

Youth in agriculture

Choose two challenges related to agriculture or rural development in your community or country and describe how you think they should be addressed.

A challenge in development of the agricultural sector (and the generation of income from it), is the mentality in most Indigenous Fijian communities that farming is for school drop-outs. While agriculture is multifaceted, I would like to focus on its practice (basically, farming)

The mentality of such leaders at the very basic unit of social living (the family) often sets out a huge challenge for most Pacific youths, who may find it difficult to cope with education and the reality of things. It has taken root in the society that 'institutional' education is given priority over traditional knowledge (also 'education') and use of natural resources to be 'successful'. While some may have obtained degrees and higher degrees, returning to the farm is almost like driving a needle through the eye, due to 'higher' expectations.

The Pacific islands (especially Fiji), though poor money wise (due to unhealthy economic building), are rich in biodiversity and arable land, that has sustained its people for generations.

The younger generation has been pushed into a new era, I believe, without a systematic transition. Most are often pushed aside as a lesser intellectual degree, tagged to them for life, unless otherwise. For example, in my village (Tailevu) youths rarely engage in farming because of low self-esteem, and lack of arable land, driving them to engage in negative peer pressure.

The second challenge therefore is the availability of arable land. Most indigenous farmers, I assume, would feel more comfortable in farming their own (mataqali/clan) piece of land for both local and commercial purposes. In my case, along the stretch of road that cuts through the deltaic plains to my village, one would observe bogged areas, muddy ground, mangrove forests, and almost the immediate realization that the road side provides at least 40% of arable land.

This is confronted by the recent issue of climate change, driving sea-level higher, threatening the natural habitat of freshwater fauna and flora, and available arable land. This observation, I stated in my report as an attaché in a Climate Change project, by the USP (University of the South Pacific) in mid 2009. Land productivity has been threatened, proven by villagers having to buy cassava and rourou (taro leaf) from the Nausori market.

Provisions for arable land are also being confronted by the service nature of the Lands department of the Fiji government. This is due to its lack of moral requirement to reply to applicants, to lay out choices available. I had this experience after applying for a piece of land being advertised. I would suppose that such institutions, knowing full well the state of the economy, should have the integrity in helping young people start-off in agriculture.

In addressing the issue, workshops, seminars, conferences and other forms of public outreach be staged to impart the community of the importance of agriculture. There needs to be a change in mentality in

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regards to development. Fiji needs to learn from countries like China and other industrialized nations. It would be apparent, that their economies were once heavily dependent on agriculture. Therefore, there exists no shortcut to being 'industrialized', and 'high living standards', as is the mind-set in today's society.

Young minds need to be supported by government driven agendas on agricultural development. This would not only be sufficient proof that the nation depends on agriculture and its young people, but the assurance of a steady source of income, and support. Educational curriculum should give agriculture more priority, so that knowledge in other subjects is agriculture oriented.

Landowners must approach the public through the government and/or visitations to communities, allowing potential farmers acquire pieces of land. Marketability of products and introduction of produce that are low volume but high value should be the next phase change in agriculture.

Moreover, a dedicated website (for Fiji) that addresses issues pertaining to agriculture must be built to help information dissemination and productivity.

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PACIFIC AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY POLICY NETWORK (PAFPNet)

YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE ESSAY, NEWS, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Application Form

Applications should be accompanied by this form and addressed to Ms Miriama Kunawave, PAFPNet Secretariat, Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva to arrive no later than 22 October, 2010. Communication will be limited to winners only or those requesting the return of original materials. Applications may alternatively be submitted by Fax (No. +679 338 6326), hand delivered to the SPC Suva office or emailed to Irdhelpdesk@spc.int. Please call +679 3370733 – ext 35344 for further details.

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