



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

The University of Fiji Staff part of the Space for Planet Earth Challenge winning team

We are proud to announce that the University of Fiji's Mr Lency Muna has the honour of being a member of the Yadrava Na Vanua Team that scooped \$NZ30,000 (\$F42,593) in the Space for Planet Earth Challenge. The Challenge was sponsored by the US Embassy in Suva and organised by the Space Base organisation of New Zealand.

Yadrava Na Vanua (Environment Watch) is a cross-institutional team consisting of students and researchers from the University of Fiji (UoF), Fiji National University (FNU), University of the South Pacific (USP), University of Western Australia, University of Canterbury and Australian National University (ANU).

Mr Muna is an Assistant Lecturer at the School of Science and Technology. Mr Muna said that as a team member, he will contribute to the research and development of carbon stocks in Fiji's mangrove forests.

"This project is aimed at contributing to the national blue carbon inventory that can be documented as Fiji's contribution to climate change mitigation efforts. I will also contribute to the GIS and remote sensing related tasks within the sub teams of the project and assist in community engagement activities throughout the project cycle," he said.

Mr. Muna said that the announcement of winning the Space for Planet Earth Challenge came as a surprise to the team because of the tough competition they faced from the Australian and New Zealand teams.

"In fact, it was an overwhelming experience for the team as we didn't have many resources compared to the international teams, so we used whatever we had to build our project. But we have proved that a local team can create a winning project despite lacking resources and support. We just have to be innovative, collaborative and focus on projects that are relevant to local, regional and global issues," he said.

Mr. Muna stated that the University of Fiji's programmes were especially important because they prepared students to participate in collaborative projects such as Yadrava Na Vanua.

"The different schools offer programmes relevant to the local, regional and global markets thus preparing students for easy integration into multidisciplinary research teams or multicultural work environments," he said.

The University also provided students with exciting extracurricular activities such as workshops and symposiums.

"These are opportunities that students can utilise to create connections with peers and experts in different fields of their interests. This in turn fosters a collaborative nature within the students and prepares them for working with different institutions or multidisciplinary teams," he said.

"I strongly believe that participating in teams such as Yadrava Na Vanua can expose students and researchers to new and innovative ideas to address important issues affecting our communities today.

Such teams allow individuals to express and practice their expertise while contributing to solving issues that matter to us,” he concluded.

The University of Fiji’ Strategic Plan 2022-2026 supports such initiatives of staff and students under the strategic goal 5.3 – Research to deepen interdisciplinary research collaborations with other universities and national, regional and international institutes.

About the Yadrava Na Vanua Team

Yadrava Na Vanua is divided into three sub-teams: mangrove and coastal carbon, forests and trees outside of forests, and remote sensing, GIS, and MRV.

A diverse and interdisciplinary team with expertise in remote sensing, GIS, climate science, forestry, mangrove, marine science, carbon sequestration, carbon sequestration verification, and ecology is part of this effort.

The Yadrava Na Vanua project focuses on integrating satellite data on land cover types across Fiji with ground truth measurements, as well as refining carbon sequestration data through machine learning analysis of high-resolution satellite images from Planet to generate international standard levels of measurement, reporting, and carbon stock verification.

The team encourages greater focus on environmental monitoring while building the next generation of environmental scientists, conservators and practitioners and, in doing so, to also conserve the environment and the Vanua for future generations.

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