



**By Dr. Mahendra Reddy Minister for Agriculture,  
Waterways & Environment**

## **International Day of Action for Rivers**

### **Rights of Rivers**



***“Rivers are the arteries of our planet; they are lifelines in the truest sense” (Mark Angelo, the founder of International Rivers Day)***

Dear All:

Bula vinaka to you all on the occasion of the International day of Action for Rivers. Every year on the 14th of March, millions of people get together to celebrate the International day of action for Rivers. The objective of the day is to signify the many values of our rivers and the need to strive and increase the public awareness and encourage the spirit of stewardship of the rivers around the world.

### ***The Theme for Celebration this year (2021)***

This year’s theme is “Rights of Rivers” – this theme beacons us all to celebrate the true value of our rivers as a very important source of life and treat it as an institution on its own right. Rivers transport water, they transport

us humans and they even transport goods. They provide a generous home for several freshwater habitats, give us food, water, support agriculture and economic activities and enable transportation. From the ancient of times, rivers have been the lifeline to several civilizations. This precious gift from nature deserves the due respect and protection that is afforded to nature itself!

The sustaining role played by rivers demands silently for the recognition of its rights through maintaining them clean and not to have litter thrown into them and keep them pollution free. The great many benefits afforded by these nature’s gifts are taken for granted many a time by humankind. Let us all pause for a moment in self introspection and give it a careful thought – what has each one of us done to preserve the rights of our rivers or in others words how can we promote the rights of our rivers?

## *The Hurting of River Rights*

Recent studies conducted have established that clearing and logging upstream has devastating consequences (caused by the loss of native forests) - reducing water quality in areas downstream from these logging activities. The impact of logging has major impacts resulting in river water quality problems and soil erosion at highly unsustainable levels. These unsustainable activities have serious social and ecological ramifications over the communities these rivers have flourished for generations.

Despite several environmental legislation(s) that aim to protect the quality of our rivers, we often times see waste in the form of white goods, trash, litter, and garbage often ends up in rivers. Normally surface waters tend to collect in lower-lying areas, any form of waste that is dropped or blown by the wind can eventually reach a nearby drain and then onto the rivers. We witness wastes that are illegally dumped directly into rivers, or dumped alongside riverbanks. We do see trash thrown by people who fish or use rivers for their recreation. Regardless of the source or the type, trash is a serious form of river abuse and pollution.

Research<sup>1</sup> has shown that people are more likely to preserve our rivers if they are clean in the first place. If a river bank or shoreline is always littered then, people are more likely to continue littering with little or no regard to the river and the innumerable benefits it brings to us humans and to the millions of species that depend on these rivers. The first step that every citizen can take is to maintain cleaner riverbanks and not litter or trash the riverbanks.

Yet another hurt being caused to our rivers is from the effects of Climate change – a key factor that damages to the river/stream path(s). We continue to see the rapid changes in the weather pattern and increased rainfall year after year. This implicitly results in much larger and swifter water flow and discharge through our river systems and many a time resulting in forcefully altering the river morphology and killing its natural path.

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<sup>1</sup> Water Encyclopedia – pollution of streams



*River Bank Erosion at Vunimoli Village, Labasa*

### *Government's Initiatives to maintain rivers*

Our Ministry in partnership with the Global Environment Facility (under the R2R project) is committed to safeguarding our rivers. We will maintain the inextricable bond between our rivers and the various forms of life (including humans) the rivers support. We will support our river protection efforts through legislation and also practical on the ground intervention.

The Ministry of Waterways has embarked on nature based solutions approach using vetiver plants to stabilize and protect our river banks. Last year alone, 50 sites were stabilized using vetiver technology (names of some of the banks to be inserted xxx). Our Ministry will scale-up the same model at other river systems in the country. We take a community-centered approach by

empowering the local communities and partner with them in addressing riverbank erosion through ecological means. The Ministry is integrating eco-system based approaches into its hard infrastructure engineering solutions to address riverbank and coastal erosion problems.

A single hedge of Vetiver grass planted on the outer slope of a dike can reduce the wave run up volume by 55%, in contrary with sod-forming grasses that give no reduction.

Communities around Fiji (especially within the 6 catchments under the GEF program) will continue to benefit from the stabilized riverbank sites.



*Stabilization at Namoka Village, Tailevu*

### *International day of Action for Rivers*

We will commemorate the international day of action for our rivers through hosting a



special event at the Emuri Village in the Nadroga/ Navosa Province on the 15th of March. We will mark this day through the official launch of the River Bank Rehabilitation Programme. A total of 93 sites have been identified within the 6 catchments (under the work plan in and around Fiji via) within the “Ridge 2 Reef” project.

On this day, I would like to convey a very important message – we should always be mindful of our actions and the repercussions it can bring to our rivers and our environment

in general. As our populations increase, our demands for natural resources from rivers too increase. Let us take a pledge today that we guard the earth's limited supplies of fresh water and the benefits it gives us and ensure all forms of human mismanagement of our rivers and waterways stops.

Rivers have the right to be treated well and protected at all times and it takes a champion like you and me to stalwart our rivers’ cause ... **I am a river champ? Are you??**



*Vetiver Planted at Navisabasaba, Sigatoka*