

CAFF aims to foster relations with South African Universities



From left; FNU Dean CAFF Professor Paul Iji, South African Charge d'Affaires to Fiji, Bingo Thamaga, FNU CAFF Associate Dean Research, Dr Champathi Gunathilake, South African First Secretary – Political, Eden Rei, and FNU Associate Dean – Learning and Teaching, Dr Kaliova Ravuiwasa.

The Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) is working through the South African High Commission based in Suva to facilitate an institution to institution cooperation and partnerships with selected tertiary institutions from South Africa aimed at boosting academic excellence, research, student and staff mobility.

The proposal to further strengthen South-South cooperation and relations was mooted during a recent meeting of the South African High Commission officials and FNU's senior College management team in April 2019.

The High Commission was represented by South African Charge d'Affaires to Fiji, Mr Bingo Thamaga and his First Secretary – Political, Mr Eden Reid, who met with CAFF Dean, Prof Paul Iji and the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching, Dr Kaliova Ravuiwasa and Associate Dean Research, Dr Champathi Gunathilake.

CAFF Dean Professor Paul Iji said South Africa was a great resource of both industry and academic excellence and establishing working partnerships with their Universities will provide great mutual benefits in terms of research, knowledge sharing as well as staff and student development.

"We are very glad to have connected with the South African High Commission here in Suva and we are excited about working with them in boosting education in Fiji," said Professor Iji.

"A number of South African universities are located in climatic and agricultural regions that are similar to Fiji. The two regions of Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal are huge on sugarcane and grain production while Limpopo is an important tropical fruit producing area."

"South Africa has been a leader in commercial agricultural production for decades and Fiji can learn from their experience. Partnerships between the institutions in South Africa and FNU will stimulate the exchange of

research ideas in these key areas of agriculture, and student exchanges will also gain from agricultural as well as youth development," added Professor Iji.

The South African delegation was pleased to learn of the history of the College and the important role it plays towards the sustainable development of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry sectors in Fiji.

Charge d'Affaires to Fiji, Mr Bingo Thamaga said there were many similarities between Fiji and South Africa and his office was keen to support development in the Pacific, particularly Fiji as a regional hub.

He noted that South Africa was the only African country with diplomatic representation in Fiji, but he will be keen to work with other countries represented in the country and the region to facilitate tri-lateral cooperation projects through the FNU to the benefit of all the Fijian people.

Mr Thamaga further advised that South Africa's foreign policy is also underpinned by the South-South cooperation in pursuit of the agenda of the Global South, which includes the Pacific Island nations.

"South Africa's foreign affairs focus on the sustainable development of the Global South will not change, in spite of the country's current limitation in economic resources. There is great optimism about the future as South Africa has just held peaceful general elections, which ushered in a New Dawn in our country" said Mr Thamaga.

"It would be much easier for institutions in the two countries to initiate the collaboration before governments can get involved with helping them to realise the aim of the envisaged partnership," Mr Thamaga concluded.

Professor Iji said they will work closely with the South Africa High Commission to facilitate a Memorandum of Understanding with the like-minded university in South Africa to pave the way for educational and other research cooperation.