



From Eriko Hibi

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The effectiveness of FAO as a hub of technical expertise depends on its ability to work and develop strategic partnerships.

In this edition, we cover efforts to support the potential for pineapple production in Vanuatu, we follow up on FAO's efforts to improve links between farmers and markets in Samoa and welcome the arrival of a new team member to the FAO Subregional office. Enjoy the read.

Eriko Hibi

FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands

Promoting pineapple potential in Vanuatu

Those pineapples that still seem exotic on a super market shelf anywhere beyond the equator, are not just gorgeous to look at and luscious to eat or drink but this seemingly omnipresent tropical produce requires a careful and lengthy process of cultivation.

In the Pacific island of Vanuatu, where pineapple production on a large commercial scale is still being developed, local family and commercial pineapple farms are being helped through a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) project to improve and enhance their production through better planting and husbandry techniques and by improving post-harvest practices through better management.

Pineapples can take anywhere between 12 months and two years to grow to maturity, as opposed to vegetables such as cabbages and tomatoes that take only one to three months.

It is easy to understand why local farmers were often protective of their crops, for while planting is relatively easy, basic planting materials of the head, side leaves or roots of the pineapple are guarded by farmers, especially those with high quality produce, to ensure competitors are not able to access the planting materials. This means that for new farmers access to local planting materials, especially from successful farms with sought after produce, can be an issue.



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Photo: Local farmer Norry David from Vanuatu, a first-time pineapple producer, sees the crop as an important potential source of revenue for his family and the country, and in just a short time has become President of the Vanuatu Pineapple Farmers Association.

Over the past year, FAO has been working with local farmers either starting from scratch, or providing advice to improve existing commercial farms producing anywhere from a few hundred to 100 000 pineapples.

FAO experts help set up demonstration farms demonstrating optimum planting techniques like ensuring that plants are sown in rows rather than planted indiscriminately. This allows for intercropping in the spaces between the pineapples, with other short term harvesting crops such as peanuts, yam, sweet potatoes and spring onions. It also makes weeding and watering easier.

The traditional method of pineapple farming takes more land space, whereas new techniques can free-up as much as 50 percent of the land that can be used for other food or cash crops. In other words, farmers can produce as much or more pineapple using fewer resources. At the same time, pineapple is also an attractive crop as it requires fewer and less costly preservation techniques compared to other fruit and vegetables.

Farmers also learn to rotate the land planted with pineapples with other produce such as cassava which helps to replenish the soil.

While fruit and vegetables are widely grown across the country's six provinces, production is dominated by semi-subsistence farmers using mainly household labour and few inputs to meet their food needs and produce some surplus for markets. With a healthy tourism industry, there is great potential to supply hotels and restaurants with good quality fruit and vegetables.

Assistance provided by FAO also assists farmers in being able to ensure off-season production. In Vanuatu, for example, the peak pineapple season is from November to February which means that a glut in production with pineapples all hitting the market at the same time, can lead to falling produce prices. Farmers are therefore encouraged to stagger production through techniques such as early flower initiation.

Overall the project aims to build public and private sector capacity to market fresh and processed pineapple products to the Vanuatu domestic market. It takes a whole value chain approach, from adoption of improved planting material, improved crop nutrition and off-season production practices; improved harvesting and post-harvest handling practices; and the adoption of improved processing practices, in order to provide an important secondary market for locally produced pineapple.

Local farmer Norry David from Efate in Vanuatu, a first-time pineapple producer has been supported by the project since June 2016. With 1 400 pineapple suckers planted, growth is already impressive. Norry plans to plant an entire hectare with pineapple using techniques that FAO has shown him. He hopes to create a job for himself and his family while also increasing the potential to enter the overseas export market. In just a short time, Norry has even become President of the Vanuatu Pineapple Farmers Association.

This technical cooperation project with a budget of USD335 000 dollars over two years (2015 to 2017), in addition to helping to train farmers and establish demonstration farms, has also produced a complete series of nine easy-to-read training booklets, cropping calendar, and a trainers guide book to pineapple production aimed at local farmers, like Norry David.

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Improving links between farmers and markets in Samoa

Farming communities in Samoa benefit from sustainably producing nutritious and healthy crops in the island's lowland areas. But what happens with the produce after harvesting?

A study was conducted recently by FAO which profiled the farmers' current production and marketing activities aiming at increasing their income.

FAO, through its Forest and Protected Area Management (FPAM) project, [has been working](#), with the Government of Samoa in establishing of three Community Conservation Areas on the island of Savai'i in Samoa. The project aims to assist farmers in the project areas with the sustainable production and marketing of vegetables and fruits.



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Project activities included setting up demonstration farms and training farmers on increasing productivity of nutritious food. The study followed up on these activities and was conducted to identify ways that enable farmers to access markets that match their capacities, production, investment, and risk profiles. It involved the cooperation with 59 farmers, 28 shops and markets and 16 tourism resorts and tourism fairs. FAO FPAM Samoa Project Coordinator, Sami Lemalu explained. "Results showed that currently farming activities are at subsistence level with only surplus crop entering the market instead of growing crops solely for sale".

In addition to the project's recent support for new farming techniques and increased varieties of vegetables farmers still need coaching and mentoring in smartly applying this new techniques and knowledge and prepare farmers to change their growing practice. Farmers are risk averse with few investing capital in their farms and many sticking to a limited range of local crops.

The study revealed that 54% of all farm produce is consumed by the farming family or within the community. A further 22% is sold at the farmers own roadside stall. This means that 76% of the produce is marketed at the farm. After domestic consumption produce is sold on an irregular basis in a range of outlets including local shops (5%), the local market (7%), the main supermarket (4%) and a long established commercial Taro market (5%). Only a very small percentage (2%) enters the supply market for hotels and restaurants.

These are very short value chain markets and often provide the highest return to the farmer and the lowest cost to the purchaser. However this produce, sold at what is effectively a retail price to the farmer, struggles to enter the larger volume wholesale markets on a consistent basis. Farmers would benefit by understanding their cost and pricing structures better to allow for more commercial sales. The benefit to the farmer is the ability to earn more cash.

The FAO consultant Simon Cole provided a list of recommendations for Savaii farmers to link to the market in a more structured manner. "It's not about doing more work, but to work a little smarter in order to gain higher returns".

Establishing conservation areas in the Pacific

The activities are supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – Pacific Alliance for Sustainability – through the Forest and Protected Area Management project. Its global environmental objective is to strengthen biodiversity conservation and reduce forest land degradation. The FAO/GEF Forestry and Protected Area Management project covers Fiji, Niue, Samoa and Vanuatu.

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Preacher delivers environmental message to villagers in Fiji

Alumeci Nakeke, Fiji Times

Lay preacher Seci Rakoroi, who has a feel for speeches that resonate with communities, recognised he had a winner right away.

"As I was explaining what our natural resources give us and what we were doing to reduce our benefits, I could sense by the way they were listening and asking questions, that they were really interested," he said, after presenting to Vuinadi Village in Cakaudrove.

"I am a preacher and can tell when a message really hits home," he said. Rakoroi is one of 19 landowners from the greater Delaikoro area who received communications training from cChange, a Suva-based regional nonprofit organisation, as part of the Wakatu Fiji campaign. The campaign was developed with support from FAO. The participants were trained in public speaking, messaging and facilitation and received simple illustration campaign flipcharts to help them present to people why some land practices hurt their communities.

A significant problem in the Delaikoro area is that farmers continue clearing forest in search of virgin soil.

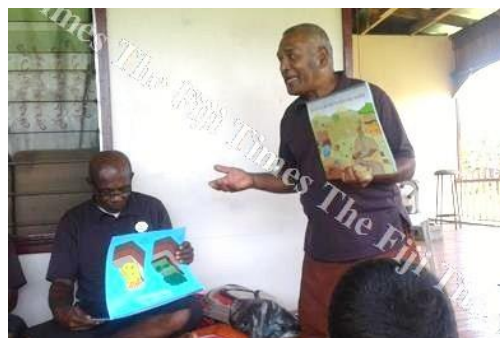


Photo: Seci Rakoroi of Wailevu District in Macuata presents to Vuinadi villagers in Cakaudrove.

Farming practices, which rely on things such as burning, exhaust the soil and force farmers on to new land. That means less and less intact forest, which is needed to ensure communities all over Vanua Levu have clean drinking water, and provide food, medicine and building materials.

"This means that we have to start spreading the word now for our people to realise that we need to change the way we are treating our land," Rakoroi said.

That day, Rakoroi and the three other Wakatu Fiji champions, Iosefo Jolame, Ilai Mataraki and Ulaiasi Salaloa did just that. They talked about how the land had taken care of people and how no one was really taking care of the land. They shared ways to farm better, to reduce flooding and protect benefits such as drinking water.

The talk was attended by about 30 landowners. Conservation International site liaison officer Vilikesa Masibalavu, who attended the talk, said he was impressed with the turnout and support from those who attended. "The support and excitement from the audience was amazing," Masibalavu said. "But there was one question that was asked by one gentleman in the audience that I could not answer at all. He asked us: 'Why didn't you come 10 years ago with this message?'"

Masibalavu said the participants were now planning to do soil improvement activities on unused lands so they could come back to plant areas closer to the village. "Most people have left and are living in settlements in the bush searching for fertile soils. Wakatu has taught them how to replant used lands," he said.

The group also conducted a Wakatu Fiji presentation at Namakomako Village, Sasa, Macuata. It was attended by 24 people. The participants identified problems like uncontrolled burning, soil erosion and a decrease in fish and prawns in their rivers. The villagers talked about planting vetiver grass, with roots deep, to control erosion and fishing taboo on the river.

Both villages also started talking about setting aside forest protected areas, through long-term leases. The participants asked for more presentations, so more mataqali could be invited and join the discussions.

"This is very encouraging. They have proposed and agreed to have another village meeting to get more community members especially those living outside the village," Masibalavu said. Wakatu Fiji is led by the ministries of iTaukei Affairs, Fisheries and Forests, and Agriculture and is about caring better for the land and forests that have taken care of Fijians for generations. The campaign believes if change is going to happen in Fiji villages, it should be driven by people from within communities and not outside experts who often can't explain the issues in ways that resonate with people.

That's why the 19 landowners were trained in communications and natural resource management, said Scott Radway, founder of cChange. And that's why more trainings to empower community leaders, are planned for 2017.

"Rakoroi and the other Wakatu Fiji community champions are showing what they can do if given the chance. And communities are showing that, if the message hits home, they will take action," Radway said.

FAO Support

The campaign was developed with support from FAO and cChange. The campaign (Wakatu which means 'tree') aims to promote actions at all levels, and in all sectors, to sustainably use the land and forests, and ensure communities can continue to benefit from healthy natural resources.

Assistant FAO Representative to Fiji, Joann Young explained. "FAO is always ready and willing to provide technical assistance where needed, but ultimately the power to secure Fiji's land and way of life lies in the hands of communities. This is why we are extremely happy to be a part of the Wakatu Campaign, a truly innovative collaboration of three government ministries to promote sustainable land use and food security

To get involved in the Wakatu Fiji campaign, visit www.facebook.com/wakatufiji.

* Alumeci Nakeke is a program fellow with cChange

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FAO welcomes officer to Samoa

Madankumar Janakiraman joins the team at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Subregional office in Samoa. Madankumar will be based in Apia as Programme Officer for the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Through its strategic investments, GEF works with partners globally to tackle the planet's biggest environmental issues. GEF's funding also helps reduce poverty, strengthen governance and achieve greater equality between women and men.

An Indian national, Madankumar will coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of projects in the Pacific region which are funded by the GEF.



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"I am coordinating the GEF portfolio for the FAO Subregional Office". Madankumar explained. "A major part of my role is to increase this portfolio and use it as a means to fund and achieve key strategic priorities of FAO in the region".

Before moving to Samoa, Madankumar previously assisted the FAO Subregional Office to develop GEF Projects in the region. He also brings experience as a Forestry Officer for GEF at FAO headquarters in Rome, working predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Madankumar's previous work experiences include working for the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, a German development agency in Timor Leste, and a Community-based NGO in Gambia, West Africa.

Madankumar is happy for the opportunity to work in Samoa. "I like the relaxed atmosphere here in Samoa and the abundant greenery of the island. And I'm very happy that my family is settling in well and adjusting to life here".

Madankumar has a Master's degree in Anthropology and a Master's degree in Sustainable Resource Management specializing in Resource Economics and Forest Management from the Technical University of Munich, Germany.

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