



## VOIVOI MAIN INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITY FOR NATOKALAU WOMEN'S GROUP ON OVALAU



Ema Kanacuva with the Natokalau Women's Club making voivoi.

Some women are gifted whose story deserves to be told. One such woman, is Ema Kanacuva, 51, of Natokalau Village, Qalivakabau, Lomaiviti.

She leads the Natokalau Women's Club and has spearheaded a few projects that have helped the

members of her group generate income for themselves.

However, in her own right, Ema has received recognition for her creativity in winning the Contemporary Wedding Wear at the Women's Expo in 2019 using pandanus leaves or 'voivoi' in her

design. Because of this design, she has also received orders to create wedding outfits also made out of 'voivoi'.

Ema is a remarkable artist whose personal forte is in the art and crafts.

Speaking in i-taukei, Ema said the knowledge she shared with her members was from learning online. She would learn these first and when it worked, she would then teach the women.

Some of these women have gone on to individually generate income for their families from these activities such as making art and craft from recycled materials like re-using old towels to make flower vases, or making pillow cases from tie and dye material, or sewing.

There are about 70 women in the Natokalau Women's Club, however, those that are active is less as many work, while others have not shown interest.

But that has not stopped Ema, from forging ahead and sharing her skills and knowledge with those women that have remained committed to the Club and are eager to learn.

Her interest to delve into the art and craft world, began when she was still in high school and used to closely follow her mum around, until she was confident of creating her own free hand patterns.

She explained that she was nominated in 2017 to attend a workshop on pattern drafting where she increased her knowledge.

Today, the Club is working hard to make the floor covering for the village community hall. Storm surges swept through the village, including the village hall and destroyed the mats that covered the floor during TC Winston in 2016.

Ema explained the Club made a

goal to replace the floor covering and managed to purchase linos' and straw mats. In addition, she said, the Club managed to weave in a week, a big mat or 'coco' that covered almost half of the floor, and took less than ten women to undertake the project.

She has also volunteered to provide 'voivoi' from her plantation to make another two 'coco' to cover the rest of the floor of the village hall.

Ema thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for providing 480 pandanus planting materials in 2017 that kick started the group's main economic generating activity, where each of the women received 20 plants each.

Then, last year, the Club was again assisted with an additional 2000 plants, she said.

She said the members were doing so well that each was receiving individual orders to make mats, including herself, especially from relatives who read her online marketing posts.

Ema shared that the sales of her art and craft has really helped the livelihood of her family, as with the other members of her Club.

In commemorating International Women's Month for March, Ema highlighted that women had the ability to think about generating economic activity that would benefit their families. She said there was land available where women could plant pandanus plants that was easy to maintain yet generate a lot of money.

## OFFICERS TRAINED ON MARKET PATHWAY



Participants at the Market Pathway.

Seventeen (17) Crop Extension and Bilateral Quarantine Agreement (BQA) Officers were reminded of their responsibilities to farmers on requirements that need to be

met to export fresh commodities to New Zealand (NZ), as per the requirements of the Bilateral Quarantine Agreement between Fiji and New Zealand.

At the closing of a three days training, Senior Agriculture Officer Ba, Solomon Naisau said as BQA officers, their contribution were vital to the agriculture sector.

"Officers play a huge role in ensuring Fiji maintains its position in the competitive agricultural export market during this global COVID-19 pandemic.

"Fiji's reputation as an exporter of high-quality, clean agricultural produce depends largely on its ability to be free from pests and diseases," said Mr. Naisau.

The Ministry of Agriculture provides an allocation of \$150k for agricultural commodities under the Fiji-NZ BQA to meet the requirements to export breadfruits, papaya, mangoes and eggplants and chilies, amongst others.

He urged the officers to utilize their agriculture network to create BQA pathways and the linkages with its key stakeholders.

"Do not look at yourselves as project officers but as personnel called by God to that position to boost the agriculture sector in Fiji, boost BQA commodities as well as the export market to further meet

the growing demand."

Mr. Naisau encouraged the officers in the Western Division to be confident and practice the lessons learnt from the training whether it be conducting farmer registrations, providing advice on quality crop management techniques, crop harvesting, fruit grading and fruit inspection.

This approach, was undertaken, he said, to maintain continuous production, supply and quality control to reduce the rejection rate of the export product.

Mr. Naisau also welcomed the newly appointed BQA officer and advised them to collaborate with existing staff.

"Expanding agriculture is expanding BQA and the export market. Your work targets the export production, understand the pathways and utilize what you have learnt, if you are stuck seek advice from other officers," he said.