Alternative Livelihoods for Sugar Cane Belt in Fiji

Reducing economic vulnerability of farmers and their families through vocational training in cash cropping, poultry farming, apiary training, and food processing.

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Lila Wati Prasad, beneficiary and beekeeper

Context

The sugar price reform has negatively affected those working within the industry in Fiji. As the industry shrinks and jobs are lost, a predominantly unskilled workforce is struggling to find alternative employment. With rising inflation and reduced household incomes, many children are leaving school in order to help their family, and basic costs of healthcare and education are often no longer able to be met.

Objectives

- Restore and improve incomes of farmers, redundant mill workers and their families
- Reduce economic vulnerability of farmers, redundant mill workers and their families
- Reduce social, economic and environmental vulnerability of communities in the cane areas

Impact

- The EU-funded Foundation for Rural and Integrated Enterprises Development (FRIEND) works with marginalized communities in under-served areas of Fiji for their social and economic development.
- The foundation was registered as an NGO in 2001 and works with Fiji’s rural communities, teaching them skills that enable them to be self-reliant and become entrepreneurs.
- Many of those who have been helped by FRIEND now have their products sold in supermarkets across Fiji, such as honey, chutneys and pickled vegetables.
- FRIEND has won several international awards including the CIVICUS Nelson Mandela Graca Machel Innovation Award in 2006 and the UN Habitat Good Practice Award in 2007.
After the storm, sweetness for Lila Wati Prasad as she starts her bee farm

Until recently, supporting herself and her 85-year-old mother-in-law was not even a possibility for Lila Wati Prasad, a 57-year-old widow who lives in Rakiraki - one of the poorest municipalities in Fiji.

Lila describes her life as a sweet one during the years of her marriage. "Everything was good back then, we worked hard and everyone was happy even though it was difficult work." But things changed when her husband passed away and their agriculture land lease expired without renewal.

Now more than 10 years later and re-settled, Lila has her first job outside the sugarcane farm – as a beekeeper. Thanks to a partnership between the European Union and a local NGO, the Foundation for Rural Integration and Enterprise of Fiji (FRIEND), Lila and many rural women like her are learning how to earn money by producing honey, herbs, fruits and vegetables.

Lila now has ten beehives fully employed behind her home and even has part-time assistant beekeeper. For the first time in her life, she has a bank account and is an active member of her community, teaching other women the art of beekeeping.

"The EU funded FRIEND project caused positive changes in all segments of my life, not just in a financial sense," says Lila. "It also had a positive impact on me as an individual—as a woman and as a member of the community I live in."

"We want to see poor people, especially the poorest and those living in harder to reach areas, have access to information, opportunities and resources to move themselves out of poverty. We envision a country where the poor have broken the generational chain of poverty and lead lives of respect and dignity," says Sashi Karan, Director of FRIEND.

As she harvests honey, Lila recalls how difficult her life had been after their farm lease had not been renewed and her husband’s untimely death.

"The sugar-cane farm was our whole life, it was a very hard time and it all became even harder and lonelier after my husband passed away, but things are getting better now for me."