



Vatubuco Youth Live By the Sweat of Their Brow



The Vatubuco Youth Group of Nasarawaqa in Bua.

The future is what you make of it, and in the sunny forests of Nasarawaqa, Bua lives a group of young men who are working together to make theirs a brighter one.

The 13-member Vatubuco Youth Group consists of young men between the ages of 16-34 years old and they've committed their efforts to planting yaqona for their personal and family targets.

The reasons that led to the groups' formation, according to group leader Isimeli Uluiviti, was based on their intent to come out of poverty and to accommodate tuition fees for their youth who studied at the tertiary level.

"We are members of the same Tokatoka called Veikurakura and we grew up with farming, it has always been a source of income for us and has put us through our education and met other social obligations," he said.

"The group was formed on the notion to assist our family members who are not on scholarship and studying in tertiary universities," he added.

"Our members come and go, while a few have remained in the village, but because of this pandemic, all the members are here helping out on the farm," said Mr. Uluiviti.

Their farm and settlement has also

played host to individuals who have shown interest in planting yaqona and as a close-knit community, they're open to welcoming anyone who wishes to learn.

"We also have young men who spend their time during school breaks who come and help around here at the farm, we also have one from as far as Nadroga here with us who is very eager to learn how to plant yaqona.

The band of young men lives by a simple principle - 'By the Sweat of Your Brow'.

"Life is hard, and what is on our plate is the result of our sweat.

"Being idle will not feed your family, being idle will not allow you to achieve your dreams, being idle only brings about criminal activities and those are things that we need to teach ourselves to withdraw from," said Isimeli.

"For us, because we reside in the village, the only option for us is to farm and make use of our time, and it is a much-enjoyed profession because the youths of our family can come together and help each other on the farm and plant their yaqona for their set targets."

Members of the group also have their own yaqona planted for different purposes, while maintaining the usual communal work; "Solelevaki is encouraged because working as a group brings about togetherness and imparts valuable life lessons," said Isimeli.

"Because we are just developing, through advice and guidance we received from our elders, we've set our 5-year plan, and the group has decided to begin planting a new yaqona plantation solely for our youth and we'll work towards a project that will also develop our community.

Meanwhile, for 23-year-old Watisoni Sovivikula, a Tertiary Education Loans Scheme recipient whose into his third year studying Bachelor in Education at the Lautoka Teachers College, spending time at the youth farm is a breath of fresh air for him.

"Growing up was a challenge and I am grateful to the interference of my namesake in regards to my education and the youth group for the motivation," he said.

"Even though there has been little development in the area, farming has always been the backbone of our livelihood and has become a hobby and we've achieved so much through farming," said Watisoni.

Apart from lending a helping hand at their farm, he and his younger brother also spare time to work on other farms to earn some money, working as farmhands; "My younger brother is a private student and because we want him to also pursue his education, we would both go and work on other farms for his tuition fee.

"The idea of farming and starting my own business has been my mission from when I was growing up as a little

boy and I also wanted to become a veterinarian," he said.

"Although things didn't go my way I am certain that through farming I will manage to get where I have always wanted to be, it might not be now but I am positive that through hard work, I will achieve what I had set all those years ago in the future," said the determined lad.

"I've started with planting 200 yaqona plants as my initiative to pay off my TELS scholarship when I start work, for now, the TELS scholarship is a big assistance for me, as it has enabled me to pursue my education.

"I am positive that my yaqona farm will fully pay off what I owe the government," he said.

The members of the group have dedicated themselves to planting yaqona, with each member having approximately 100-200 yaqona plants currently in the ground, with plans to further increase their planting to reach semi-commercial and commercial levels.

"We need to start now and starting with whatever amount can get you somewhere and over time we will expand, never be ashamed to toil the land as it is the land that will pay for what we want and need," they said.

The Vatubuco group received assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture through technical advice and capacity building on farming as a business.

GROW YAQONA FOR CASH



Yaqona
(*Piper methysticum*)

YAQONA



Recommended varieties:

- Loa kasa leka
- Loa kasa balavu
- Vula kasa balavu
- Qila Leka
- Matakaro balavu
- Yonolulu
- Damu
- Vula Kasa Leka
- I. Yalu
- Qila Balavu
- Dokobana Vula
- Matakaro Ieka
- Dokobana Ioa

Seed Rate
2,500 mounds/ha
(3-5 cuttings/mound)

Planting Time:
All year round.

Spacing	Fertilizer/Manure	Weed Control/Management	Disease Control/Management	Insect Control/Management	Harvest/Yield/Food Value	Disaster Risk and Climate Change tips
Traditional System: Between rows: 2m Plants within rows: 2m	Soil analysis should be done before planting Yaqona is best on new fertile soil with high organic matter	Hand weeding is recommended	Kava Die Back Disease: Use traditional growing methods: - remove and destroy infected plants by burning & burying. Grow only on good soils, with adequate shade. Intercrop with crops such as dalo, dalo-ni-tana, coconuts, banana, cassava, yams and sweet potato. Avoid planting host plants such as Cucurbit plants (pumpkin, cucumber, watermelon), solanaceous plants (tomato, capsicum, chillies, eggplant and tobacco), leguminous plants, pineapple, erythrina (drala) and weeds (mileamminute and commelina) Use clean and healthy planting materials from non-infected plants.	No major insect pest	Harvesting after 3-4 years from planting can be left longer in the field. Yield (Dry): 2-3 tonnes/ha Food Value: Carbohydrate and as a laxative.	In disaster prone areas, plant Yaqona has part of a multi-crop food garden (with coconut, yams, cocoa, coffee). Can be a good source of income after disaster. Mulch to keep soil moisture in severe drought period, prune field-grown plants extensively by removing large leaves to reduce evapotranspiration rates.