

12 years of success - Fiji Times Online

Reyaz Mohammed, Malini Gaunder and Reshma Sharma display the variety of chutney available at Friend Fiji's Food Health and Sustainability Festival as part of its 12-year anniversary in Tuvu, Ba.

Picture: JAI PRASAD

TWELVE years of sweat and success was marked by the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND Fiji) at its headquarters in Tuvu, Ba yesterday.

The event gathered residents from many of the Ra to Sigatoka communities where the organisation played a key role in facilitating income-generating activities for underprivileged families since 2001.

While the organisation's outreach has expanded to the Northern Division, the nearby Yasawa islands and most recently to the outskirts of Suva, the most pressing challenge has been the opportunity to provide steady markets for corporate entities, says director Sashi Kiran.

"We have found that the challenges for grassroots people are businesses" she said.

"Even if somebody is doing a backyard project and wanting to sell, there are licences now that make it very hard for small-scale holders to operate.

"When I started first, the hardest part was selling local products. I think it's really looking at the corporate sector, which is trying to have a maximum amount of profit that has been the challenge.

"If a corporate organisation says they want a certain amount of market, it makes it very hard because they want a good market and would rather bring in imported, cheap things where they can have a market."

The organisation has increasingly turned its focus to health and marked its anniversary with an exhibition of the retailed food products and craft made by members of their target communities.

"There has to be a wide consciousness that you want to have not only local food and local products because it's good for the economy, but because it is healthier.

"The food festival is really about our focus on health in the community. We want traditional cooking to come back into fashion."