



## FIJI LEADS NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON FOOD SYSTEMS



PS Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass (first from right) during the virtual dialogue on food systems.

Fiji has commenced a series of national dialogues on food systems ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) taking place in September 2021.

The first national dialogue on Action Track 1 to “ensure safe and nutritious food for all” was held virtually on Monday 10 May, 2021 and marks the commencement of

series of national dialogues across all five Action Tracks.

Officiating the online dialogue forum, Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass addressed the forum. “In Fiji and the Pacific, the food we eat brings us together as families, communities and nations and links us back to the land and sea, where our food is traditionally sourced from,” he said.

He further stressed that food underpinned our cultures, our economies and our relationships with the natural world.

“Our involvement in the Summit has come at a crucial time as our country battles the COVID-19 pandemic once again. This makes this Food Systems Summit even more crucial to us as it will enable Fiji and the rest of the world to study the challenges exposed or exacerbated by the COVID crisis and to find transformative solutions to emerge and build back,” he further emphasised.

Mr Dass said that given the COVID situation, it would be very likely that the remaining four national dialogues would be held virtually.

The Fiji national dialogues will consolidate diverse and transformative views and voices from stakeholders which would, feed into Fiji’s national report and submission to the UNFSS global Summit, being convened by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in September.

“Our national dialogues will enable Fiji to contribute to bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems,” he said.

Action Track 1 is aimed at working, at a global level, to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition and reduce the incidence of non-communicable disease, enabling all people to be nourished and healthy.

“This goal requires that all people at all times have access to sufficient

quantities of affordable and safe food products.

“Achieving the goal means increasing the availability of nutritious food, making food more affordable and reducing inequalities in access to food.

“In essence, we are talking about ‘Food Security’ and this is pivotal given the challenges we face today, and the increasing nature of challenges we are likely to see going forward.”

An overwhelming and diverse group of 71 participants were part of the multi-stakeholder national dialogue from areas of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, farmers, youth and women’s organisations, consumer groups and environmental activists.

The second national dialogue was convened on Wednesday 12th May to discuss and come up with actions under Action Track 2, which is, ‘Shift to Sustainable Consumption Patterns’.

## PHYSICAL DISABILITY DRIVES PAULIONE TO ACHIEVE HIS DREAMS



Paulione standing in front of his carrier

Being brought up in a rural community, hours away from the nearest town, and physically challenged, was all the motivation Paulione Taukei, 55, needed to change his circumstances and become a successful farmer.

The widowed farmer from Namoli Village, Noikoro, Navosa did not allow his physical disability to stop him from achieving his goal, which was to buy a carrier to help his fellow villages in transporting their produce to Sigatoka Market.

Speaking in the Navosa dialect, Paulione explained he was born

with a dislocated joint.

He said his unique situation challenged him to carry out tasks that other able-bodied people did, such as fetching firewood, ploughing the land, and even falling in love.

There were also trying times, when he would be teased mercilessly and that would sometimes bring him to tears, other times, he would retaliate. But as he grew up, he finally learnt to accept himself as made by his Creator, in the image of God.

Namoli Village is located in rough

terrain of the Navosa highlands and a five-hour drive up from Sigatoka Town.

He grew up in a family that struggled to survive and the only option for livelihood was farming.

Receiving an education, he knew very early on, was not for him.

Paulione reminisces the days of his youth, the excitement of growing up in the village away from the fast-paced changes in technology and western modernization.

He said in the village, the network connectivity was weak therefore it was difficult to reach anyone by

mobile phone. To fill in the time, he recalled, they spontaneously would come up with fun activities like, hunting wild boars or visiting other villages. He and his mates would find something to eat out in the bush, which added to their experience, and that in turn slowly molded them into capable young men.

Paulione did not see himself as working in an office or for a company. He realized that the challenges he faced could be overcome if he focused on farming and setting goals to achieve.

He said it was extremely important that one set targets to accomplish during harvests, which was what he did.

His yaqona farm has helped him achieve the goals for his family and community such as purchasing a carrier valued at \$87,000.

The carrier was to assist in providing transport for his fellow villagers, as there was no bus service that far up in the highlands and given they were all farmers, it was vital they reach Sigatoka Market to sell their produce.

Traveling to Sigatoka Market, meant leaving very early in the mornings and returning late in the evenings, due to the vast distance to be covered.

Paulione said it always pained him to observe the elderly men and women struggle to find a way to take their produce to the market. They would wait for other vehicles coming from villages after them that would also be traveling to the same destination.

It was from watching this constantly that gave him the idea to purchase a carrier, thanks to his yaqona farm.

With the vision to help his people combat the hardships they face in the interior of Navosa, he continues to set achievable and realistic goals.

His next goal is to obtain a public service vehicle license for taxi or mini-bus to carry out regular runs for patients at the newly-opened Navosa Hospital.

He said given the need for regular transport in the area, that was his next target.

Assistance is slow in reaching them in the highlands, so Paulione takes the initiative and works to achieve the solution.

He said his farm allowed him to achieve what some may have thought impossible, and that again drove him to work even harder on his farm.

He said he may have a dislocated hip but he could still achieve his dream and if he could, there was no excuse for able-bodied persons not to.

Paulione’s dream as a child was to pay for everything he wanted, and while receiving an education did not happen for him, farming yaqona certainly made that possible.

He named his carrier ‘Mount Koroiwaya’, a tribute to his maternal links, and a site to behold for visitors to the land.