his years of tilling the land, blood, sweat, and tears lay crumbled in front of him.

"When my lease expired from Naboutini, I didn't have anything else with me, I also demolished my six-bedroom house because they did not renew my land lease," he said.

"It was a very sad and bad time for me, but I did not look back, I kept on moving forward; thankfully, I

stayed with my relatives when I was displaced."

Three years later, through his determination, he secured a five-acre lease within the same area of Naboutini.

Shortly afterward, he rebuilt his new home, he began his cane farming again until he retired from work as a bus driver before he took up vegetable farming.

As expected, there were a few challenges along the way but he was unfazed and continued with his farm.

"I was a sugarcane farmer, I had never tried vegetable farming before but now that I am retired from work, I decided to move into cash crop farming to assist me with my everyday living," said Mr. Prasad.

Last year he planted maize, beans, and cowpeas for the market, along with other assorted vegetables for his family consumption, complemented by the 25 coconut trees that lined his farm.

"My wife helps me a lot in the farm as I have only one son who was working at the Air Terminal Services in Nadi, but is now at home because of the COVID-19," he added.

For him, the thought of pioneering an initiative implemented by the Government was out of the equation, but he was pleasantly surprised to be offered an opportunity to do so when the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) had conducted awareness sessions in the lead up to the launching of the program.

On Thursday 07th May 2020 Mr. Prasad, along with 14 other farmers from Sabeto signed on the dotted line and became part of the pioneering group of farmers who became the first lot of contracted farmers under the AMA's Contractual Farming initiative.

The AMA has so far secured a total of 43 farmers who have expressed their interest and commitment towards the contractual farming initiative by signing up for the program.

Mr. Prasad thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Marketing Authority for their support in promoting and implementing the contractual farming initiative for the farmers' benefit.

"For me, this is history, I am now 60-years-old and we are here today to sign a contract to supply to the AMA. I am very thankful to the Minister for Agriculture Hon. Mahendra Reddy for his support for us and I believe that this will only benefit us farmers in the long run," said Mr. Prasad.

"Whatever farming or whatever business you do, you will face some problems and challenges but it does not mean that you give up on trying. It all depends on how you tackle those problems and how you handle the situation," he encourages.

His advice to youth, "Make use of the resources and the time you have at this particular age" to be a successful person in life.

"My only advice is to the youths out there, we have a lot of land available to us which is not being utilized and is idle, my advice to them is to take ownership and make use of all the resources available to them in the village or wherever they may be," he shared.

Sound advice from Mr. Prasad who is a living testament of hard work and perseverance. Despite life giving him lemons, he made lemonade and turned his fortunes around for the betterment of his family.

Meanwhile, farmers who have signed the contractual agreements with the AMA have made a mutual agreement to provide the AMA with the quantity of the required produce, at the intervals at which it would be required, with a determined pricing range to be paid out to the farmers and added stipulations on the AMA and farmers obligations.