

Takitaki

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Food Security, Environment, Health



Change Agents Training—18th to 23rd April

In trying to tackle poverty at a larger scale FRIEND has embarked on a nationwide food security program encouraging every family to have a home garden and communities to consider commercial cash crop farming to help in import substitution.

FRIEND has identified the three issues of Food Security, Environment conservation and Health as major issues affecting the rural and under-served communities it works with.

A total of twenty five Change Agents from various areas in the Western and Northern division have been selected by FRIEND and have undergone special training in Lautoka this month looking at these issues closely and getting equipped to work with their communities in these areas.

Farmers have indicated that they are unsure on what to plant as they struggle to market their produce once its ready. FRIEND will be providing the marketing support for the farmers it works with and will process the fruits or link them up with potential markets.

It is hoped that sustainable home gardening will benefit families in managing their diets, managing non communicable diseases as well save money in these difficult times.

These Change Agents will be working in their communities guided by FRIEND to carry out development work in their respective zones.

Upto four people each from Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki, Nadi and Labasa participated in this initial workshop. SPC

FACT joined hands with FRIEND to provide the Change Agents with necessary skills to be able to work with the farmers in boosting Food Security in the country.



Value based Training of Trainers Workshop



30th March—1st April, 2009

A constant hindrance to development work in the field we find are short cut in work, lack of quality and consistency, stealing, conflicts etc. ... the very basic value structure seems to have had collapsed. After much thought we realized that we could try and deal with these through values education program.

A three day intensive 'Training of trainers' Workshop was organized by the University of South Pacific and FRIEND. Dr Seetha Kunchithapadam, Co-ordinator of Value Based Spiritual Education from the Sahaj Marg Research & Training Institute, Chennai, India conducted the session. She used many simple experiments to demonstrate the values in daily life.

The participants were divided into groups and were asked to come up with local stories, games, poems, etc on values they were working on namely—Attitude to Work/ Commitment, Cooperation, Courage, Listening, Responsibility/ Accountability, Thankfulness, Humanity, Peace and Justice. Each value group was also supposed to come up with sub values and come up with training modules for each. Now the trainers have modules using local content to teach these values and this will be integral part of all training program at FRIEND hoping that these will bring about sustainable development. The trainers will also be running pilot programs with youth, farmers and corporate organisations and will evaluate these to gauge its effectiveness. Dr. Seetha said it was important that trainers inculcated these values in themselves and teach by being the role models. "Charity begins at home, so whatever we want has to start from us. We must first be convinced that we are in the right path and that it will be better for the society; we must have the willingness and commitment in the work we are undertaking".

The program was made possible with the support of the Canada Fund and Sahaj Marg Spirituality Foundation.

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An award winning free lance travel journalist Susan Kurosawa's article on FRIEND this month—

Fiji cook-up enterprise bears fruit

THE CURIOUS COOK
as published in The Australian

IN a small suburban house in Valetia Street, Lautoka, 24km north of Fiji's Nadi airport, there's a chatty buzz as a small group of hair-netted housewives stir huge cooking pots of chutney. The air smells sweetly of mango mingled with the sharp tang of tamarind. It looks like a community cook-up session and in a sense it is, but there's more to the enterprise. The women are making much-needed money while working with simple village produce in this quality-controlled kitchen run by the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises'n' Development, a non-government initiative designed to employ and empower marginalised Fijians.

In 2002, a woman from a rural community brought in samples of her family-recipe lime pickle to the then fledgling FRIEND office and the idea took hold for a small-scale project. Now, in a typical year, six tonnes of mangoes, four tonnes of chillis and two tonnes each of limes and tamarinds will be processed and bottled. Ancillary products with longer shelf life, such as banana chips, sweet-and-sour tamarind sweets and spicy crackers, are also produced according to demand.

Local farmers supply the fruit, the women cook and payment is apportioned by the number of jars and packets sold.

Across the street is another basic bungalow, its pillar gates painted with palm-tree murals, where FRIEND's founder and director Sashi Kiran and her staff administer the initiative, formed seven years ago to target groups that are "fighting poverty and are under-served". Aside from the farmers and village cooks, Kiran says FRIEND also works with "youths at risk, squatter communities, prisoners, village dwellers, people with special needs and abandoned women with families to support".

But the face, as it were, of FRIEND for tourists is the range of pickles, jams and chutneys produced under its Developing Enterprises for Sustainable Income program. Aside from the tastiness of these traditionally cooked foods, they are excellent made-in-Fiji mementoes. "No one else is using natural resources in this way," Kiran laments. "Almost every corner in Lautoka or Nadi has an avocado tree, yet we import guacomole from Los Angeles."

Kiran says a lot of the cheaper wooden and fabric souvenirs available in Fijian shops are made in China; if you purchase a FRIEND product, the money goes to Fijian villagers and families. As attention has grown, FRIEND has acquired a slew of sponsors and non-government organisation partners, and its food products are used in Fijian hotels such as Vomo and Wakaya island resorts. It has been

difficult to spread the word, Kiran tells me. But recognition of FRIEND's endeavours in July 2007 as "a good practice" by the UN Human Settlements Program provided impetus, as did a visit to Lautoka headquarters by Prince Charles in 2005.

After my visit with Kiran, I mention the pickles and chutneys to tourism powerhouse Jenny Leewai Burke of Nukubati and Fiji Orchid resorts and she is instantly on to the FRIEND office, ordering supplies for her kitchens and boutiques and as corporate giveaways. "A lot of promotion is still by word of mouth," Kiran says. "But at last there is a sense of sustainability and recognition that we are here to stay."

Also on offer, under the FRIEND's Fiji Style banner, is an arts-and-crafts series of gorgeous hand-finished greeting cards: Santa Claus may come with a shell beard or an angel with straw wings; fish may be fashioned from glued grains of sand, and quilling (or paper filigree) appears frequently to form, say, rolled flowers or butterflies. Also for sale are mulberry paper products, woven baskets, calico bags and bespoke coconut and shell jewellery.

About 40 outlets across the island group stock the craft products and edibles, including the international airport's Prouds and Tappoo duty-free shops. Kiran says there is no problem taking the jars of pickles, chutneys and jams into Australia as long as, of course, they are declared to Customs on entry. If you are at self-catering accommodation in Fiji and want a hit of spicy relish, look for the ladies' prettily labelled 200g or 400g jars at supermarket chains such as Cost-U-Less or MH. Among the options (some of which are seasonal) are chilli, lime or mango pickles and tamarind, chilli or sweet mango chutney. Fruit-thick FRIEND's Fiji Style jams include guava, star apple and citrus marmalade.

And if staying at a resort in Fiji with imported jams or relishes on its dining tables or buffets, make a stand and demand the chutney ladies' authentic

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Snake – the Colonial Master.



Tom Kinikinilau was a shy young man when he first started coming to FRIEND last year. He now plays a powerful role in our Birds n Bats Drama that has been making waves in western communities over the last few weeks. Our Youth Coordinator

Jone Nawaikula speaks with Tom about his experience.

J: Bula Tom! It seems that you're getting famous week after week and everyone seems to know you in the communities that we visit. What is it that makes you tick?

T: Yeah...I guess this drama thingie is slowly getting to be well-known. I love being the Snake as I dominantly have control over the other animals. I just hope I become a good role model for my audiences especially the youths and children watching and they can pick up something of value from the play.

J: I noted that every-time your character comes on stage, audience roar at the sight of your hissing and slithering silently from behind the curtain hoping to eat Mini Minah before her mother knows it! What makes your character so adorable and not menacing to the audience.

T: Already, I have met most of my peers offstage and it takes a while for my part to make a heart-stopping appearance into the scene. I guess my friends expect me as Tom as they see me on a daily basis but when they see the snake character appears from behind the curtain, it makes them wonder if it really is me. How I put my acting skills into perfection of the character of the Snake makes them think twice, if it really is Tom behind the mask.

J: You also represent the Colonial period. How

does that change of character feel?

T: I feel very authoritative, bossing everyone and have the power to rule just like, my snake character. I don't approve of my character as a snake and as a colonial boss, however I have to provide an impact to the audience on how bad was it during the colonial days. Thinking back to the colonial period I feel sorry for my ancestors and the girmits on how they were treated.

J: What has the play done for you in terms of your self - development?

T: It has created employment for me, boosting up my confidence in public speaking and personal grooming and self esteem. I have learned about art and organisational skills in our team and the importance of teamwork.

J: What is the message that you are sending out to the audience as your character or the drama as a whole?

T: In my character I felt that I was the negative animal but I hope the audience sees the real picture on what moral values that they can pick up from the play such as differences and discussion on problems.

J: What good advice you can give to your peers?

T: Learning from the values of our Bats and Birds play I encourage my peers not to discriminate race, colour, religion etc. Also we can resolve our conflicts by discussion and show respect and loyalty to our elders and other races.

(Contact FRIEND if you wish for a Birds and Bats performance in your community)



Recipe Corner Zingy Chicken Omelet

Ingredients: 1 chicken breast, 2 tbsp. capsicum, 1/4 c. onion, 1/4 c. celery, 3 tbsp. butter, 2 cloves garlic, 5 eggs, slightly beaten, 1/2 c. milk, 1/2 tsp. salt, Friends Fiji Style Chilli Chutney.

Method: Heat a little butter. Cook onion till soft, add cubed chicken, a teaspoon Friends Fiji Style Chilli Chutney and garlic. Once chicken is cooked, add capsicum and celery; heat through. Remove mixture from skillet. Combine eggs, milk, and salt; pour into hot skillet with a little more butter. Cook slowly, lifting eggs to allow uncooked portion to flow under. Place chicken/vegetable mixture on half the omelet; fold over. Tilt pan and roll omelet onto hot plate. Serve garnished with sliced fresh tomatoes and coriander with toast and a hot cuppa. Serves 2-3.



A tasty Idea for your Sunday Brunch

With Sandhya Narayan

