



March Issue 2022

NURSERY SUPPORT PACKAGE
LAUNCHED
page 2

MORE THAN 200 KORO FARMERS
ATTEND 'MARKET DAY'
page 3

MoA RECEIVES HEAVY MACHINERY
FROM JAPANESE GOVERNMENT
page 4

HISTORIC KORO SEA CROSSING BY
SAO LOMAIVITI
page 5

AGRICULTURE CELEBRATES
CONTRIBUTIONS
page 6

PHOTO GALLERY
page 7

AGRICULTURE MINISTRY TARGETS MORE RESOURCES FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT



Executive Officials during the Gender Policy Booklet launching at the South Sea Orchard in Nasau, Nadi.

The Ministry of Agriculture will earmark the allocation of more resources towards developing women in agriculture.

With the contribution of women towards the agriculture sectors' overall growth and development being a pivotal aspect in the sector's current economic status as a leading export earner, and as an impetus to increase their involvement, adequate resources will be assigned to foster more active engagement.

Speaking at the launching of the Policy for Gender in Agriculture in Fiji (2022-2027), Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy highlighted that the Ministry had put in place systems to bridge disparities that had previously existed in the system.

"I would like to especially acknowledge our women farmers who are present here today – thank you so much for all your contribution to the growth of Fiji's agriculture sector. The 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census recorded 46.8% of Women participating in at least one agricultural activity – Crop, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry and this finding indicates the importance of your involvement in achieving your household agricultural output.

"Fourteen (14) per cent of our women are actively engaged in the agriculture sector, we need to ensure that their number grows and we need to ensure that they are given not only recognition but have a dedicated amount of resources allocated to help them to better achieve their vision, outcome and objectives,"

he said.

"So with the policy, we then can sharpen ourselves in terms of arguing for more resources," added Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy also elaborated on the Women in Agriculture programme (which had an initial budgetary funding of \$300K) as part of a new series of nine programmes targeted at improving the sector's productivity portfolio, which women could utilise to apply for farming support materials like greenhouse and nursery materials, small farming tools, planting materials etc.

However, he added there was still more to be done to attract more women participation in agriculture; "the Ministry conducts several training on various commodities, and for all these training, we need to call people to come and attend those training, if we just sit in our office and say they didn't apply, that's why they're not here, mostly only the men are here, that doesn't work, it will take ages to bridge that disparity in terms of employment and equal opportunities.

"So all we're saying is that we in the leadership position, we're in charge of resources, we need to first accept that there is a disparity, accept that women play a very important and critical role in defining the quality of our livelihoods, so let's reach out to them and say you need to be given some additional attention," said Hon. Reddy.

"To assist the Ministry to do that and to ensure

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that we've got more dedicated resources, we thought we should have a dedicated policy but not only that, when you reach out to NGOs and link up with development partners, donor agencies, we will champion the Policy telling them we've launched the Policy, but what do we do with it when we don't have adequate resources to implement it.

"Can you give us some money, rather than

lumping it up and saying this is for livestock, can you dedicate some money for women in livestock and so forth, so this policy will help us not only to give you resources but to source resources as well," said Minister Reddy.

Consequently, the 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census findings presented a Gender Report (Volume III –FAC 2020) which is a first in any Agriculture Census that has been conducted over the

years. The Gender report found that despite the involvement of women in the sector over the years, most women still practice subsistence agriculture whereby the number recorded tend to decrease when it comes to the identification of professional and commercial agriculture activity. So, despite the high incidence of women's participation in agriculture, only 14% of professional farmers are women.

NURSERY SUPPORT PACKAGE LAUNCHED



Materials for Nursery Kit support programme

The newly launched Nursery Support Package will help to set the platform to boost the production of crops for the local and export markets, regardless of crop seasonality.

While launching the Nursery Support Package at Lakena Agriculture Station in Nausori on 29 March, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said it was Government's priority to ensure sustained production of crops to meet the demands of the market.

"We want to continue to boost production and exports, to do that, we want to give leverage to our farmers, our youth groups, our women's groups and villagers (as a group) so that they can grow in seasons beyond the normal seasons through protected agriculture.

"Protected agriculture is either nursery, greenhouse or hydroponics and I want to announce that we want to give Nursery Support Packages to 600 individuals and

120 groups," said Minister Reddy. "600 individuals who are selected, who've applied online, the online portal is ready and will be open for 2 weeks, will get a digging fork, knife, jerry can, sowing trays, 5kg Urea and 25m shylon cloths, their contribution will be timber and nail to construct the nursery," he elaborated.

"The 120 groups – each group, whether it is a youth group, women's group or whether it is a village who will apply will get up to 10 digging forks, 10 knives, 10 jerry cans, 10 sowing trays, up to 25kg Urea and 50-metre shylon cloths. The groups will get a bigger quantity and shylon cloth to allow the group to construct bigger nurseries.

Minister Reddy said the nurseries would allow these recipients to grow seedlings, pot plants or vegetables and be able to sell them or supply them to the market of their choice, be it at the local market, tourism sector or the exporter or middlemen.

"In this way, we will be able to extend the

growing season, we will be able to allow the farmer or his/her crop to withstand harsh conditions, allowing the farmers to protect that particular seedling or crop or lettuce of cabbage from pests and diseases.

"We're opening up the applications from today (Tuesday 29.03.22) for two weeks and the selection will be completed at the end of the 3rd week. 600 applicants will get it regardless of your location, all you need to do is apply online and you can be assisted through this programme.

"So I urge all people in settlements, farmers, villages and the islands to apply for this online, if anyone has any difficulty applying online, please contact your nearest agriculture office or extension officer and they will fill it for you, they will enter your information and send it," he said.

The Nursery Support Package is only for Rural & Maritime Farmers.

MORE THAN 200 KORO FARMERS ATTEND ‘MARKET DAY’

In a first for a maritime zone, buyers who were also exporters were brought to a maritime island to meet more than 200 suppliers or farmers for possible contract sign ups.

Dubbed the ‘Buyer-Supplier Engagement Day,’ the event was organized by Market Development Facility in collaboration with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and Save the Children was held on 15 March.

In officiating at the day-long event in Nasau, Koro, Ministry of Agriculture’s Acting Chief Economist, Ms Sera Bose said Koro earned \$13m annually as gross value from agriculture activities through dalo, cassava, and kava.

As one of the main producers of quality dalo for Exports, she commended the Koro farmers for the achievement.

“They are not only contributing positively to enhancing their family income but also to growing the economy,” she said.

“I understand this is the first kind of event, where the market is brought directly to the doorsteps of suppliers or farmers.

This opportunity allows farmers to engage directly with the market. Therefore I urge you all, our farmers in Koro, to make use of this occasion to enhance your knowledge on available markets and how you can maximise its use to increase your income,” she said

The Acting Chief Economist explained developing and improving market access for farmers was paramount to achieving strategic priorities of the Ministry as highlighted in the Ministry of Agriculture 2019 – 2023 Strategic Development Plan.

“This was later strengthened in the 2020 Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan that supported the SDP in response to COVID-19. Encouraging Market Access for farmers will also contribute to achieving Commercialisation of Fiji’s Agriculture Sector and improving sustainable rural livelihood which are key highlights of the Ministry of Agriculture Vision & Mission.”

A farmer, Apenisa Kaunisela, 58, of Nasau, Mudu the event motivated him to work more on his farm.

Speaking in i-Taukei, Mr Kaunisela said the event was the first of its kind to happen to them and he was grateful.

He said it would boost his work on the farm knowing that the market had come to meet them.

He has been farming for over 40 years which has allowed him to slowly rebuild his home after TC Winston destroyed it in 2016, educate his children, fulfill his social obligations to the vanua, the church, and his family.

Salome, 53, from Navaga Village, in the District of Cawa explained in i-Taukei that all her years of living on Koro, it was the first time the buyers came to see them as farmers to discuss business.

She said she was thrilled about the event and believed it was part of God’s plan for them.

The buyers who came to Koro were Coconut Millers of Fiji, Food Processors, Agriculture Marketing Authority, Garden City Exports, Fiji Kava, KK’s Hardware, and courier company, CDP.

Buyers each took turns to make a brief presentation of the commodities they exported and what they required from the farmers.



Koro farmers in attendance during the Koro Market Day

MoA RECEIVES HEAVY MACHINERY FROM JAPANESE GOVERNMENT



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra receives key from His Excellency Mr Kawakami Fumihiro, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Fiji

The Government of Japan provided US\$188,780 to the Ministry of Agriculture for the purchase of heavy machinery (an excavator and 2 tip trucks) under Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Programme.

His Excellency Mr Kawakami Fumihiro, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Fiji handed over the heavy machinery to the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy on Tuesday 29 March 2022 at the Lakena Agriculture Station in Nausori.

The GGP Programme is part of the overall Japanese ODA implemented by the Embassy of Japan to empower the people at the Grassroots level. While handing over the assistance, H.E Mr Fumihiro said the machines would be an essential tool to

boost the economic growth of the Northern Division through the development of the agriculture sector.

"It gives me great joy to see that the handing over of the agricultural heavy machinery today, is the tangible realization of Japan's actions under the Japan-Pacific Bond Policy KIZUNA Policy, announced by the then Japanese Prime Minister, Mr Suga Yoshihide, at the 9th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM9), held in July 2021.

"The Japanese phrase "KIZUNA" carries almost the same meaning as "Veitokani" in iTaukei, which describes close bonds and connections between people," said H.E Fumihiro.

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra

Reddy acknowledged the partnership between the Government of Japan and the Fijian Government, citing the contract signed on 19th March 2021 between the Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Fiji and the Ministry of Agriculture which indicated the provision of 1 new Excavator and 2 Tip Trucks worth USD 188,780.00.

"These trucks will ensure the development of farm roads and farmer access to markets in the Northern Division.

"The Government of Fiji is assisting farmers on critical commercial and export crop agriculture while at the same time expanding livestock products to reduce our reliance on imports and as you might be aware, the new mini-Budget focus is on supporting farm mechanization and Commercial Agricultural Development Programs through procurement of agricultural machinery.

"Hence, this assistance couldn't have been received at a better time when the Government's strategic priorities are on the expansion of agricultural services through increased mechanization. We aim to share these resources and eliminate inequalities which in the end will assist with achieving zero hunger and having a competitive, sustainable and resilient agriculture sector," said Hon. Reddy.

The project is also aligned to Fiji's 20 Year and 5 Year Development Plans, particularly with its respective targets and goals, namely, "Food and Nutrition Security" as well as "Competitive, Sustainable and Value-adding Agriculture."

HON. MINISTER CELEBRATED HOLI WITH WOMEN OF NAVUA

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy celebrated the festival of Holi in Navua amongst women farmers of Naitata, Navua.

His message centered on trust as a building block for any society with the festival of Holi being symbolic of trust in all facets.

"Wherever we gather, we must take a minute and thank our forefathers because what we are today is because of successful and successive leaders in the country.

"We must acknowledge all leaders, past and present in all of society, informal institutions, NGOs, religious organizations, youth groups, women groups, all leaders have shared a common vision of peace and prosperity.

"We're all Fijians and there should be no reason why we must not live as one society. The core of any society, country, economy is trust.

"The entire message of Holi is about trust, so we must continue to trust in our leadership," said Minister Reddy.



Minister - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy celebrating Holi in Navua.

HISTORIC KORO SEA CROSSING BY SAO LOMAIVITI



Team accompanying SAO Lomaiviti to Koro for the Market Day.

In a historic first, SAO Lomaiviti, Ravikash Narayan became the first officer from Ovalau to cross safely on a fibre glass boat to Koro on Monday, 14 March returning four days later the same way.

He traveled with Fiji Kava officers who came to attend another first and successful, 'Buyer-Supplier Engagement Day' on Nasau, Koro a pilot initiative of Market Development Facility in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, ADRA, and Save the Children.

"I went to also attend the Bose ni Tikina. I am the only staff from the Ministry's office in Levuka who crossed rough Koro seas to serve our farmers on Koro. Usually, I had to travel to Suva first then from there to Koro Island. But to save time I chose to cross via fibre (boat)," Ravi explained.

"It only took one hour 40 minutes when we crossed from Levuka to Koro. The weather was calm and that is the shortest time ever. It normally takes about six hours to make that crossing," he added.

On his return, the sea was rougher and the trip took three hours, SAO Lomaiviti said. While the trip was a successful cross over on the Koro Sea, Ravi did not encourage anyone else to make the same trip.

"While this was a historic trip for me, I still wouldn't recommend that others do it because you never know what the weather will be like in open seas. Remember we crossed the Koro Sea and it is dangerous. We were lucky."

Overall, the entire trip was a very successful one, he said.

"I would like to thank all my support staff, other government agencies and NGOs for making the Koro Island Market Day a success, as well as attending and responding to questions raised at the Bose ni Tikina Cawa and Mudu."



SAO Lomaiviti - Mr Ravikash Narayan during his trip to Koro.

AGRICULTURE CELEBRATES CONTRIBUTIONS OF ITS WOMEN



Dr. Keresi Lomata attending to a cattle in a dairy farm.

Being more assertive and confident and having wisdom, commitment, and passion are key attributes to standing out in a male-dominated environment.

These were the sentiments expressed by women in leadership positions in the Ministry of Agriculture. Acting Head of Agriculture Economic Development, Ms Sera Bose who is the only female Head of a division within the Ministry, said since joining eight years ago her journey had been challenging yet, at the same time, interesting.

“You are challenged every time to deliver your maximum output as compared to your other colleagues, sometimes it pushes you to your limit and at the same time it makes your work more interesting because you are continuously learning every time you successfully deliver,” she explained.

For women who faced similar challenges in working in a male-dominated environment, Ms Bose urged women to embrace these with wisdom, commitment and passion.

“You will always come out smiling when you know you have been there and you gave in all your best. So it was never a challenge, ‘tis a season only,” Ms Bose said. For young women who were undecided on their career path, Ms Bose advised to “Choose a career you will be comfortable in that fully addresses your area of interest and brings out the best in you.”

Senior Veterinary Officer – Vatuwaqa, Dr Keresi Lomata who has been with the Ministry for five years expressed similar sentiments as Ms Bose.

“It was quite challenging at first. Women in this profession are perceived as having limited intellect and physical strength compared to men and that made me less confident in the beginning. But then I got to interact more with my colleagues and clients, and learned more about the system and the processes, and so I gained more confidence,” she explained.

In terms of advice to women facing similar challenges, Dr Lomata urged them to be

more assertive and confident enough to stand up for oneself without having to disrespect others.

With respect to young women who were still undecided in terms of a career path, she said “Learning never stops. Even if you become really good at your job, and you know your strengths, also know, that it is ok

to ask for help.”

Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Vinesh Kumar acknowledged the invaluable contribution of the women in the Ministry and paid tribute to them.

“I am extremely proud of the work done by the women in the Ministry. They are indeed resilient, hardworking, and intelligent. I can truly say, that women have made a difference in ensuring that the wheels of the Ministry

continues to turn unhindered.

“We had women who were part of the frontliners in the COVID-19 operations last year, others were out in the field assessing damages during the recent heavy floods in the West. Women in the Ministry are quick to sacrifice their time with loved ones to ensure the work of the Ministry especially in looking after our farmers’ is not compromised.

This year’s theme of Breaking Bias is certainly apt in this context. I am also proud that we are now employing more women in technical and leadership positions through the Open Merit Recruitment System like Fieldwomen, Agriculture Technical Officers, Senior Agriculture Officers, Principal level officers, and a Regional Manager post.

“So, Vinaka Vakalevu to all the women in the Ministry of Agriculture,” the Permanent Secretary said.

There are a total of 316 women employed in the Ministry with seven women holding leadership positions, 188 technical officers, and 121 providing support services.



Acting Head of Agriculture Economic Development - Ms Sera Bose (left) with Principal Economic Planning Officer (PEPO) Policy - Ms Alitiana Mua.

MEET OUR NEW APPOINTMENTS FOR MARCH

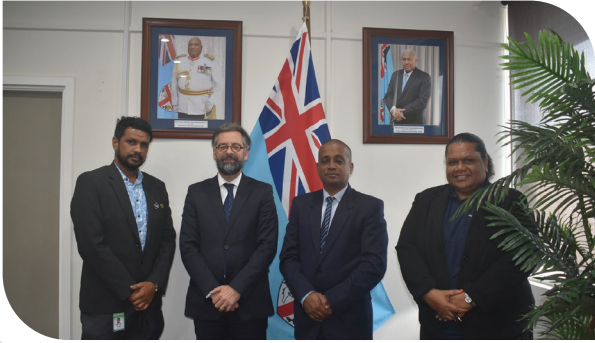


**Principal Agriculture Officer Policy Operations Headquarters
Mr. Suruj Prasad**



**Agricultural Technical Officer [Meat Inspection] Vuda - Animal Health and Production
Ms. Tania Faktaufon**

PHOTO GALLERY



The Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Vinesh Kumar, received a courtesy visit from the Non-resident Ambassador of Brazil to Fiji, His Excellency, Mauricio Carvalho Lyrio, at the Ministry of Agriculture Headquarters in Raiwaqa



The Economic Planning & Statistics Division facilitated the training on the use of KOBO Toolbox application to the technical officers of the Poverty Monitoring Unit.



Landuse staff celebrating Women's Day



Ministry staff in Koro



Stray Animal team in the West



AH&P staff at FBC for talkback show



Participants at the Plant Health Clinic Training at SPC Campus, Narere.



Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Vinesh Kumar (4th from left) with the participants of the Protected Cropping workshop at Radisson Blu Resort