

PACIFIC AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY POLICY NETWORK (PAFPNet)

YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE ESSAY, NEWS, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Application Form

Applications should be accompanied by this form and addressed to Ms Miriama Kunawave, PAFPNet Secretariat, Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva to arrive no later than 22 October, 2010. Communication will be limited to winners only or those requesting the return of original materials. Applications may alternatively be submitted by Fax (No. +679 338 6326), hand delivered to the SPC Suva office or emailed to lrhelpdesk@spc.int. Please call +679 3370733 – ext 35344 for further details.

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Biographical Note:

I am an IT professional but have great interests in community development especially how ICT and technologies can be used to empower and equip people especially in rural areas and assist in the development of their community and themselves as individuals. The Manus Professionals for Community Development Inc Association, a voluntary association comprising of professionals located globally originating from Manus Province, Papua New Guinea was formed to look at how it can, as a group, provide their skills and multi- professions in assisting in the development of our people and province.

Coconut – The Tree of Survival
Carole N Cholai, Papua New Guinea

I come from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and originate from Manus Province. It is a small island province of PNG with the smallest provincial population located far north of mainland Papua New Guinea.

It is also one of the minor-developed provinces of PNG and the economy is primarily based around fishing, remittances and coconut (copra).

The island province is made up of many little islands thus the common mode of transport is by sea – on dinghies.

To travel to Manus Province from Port Moresby, capital city of Papua New Guinea would cost you around over 1,000 PGK (250 USD approx).

A lot of Manusians who have gained formal education opt to, and live outside of the province, working in the larger towns and cities of Papua New Guinea and abroad as there is little opportunity of professional full time formal employment in the province.

The local villagers (islanders) depend on money being sent in by their working relatives abroad and day to day living includes fishing, sago harvesting and gardening.

Manus is not one that has good fertile soil and only a small part of Manus boasts of fertile soil for planting of many different food crops – including peanuts, kaukau (sweet potato), and taro where volcanic soil exists.

The majority of islands are mainly covered by coconuts and sago.

It was a night discussion with my dad on the topic of our Province and coconuts that got me thinking about how we could pursue into this venture and make it happen.

“We say Manus is poor in terms of soil fertility, no great mining venture in the province and poor development but God has blessed our province with coconut, the sea and fish for survival and these things men can survive on. If we look at coconut – all we are concentrating on is how much copra (dried coconut) we can get and small production of coconut oil that we use for cooking and selling at the local markets, but we do not look at and consider the greater potential it has, as a whole plant.” – Michael Cholai.

He went on to state how every single part of the plant has a great use for it. The coconut juice can become cooking oil, and be used as source of fuel. The fibre, can be used to produce industrial rope, the palm fronds used for weaving of baskets. If we can get our people to look at these opportunities apart from hard labour for a small income from copra due to cost of transporting copra to the main town from outer villages and low market price, we could make full use of the coconut tree and engage in supplying of coconut husk to developed countries for other end-products.

I was excited by this and decided to go on the net and find out more information. It never crossed my mind how much potential there is in one tree! A search on Google brought up many sites explaining on the potential of coconut husks and fibre, its valuable uses, the global demand and requirements on how to start up in this area.

I read up more on Coconut Husk which its by-products are Coco Coir and Coco Peat, where *coco coir* have great uses for them in countries such as China, Japan and Germany where there is great soil erosion problems, these can be used as a way of assisting with minimizing soil erosion, natural dye for textile industries and Mercedes Benz Cars in Germany uses coco coir in car seats as heat insulators.

Coco peat has great value in the Horticulture Industry as potting medium and fertilizers.

(www.agriculture.ph/make-money-from-coconut-husks)

Wikipedia also gave a great insight on coco coir which is used for floor mats, brushes, floor tiles, sacking and ropes. (www.wikipedia.com/coir)

As taken from Wikipedia, the total world production of coconut fibre production is 250, 000 tonnes and are mostly supplied by countries in Asia (India, Sri Lanka) and in recent years, some Caribbean countries, Mexico and Indonesia have started to supply to the global market in large scale.

From Alibaba.com site also, you are given advice on the type of machinery you would need to assist in this and the exact requirements of the coconut husk in terms of quality and quantity and companies you can export to.

This looks like a great opportunity and can be started off on a small-scale pilot phase. This could not only benefit our little province but also be an opportunity for other Pacific Island nations where we have our major agricultural crop being the coconut.

It will take a lot of commitment though from the locals, to keep up with the supply of coconut husks to meet the demand from a company willing to buy and also brings greater variety of opportunity to simply collecting coconuts for copra.

Being a Manus professional living outside of my home province, as with many others, there is a common interest on how we can bring back skills and opportunities for our people to assist them in business opportunities and making use of available resources, to minimize the dependency on remittances and overall assist in the development and economy of our small island province. I wish to explore further into these areas of opportunities with the various uses of coconut plant and ways of how we can use this to get the village youths (men and women) in being part of contributing to world supply of coconut husks, jewellery making for women folk and at ways of coconut oil production as a source of fuel.

From one plant, brings great opportunities for our people – it takes commitment and time and careful planning to make it a reality and successful and I hope that one good day, Manus Province as well as other pacific countries can make full use of the “Tree of Survival” – the coconut tree.