



PASSION FOR FLOWERS KEEPS KIRAN FIT



Ms. Kiran Lal at her Floriculture nursery in Vatuwaqa.

Her love for flowers knows no bounds and there is not a day that one will not find her in her garden.

Floriculturist, Ms Kiran Lal, 71, who resides in Vatuwaqa, outside Suva has made use of every available space in her compound, from the front of her yard to the sides of her home, right to her backyard – every inch of land is taken up by her plants.

She has different species of anthuriums, herbs, spices, and golden palms that have been set up neatly and tightly stacked with a narrow pathway snaking its way throughout her greenhouse, the only space for movement. Yet, Kiran easily glides between her flowers almost as if floating on air as she knows exactly where each is located and which needs her attention.

Kiran recalls her childhood where farming was the family's main source of income.

"My mum was a farmer and when I was young, together with my ten other siblings we used to help mum. Every day we would be helping mum and dad. We used to grow pineapples, yaqona, vegetables, and root crops in our farm in Wainibuku," she said.

"Every Thursdays we would prepare all the things for the market, pack it in bundles and have it ready for the market. Fridays my mum or

brothers would take it to the market to sell. That was our source of income."

She said taking care of her plants was her happy place, a hobby that she is passionate about.

"This," looking around and gesturing with her arms, "is my hobby. I am always here every day, it helps me keep my mind busy and it keeps me healthy too. I don't have pain in my body, I still carry heavy buckets, even though I am 71 years' old."

"I do this all by myself. I mix everything the mud, the manure, the sand – into the pots."

Her greenhouse is located at her home on Khemindra Street. She has been delving in this industry from her home for over 20 years.

She only sells once a month at the Roc Market and the Market Day at Sports City. Otherwise, her hobby is to only to be with her plants, watch them grow beautifully, and continue to take care of them.

In commemorating International Women's Day, Kiran's advice to other women was they should work hard even though their husbands may be employed full time.

"Ladies, should take up something that will keep them active, like working in a garden or anything. If you have available land near or around your

home, plant something. You don't have to plant a lot, start small, like 2 branches of baigani.

"You don't need to buy anything from the market, just plant it home. You will help your husband and your family and your health too," she said.

The Ministry of Agriculture assisted Kiran in expanding her greenhouse nursery last year by providing her with the building materials. This was made possible after her Floriculture Group called Dream Women Empowerment registered their group, hence five members were assisted. Dream Women Empowerment Group was assisted under the Ministry of Agriculture's Women in Agriculture capital programme to assist women entrepreneur to start or expand their cottage industries. Government allocated \$150k this current financial year.

The programme supports women and women's group for active participation in Agriculture Development through the; commercializing floriculture for cut flowers and green foliage production and establishment of nurseries; and strengthening traditional art through commercializing Voivoi and Masi production.

WOMEN'S VANILLA NURSERY PROJECTS INSTALLS FLUSH TOILETS IN HOMES



Mrs Sera Tuva at their Vanilla Nursery at Naitutu Village.

Fiji's first demo vanilla nursery is easing life's hardships for a women's group in Tailevu.

This is after the Group set a target to buy and install flush toilets in each of their ten-members' homes.

El-Shaddai Women's Group Secretary, Mrs Sera Tuva, 55, explained in i-taukei the vanilla nursery was first trialed with them in 2013 at Naitutu Village, Waidalice, Tailevu.

The Ministry of Agriculture provided the building materials for the greenhouse and 77 vanilla plants to begin their nursery, she said, to which they are truly grateful.

Vanilla takes three years' to fully mature. The Group calculated they would harvest in 2016.

She said when 2016 came around, they found that it was not a good harvest. They found that vanilla grown outside of the greenhouse, thrived more compared to the ones they grew.

Sera said vanilla was sensitive to climatic changes and believed that was the reason they did not get a good harvest.

She explained that while there was not a consistent market for vanilla for them, buyers who had come to them bought at \$500 and \$700/a kilo.

However, Sera said despite the not-so-good harvest the Group continued to rake in money from the vanilla vines that were also marketable. The vines are sold at \$2 each for a metre-long in length.

In 2018 and 2019, the Group managed to harvest though still not to what they expected, but it was enough to start the ball rolling to achieve their goal, a need – buy and install flush toilets in each of their members' homes. A basic need that many of us living in the urban and peri-urban areas tend to forget.

She said the Group always met the orders they received whether it was for 5,000 or 10,000 vines and this had a significant impact on the individual families of their members. It was how they managed to successfully pull off the project of installing flush toilets last year.

Each of the women in the Group have their own flower gardens at home, which also assists in improving their livelihoods such as taking care of the education of their children, she said.

The Group plans to move into planting anthuriums. The challenge is finding the time to maintain the upkeep of the current nursery as living in a village means there are communal obligations to be met first.

However, Sera is optimistic that God will lead the way for the Group.

In commemorating International Women's Day, her advice to women was nothing was impossible if God lead the way. She said women were not only helpers to provide food on the table; today, women could also bring in the money to put food on the table.

She encouraged women to make use of the space outside their homes, similar to what she had done. There is not a space available around her home; these are taken up by her flowers, and her vegetables.

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