



NEWLY REGISTERED BOUBALE YOUTH GROUP PROUD OF FIRST RICE HARVEST



SAO North Mr. Sujendra Prasad with the Boubale Youth Group.

A newly registered youth group in Labasa was proud to witness the fruits of their labor after they harvested their first rice yield recently.

Boubale Youth Group technical adviser, Mr Vijendra Singh, 44, said the group was formed in September last year.

"The reason we formed this youth group was to help the youths in the area be involved in income-generating activities during this difficult time, when there is no school. Most of our members are in high school," he said.

"We felt good about our first harvest. We put in the hard work. We hope to harvest more rice next year. We will continue planting and we plan to invest into other economic generating activities so our members can have

something for themselves."

The Group is now actively looking for vacant land in the area in the hope to utilize and give back one-third to its owners, as a gesture of good faith.

Mr. Singh, who is one of four technical advisers for the Group explained they harvested almost two tonnes of rice and they were now drying the rice to have it ready to be sold.

They had prepared the land early this year and after TC's Yasa and Ana, the Group planted in March.

Mr. Singh acknowledged the assistance provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture for providing sandalwood seedlings and rice seeds.

Boubale Youth Group has 15

members.

Principal Agriculture Officer, North, Mr. Binesh Prasad said they assisted the Group with harvesting by using the Ministry's rice harvesters.

"Boubale Youth Group was one of the many rice clusters that the team in the North have and are assisting to harvest their rice. We have been working after hours as well and even late at night to ensure that we are able to harvest as we are close to the end of harvesting season," he said.

Mr. Prasad said the North had nine rice harvesters that were working simultaneously at different rice farms to ensure they covered as many rice farms as quickly as possible.

A CALL TO SERVE



Ministry staff serving in the Lami Area.



vaccination."

Another officer who has been serving in the Ministry of Agriculture for 7 years in the Brucellosis Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC) based in Koronivia, Mr. Filimoni Sabe is not a stranger to the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

"It is part of our daily work at the Veterinary Laboratory in Koronivia that we wear PPE, practice basic health hygiene, planning of surveillance and fieldwork when dealing with livestock, I was used to it but the only difference is this involves human beings," he said.

The young man from Naruwai, Bua who has maternal links to Lutu, Wainimala in Naitasiri is the team leader for Team Alpha at the LEOC in-charge of Vaccination Drive in the Lami Zone.

"I thank the Almighty Father for this opportunity to serve as a civil servant in this crisis and for his protection over the team during this operation," said Fili.

"During the operation, it is the feeling that you have in making a difference in your society by minimizing the risks of the spread of COVID-19 that is fulfilling and satisfying," he said.

"At the end of the day I feel proud, happy, encouraged, satisfied and emotional at times and what worries me is that I can also be a carrier of the virus to my family members at home, and because of that I always practice the necessary precaution to prevent it from being transmitted to my home."

Fili and his Alpha team at LEOC begin their day as early as 6 am and knock off late at night. They have also experienced varying reactions from the public, braving the unpredictable conditions of places to reach homes, residents and communities in the vicinity of Lami.

"Getting people in the greater Lami area safeguarded from this pandemic through the team is overwhelming and I must thank them for their sacrifices and their time in carrying out the work and I wish them safety and good health," said Fili.

Meanwhile for Elaine Matasuka, who is a mother of 3 from Lomanikoro in Bau and is based at the Animal Health and Production Division (AH&P) of the Ministry at Toa Street in Vatuwaqa, being a part of the LEOC team since the lockdown has been a fulfilling journey.

"I am thankful to the Ministry

of Agriculture for giving me the opportunity to do my civic duty and be part of the Ministry of Health's effort in conducting awareness programme, screening & vaccination registration to the communities and business houses in the greater Lami area," she said.

Elaine, who has been living in Lami for the past 23 years feels a sense of pride as she sets about helping others and she wants to do everything in her power to make sure that people are taken care of and protected from this virus.

"Being a mother I am able to multi-task with my duties at home while also working with the Health team and other civil servants but I have to ensure that I abide by the COVID-19 guidelines when I am out in the field because at the end of the day I will return to my family," said Elaine.

Elaine has also had her share of walking to areas with different terrain to conduct awareness and screening, distribute vegetable seeds to families and has met people from different walks of life, and communities who also express their different reactions upon meeting her team.

"During all these visits, we have received different reactions from people, some are interested individuals whereas some are not so welcoming citizens, some were not interested in our awareness and vaccination program, which is sad," she said.

"I have experienced customer relations at AH&P for the past 30 years and being the first point of contact I assist and direct customers to what they require and I was able to do the same during the operation."

The Lami Emergency Operation Centre has a total of 72 personnel from the Ministry of Fisheries, Infrastructure and Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources, Agriculture, Health and Medical Services, Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Education, Heritage & Arts, Rural and Maritime Development, Housing, Communication and Information, the Republic of Fiji Military Force, the Fiji Police Force, Fiji Corrections Service, Lami Town Council and the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji together make up the two Alpha and Bravo teams.

If there is a positive to come out of this current predicament that Fiji has found itself in, it is this, the humanity and solidarity of one's fellow man has shone through.

During this second wave of the coronavirus outbreak, not only have Health workers stood tall at the frontline, their civil servant brethren have stood right there with them to help keep Fijians safe and sound from this highly transmissible variant of COVID-19.

Stationed at the Lami Emergency Operation Centre (LEOC) are civil servants from different Government bodies who have sacrificed their time to selflessly lend a hand to their Health counterparts.

Amongst these civil servants are three officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, and as they share their experience, they also tell of the misconceptions surrounding COVID-19 and talk about the small victories they have witnessed as frontliners.

One of them is Ms Silika Liliwaimanu Mataitoga, a Senior Technical Assistant (STA) based at the Fiji Agriculture Chemistry Laboratory

at Koronivia Research Station said that she never really felt the true meaning of being a 'Civil Servant' till her inclusion in the national COVID-19 operation.

"I got to truly experience that as a civil servant, your life comes second to the people that you serve, the people who place their trust in you, to the Fijian people that we need to come through for, especially in their hour of need or for a time such as this," she said.

"Also where the amount of empathy surpasses everything else, taking in all the fear, the anxiety, the criticism and trying to reassure the public that we are trying the best that we can to assist in whatever way we can, considering that this COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented."

The Nawaikama, Gau in Lomaiviti lass with maternal links to Lomanikoro, Nakasaleka in Kadavu plays a vital role at the Lami Command Centre and is a member of Team Bravo.

Silika's role includes assisting Lami Command Centre (Reporting Team) to compile all the summary reports sent in from all stations, such as fever clinic assistance, mass

screening, seedling distribution, food ration distribution, vaccination team and public health awareness, collating and submitting daily situational reports to the Commissioner Central Division's Office.

From her normal 8:00 am-4:30 pm job as an STA who commuted daily to and from Lami to Koronivia, it never occurred to Silika that she would one day be part of a mammoth operation.

"I never dreamt I would be part of something like this and it delights me to be a part of an operation where we are fighting against an unknown enemy that is causing terror and wreaking havoc in its wake to many of our beloved citizens, irrespective of age, gender and creed," she said.

"But I believe that nothing happens without God's hand in it and that, despite the unfathomable task at hand, that no one dreamt would happen, its either we can work together in eradicating this pandemic from our shores, or live in symbiosis with it and treating it as the normal flu as most developed countries are now trying to, especially through the use of