



Goodbye 2013

Another Year Over! A New One to Come....

December was a time for reflection, celebration and working out strategies for times to come.

“It has been a difficult year at FRIEND,” reflects Founder/Director Sashi Kiran, “ But at the same time we have seen exciting growth and progress, we have not only reached out to record numbers of communities—137 in the west and 35 in the North and had to reconstruct our office and the production centre while conducting normal programing”.

“The year began in a temporary office after the damage caused by cyclone Evan. At the end of the year we have two cyclone rated buildings where organization could serve the communities from. Our staff strength grew to 60 and we exceeded our projected outreach target to the communities. “We were already serving communi-

ties between Sigatoka and Rakiraki in Viti Levu and Dreketi to Wainikoro in Vanua levu. One on the major highlights has been to finally reaching out to the Yasawas. We have been getting requests from the islands for a number of years now and with the assistance of Australian Aid we have been able to constructs plant nurseries in 3 communities in the Yasawas, ” says Sashi .“

This year saw the launch of the D Book, a collection of case studies and a new range of products– the herbal teas, spices and trials of local flours.

Despite having limitations in resources with damages due to cyclone Evan FRIEND was able to reach out to more than 1000 farmers under the EU funded GROW program and assisted with poultry, irrigation, cash crop and bee keeping projects.



Farmer Summits - Voices for Development

More than 800 farmers participated in Farmer Summits this month to review their progress and challenges in the field over the past year.

These day long sessions themed “Promoting Prosperity” were held over four days with a day dedicated to Cash Crop Farmers and a day for Poultry Project holders in Lautoka and Labasa.

The farmers benefitted from the knowledge of Australian Agronomist Gerard Faber who advocated for Pest and Weed Management using

organic products from the local areas . The Forum also heard about improving yield using good management practices.

“Application of this knowledge on farm is the way to ensure better yields and in turn better income” says a farmer.

FRIEND works with these farmers through the EU funded GROW projects aimed at improving and sustaining livelihoods in the sugar belt areas.

Nurseries in Yasawas

A total of five plant nurseries have been set up using the grant of \$85,000 provided by Australian Aid through Fiji Community Development Program.

Three of these set ups are in the Yasawas, while one is on Viti Levu and one on Vanua Levu.

Each of the nursery is germinating vegetable and fruit tree seedlings for food security and an inbuilt disaster mitigating aspects to ensure that seedlings can be protected from natural disasters like cyclone.

“While the project holders on the bigger islands have had some experience with potting and selling plants, those in Yasawas are venturing into the area for the first time,” says Nurseries Project Officer Abdul Asif.

Disaster mitigation was looked at when selecting set ups on the islands, which are very prone to disasters, such as cyclone.

“The nurseries in Yasawas are located on the island of Nativi in Malevu, Marou and Kese villages. This Island consists of 7 villages scattered around the island. The nursery in Marou will be managed by a very proactive family and the ones in Kese and Malevu will be managed by youth/ women’s groups. FRIEND will be working closely with them to ensure that they receive the necessary support.”

“During disasters, the cover cloth could be pinned off the ground, folded and kept indoors, while the seedlings

can be stored in a safe enclosure.” says Abdul.

The nurseries were established by looking at the agricultural potential of the village people. After seed distribution during FRIEND’s first visit villagers have been planting vegetables such as capsicum, tomatoes, chillies, long bean, carrot, and eggplant.

“We had initially proposed three set ups, however we were able to stretch the dollar to complete five projects,” says Abdul.

Agronomist Gerard Faber from Australia spent some time training each of the project holder in set up and management of nurseries as well as preparing potting media.

A Dreketi farmer in the North Sekaia Toga now supplies five surrounding villages with vegetable and fruit tree seedlings with his new nursery.

Rakiraki project holder, Kiran, a mother of five who has been growing and selling plants for supplementary household income on a small scale says the nursery is a big help for her and within the first month her sales has increased.

“Sales was not regular, but with my new nursery set up I am looking forward to a steadier income as I can now safely plant a large variety of plants for sale. It means a greater sense of financial security for me and my children and peace of mind,” says Kiran.



Potential for Income through the Dried Food Industry



“Our communities get excited when we work with them on identifying readily available items in their communities that they can use to earn incomes,” says Ansoo Rina of FRIEND Labasa Office.

The Labasa office has so far trained around 400 women and youth this year to realize the income potential in items such as dried coconut, herbal teas, fruits and flours.

“In Labasa a lot of things grow really well, however transporting them fresh to the market is a challenge. Our Food Processing Trainings allows communities to preserve fruits, herbs, nuts and root crops by solar drying techniques. We are then able to buy these items off communities at fair trade prices and package it for marketing.

The dried food items from Labasa include *Friend's Fiji Style*® teas, spices and desiccated coconut .

“Despite the abundance of coconuts in Fiji, Fiji is importing almost 100% of the desiccated coconut into the country. I believe we are the only producers of local desiccated coconut in Fiji.” says Ansoo.

“We have been trialing this product for quality and consistency over the last few years . Now with more people involved in the production process, the product is ready to be launched into the wider market.” says Ansoo.

FRIEND works closely with communities to monitor the quality issues for all its products.

“We work with communities in the North to collect the finished goods. This is then sorted and shipped across to the FRIEND HQ in Tuvu for packaging and marketing.”

“Currently FRIEND is working with around 150 suppliers in the North for the various products that are marketed under the Friend's Fiji Style brandname.”

The team is also experimenting with new products that are expected to bring new income opportunities for people in the North which include dried basil, layalaya and mint.

“There are a number of products under trial that are to be launched into the market soon. These include various root crop flours made from Kumala, Dalo and Cassava that are very nutritious and good for health.” says Ansoo.



Youth Employment Network Graduation



28 students from Ba and Tavua received their completion certificates in a special ceremony held at USP Lautoka Campus.

PMU Team Leader Mr Andrew Winter-Taylor talked to students about importance of developing the traits of a good worker.

“I believe having a positive attitude goes a long way in whatever challenges one

may have to face,” he says.

FRIEND Associate Director Dr Jone Hawea acknowledged the contribution of EU funds that has allowed FRIEND to partner with USP for upskilling youths from sugar families for the job market.

At the completion of the second year of the GROW YEN project 140 students had undergone YEN training with the funding support from the European Un-

USP CCE Coordinator Mr Rajendra Singh, PMU Team Leader Mr Andrew Winter-Taylor & FRIEND Associate Director Dr Jone Hawea with a group of graduating students.

Recipe Corner— Miti & Baigani

Ingredients:

- 6 medium eggplants
- 1 cup fresh coconut miti
- 1 tbsp. fresh Lemon Juice
- Tomatoes to garnish

Method:

1. Boil eggplants in about 3 cups of water.
2. Skin and mash in a bowl.
3. Add lemon juice and freshly squeezed miti.
4. Garnish with chopped tomatoes.



FRIEND Board 2013



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Team Labasa Dreams for 2014



As the 11 of us rode to Palm Lea Lodge on the 6th December, we knew that it would be a time of relaxation and fun as we reflect on the year at FRIEND.

In the 1 ½ day journey, all of us connected to the historical roots of FRIEND and its odyssey until now.

Refreshing in its own way, we all worked together to identify the gaps in 2013 and brainstormed for a workable 2014.

Amidst all the activities, we could see staff taking dips in the pool, calm their minds with meditation and fill their bellies with a variety of food!!

“It was a time where the team canvassed the year ending and the aspiration for a fruitful 2014 in reaching out to under-served” said Makereta Tawa, Team Leader Labasa.

A Day of Sun & Salt

“Swimming, snorkeling and good food, a day of total relaxation,” says Sandhya Narayan reminiscing the fun day out of office.

A total of 45 staff members based at the Tuvu office participated in the day cruise to an is-

land as the annual end of year fun activity. “Boarding the boat from Denerau, it took us roughly an hour to get to Tivua Island. The journey itself was fun as the day was just fine for sailing and the team joined the crew to sing and dance all the way.”

The management decided on a special tour as staff had endured much over the year with constant shifting as construction was under way most of the year part of post cyclone recovery. Despite all the challenges the team was able to reach out and work beyond the targets set.

