

# DVV International: Community Learning in Fiji



DVV International

Education for Everyone. Worldwide.  
Lifelong.



Kasanita in her garden with her granddaughter.

“People who don’t value education are poor in every sense of the word”. This is the starting statement of Ms Kasanita Buloulutu, a 63 year old indigenous Fijian (I Taukei) grandmother as she takes a slow resurveying of her village house, her backyard herb, flower, vegetable, fruit and root crop garden and the surrounding sugar cane farm. A glow comes over her face as she recalls how she became a licensed teacher at age 16. The colonial government strategy at the time was to employ locals who had reached certain approved levels from chosen high schools around the country. She spent 15 years teaching at 3 different primary schools. When the government started replacing them with graduates of newly established teaching schools, Kasanita had to retire to Koroqaqa, her husband’s village. There she set up her family home and raised her 5 children. While

adjusting to village life she quickly realized that her in-law relatives needed exposure to life outside the village boundaries. She began to look for ways to help them out of the cycles of poverty.

In 2002, she invited FRIEND (Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development) to her village to encourage participation in the Save Scheme. In this scheme, women deposit a minimum of \$2 every week. Savings can be withdrawn only at the end of the year.

**“She recalls a feeling of disbelief because for the first time in her life she was able to speak at a forum that involved prominent figures in the country, and yet she was able to speak their language.”**

In 2007 the FRIEND Governance programme started and Kasanita was ready for it. This was the turning point for her role in her village community. Participatory Budgeting was a big feature of the programme in which village members actively took part in a training that consisted of a graduation from personal budgeting to one for the village, the district, the province and an attempt at understanding the national budget. FRIEND facilitated a face to face session with local Government administrators where Kasanita and other participants could ask questions related to their community development.

In 2009, Kasanita was invited to a conference themed “The Fiji Dialogue” where she had the opportunity to come face to face with National administrators and lobby for her village issues. She recalls a feeling of disbelief because for the first time in her life she was able to speak at a forum that involved prominent figures in the country, and yet she was able to speak their language, having understood the budgetary allocations and the mechanisms in place.

One result was the major upgrading of the road that led to Koroqqa village. This solved a lot of transportation problems, especially for school children and commuters. Various government departments were instructed to carry out development and awareness work in the village.

Today the villagers listen to her. This is no small feat in a male dominated society. Her knowledge of government mechanisms puts her in an advisory role for young couples and youth.

She pauses as she shows the yam garden that she planted with her husband. They will be harvested in time for the annual national school examinations of which 3 of her 7 grandchildren will be taking part. She generates income from sales of her produce, and most customers make their way to her village home to buy.

Kasanita is one of the many underserved members of around 500 rural communities that FRIEND works with for socio-economic empowerment, recognising and utilising the social strengths of individuals and communities, linking them with their resource strengths and motivating them in self-sustenance.

Economic empowerment without the social work aspect has led to many failed programmes – a hard pill that is still difficult for development organisations and stakeholders to swallow. The alternative approach by FRIEND is to integrate livelihood programmes with those that address the need for social protection and social empowerment.

The process is implemented through the social structures which were identified when FRIEND entered the community. The governance programme that ensues deals with trauma mitigation and peace-building, healthy lifestyles, cooking methods, back yard gardening, exercise programmes and financial literacy training.

This is a far cry from technical and vocational trainings which offer topics like agricultural good practices, food processing for livelihood, etc. In the last decade, education was almost exclusively practiced in formal settings and training programmes only allocated for recognized “formal facilitators”. There is little recognition of the great potential that survives within traditional or cultural settings.

FRIEND takes advantage of the rich traditional and cultural knowledge that exists within the different communities in Fiji, including the indigenous Fijians, those of Indian origins, Pacific Islanders of Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian heritage and lineage. Community based learning using localised methods and experiences has proven to be a successful approach for most of FRIEND’s work over the years.

Kasanita is very clear on one issue: “I will only stop learning when I stop breathing”.

Her story provides testimony of the power of continued localised Adult Education using social empowerment as a necessary associate to economic empowerment and development.

### **More information**

[www.friendfiji.com](http://www.friendfiji.com)

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