



No time for political differences

THIS is not the time to be wearing our political party hats, this is the time to unite and work towards building a better nation.

Minister of Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu echoed these sentiments while addressing villagers of Saqani and Natewa in the province of Cakaudrove while touring Vanua Levu for the 30MillionTrees15Years consultation in March. Minister Naiqamu

was accompanied by his Ministry staff in the Northern Division and other government representatives during this tour.

"Sa oti na veidigidigi, sa mai qaqa na Fiji First. Ia ena gauna au dabe tiko kina qo, au sega ni dabe tiko meu makataka na Fiji First Party, au makataka tiko mai na matanitu. (Elections are over, Fiji First has won. But I sit here today as a representative of Government and not a representative of my political party)," Mr Naiqamu said.

"Au kerea meda dui luvata noda sala vaka politiki meda duavata, meda cakacakavata ena kena vakatorocaketaki na noda vanua o Viti. (I plead with you all to remove the political hats you wear. The Government needs us to unite and work together to build a better nation)."

Minister Naiqamu also stressed the importance of the 30MillionTrees 15Years Initiative and encouraged villagers to plant as many trees as possible because of climate change and its impacts.

"Ira noda qase e liu ra ceguva na cagi bulabula, ia nikua eda sa vuki iriiri ga se da vakayagataka na irinicagi. E vakaraitaka tu ya vei keda na veisau ni draki. (Our forefathers inhaled fresh air, but today we hold hand fans or use electric fans and that shows the impact of climate change in our communities)."

Minister Naiqamu managed to visit Valovoni Village, Togaviti Village, Koronatoga Village, Saqani Village and Natewa Village. He had to cut short his consultation tour due to the Covid19 outbreak and returned to Suva.



Turaga ni Yavusa Saqani - Ratu Esakaia Daugunu plants a tree with Roko-Tui Cakaudrove Mr Ropate Ramacake in Saqani Village last month.

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Young entrepreneur Averyl Avchial with his products made out of Lauai trees.



The Waidalice River runs parallel along the Kemasu Farm.

FOR 22-year-old Averyl Avchial being one step ahead of his father has brought him a long way.

Averyl is now on his way to becoming a millionaire – probably the youngest one in Fiji if all goes according to plan thanks to the support of the Ministry of Forestry and also his support team at Kemasu Farm in Waidalice.

The young entrepreneur owns Averyl (Fiji) - a business which manufactures candlenut soap, candle sugar scrub, candlenut oil to name a few.

Candlenut is produced by the Lauai tree which is also locally known as toto, sikeci, tuitui, qereqere and waiwai.

“It has been slightly more than one year

now that I have been running this business and I am grateful for the support rendered by the Ministry of Forestry and most importantly my family at Kemasu Farm in Waidalice,” Averyl said.

Averyl has so far managed to plant 10,000 Lauai trees in Kemasu Farm which he considers as his engine room.

“I am lucky to have the support of Keresoni and Susana Ramuwai who have given me 50 hectares of land to use for Lauai Farm and other crops,” he said.

Averyl met up with the couple through their church gatherings and was surprised when they decided to give a piece of land so that he could start his business venture.

The couple have reigned in youths from

around the area and family members to help till their 250 hectares of land.

“We have given Averyl 50 hectares for his business venture and he has only used a portion of it with the 10,000 Lauai trees that are already planted,” Mr Ramuwai said.

“We will support him all the way because we know that through this partnership with Government and Averyl, we will also benefit financially,” he added.

Mr Ramuwai said because of Averyl's young age, he is also setting a good example for the six youths who are helping out at the farm.

“Am sure these youths will also follow in Averyl's footsteps and make sure of the land that is lying idle back in their villages.”



Averyl with Director Forestry Operations Central Eastern Mr George Vuki with Mr Keresoni and Susana Ramuwai at their Kemasu Farm at Waidalice.



Mode of transport up to Kemasu Farm.



Averyl with farm hands and staff of the Ministry of Forestry.



Youths from Waidalice help plant Lauci trees at Kemasu farm.

Averyl manufactures his products at his home in Baulevu and also in Raviravi in Ba. They are sold in most supermarkets across Fiji namely Hansons Supermarket.

"I hope to venture into the Malaysian market with my products as candlenut is a billion dollar industry there but I will take one step at a time," Averyl said.

Ministry of Forestry's Director Forestry Operations Central Eastern Division Mr George Vuki said the ministry is focusing on researching on minor forest products and non-timber forest products with the view towards harnessing these to create economic opportunities for our people.

"We have started to research into products like candle nut trees or sikeci, the fruits of

which could be harvested in two years and used for scented oils like dilo or coconut. We are hopeful that these minor products will boost the Ministry's economic contribution to the country's GDP" Mr Vuki said.

"We want to continue to create employment opportunities in the sector so as continue to put food on the tables of ordinary Fijians and Averyl business venture is a good example of that in the sense that Averyl's business has managed to economically empower youths who are helping out in the farm."

According to the book "A Guide to Some Indigenous Fijian Trees", the Lauci tree is believed to have been introduced by the early Fijian settlers. It is indigenous to Malaysia

but has also become so well naturalized in many parts of the south-east Asia, Melanesia and Polynesia that its exact native range is difficult to establish.

According to Averyl, research has shown that Lauci trees have health benefits like improve digestive system, relief of fungal infections, reduce heart disease, overcome insomnia, treat tooth ache and reduce weight loss to name a few.

"I encourage youths around Fiji to make use of the idle land that is available in their villages and that there are ways and means to get assistance to venture into a business," Averyl said.

"Nothing is impossible if the heart is willing."



Mr Vilikesa Verebalavu plants a tree at Togaviti Village.



Women of Togaviti Village in the district of Vaturova in Cakaudrove pose with Minister Naiqamu in February.



Mr Vilikesa Verebalavu presents a whale's tooth to Minister Naiqamu to traditionally handover their land.



Villagers of Togaviti listen attentively during the 30MillionTrees15Years Consultation.

Villagers pledge land in memory of late kinsmen

TO honor their late kinsmen and former employee of the Ministry of Forestry, the late Mr. Sosou Tikomaibolatangane, the village of Togaviti in the district of Vaturova in Cakaudrove, traditionally handed over more than 2000 acres of land for the 30MillionTrees15Years initiative.

The late Mr. Tikomaibolatangane, worked at the Ministry from 2014 to January this year when he passed away at the Labasa Hospital.

Minister Naiqamu paid tribute to the late Mr. Sosou Tikomaibolatangane who is from Togaviti Village saying "I am sure he has left behind a legacy for you all. He had contributed greatly to the 1Million Trees that were planted last year and am sure he would be smiling down from heaven with the step you have taken today in supporting this tree planting initiative."

The villagers pledged their land during

the 30MillionTrees15Years consultation talks facilitated by Minister Naiqamu in February.

Mataqali Qoilagi headman Mr Vilikesa Verebalavu, traditionally presented a whale's tooth to Minister Naiqamu to officially signify the hand-over of their land for tree planting initiative.

"Am sure we are all united in supporting this Government's initiative in planting more trees because we and our future generations will benefit. The 30MillionTrees15Years is a great initiative as trees are a source of life," Mr Verebalavu said.

He added they will be informing other 'mataqali' members who reside in the urban centres of the traditional undertaking that transpired.

Minister Naiqamu directed the Assistance Roko-Tui Cakaudrove Mr Ropate Ramacake to receive the whale's tooth indicating the

provincial council office – which also represents the 'vanua' would safely record the historical event that had taken place.

"This is a milestone achievement for my Ministry as this is the first village to have traditionally given us their land soon after our consultation," Minister Naiqamu said.

"My ministry will ensure that we plant as many trees as possible for the benefit of villagers and for the future generations yet to come."

Minister Naiqamu said what transpired shows how much faith villagers have in the Ministry and he ensured that more trees will be planted on the ground in the next few weeks.

Tree planting in Togaviti Village would begin once the Covid19 gathering ban has been lifted.

Naiqamu assists remote school to remain open

A total of 34 students in one of the most remote villages in the district of Saqani in Cakaudrove will now have the chance to continue with their education right at their doorstep after Minister for Forestry, Honourable Osea Naiqamu committed to help properly build the school.

Continuing with the 30MillionTrees15Years consultation tour last month, Minister Naiqamu visited Valovoni Village last Tuesday and visited Kabu kei Nailoca Infant School in Saqani.

Teacher-in-charge Mrs Aqela Raikidravu said she was overwhelmed meeting Minister Naiqamu and that she found him to be a very down-to-earth and humble man.

“The school is also fortunate that Minister Naiqamu has committed to making 34 wooden desks and chairs for students who are sitting on the floor during class,”

Mrs Raikidravu said.

Valovoni Village which is situated 18 kilometres from the main road and is one of the most



Minister Naiqamu in one of the classrooms in the school.

remote villages in the district of Saqani has 65 families whose children attend Kabu kei Nailoca Infant School.

Mrs Raikidravu shed tears after Minister Naiqamu also pledged to get Ministry of Forestry officials from the Timber Utilisation Division (TUD) in Nasinu to help renovate the school so that it adheres to Occupational Health & Safety Regulations (OHS) and that it continues to remain open.

“Not only that, villagers will now have experts from the Ministry of Forestry to help them renovate the school and also build the teachers quarters.”

“There are three of us teaching here at the school but we don't have quarters. We are residing with villagers so just with Minister Naiqamu's visit today we have planned to get some major projects done.”

“If our school closes down, our children will

have to travel long distances just to get an education,” Mrs Raikidravu said.

Mrs Raikidravu and students also took the time to plant sandalwood and fruit trees around the school.

Children from nearby villages namely Nacula and Nadogo also attend the school which was recently built in December last year.

School manager Mr Eparama Tainiciwalu said villagers used money earned from kava sales to construct the school building last year.

“Villagers decided to build the new school after requests for assistance to the authorities failed to materialize,” Mr Tainiciwalu said.

“We have asked for help but we got no response so we decided to build a school,” he said.

Mr Tainiciwalu said before their children used a house in Valovoni Village, but parents decided to build a proper school and raised funds to do that.

He added they had used about \$12,000 on the current school building which the Ministry of Health is intending to close down.

“We are so fortunate that the Minister of Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu is here today and not only is he here for sightseeing while visiting our school, he has made a commitment to help us renovate our school and also provide much needed desks and chairs for the students,” Mr Tainiciwalu said.

Minister Naiqamu ready to plant a sandalwood tree with students of Kabu kei Nailoca Infant School.





Narocake focuses on prawn farming

Mangrove forests are most definitely an important ecosystem on earth as they have an enormous capacity to absorb carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

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These were the sentiments echoed by Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Mr Pene Baleinabuli as he launched the Narocake Community Brackish Shrimp Pond Project in Rewa last month.

“As Climate Change threatens to increase the frequency and severity of storms, mangroves provide a stout defense against storm rage. Mangroves also provide habitats for fish, shellfish and are crucial to sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities,” Mr Baleinabuli said.

He added the Rewa River Delta in Fiji’s Central Division contains the largest mangrove ecosystem complex in the country.

“However, currently the mangroves are under threat. They are experiencing very high pressures of land use and land conversion,”

he added.

Mr Baleinabuli said conversion from mangroves typically involves clearing the forest, importing topsoil to fill in and raise the surface elevation, and ultimate conversion to land uses.

“Most communities in coastal and mangrove wetland live a subsistence livelihood and depend on coastal and mangrove wetland resources as a source of revenue generation from the sale of fuel wood, house piles, dyes, pandanus leaves, shells, fish, mud crabs, mud lobster, a



Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Mr Pene Baleinabuli opens the pond site



Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Mr Pene Baleinabuli with villagers of Narocake at the pond site.



Villagers of Narocake in Rewa at the pond site.



Villagers of Narocake in Rewa during the formalities of the launching of their Brackish Pond Project last month.

wide range of crustaceans and many local delicacies.”

He added local communities depend on these resources to supplement and sustain their subsistence life style.

“With assistance from the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), under the Fiji National Forest Policy (2007), a feasibility study was carried out with villages along the Rewa Delta to identify suitable sites for brackish shrimp farming,” Mr Baleinabuli said.

He said the main objective is to establish demonstration sites that will show case community based management regimes for:

- coastal and mangrove wetlands;
- reforest degraded coastal and mangrove wetlands for biodiversity conservation; and
- provide alternative opportunities for

community livelihoods to ensure improved human wellbeing.

“As such, villages in Natila, Waicoka, Naivakau and Narocake where we are today were set up with Community Brackishwater Shrimp Ponds.”

“These community shrimp ponds are the first of its kind to be funded through the ITTO. They provide an alternative livelihood source to the villages.”

Mr Baleinabuli added that by easing the strain on mangroves, the shrimp ponds allow the reforestation of the mangroves and support the Mangrove Ecosystem for Climate Change and Livelihood (MESCAL) initiative, which is coordinated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

He said it is very pleasing to see the shrimp pond project is driven by the community.

“On behalf of the Ministries of Fisheries and Forestry, I thank you for your forest restoration efforts through the establishment of these shrimp ponds.”

“It is encouraging to see the young people helping out. I understand that you have put in the hard yards from Day 1 – helping out with the construction of the pond, receiving training on the pond management and how to handle sales.”

He added that with shrimps being sold in the local market, he hopes that in the future this local supply will reduce the need for imports, which is what the Ministry of Fisheries is trying to achieve.

“Leading by example, you young people are the perfect leaders of tomorrow and Champions for Climate Change and sustainable socio-economic development.”





OBITUARY

Moce mada Sousou

COMRADESHIP at work and unity is common in the Ministry of Forestry and no wonder because no man is an island as together we try to achieve our 30MillionTrees15Years target.

We no longer see it as a target because forests are the lungs of the earth and is considered a natural pharmacy, therefore we all need to plant trees – lots of it.

In January the Minister of Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu led a delegation to Togaviti Village in the district of Vatuova in Cakaudrove taking one of his staff members based in the Northern Division for the last time to his village.

Charge-hand Mr Sousou Tikomaibolatagane, 29, who had only been transferred to the North from Suva 3 weeks ago, died of a heart-attack on Monday February 17, 2020.

Sousou as he is commonly known was an A+ student passing his Certificate in Applied Woodcraft Technology with flying colours. Out of the 17 units for that Certificate Level, Sousou passed 5 units with an A+ grade and 12 units with A grade. In delivering his eulogy, Minister Naiqamu said Sousou walked 150 kilometres in 3 days with just a sulu and shirt in his knapsack to attend his interview at the Labasa Office way back in 2014.

After graduating with his Certificate in Applied Woodcraft Technology, Sousou applied for the post of Sawmill Operator and he got the job and was posted to Nasinu in Suva until 3 weeks ago.

Minister Naiqamu described Sousou as a person with a generous heart as he divided his salary to his 3 younger sisters whom he was supporting financially. Two of them will be graduating from LTC in April while the third is still at high school.

Minister Naiqamu also thanked Sousou for his contribution to the tree planting initiative undertaken by the Ministry and that Sousou has left a great legacy behind.



Minister Naiqamu in tears as he delivers his eulogy on the life of one of his dedicated staff.



Ministry of Forestry's Master Manasa Radolo accepts the 'tabua' for the 'ivakasobu' accorded to Minister Naiqamu and the late Mr Sousou Tikomaibolagane.



Ministry of Forestry staff carry the casket of Mr Sousou Tikomaibolagane.



Minister Naiqamu and Executive Director Forestry Operations Mr Manasa Luvunakoro exit the church for the burial site.



Ministry of Forestry staff bidding one of their fallen comrades goodbye for the last time.



Two of the late Mr Sousou Tikomaibolagane's younger sisters make their way to the burial site.



Wives and staff of the Ministry of Forestry at the burial site.



The late Mr Sousou Tikomaibolagane.



Ministry of Forestry

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SCAN ME