



GOOD PRACTICES NOTES

01

Five Key Points

1. Challenges and constraints the 'Rural Millionaire Farming Program (RMP) addressed:

- Lack of linkages between rural farmers and Government and other key stakeholders
- Lack of commercial and business practice in rural farming as they are mostly subsistence farmers.
- High unemployment rate
- High rate of rural – urban drift amongst the youths
- Lack of participatory and inclusive approach to rural farming
- Low education level of the youths
- Geographical location of the island.

2. Objective

- Participatory and integrated partnership approach of the 'Rural Millionaire Farming Practice', based on the 'Three Legged Stool' concept and principles of Vanua (community), Lotu (church) and Matanitu (government).

3. Methodology

- i) Wider consultations – community of Sawaieke village, church, government and other key stakeholders.
- ii) Stakeholders' engagement – MRMD, MOA, ITAB, FDB
- iii) Capacity development – physically, spiritually, and mentally under the 'Three Legged Stool' concept.

4. Highlights of the result

- RMP benefited the Sawaieke Youth Farmers, resulting in:
 - Higher and sustainable income and wealth
 - Increased availability of knowledge and skills
 - Improved livelihood with new homes constructed, new businesses established
 - Investment on childrens' education
 - Investment with financial institutions.

5. Recommendation

- Continuous capacity building and upskilling on 'Good Agricultural Practices', Financial Education, Value Chain, and other training needs of the farmers to be provided by key government agencies, and other training institutions for the sustainability of RM; and
- Continuous spiritual and mental strengthening/ advice by the church and village elders to the youth farmers.

“Rural Millionaire Farming Program”

Introduction

- The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development (MRMD), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB), introduced the “Rural Millionaire Farming Program” in 2014 to improve the income and livelihood of the farming households in rural communities in Fiji. The Fiji Correctional Service through its “Yellow Ribbon program”, has given an opportunity to ex-offenders also to return to their villages and engage in the RMP, which involves the cultivation of yaqona (*Piper methysticum*) and taro (*Colocasia esculenta*). This RMP facilitated a smooth transition from an individual/ subsistence farming to a collective/communal integrated partnership using the “Three Legged Stool concept”:
 - Community (Vanua);
 - Church (Lotu); and
 - Government (Matanitu).
- The RMP concept observes the community (Vanua) taboo requiring youth farmers to abstain from the abusive use of alcohol/yaqona and smoking, allowing them to fully engage and concentrate on farming adhering to the principles of the “Three Legged Stool” concept.
- Rural farmers usually face a lot of challenges relating to lack of linkages and support by Government and other key stakeholders, poor understanding of commercial farming and business practices, unemployment, rural – urban drift of youths, lack of participatory and inclusive approach to farming.
- The integrated partnership in RMP addresses specific challenges related to lack of financial

literacy, planning and acquiring production inputs (e.g. quality seedlings and farming equipment), and accessing rural extension advisory support services.

- RMP also addresses self-sufficiency, efficient utilization of available resources to grasp opportunities and develop innovation, reflecting on farmers' capital endowments (human, natural, physical, financial and social), and relative importance with each other and in their context, with sustainable livelihoods using the RMP framework.
- The "Rural Millionaire Project (RMP)" was piloted in Sawaieke village. The District of Sawaieke with a land area of about 190km² is on the North Eastern part of Gau Island, located 90km east of Fiji's capital, Suva. Gau is the fifth largest island in Fiji and is part of the Lomaiviti Province in the Eastern group of islands making up the Fiji archipelago. There are 16 coastal villages and eleven settlements on the island with an estimated resident population of over 3,000. Sawaieke District has a collective population of 1,800. (Pictures 1 & 2)

Picture 1: Fiji Map – Gau Island in the Province of Lomaiviti



Picture 2: Sawaieke Village, Gau Island



- A holistic approach to developing the Sawaieke village youths using RMP has social and economic benefits, with unemployment addressed at village level. The RMP targeted 46 youths, age between 20 to 40 years old. The youths were engaged in planting yaqona (*Piper methysticum*) as a primary product for their income and taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) as a secondary product for their daily staple food supply.
- A three year (2014 – 2016) Agricultural Farm Plan was developed for the 46 Sawaieke youths to plant 1,000 yaqona plants per head in 2014, and gradually increase within the three year period. The agricultural farm plan was reviewed annually by the youth farmers and stakeholders, ensuring targets are realistic and achievable.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and iTaukei Affairs Board provided a monitoring mechanism and technical advisory support services to the youths.
- The youths of Sawaieke witnessed greater opportunities and benefits of residing in the village, where one can earn higher income and wealth, compared to those earning in town and cities. Financial returns from yaqona farming has enabled the youths and their families to:

- Build new houses worth FJD \$30,000 - \$50,000 each;
- Operating small shops/ canteens;
- Purchased outboard boats;
- Four wheel drive vehicle;
- Invested in properties in Suva;
- Opening savings accounts with financial institutions; and
- Investing in investment institutions.

- This led to an urban – rural drift, with 73 youths returning to the village of Sawaieke within two months, from December 2018 to January 2019.
- In achieving self-sufficiency, the youth farmers funded the RMP from their financial return of the yaqona without any external funding or financial assistance.

Methodology

Wider Consultations

- The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development (MRMD), in collaboration with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Board (ITAB) conducted consultations with the Church Leaders and Vanua of Sawaieke, Gau in 2014 to adopt the RMP.

- Consultation meetings were also held with the youths of Sawaieke. 46 unemployed youths were identified from the meetings to pilot the RMP.
- The Lomaiviti Provincial Council was consulted by ITAB regarding the RMP in Sawaieke and also informed about the “Three Legged Stool” concept, as basis for the successful implementation of the program.

Stakeholder Engagement

- The Ministry of Agriculture developed an Agricultural Farm Plan for the Sawaieke youths for the RMP.
- Government, through the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, iTaukei Affairs Board and Ministry of Agriculture provided technical advice and monitoring of the RMP from the initial to the last phase in co-ordination with the village/ district committees, and the Lomaiviti Provincial Council.
- The Assistant Roko and District Officer of Gau Island continued to monitor the implementation of the agricultural farm plan.
- Church leaders provided spiritual motivation and promoted the subject of diligence, the importance of trust and faith in God and adhering to biblical principles that facilitates dedication and commitment to achieve their vision and goals.
- The village elders provided physical and mental motivation through the “vosa vakavanua” or advice given to the youths during their monthly church service.
- Traditional taboos such as abstaining from the consumption of alcohol/yaqona and smoking were observed during the implementation of the farming program and this was monitored on quarterly basis.
- The youths dedicated one tenth of their harvest, as their “tithe” to the church as illustrated in Picture 3 below.

Picture 3: Stakeholder representatives at Sawaieke Village receiving yaqona as ‘tithe’ to the Church and Vanua.



Capacity Development

- Capacity development – physically, mentally and spiritually under the “Three Legged Stool” concept of the Vanua (Community), Lotu (Church) and Matanitu (Government).
- Training of youths on technical skills and good agricultural practices (GAPs) undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Identification of potentially skilled individuals in the villages to complement village projects. Example traditional carpenters or accredited carpenters from vocational or tertiary institutions.
- Financial training/education for the farmers provided by MRMD and ITAB on the smart use of the yaqona income for investing in education, construction of houses, financial institutions investments and savings; and income-generating activities.

Key Findings

- The key partners that provide technical and financial support for RMP are the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development (MRMD), iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB) and Ministry of Agriculture.
- Other stakeholders that provided support for RMP are the Gau Development Board, Gau Methodist Church, Fiji Development Bank and Sawaieke District/ Tikina Committee.
- The RMP in Sawaieke village had no funding support for its implementation and Government subsidy on rural agriculture farming had to be considered. The main challenge is funding to facilitate the consultation, administration, awareness, monitoring & evaluation and logistical costs of the RMP Framework.
- Key elements to be considered for the farming practice to become sustainable includes setting a “Vision and Strategic Goals” in consultation with the village elders, youths and their families to own and implement the concept with governing principles of accountability and transparency to secure confidence and trust at all levels.
- The conditions needed for the program to be successful must include support from the community, church and government, using the “Three Legged Stool” concept with respective principles inculcated to the farmers, that will help sustain their partnership collectively with stakeholders.

- A key aspect of the RMP is the “solesolevaki” (communal farming) or cooperation, which requires all farmers to contribute and participate in all the yaqona farming with returns shared amongst the farmers themselves.
- RMP is participatory and gender inclusive, as youth farmers include young couples (men and women) and family members who were engaged during the consultation and planning process, with the support of the Community, Church and Government.
- Women played an important role in providing the support required in farming, such as preparation of healthy nutrition meals for their husbands on a 24/7 basis.
- Farmers were able to generate higher income and wealth from the 4.6 million dollars FJD achieved in the first yaqona harvest in 2016.
- RMP has significantly improve the livelihood of the youth farmers and their families in Sawaieke, and repercussions are youths in Gau have returned to their villages to better utilize their land and resources.
- Emerging innovative techniques of RMP linked the farmers to financial services provided at the village site, enabling farmers to open bank accounts, access investment information and advice.
- The impacts of the RMP had been consistently monitored, evaluated and assessed by the Assistant Roko, District Officer of Gau Island, Turaga ni Koro of Sawaieke village, Village District Councils and Provincial Council.
- Yaqona production and corresponding income earned by the Sawaieke Youths from their first harvest in 2016 is outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Yaqona Production and Income

Year	Production (Volume)	Annual Income (FJD)
2016 (actual)	92,000kg	4.6 million

- The “Three Legged Stool” concept of the community, church and government has been used as basis of development in rural arrears of Fiji, in different context that holistically encompasses economic and social infrastructure development.
- Proper consultation with the village elders, district administrators, youth groups and their families, key stakeholders or enablers in the supply chain, namely the church, community and government is vital for the proper replication and adaptation of RMP.

- RMP is a sustainable institution as a key driver or player, while the beneficiaries are the youth farmers and their families. The practice is economically sustainable as the income generated form the first harvest in 2016 was 4.6 million FJD. This was used for constructing new houses, open small canteens/ shops operated by women, purchase of outboard boats, four wheel drives and properties. Farmers also opened individual savings accounts with financial institutions.
- Rural advisory support extension services are provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, ensuring farmers are provided with the Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) for sustainable soil fertility and land management.

Recommendation and Conclusion

- The “Rural Millionaire Farming Program (RMP)” has significantly changed the mind-set and approach of the youths to rural farming at Sawaieke village, as they have witnessed a higher income of 4.6 million dollars (FJD) and associated benefits to their households acquired from their first harvest in 2016.
- More youths have taken farming seriously, and have returned to their villages to replicate the RMP.
- RMP has addressed unemployment of youths, rural – urban drift, secured high income source, and improve livelihoods and food security for the community of Sawaieke, thus boosting the overall agricultural sector of Fiji.

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