1.0 Introduction:

The Cultural Enhancement Program of the Department of Culture and Heritage aims at promoting cultural industries at the grassroots level through Festivals, Exhibitions, Promotions and Workshops. Although the concept has been in existence, the challenge vests with the implementations as the indigenous people vary in their cultural heritage. Thus an approach taken in the beginning of this year, was to pilot the program with the Province of Macuata. The focus on Macuata originated out of the Tui Macuata’s being a representative of the Vanua and Chiefs of Fiji in the recent Festival of Pacific Arts held in American Samoa in 2008.

Having witnessed the level of presentations of skills and talents from the Fiji delegation, the Turaga Tui Macuata was inspired to encourage the people of Macuata towards the promotion of cultural practices, revival of lost skills and knowledge and encourage local festivals as a means of promoting cultural practices and also offer opportunities for the people of Macuata showcase their skills and talents which could in turn be a source of income right at the household level.

1.1 2009 Proposals for Macuata Province:

As being the Senior Cultural Development Officer, I was assigned the important task of creating a collaboration of all stakeholders and soliciting views from those concerned within the Province of Macuata in mid February, 2009 before any implementation activity was pursued. Briefings were held with the Roko Tui Macuata and the Women’s Interest Officers under the Ministry of Women, Northern, to provide an overview of the program, consider and confirm a calendar of events for 2009 and enhance collaboration through mobilization of resources. My visit to the Northern Division was so timely that the first round District Meetings within the Province of Macuata was scheduled the following week. I was privileged to be part of the Government Delegation attending the 12 District Meetings from 26/2-14/3/09, promulgating the objectives of the program and soliciting the support of the villages.

1.2 Highlights from the Awareness Campaign:

The following issues were gathered from the awareness in the eight (8) out of the twelve (12) district meetings attended:
The hive of tourism activities currently being undertaken along the northern coastline of Macuata proved an opportune platform for setting up cultural enterprises;

The need to develop local heritage sites for Eco-Tourism purposes;

The need for handicraft, such as jewelry making, screen printing and performing art development in already established tourism outlets (Druarua Island and Udu Point);

The need to organize community based workshop on Kuta weaving for younger women in the four districts of Macuata, Seqaqa, Dreketi and Sasa;

The need for a revival of woodcarving and traditional costumes (pandanus skirts) skills workshop in the District of Namuka;

Identifying traditional practices of certain provinces that are slowly dying out or not practiced anymore.

2.0 OBJECTIVES:

The intention of the workshop was to develop and illustrate the relevance of traditional skills as a means for the people of the four districts (Macuata, Seqaqa, Dreketi and Sasa) to retain their identity. In addition, the workshop is a means of empowering women and youths to remind themselves of their traditions and create opportunities to generate additional income. The three main objective of the workshop are highlighted as follows aiming at:

**Traditional Skills and Resources within the community**

- To identify traditional skills that belongs to each indigenous community;
- To identify resource persons who are owners of traditional skills within the community;
- To identify and develop natural resources within those communities to be used to create and produce authentic handicrafts.

**Skills Impartation**

- To impart to other members of the community who have the knowledge of their own traditional skills;
- To develop other skills that are not traditional to that community;
- To enable incoming-generation at the village level and upgrade their standard of living;
- Maintaining traditional skills of weaving for future generation;
- To strengthen cultural sustainability within their communities.

- **Market**
  - To identify and develop markets for the products produced by these communities.

### 3.0 WORKSHOP:

#### 3.1 Kuta Mat Weaving Skills Workshop:

With the success of the District Council Meetings attended, the first workshop was held at Seaqaqa from 4th - 8th May to involve young women from the 39 villages within the Districts of Macuata, Seaqaqa, Dreketi and Sasa. The need for the one week workshop was the request of the Turaga Tui Macuata, as Kuta mats is traditionally renowned as being one of the traditional craft of his province. The raw materials are a surplus in the four districts, yet the skill to utilize these is minimal. It has been a practice that only older women are engaged in kuta weaving and it has come a time that the traditional skills is passed on to the younger women at village level. It is a fact that the elderly in rural villages' men and women are currently the main guardians of traditional cultures and skills in the different provinces in Fiji. Losing these skills, would mean a big loss for future generation who are at present still ignorant to the value of preserving their traditional heritage.

During the District of Macuata Meeting, the Traditional Head of the Province of Macuata reiterated his call for the promotion of cultural heritage at the provincial level and that the grassroots to be reinvigorated in developing and enhancing their traditional skills. As also highlighted in his official address, “Fijian indigenous society is very communal, with great importance attached to the church, the vanua, and the village family unit. At present, there is a real need to preserve our customs and traditions for our future generations which will be lost if we are not vigilant enough for its preservation, for it is each and everyone’s responsibility that it remains intact at all times”

### 4.0 LOGISTICS:
4.1 Pre-preparation of the Workshop

Prior to the planning process of the workshop a structure was implemented to specify roles and responsibilities of the organizing team that involved both the Department of Culture and the Macuata Provincial Office personnel. The major roles of the Macuata Team headed by the Roko responsible were, involving the participation of young women representing the 39 villages, indicating specific activities & tasks, providing logistical support to the DCH Team and consulting with other government and relevant stakeholders to enable us achieve the best for the preparation of the one week workshop, all logistics were put in place before the workshop commenced.

Assistant Roko Peni Rakanace and the Youth Worker Macuata had liaised with the district representatives and village headmen of the 39 villages to identify two participants from each village, arrange for their transports, identify five master-weavers trainers, preparation of venue and accommodation centre and caterers. Each participant was required to prepare for their own beddings and raw materials for weaving as part of their contribution towards their training.

Not all villages were represented as most young women were engaged in the yearly Provincial Methodist Conference held at the same week. The 55 participants all converged at the Seqaqa Secondary College on Monday morning the 4th of May where they were also billeted for the week. Having Seqaqa College as venue was appropriate and centralized due to the physical locations of participating villages within the four districts.

Participants were provided with transport from their various villages to the venue as this was one of the major problems faced during the workshop as most represented villages are not accessible by normal bus routes, therefore using mini carriers was the only option for their transportation. Members of the Assembly of God Church community living close by the school compound were requested to cater for the week.

4.2 Official Opening

The Roko Tui Macuata, Mr. Sitiveni Lalibuli who had just resumed office upon transfer from the Bua Provincial Office, was invited to officiate the opening of the workshop who had reminded the participants the importance of learning their renowned traditional skills and if neglected, it will surely be lost. Participants were reminded that indigenous people belong to a vanua, yavusa and mataqali and have shared aspects of lives in its cultures and traditions. Elders are renown in their different cultural knowledge and skills in the different provinces in Fiji. It is their roles that these skills
are made known and shared to their younger generations for their betterment in the future. "Knowing and practicing kuta weaving skills will enable you as participants open doors to money-making development from your homes which will surely assist you great deal in your every day living".

The Ministry of Women, Women Interest Officers were also present in the opening, who later shared with the participants the needs of having closer collaborations in their future programs that will focus on their upcoming visionary plans for local handicraft marketing. Participants were also highlighted on their Northern Craft Fair Program which is scheduled for 11th – 12th June, 2009, encouraging them to participate in the two days event.

After the Official Opening, one of the Resource ladies, Lusiana Turagasau from the village of Korovuli had demonstrated the basic stages of kuta harvesting, ways and means for longer and better preservation to maintain the golden color and texture of the raw material. The traditional and natural processes of preserving the harvested kuta is very important so the availability of raw material will always be in abundance when required by the weavers all throughout the year because harvesting months are only from March- June every year.

4.3 Daily Programs

The first day program opened with a registration program and each participant was issued with their ID Cards. Before the commencement of the first day’s session, participants were divided into five groups led by each trainer, ensuring that each group consisted of both younger and older participants enabling them to share their knowledge and skills during the programs.

Each day begun at 8.30am with morning devotion likewise at 5.00pm, closing the days program. The session on skills impartation was conducted during the day with the first session in the morning, the second session after morning tea and final session after lunch.
Lectures were also incorporated into the workshop program for traditional roles and obligations of the community. The older women were requested to advice and teach younger members of their traditional knowledge and history.

From the Department’s perspective these lectures are to give younger members of the community better view of where their history and to let them appreciate their inheritance and their heritage. The lectures raises the awareness on the importance of preserving, reviving the traditions and culture in both tangible and intangible heritage.

4.4 Official Closing

The participation of the Manager Northern Development Program (NDP), Mr. Waisele Tuidama was a great opportunity for the participants and other stakeholders present during the official closing, as he had discussed and highlighted the various issues consisting financial assistance offered in their programs, particularly micro-entrepreneurs in enhancing their livelihoods. The National Centre for Small and Micro Enterprises Development (NCSMED) is the implementing agency for the NDP program operating in Labasa.

The Chief Guest in his official address highlighted the importance of transferring the traditional skills of weaving Kuta to the younger generation because both Macuata and Bua are renown of the traditional mat and its part of their heritage. He further stressed that, “Handicraft products made from kuta such as mats, wedding costumes, table mats and other craft accessories is highly marketable in Tonga, United States of America and other Pacific Islands. I am urging you today, to make use of these market opportunities. With the knowledge and skills acquired from this project, will be able to foster the development of your productive capacities to generate income and increase trade in creative products and services.”

After the awarding the workshop participating certificates, participants were offered forms to request for potential entrepreneurship assistance through the Northern development
Program. The two representatives from FRIEND and FTIB were also given time slots to highlight the potential market assistances from their organizations. The presence of both offices in Labasa will assist them further to alleviate their market access problems as confirmed by both reps.

5.0 PERSONNEL:

5.01 Resource Women:

The resource women as trainers were renown of their skills in their own districts and have also showcased their products and participated in the 2006 Melanesian Festival, Wasawasa Festivals 2008 and various Craft Fairs organized by the Fiji Arts Council around the country.

They were Lusiana Turagasau (65yrs) and Ditui Raqere (58yrs.) from Korovuli, Sereima Divavan i(63yrs) and Melaia Sewasewa (62yrs.) from Navakasobu villages. The youngest of the five trainers, Leba Tudravu who is 28 years old, from the village of Naravuka had been highly recommended by the Fiji Arts Council in her participation in the Wasawasa Festival held last year. Her participation in this workshop had encouraged the younger women to acquire the skills. The five women were also given time to share their experiences in their affections in knowing the art which has contributed a great deal financially in their family lives.
As lamented by Leba, "Kuta mats is the traditional mat where I come from (she hails from Bua), my practicing the art represents a very valuable form of my cultural expression, a wealth of self confidence which has contributed to my everyday living. Learning the weaving from my maternal grandmother in the age of sixteen (16) has taken me to a standard that I will never regret and I will always thank God for the knowledge He has blessed me with. I have participated in National events to represent Macuata, and have won awards which I had never thought to receive."

She also highlighted that she has been selected to represent Fiji in the Commonwealth Natural Fiber Skills Workshop in Bangalore, India from 21\textsuperscript{st} – 24\textsuperscript{th} June, 2009, which will be another milestone in her life if attended.

5.02 Participants:

The target groups were younger women and youths- 56 participants consisting of one male represented the 39 villages in the four districts of Macuata, Seqaqa, Sasa and Dreketi. It was an opportunity to work together and know each other well to share their experiences in the one week. It was expected that the 39 villages consisting the four districts would attend but unfortunately, most women were involved in their Annual Methodist Meeting which was concurrently held with the workshop.

Mr. Mataiasi Qaroro from the village of Niurua as the only male participant had demonstrated his stupendous skills which had amazed everyone in the workshop. He acquired the skills of weaving from his maternal grandmother who hailed from the village of Navakasobu where Mataiasi was brought up in his young days, and continued to embrace it. He reminisced the magnificent times when he accompanied his grandmother in harvesting the raw material from the kuta ponds in Navakasobu and later showing him the various stages and methods of its preservation.

“My acquiring the unique skills from her was like a lifetime fortune which I had continued to embrace since then which has enriched and adapted my knowledge to weave contemporary pieces such as wedding costumes for both the bride and bridegroom pieces, apart from the
normal kuta mats." I have been married for some years and have assisted my wife in her role as a housewife, contributing in family and vanua functions."

Mataiasi had showcased some of his unique pieces, ranging from davodavo to vakabati even astounding the trainers of the designs used were not known to them.

"One of my main reasons to attend this one week training is to know the round shaped mat and also try and encourage the younger women that the more they practice the art, the better they will achieve which will provide greater opportunities for income generation in your households."

6.0 BUDGET

The Department of Culture and Heritage was able to allocate $7,000.00 to cover all expenses required to organize the one week workshop. All expenses details are highlighted in the Financial Statement attached to this report.

7.0 Highlights from the Workshop:

- The workshop was able to train young indigenous women of the 39 villages and had contributed to their empowerment to focus on small and medium enterprises to improve the livelihoods by developing economic activities to generate income
- Participants were offered forms to request for potential entrepreneurship assistance through the Northern development Program
- To enable the organizers to identify the outstanding participants who had demonstrated their best in learning the weaving skills with an intention to develop
and promote them further through other cultural entrepreneurial activities collaborated through the Fiji Arts Council

- Potential market assistance from FTIB and FRIENDS. The presence of both offices in Labasa will alleviate their problem

- The participants were invited to participate in other integrated government programs such as the Northern Craft Fair scheduled for 11th – 12th June organized by the Ministry of Women and the Pacific Youth Festival to be hosted by Fiji from 13th – 18th July in Suva. The younger women who had participated are live members of the Macuata Youth Group and multi skilled in other cultural activities which are trying to showcase as a Macuata Contingent for the upcoming Pacific Youth Festival
8.0 OTHER MEETINGS ATTENDED:

Presentations and consultations were also held soon after the week of the workshop as invitation were received by the Department to present at the Cakaudrove, Bua Macuata Youth Rally on 12th May, in the Macuata Provincial Council Meeting on 13th-14th May and traveling to Druadrua Island with the Manager Community Based Tourism on 14th-15th May for consultation as a follow up request in the recent Tikina Namuka meeting.

8.01 Presentation at the Cakaudrove, Bua Macuata Youth Rally on 12th May at Qomate Building:

Listeners in the meeting were office bearers and reps of the Association from various villages within the three Provinces under the leadership of Assistant Roko Peni Rakanace in the Macuata Provincial Office.

The main agenda of the meeting was the preparation of youths from the three provinces to showcase their talents in meke, handicraft skills and other cultural activities in the upcoming Youth Festival hosted by Fiji in July, 2009. In particular for Macuata was a partnership drive with the Provincial Office Macuata towards the result for the Turaga na Tui Macuata’s request during the last Pacific Festival of Arts in American Samoa, which was later endorsed by the Minister for Education Culture & Arts to develop and protect Macuata’s culture and heritage as part of the Government’s “Look North Policy”.

The manager Foundation Rural and Integrated Enterprise N Development (FRIEND) was also invited to do a presentation during the meeting. FRIEND is a registered non-government organization administering community programs for unemployed and rural women. The Organization works with the various community around Fiji to create income generation programs, and to help empower individuals and communities both socially and economically. Their major concerns are Food Security, Environment Conservation and Health.

8.02 Presentation at the Macuata Provincial Meeting 13th-14th May at Kytria Hall

The three main issues highlighted during the presentation that required the endorsement of the Provincial Council were:

- The establishment of the Provincial Heritage Committee
- The request for establishment for a Provincial Center for Culture and Arts to provide a space for showcasing of cultural traditions, craft demonstrations and an outlet for cultural resources for the entire province of Macuata
- The request to preserve potential Heritage sites for development and attractions. Resource Owners are to be aware of such heritage sites when allowing such pieces of land to be leased

The establishment for a Provincial Heritage Committee was unanimously agreed and endorsed by the Council. The following were elected to be members of the Committee, RatuTevita Roqica as Chairman who is also a member of the Provincial Council, Turaga na Tui Mali, Turaga Tui Sawana, Mata ni Tikina of Udu, Namuka and Dreketi.
It was also highlighted in the Provincial Council meeting that discussions and consultations are continuing for the need to allow a space for a Cultural Centre within the existing Provincial Building Complex. There is an existing building already in the complex to begin with, but constructing a Fijian Bure would be very important to showcase the cultural skills of indigenous men, women and youths of the entire Province of Macuata.

- **8.03 Consultation Meeting with the Vanua in Druadrua Island:**

A discussion was held in the village of Druadrua with the village elders who had raised the following requests:

- The urgent need to have proper training in customer services and tour guiding to ensure that visitors are given the real Fijian experience while in their Island. This can also be considered as an opportunity for exchange amongst the locals and the visitor.

- The use of their natural resources around them is in great abundance, yet the skills to utilize these are very minimal or have been lost. There is urgent need to revive their traditional skills and knowledge such as wood carving and traditional costumes for the tourism markets which have been established through the Blue Lagoon Cruises. This ensures handicrafts authenticity which can be value added to benefit both the locals and their customers.

- It was highlighted in the meeting that such training to involve members of the community in the entire district of Namuka, consisting (11) eleven villages. This is cost effective to government which is also a training policy of the Department of Culture.

- The need to improve on infrastructural standards and their village facilities such as rest-rooms, footpaths, etc.

- The need to build a Fijian Bure for traditional Fijian activities that will be a very significant tourism icon for Druadrua Island.

- The need to upgrade and improve their Fijian dances and using their traditional costumes such as pandanus skirts is a must to use rather then sulu- vakatoga.

- The villages had also highlighted long standing land issues for Tourism Development that needed urgent attention.

With the integrated approach done by the Department of Culture and the Community Based Tourism on this visit, is a way forward for the villages to ensure the communities gain the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully create and operate legal and profitable business entities within their communities. It must be noted that this community based tourism effort in Druadrua Island has the support of the private sector in terms of tourism market supply (i.e Blue Lagoon Cruises). Further more, the training mentioned are vital to such projects to enable them to be equipped with tools, knowledge and abilities necessary to sustain the creation and operation of successful tourism.

Villages have agreed that the workshop be held in July.
9.0 Recommendations

- Working closely with relevant Ministries and Non-Government Organizations, such as Community Based Tourism, Ministry of Women, Commissioner Northern, Ministry of Youth, Macuata Provincial Office and Northern Development Program are very important to strengthen their commitment and leadership to enforce effective regulations to protect and support cultural heritage and tourism development.

- Continuous consultations and coordination with the various Ministries for the establishment for a Macuata Provincial Centre for Culture and Arts Building. The need to build a Fijian Bure for traditional and other multifunctional activities that will be a very significant Fijian Traditional icon for Macuata.

- Working in collaboration with the newly established Provincial Heritage Committee is very important to enable them to work effectively with other stakeholders in the Northern Division for their commitment and taking a leading role for any cultural heritage activities earmarked for Macuata.

- Working with the Ministry of Women in Labasa through the Macuata Provincial Office for the scheduled Northern Craft Fair and with the Ministry of Youth for the request of Macuata Youths participation in the Pacific Youth Festival, hosted by Fiji in July, 2009.

- Endorsing requests from other districts (Namuka and Udu Districts) for similar craft revival/development based on the needs identified by the communities themselves, before bringing the entire Province to participate in the proposed Adi Babasiga Festival in October, 2009.

- It is recommended that members of the communities who had participated in craft development workshops to undergo business training to prepare them to start and operate their own businesses. These trainings are part of the Northern Development Program (NDP) which is free of charge. This will also be an opportunity for the participants to maintain the standards, quality, and value added for their products.

- The Fiji Arts Council to ensure that names of participants who had acquired and demonstrated their best in learning and identified during such workshops are incorporated in their already established craft database with an intention to develop and promote them further through other cultural entrepreneurial activities collaborated through the Fiji Arts Council.

- Strengthen relationship and network with the identified potential markets such as FTIB and FRIENDS in Labasa for the benefit of local craft producers in ways of maintaining the authenticity, quality, quantity and consistency of their products supplies once markets are established.
10.0 Conclusions:

The one week workshop has been a very successful one and had witnessed the commitment of each participant in trying to learn the skills of weaving, especially the younger women who demonstrated their own creativities in addition to Kuta mats weaving utilizing off-cuts of the materials.

It has been revealed that the workshop was a way forward for the participants to encourage them to utilize their natural resources to support them in the development of micro and small enterprises to raise their standards of living, particularly in making use of the readily available markets identified during the workshop.

Working as a team with the Macuata Provincial Officers had created an atmosphere of commonality among the participants and the team spirit illustrated was commendable, surely that had contributed a great deal in achieving the goals of the training.

The contribution and assistance of each and everyone in the Ministry and the Department is highly acknowledged.