

SCEFI EMBLEMATIC STORIES

The Virtues Project Fiji:

Making A Difference In Koroiipita



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The series of emblematic stories under the Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI) were developed in collaboration with the relevant civil society organisations, with contributions from:

- ▶ Sonja Bachmann, UNDP SCEFI Coordinator
- ▶ Fane Raravula, Independent Consultant and Grant Facilitator
- ▶ Rusiate Ratuniata, Independent Consultant and Grant Facilitator
- ▶ Isikeli Valemei, Grants Manager, SCEFI programme
- ▶ Janet Murdock
- ▶ The stories were edited by Ms. Achila Imchen.



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Making A Difference In Koroipita

SUMMARY

The population of Koroipita, a township project located outside Lautoka in Ba province, reflects the diversity of Fijian society. Its low-income and destitute residents, however, all share the common experience of poverty and social dislocation. In 2014, the Virtues Project Fiji (VPF), an organisation that provides individuals and communities with skills and 'virtues' to build peaceful communities, was able to impart training to its community members with assistance from UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement Fiji Initiative (SCEFI). This initiative enabled VPF to reach out to members whom they were unable to reach in the past due to lack of funding support.

INTRODUCTION

Koroipita is a model township project located outside Lautoka in the province of Ba, Fiji. The construction of Koroipita was supported by various charities, including the Rotary Club, Habitat for Humanity, New Zealand Aid and the European Union. The residents of Koroipita are very low-income earners and consist of famers who have been evicted as a result of expired land leases, or destitute because of dislocation due to natural disasters. Members of the community are generally 'looked down upon' by the general population. Domestic violence is also a problem in Koroipita as in many communities in Fiji.

Koroipita does not provide 'ownership' of the houses to its residents. The stay of those offered homes in Koroipita is conditional. One condition stipulates that residents are expected to leave when they achieve economic sufficiency. Households are also expected to take part in communal activities geared towards assisting them in becoming self-sufficient. These activities include training in setting up and managing small businesses and skills on community living and proper parenting. The hope is that by providing a stable environment, the children of Koroipita can reach high levels of achievement at school and in sports so that the community becomes associated with success.

The Virtues Project Fiji (VPF) is the Fiji branch of the Virtues Project, an international network which aims to inspire in people the practice of virtues in everyday life (see Box 1). VPF collaborates with local organizations to conduct workshops, using a set methodology aimed at

building collaborative and resilient people whose attitudes and actions reflect positive human values. The first section of the methodology includes five simple strategies for raising children and developing virtues of their character. The second section contains 52 virtues, one for each week of the year, and describes each virtue in simple terms.

During 2010–2012, VPF imparted training to about 50 households in Koroipita on its five strategies, which are practices on how to bring virtues to life. The training taught participants how to: learn the language of integrity and self-esteem, understand the roles of parents, discover ways to introduce time into family life, help children make moral choices.

BOX 1. What is The Virtues Project Fiji?

The Virtues Project was set up in 1992 and the Virtues Project Fiji (VPF) began work in Fiji in 1994. VPF has a long history of promoting the 52 defined virtues for community living in Fiji. During 1994 to 2002 VPF training was offered to parents under the Boarding School Meals project carried out by the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific Fiji. The 52 defined 'virtues' were translated into the iTaukei and Hindi languages. In between 2003 to 2014 training was provided to prisoners at the invitation of the Fiji Corrections Services. All of Fiji's prisons received training at one time or another. Training was also provided by VPF to schools throughout Fiji, to teachers, students and parents alike. AusAid and Vodafone Amalgamated Telecom Holding (ATH) Foundation supported some of the trainings.

Since then, an additional 200 households were added to Koroipita. The organization could however no longer impart training to the new families due to lack of funds. In 2014, with assistance from UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement Fiji Initiative (SCEFI), VPF was able to re-engage with the Koroipita community and reach out to the new families (see Box 2). VPF also identified and provided training to individuals from the community who had the potential to become 'virtues facilitators' so that they could become a source of support within the community in the future.



Photo Credit: Virtues Project Fiji

BOX 1. How SCEFI Supports Civic Engagement in Local Communities

UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI) is a three year project (2013-2016) aimed at strengthening peaceful and inclusive development in Fiji by enabling citizens to engage in community activities. It emphasises fostering democracy from the bottom up, and as such, the strengthening of collaboration between decision-makers and citizens. SCEFI is organized around six core themes: transformative leadership, non-discrimination and inclusiveness, equitable service delivery, accountability and human rights, voice and choice, decision making and coalition building.

SCEFI's outreach strategy involved receiving proposals and funding projects of civic engagement across Fiji. Towards this objective, it recruited and trained 11 local facilitators who visited Fiji's 14 provinces and conducted 236 information sessions that reached over 3,000 people in 2014. SCEFI facilitators were critical to realizing the Initiative's aim of targeting far-flung communities and citizens groups, and identifying emblematic projects which represented empowerment, self-help and collaborative action.

Through the outreach effort, 88 project proposals in total were submitted for consideration. Facilitators also helped organizations to prepare grant proposals. Once the grant proposals were approved, representatives of each organization attended a three-day training workshop where grantees were informed about SCEFI's overall objectives and provided support on management and reporting requirements. The training provided skill-building and information on key concepts such as civic engagement and strengthening collaboration between government and civil society. Facilitators also provided mentoring and facilitation support to grantees during project implementation, and assisted with reporting and financial requirements.

PROCESS: TRAINING IN COMMUNITY LIVING

The SCEFI project was carried out in two phases in Koroipita using contextualised training methodologies to teach community living and community governance. The first phase offered training to all the community members through evening workshops on the five strategies of the Virtues Project. In the second phase, VPF reached out to the block leaders of the 11 blocks of Koroipita, who helped identify families in need of support. This phase enabled the block leaders to better understand the challenges facing the community, and how they could best assist members of their community.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

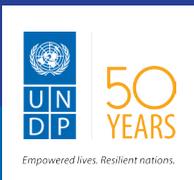
- ▶ Most of the workshop participants were responsive to the information imparted during the training. About 6 people were able to exemplify what they had learned by showing improvement in their family life.
- ▶ By reaching out to the leaders of each of the 11 blocks of Koroipita and obtaining their assistance in identifying families in need of support, VPF helped imbed the Virtues methodology within the governance structure of the Koroipita community.
- ▶ This project benefited greatly from the participation of a Canadian Virtues Ventriloquist, Ms. Val Hilliker, who used puppets and plays to explain key concepts and messages. Her involvement also enhanced the children's enthusiasm and response.
- ▶ Many businesses and organizations came on board to support the project as sponsors and donations of resources. The sponsors included Fiji Airways, Airport Fiji Ltd, Westpac, Aqua Pacific, Punjas, Avis, Crest Chicken, Fiji Time, Fiji Sun, Fiji TV and Mix FM.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ▶ The project brought greater understanding to the complexity of the myriad of issues facing families in a community like Koroipita. The Virtues Project's five strategies helped address the challenges facing such communities.
- ▶ The project identified the possibility of youth in the community undertaking activities on behalf of their block leaders. VPF discovered that the block leaders were struggling to carry out all the duties assigned to them. The service of the youth therefore should be harnessed to maintain order, cleanliness and to help resolve problems in their blocks. Engaging the youth in the community activities also helps generate self-worth and empowerment.
- ▶ Training community members to use the five strategies of the Virtues Project is not an immediate solution, but the strategies could be potentially effective tools to help members meet life's challenges. Virtues facilitators play a critical role in strengthening community self-governance.







United Nations Development Programme
Level 8, Kadavu House, 414 Victoria Parade
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji

Tel : 679 331 2500

Fax : 679 330 1718

Email: registry.fj@undp.org | www.pacific.undp.org