

Journal entries from:

**Mareta Tiuhe'a: President- Rotuma Women Association**

*Monday 22nd October, 2012*

The group from Rotuma after finally arriving in Suva boarded the Fiji Sea-road service bus to Natovi landing. The crossing on the vessel "Spirit of Harmony" was fairly calm and everyone from the island was so excited that after weeks of anticipation, we can finally say "Labasa here we come". We set sail around 8am and arrived at midday in Nabouwalu landing, Vanua Levu. The way we travelled seemed nice compared to our way of island travel to Rotuma. There was a bus organized just for the summit participants and we then boarded the same bus we travelled from Suva onboard the vessel before it began the 3 hour or so-bus ride which had me glued to the edge of my seat, all the way to Labasa. There were many things to see along the way, the lush forests flowing streams along the roadside, villages and settlements nested at the rolling mountain ranges. Pine trees fill the road scenery with smiling Fijian children waving to the speeding bus. But alas, I cannot any longer ignore the fact that I am so very hungry!! The busload of summit participants were dropped off at the Labasa town hall for briefing before we made our way to the host village, Vunivau where we will be staying for the next four days. A church service at the village that same evening to welcome us and despite being tired, the youth choir's singing rejuvenated us as we reflected on our journey from the island to now being at Vunivau enjoying the hospitality of the villagers. For the rest of our stay we were treated like kings. Our meals were taken at the community hall while the women were sleeping in one house separate from the men as we were given free reign of their homes.

*Tuesday until Thursday 23rd – 25th October*

The community group comprising of men from Lomaiviti, Ba and Macuata were hosted with us at Vunivau and we caught the special bus to the Town Civic Centre where summit was held. We are so very fortunate to be part of this summit, thank you to LajeRotuma for making this possible. My knowledge on climate change and its causes, its impacts and practical solutions to educate my island people, to share and work with them especially the women was greatly improved and broadened. When we return to the home island, we will be working with LajeRotuma for we are very much encouraged and strengthened with new knowledge. Isolated and beautiful as always, Rotuma still has its own problems also affected by the changing climate. So much for that, Eva, Rina and I after sitting it out the first two days of the summit, decided to walk home to Vunivau. The first afternoon on Tuesday, we must have looked a sight with our dresses and long *sulu* walking on the road. It took us 2 hours to reach the village. We left town at 6pm and arriving just after 8pm, the longest walk of my life but enjoyed the afternoon scenery! We did the same on the second afternoon (Wednesday) but this time we took our change for walking after the summit program. Later in the evening, we were hosted by the Labasa Rotuman community who gathered at Dr Ane and Mareko's home for dinner, *faiaksia 'e hanisi to our families*.

Our last night on Thursday in Vunivau, the village organized a farewell service with beautiful hymns and choruses one last time. We reciprocated with the singing of a Fijian *polotu*. Saying

our goodbyes was tearful and a sad occasion after a night of singing, dancing and drinking kava of course! I felt like crying and crying as we said our goodbyes at Vunivau. The women of Vunivau will be remembered for a long time.

We are on the road again to Savusavu in a hired air conditioned-van giving the six of us comfort to share our experiences which are all happy ones! We stopped on the roadside to fill our bottles of water from a spring of water coming out of the side of the rocky hill, famous stop for most users of the highway who enjoy the cold clear pure waters. Monifa had already arranged with National Trust of Fiji for our group to walk the Waisali Forest Reserve. This walk was an eye-opener and muscle stretcher too! First we walked downhill the tracks, a man-made walkway supported by thin wood rails. Lush forests surround us with almost every kind of Fijian tree and clear pools of cold water so inviting that I wish we were allowed to dip into the pool and remain there for the whole day. Halfway through the tracks, my leg muscles were screaming for rest and feel as if my chest was about to burst open! Despite all that I enjoyed very much the walking up and down the forest trails.

Our next stop around early afternoon was Savusavu town after a ride of sheer enjoyment of the scene of rolling hills, scattered villages, waterfalls in the distance on the walls of green and lush vegetation. Savusavu is one of the most beautiful tourist attraction destinations in Fiji and we got to do the J. Hunters pearl farm tour. Rina, Eva and I went swimming at the Hot Springs hotel pool in the afternoon, where we were staying for the night. Later in the evening, we went to the Atalifo family for dinner and met with the matriarch of the family Sara and rest of the Rotumans who were able to join us for the evening, *Noa'ia 'e hanisi*. After an early rise to catch the sea-road bus from Savusavu back to Nabouwalu to board the vessel "Spirit of Harmony". I feel as if the all the dust and dirt of Savusavu was plastered on my face. Thank you lord for letting my colleagues and I from Rotuma, be a small part of the climate change summit. Thank you LajeRotuma for making this possible. To sum it all 'Climate change and its impacts change our lives tremendously and now it is time to put knowledge learnt into action.

*Colo-i-Suva field update: Morning of 30th October 2012*

Our guide was a Fijian man who was very quiet and always smiling. This is the first time for me to visit Colo-i-suva Forest Park that is managed by Department of Forestry. Just like our visit to Waisale rain forest and the deep pools are beautiful with cool flowing streams that were so inviting. Walking on man-made steps going up and then coming down only to go up again. I rested a lot of times but it was such an enjoyable walk, trekking under the dense and shadowy forest. Birds called out to us, voivoi (Pandanus) plants are so long leafy and wide. The guide brought us out at about one o'clock and we being so tired and hungry. We then caught the bus back to Suva after thanking the forestry people. I have spent so much time in our forests on the island home, Rotuma as I have done in Fiji which has reminded me that I must take time to observe and 'walk about' my own forests (of course not so large as those that I have visited) back home. We are thankful for the opportunity to visit such places and it opens our eyes to so many things that we took for granted in our lives."



**At Colo-i-Suva Forest Park**



**Standing at the Pool**

### **National Food and Nutrition Centre visit: Noon, 30th October, 2012**

Back in Suva after Colo-i-Suva we were told to have lunch while Monifa took the lead to NFNC for we had missed our scheduled meeting by an hour! Anyway while still deciding on our lunch we were told to travel to NFNC because the lovely staff were still waiting for us patiently. After introductions and a lovely welcome speech in our mother tongue by a young man named Vamarasi, we were treated to fruit drinks, water melon, pineapple and bananas. A short lecture of home made remedies for our back-yard vegetable gardens and a tour of their organic vegetable garden that was looking very healthy. Sweet smelling flowers were planted around the garden to prevent pests from attacking the vegetables. We were given bags, the remaining material from its last World Food Day celebrations with a focus on anaemia. In the bag was a t-shirt, a cap, and very useful information as to how and when to grow each type of vegetable. How fortunate are we to be in this group from Rotuma to share and be part of all the activities LRI organized for us to take part in.



**At the NFNC organic garden**

### **Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park update: 5-6 Nov, 2012**

5th November, 2012: Paul Wong, Maryva and myself slept at Monifa's place to meet up with Rina at 5pm to leave for Sigatoka. We arrived at Sigatoka around 7:15 in the morning. Monifa met us at van stop before we walked into town to buy bread and fruits for breakfast at Jason Tutani's place, whom I learnt later is the park manager for the famous Sigatoka sand Dunes National Park. After breakfast Jason took us on a tour of Sigatoka town. Rina, Maryva and I had

an arm treatment at the Sigatoka spa, very lovely and soothing experience. We arrived at the park got introduced to the staff and Fax', the ranger took us on the shorter track up the dunes. We started climbing on man-made steps until we reached the top of the hill called Yataga Look-Out. It was very windy but what a lovely scene for we can see the sea from where we were standing, so majestic with the rolling hills on my left and the top of thick cover of mahogany on my right. We made our way down to the sea where it was not so calm, white caps cover the sea and were told lots of sharks inhabit that part of the sea. We walked back via the Mahakani trail under the shadows of the leafy mahogany trees. What an inspiring, energetic short trip that afternoon back at the park when upon our return Mr. Tutani gave us a short history of the park which is very interesting and informative.



**Briefing at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park**

6th November, 2012: We slept at Waitaci villas last night, Maryva, Rina, Paul and myself. We later learnt that it belongs to Jason's grandmother, a blue-eyed lovely old lady who greeted us so warmly when we went to check in on one of her villas. Monifa arranged for our pick up to the sand dunes around 8am before the sun is too hot to climb the larger dunes. When we arrived at Kulukulu settlement at the foot of a huge sand dune, Monifa was already up there with her camera. I started to walk and not even half way, I couldn't walk anymore so lay down on my stomach for it seemed that all my breath have left me. I crawled the rest of the way up for I almost gave up, thank you lord for helping me. I know if I had not made it up there I would have let my group down, go Rotuma go! That was not the only sand dune to climb but not as steep as the first one. I am afraid of heights with my insides cold despite the warmth from the first rays of sunlight breaking through the clouds that morning. I struggled, really struggled to go all the way up then a walk down a very steep hill crossing to the beach to cool off and watch the

crashing of waves with the wind on our faces. It was worth enduring the exhausting climb up and down the sand dunes. As we walked along the beach picking shells for tefui or belts, there were drift wood everywhere and there I was so thankful for the distance I have come and yet to conquer with the encouragement of my group. Watching a documentary of the sand dunes is so different an experience from conquering it on foot, so awesome and amazing. Sigatoka and Fiji are truly blessed with such national heritage to treasure and protect. "I wonder at our own historical sites on Rotuma and the means to inspire our own community to restore and protect these important places for ourselves and the world."



**Jason holding a workshop session with the group post-walk**



**Wind-blown dune shores**

## **Rosarine Fonmoa**

22nd October

Left home{Suva street}at 3am to catch the Sea road transport bus to Labasa at Suva bus stand. arrived at Nabawalu after mid -day. Traveled to Labasa by bus -reached Labasa town at 4;20pm.Traveled by taxi to Vunivau village -our home for the next three days[23rd-25th]. Welcome church service by the Vunivau community followed by dinner. I had a very tiring but enjoyable trip with a total of 11 hours of travelling.

23rd – 25th October

The national summit for building resilience to climate change was held at the Labasa town hall. The themes for first day was on mainstreaming issues on climate change in national policy making processes. Two ministries i.e. Health, Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation and iTaukei Affairs Board spoke on their experiences on initiatives that include or consider climate change in their conduct of business and different aspects of their work. Second day topic was on education and training with third day on adaptation and mitigation. Climate change is an issue that we should not ignore but treat seriously. There are changes we observe and notice on Rotuma that are affected by the weather and climate. There stronger and bigger waves observed, more rainy days and uncertain weather plus our fishing is not as plentiful as in the past. I learnt that although there are changes happening around us affecting our health and our way of life, I play a very important role to teach and encourage my family, community to have a friendly positive outlook on our environment. We need healthy eating habits, clean drinking water and waste management projects. We need to stop killing our forests. We need to preserve our natural resources wisely from our reefs where we fish to the farm lands, for our future generation.

## **Gagaj Taimanav**

I am thankful for being here at Labasa to attend the national climate change summit with a theme on “Building resilience to climate change”. Many things we learnt about the changing climate (*jenjen ne tupua’ ne lagi teet is kop la mamaf se*). I listened to many experts and the assistance given by government to those places where difficulties were faced caused by the changing weather or climatic conditions. The team who catered for the large gathering of about 200 people fed us well. Our host village at Vunivau were very gracious and welcomed us with a service and farewell with another church service and entertainment on the last night. We were even hosted by the Rotumans at Labasa on Wednesday evening for dinner and *kainaga* at Savusavu when we travelled down after the summit on Friday evening. The visit to the JHunters pearl farm was interesting for I was able to see how the oyster shell is being farmed for its pearls. The deep pool at Itu’muta seems like it would be suitable to farm these pearl oysters! However, Rupeti, Rosarina and I are planning a waste care project for our community at Itu’muta as an outcome of our trip and learning whilst at Labasa.

## **Maryva Emose**

Travelling to Labasa seemed a long journey because we were at the bus stand around four early morning on Monday. When we got to Natovi the morning glory promised a great day to be on a boat to Nabouwalu before hopping back onto the Searoad bus to complete the road trip to Labasa. Despite the long distance and dust off the road, our excitement was not dampened. Our friends at Vunivau village which hosted us during our stay at Labasa looked after us very well. On the first day of the summit, Rosarina, Mareta and I walked back to the village in the afternoon instead of the service bus organized for us. By the second day, I learnt more about the changing climatic conditions and our natural environment. Another new experience was at the stream where the *Marama ni Yavusa* took us for a swim. The third and last day of the summit, I joined a group who was planting trees at the botanical garden organized with seedlings provided by Forestry. Other field trip experiences include learning about land use planning and new techniques of planting. The village farewell at the church and at the hall was great fun for I didn't manage to sleep at all! I was very sad to having to say goodbye to my village friends. The next day which was planned for a road trip to Savusavu gave me time for a nap before the walk at the Waisale Forest Reserve. There was a spring at the side of the highway on our way to Waisale which we stopped to taste the fresh cool water and bottle for our walk. The pearl farm visit which included a boat trip along the Savusavu harbor was good.

## **Rupeti Vafo'ou**

*23rd October:* One of the key learning for me today was the local climate /smart solution work shop that I attended in the afternoon. I have learnt so much about climate change, change of weather patterns and many others that I can't wait to share with my people on the Island when I return. I believe that this information is valuable because we experience the climatic change on the island and how we can adapt to it.

*25th October:* I enjoyed the water and sanitation/waste management workshop today that was presented by Ministry of health. We from Rotuma were able to share with other participants the waste care projects that we carry out on the Island. I was glad to be part of this sharing of experiences and adaptation methods that other communities in Fiji are caring out. Reduce Reuse Recycle was the fundamental topic that was discussed. I believe that I am fortunate to attend this Building resilience to climate change and I can't wait to return to the Island and present what I have grasped during the three day summit in Labasa.



Photos taken at their last outing whilst in Suva for the radio session at FBC for *He'oaf Rotuma*.

