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THIS ISSUE

2. Govt Injects \$3.3M in Tree Planting
4. Forest Certification Critical for our Highly-Valued Mahogany: A-G and Economy Minister
6. Ministry Builds Staff Capacity to Strengthen Legal Approach to Forestry Crime

8. Government Investment Empowers Islanders to Build Better Houses and Establish Pine Market
9. Forest Conservation With Fiji's Forestry ER Programme
11. Seoul Forest Declaration Calls for Shared Responsibility towards Sustainable Forest

12. Forestry skills training open door to opportunities
14. Korovou crafts his way to teach others value-adding skills at Ministry
15. Economic empowerment: Father and Son Entrepreneurs Pave Way for Candlenut Industry...

Government Injects \$3.3M in tree planting with 12.5 Million Trees and Mangroves Planted since 2019



Teachers of Pundit Vishnu Deo Memorial Primary School in raiwaqa plant a tree during their wellness day last month

The Government is injecting \$3.3 million in the new financial year to continue Fiji's landscape restoration programme through the planting of trees and mangroves under Fiji's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years (30MT15Y) initiative.

Delivering the 2022-2023 Budget Address last Friday, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said since its inception in 2019, Fiji has planted over 12 million new trees through this commitment.

"The allocated budget will provide technical support in terms of seed sourcing, seed supply, nursery and silviculture practice training and direct incentives for landowners to establish and manage their own forests," Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

The Ministry of Forestry is coordinating Fiji's national tree-planting programme where Fijians and visitors alike have helped plant 12.5 million trees and mangroves since 2019. This represents 41.96 per cent of its 30 million trees

target to be planted in 15 years. This achievement needs to be nationally acknowledged and celebrated as it reflects Government's commitment towards building a prosperous, cleaner, greener and a better Fiji.

The Ministry will continue to coordinate Fiji's tree-planting campaign with the aim of expanding our forest cover and restoring degraded forest areas. This initiative is one of Fiji's main platforms towards addressing climate change because trees are scientifically proven to be among the best nature-based solutions for capturing carbon. Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama said the national tree-planting initiative was at the heart of the important work of growing Fiji's green and blue economy from ridge to reef—mountains, forests, fields and mangrove forest estuaries.

"They are all part of Fiji, and each generation is given stewardship of this beautiful environment—to nurture it, care for it, and pass it on to the next generation. Our

commitment today must be to bequeath to our children an environment that is better than the one we inherited—much better," Mr Bainimarama said.

The Prime Minister acknowledged all Fijians and visitors from abroad who have contributed to the tree planting initiative, labelling it 'a huge achievement.

He said this was possible due to the large interest from members of communities in rural areas and the outer islands, in peri-urban and even urban areas who have available land, no matter the size. It is inspiring to see that the people of Fiji have over the years, developed a deeper appreciation for the value of forests and trees in protecting the environment including water sources and coastal communities, addressing climate change, enhancing biodiversity, and increasing the opportunities for improved socio-economic development.

Mr Bainimarama also acknowledged the private business organisations



Senior high school students from around Fiji, Australia and New Zealand after planting trees at CMF College in Nasinu as part of the Pacific Student Leaders Programme.

who had contributed to Fiji's planting achievements by undertaking planting as part of their corporate responsibility to our environment.

"The whole of Fiji including stakeholders in the forestry sector, private sector, academia, non-government organisations, religious groups, landowners, schools and youths, have all contributed to more than 12.5 million trees and mangroves in three years and that is a massive achievement for our nation," he said.

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"Fijians are more aware of the importance of forests and trees and how these relate to the environment and nature as a whole. We are not just concerned about the effects of climate change, but are actively involved in finding solutions. We are aware that planting trees - the right type of tree, in the right place, at the right time - is essential to combating climate change and providing a means for sustainable socio-economic development for our current and future generations," Mr Bainimarama said.

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Fiji Pine Limited (FPL) and Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) have contributed 70.25 per cent of the planting achievement, while communal and individual

landowners have planted the balance with technical guidance and assistance from the Ministry of Forestry.

Communal plantings were also funded by non-governmental organisations like the Ridge to Reef programme, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) project in the Rewa Delta and International Climate Initiative (IKI) project in the Yasawas and Malolo islands.

The area planted is 11315.6 hectares which includes mangroves, exotic species, native, non-wood species and fruit trees.

With the dry season approaching after a prolonged wet season, the Ministry would like to advise landowners to undertake maintenance work on their planted seedlings which includes weeding and forest protection activities to minimise damages from grazing and forest fires.

The Ministry keeps track of the trees planted through the use of technology such as GPS, drones and ArcGIS software.

The Ministry has also developed a dashboard where the public can record the trees that they have planted. The dashboard is available online on the Ministry's website - www.forestry.gov.fj

History

Fiji started with a target of four million trees in four years in January 2019 when the then President His Excellency Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote launched the initiative at the State House.

By September of that year, the target was increased to 30 million trees in 15 years after Government noticed the planting of one million trees and mangroves within nine months. The Prime Minister announced the new target in September of 2019 whilst attending the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York.

The tree-planting initiative is also part of Fiji's green recovery following the devastation to our national economy caused by the recent series of natural disasters and COVID-19.

Taking care of our one and only planet and reducing our impact together sends across a united message: that we as A-People are a strong force for environmental and societal good. Together, we make a big difference in starting and sustaining the change needed for the years to come.

We owe it to those who have cared for our planet in the past, and we owe it to those who will succeed us in our roles as stewards of the forests in future.

Source: Ministry of Forestry



Attorney-General and Minister for Economy Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum (sixth from left) with representatives from organisations who helped prepare the FHCL Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report. Photo: Ministry of Forestry

Forest Certification critical for our highly-valued mahogany: AG and Economy Minister

“The launch of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Ltd (FHCL)’s Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report is an important and critical step towards certifying our highly valued mahogany,” says Attorney-General and Minister for Economy Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

He made the comment while launching the report at the Holiday Inn Suva on June 24, 2022, when he was also acting as Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said for the premium market positioning of Fiji’s mahogany products, FHCL’s readiness to target entrance into the Forest Stewardship Council Certification Scheme must be applauded.

FHCL was established in 1998 as a State-owned Enterprise to manage the Government of Fiji’s hardwood plantations.

Fiji developed its own Mahogany Branding and Licencing Act, which was endorsed by Cabinet in 2011. This safeguards our mahogany products from illegal local and international traders. However, a major barrier to accessing lucrative

markets overseas and negotiating prices is the inability to deliver products from a ‘certified mahogany plantation forest’.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said there was a tremendous need to get our mahogany certified to enable us to compete in the international market arena, adding niche value to place us above other similar mahogany sources from Asia and Africa.

In light of this, he said there was a need for forest certification on our mahogany forest plantations because once our mahogany is certified, it would be able to access niche markets internationally with the optimum price in the European and U.S markets.

Currently, most of our mahogany products have been exported to the South American and American markets where our Fijian mahogany has been re-classified before being resold to other niche markets in Europe and the U.S as certified products.

“Since the reforms of the mahogany industry in Fiji, the Government way back then recognised the fact that FHCL, notwithstanding the fact that it had the largest planted mahogany



Attorney-General and Minister for Economy Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum (right) hands over the FHCL Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report to FHCL Board of Directors chairman Sanjit Patel at Holiday Inn Suva on June 24, 2022. Photo: Ministry of Forestry

forest in the world, did not get premium dollars for its mahogany, which I think was a great tragedy,” Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

“And at that point in time, FHCL had a debt stock of about \$25 million, even though it had the largest planted mahogany forest in

the world. Another factor was that it was planted predominantly on indigenous land. The fact that it came from Fiji, our mahogany was not sold at a premium price. Our mahogany was not distinguished from other mahogany that was harvested illegally and from virgin forests.

“And we are still selling some of that mahogany to Central America or South America where it gets mixed up with other mahogany, so the value comes below what it should be sold for.

“There is no doubt that since the licensing regime that was put in place after the 2011 Act was put in place, our mahogany has become a lot more inaccessible where there is a particular regime of people who can only harvest mahogany. That was the critical first step. It was also critically important to have the branding done to be able to distinguish Fijian mahogany from other mahogany in the world.”

Fiji was once exporting around 500 cubic metres a month of Fijian mahogany decking and exterior furniture products to the New Zealand and Australian markets 10 years ago. However, this stopped when both of these countries only allowed certified timber products into their countries.

The current average Fijian Mahogany export price is around FJ\$2,000 per cubic metre, and the current potential international markets can easily double once our mahogany are certified.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum mentioned that the Fiji Pine Limited was already Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC) certified and the company now enjoys the many certification benefits that have been achieved via market access, technological advancements, and tightened documentary controls that have enabled efficient and effective decision-making.

“We know that Fiji Pine has already received the certification and the idea is to extend that certification to

FHCL,” he added. The Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report is FHCL’s Certification Strategic Action Plan.

The report highlights the gaps in FHCL management to allow them to be actively addressed to achieve compliance to international FSC Forest Management Standards.

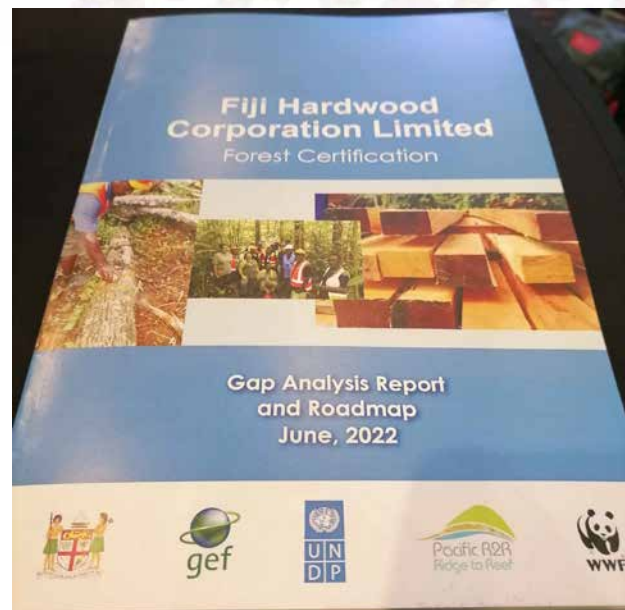
By obtaining a FSC, a forest could confirm that it was being managed in a way that conserves biological diversity, enhances the lives of landowners and workers, while ensuring economic sustainability.

He said FSC certification would also mean that we needed to safeguard the environment, reduce the negative impacts with our operations, address social issues with our landowners and the need to operate sustainably by harvesting and reforestation projects. It will also raise the standard of work, looking after workers and industry players.

“So today it’s a very significant achievement together with the fact that with this Board now, the debt stock of FHCL is less than what it ever was. This is a highly significant milestone that FHCL has achieved and that should also be applauded,” Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

He added that this would ensure our mahogany products can access lucrative markets which will in turn help increase the forestry sector’s contribution to Fiji’s economic growth.

“Once this gap analysis report is put in place, then if you get the mahogany forests certified, you will then be able to get FHCL trees



The Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report.
Photo: Ministry of Forestry

certified, which will get a much higher value. Once FHCL is on a sustainable path, then there will be more proceeds in the sharing of profits with the landowners themselves,” Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

“I want to thank all those involved in the process of identifying the gaps, in identifying a pathway towards which we can achieve the certification of mahogany forests. In fact, if we have the proper certification, it could be optimal for us to do the value adding in Fiji itself. It would attract investors to set up plants here to do the value adding process in Fiji. And we must try and achieve this strategically,” he added.

The FHCL Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report was handed to FHCL to take actions on the recommendations of the report.

It will be a Guide and with the Roadmap will allow the company to prioritise which activities to undertake on the road to achieving Forest Certification.

The report was funded by WWF under the UNDP Ridge to Reef Project, with the Ministry of Forestry providing technical support and authored the Report.

Ministry Builds Staff Capacity to Strengthen Legal Approach to Forestry Crime



Prosecution and investigation training

To strengthen the legal approach to forestry crime in the country, the Ministry, in collaboration with the ODPP and FICAC, provided training to forestry officials. This is to improve their knowledge base and introduce them to

a set of techniques that would allow for more efficient prosecution of forestry-related offences.

The Ministry's Permanent Secretary, Pene Baleinabuli, said the Ministry strongly believes that involving the staff in training and development programmes was essential in sustaining the delivery of high quality service. Mr Baleinabuli stated that there was an urgent need to improve monitoring, control and surveillance of illegal forestry operations, as this resulted in communities losing out on much-needed revenue from their forests. Illegal logging also affects real economic growth as measured by gross domestic product, which in turn affects our national development agenda.

"As such, this training will empower staff to be more vigilant on the ground and be in a position to investigate and prosecute forest crimes anywhere in Fiji," Mr Baleinabuli said.

On May 27, five forestry staff earned a Basic Prosecution Certificate from the ODPP in Suva following a month-long capacity-building programme for staff. They were among 38 participants from other Government ministries and organisations who participated in the training and who will proceed to the Advanced Level in

the coming months.

In a statement, the ODPP said: "The Basic Prosecution Course for Statutory Regulators is part of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP)'s on-going pledge and commitment towards providing the public with an efficient and professional prosecution service by enabling prosecutors appointed by Permanent Secretaries to take matters to court under their own specific legislation.

"The ODPP assists the staff of these Ministries and Government Departments by providing legal advice on the range of possible charges and the evidence required in prosecuting infringements under their own specific legislation. The ODPP also provides desk officers to assist."

On June 4, another 10 staff were awarded Certificate of Participation in Suva after a week-long Financial Investigation training by FICAC. According to FICAC, the six-day training was comprehensive as it focused on in-depth investigation processes and activities undertaken in order to investigate financial crimes successfully.

"The segments of the training are coherently aligned to cover the essentials of financial investigations. The Financial Investigations Training also emphasises on the basic legal framework relating to criminal offences linked to financial crimes." In addition, our staff have also participated in FICAC's one-day Anti-Bribery and Ethics and Values Workshop.

Illegal logging defined

Illegal logging is the harvest, transportation, purchase or sale of timber in contravention or violation of national laws such as the Forest Act 1992, Environmental Management Act 2005 and iTaukei Lands Trust Act. The harvesting

Forests can be managed without compromising on decent jobs, long-term livelihoods and environmental sustainability, says Director Forestry Operations North Maleli Nakasava.

Mr Nakasava, who oversees forestry operations in a division known for illegal logging operations, believes it is their responsibility as foresters to ensure that society, the economy, and the environment are all sustainable, and that everyone has fair and equitable returns from forest resources future by eliminating all forms of corruption.

He was among 15 forestry staff who recently graduated from specialised training recently conducted by the Office of the Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC). The Government, through the Ministry of Forestry, is mandated to conserve, manage and develop Fiji's forestry resources to ensure their long term sustainable use for the benefit of all Fijians.

To ensure that this is observed at all times, the Ministry is building capacity of its staff across the country by expanding their knowledge base and introducing them to a set of skills and practices that would allow for more efficient investigation and prosecution of forestry-related offences.

procedure itself may be illegal, including using corrupt means to gain access to forests and planted trees, removing them without valuing and avoiding payment of forestry charges and landowner royalties and processing these illegally sourced logs in a licensed facility which prohibits processing of “stolen” logs.

Ministry of Forestry's role

Illegal logging is a source of global concern because of its negative environmental consequences, which include the loss of forest products required by rural populations, conflict, and considerable tax revenue losses that could be used for development.

Since the Ministry is mandated to issue licences for the removal of forest products, the operation of sawmills and treatment plants, in a sustainable manner, it has to strictly monitor and ensure compliance with forest laws, regulations and guidelines. The non-compliance is actually a breach of the forest laws and regulations.

“To combat illegal logging, our staff are trained to investigate and ensure the prosecution of offenders, not only to curb crimes in forestry but to ensure that the nation does not lose out socially, economically and environmentally,” the Permanent Secretary said.

Mr Nakasava and his deputy, Uraia Racule were nominated by the Permanent Secretary to attend the prosecution training. He said that, as leaders, they were required to understand the nuances of combating forestry-related crimes.

“No forestry-related offence has ever been prosecuted in Fiji. We normally investigate and we penalise contractors or individuals found in breach of the forestry laws,” Mr Nakasava said.

“However, we have observed in our Forest Statutes or Acts that the contractor's payment is less than the market price of the stolen goods. As a result, the PS has given us directives to take cases to court if need be, and we thank the Ministry for nominating us for this training.



“Attending this course and guiding our team who have already received their Advanced Certificates to pursue cases is a challenge that we as leaders welcome,” he added.

The training focused on capacity building of the trainees to detect, investigate and prosecute offenders.

Say no to illegal logging pledge
Taking cases to court is the last thing we want to do, Mr Nakasava said. He has appealed to individuals, stakeholders, communities and resource owners to take ownership of protecting their forests and join the pledge against illegal logging and other forest-related offences.

The Ministry launched a “Say No to Illegal Logging” pledge on February 11 in Labasa. There have been more than 320 pledges to date from individuals, stakeholders and resource owners.

“Making that pledge is a labour of love for which you are not compensated, but it is something to consider for our future generations. “We want zero tolerance for unlawful logging in the Northern Division. If we are taking cases to court year after year, it shows that we are not doing our duty of enforcement,” Mr Nakasava said.

“Resources that we have now were not borrowed from our grandparents, they are inherited from our children. We are currently borrowing everything that we are utilising from our children. Our children are the true owners.

“I’m asking members of the public if they can help the Ministry of Forestry by acting as our eyes and ears on the ground.”

For Forestry Officer Operations/ Eastern Waisake Vunisa, he said the review of forestry legislation would also help strengthen the Ministry’s resolve against illegal activities in the forestry sector.

This prosecution training, he said, would indirectly create awareness in the communities, encouraging them to learn how contractors and landowners make agreements, as well as the legal conditions that apply, so that all parties may achieve a win-win situation.

This is a critical development that the Ministry aims to address through partnerships with enforcement institutions such as the Police, ODPP and FICAC and through strengthening the ethical standards and sense of mission within the Ministry.

Additionally, partnership through a MoU with Fiji Revenue and Customs Service has resulted in the formation of a committee through which the Ministry will track tax compliance of all Forest Sector Industries.

We will no longer be complacent but relentless in our efforts to ensure compliance of the sector to Fijian laws and standards for the benefit of all involved and that of the nation.



Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Voreqe Bainimarama with community members at the Lomaiviti Provincial Council Meeting at Nasova, Ovalau, on June 8, 2022. Photo: Office of the Prime Minister

Government Investment Empowers Islanders to Build Better Houses and Establish Pine Market

Mr Bainimarama said in partnership with the Fiji Pine Trust, the Ministry of Forestry has helped construct 46 houses with a total value of \$152,915.

Villages in the maritime areas, including the province of Lomaiviti, can now experience a sense of business entrepreneurship through their forest produce, like pine.

This is made possible through the Government's continuous investment of millions of dollars supporting pine schemes around the country.

Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama addressed this at the Lomaiviti Provincial Council at Nasova in Ovalau earlier this week.

He told the meeting that the Government has supported pine schemes throughout the country through a grant to Fiji Pine Trust for the extension of privately owned plantations and community forestry programmes.

"We put more than words behind our commitment to this

community resource -- we make major investments. Since 2014, we've supported the Pine Schemes through a grant to Fiji Pine Trust for the extension of privately owned plantation and community forestry programmes," Mr Bainimarama said.

"In addition, we've provided capital funding of half a million dollars annually from 2016 to-date, with a total of \$3 Million to assist the maritime islands, including the Lomaiviti Province, to harvest and process their matured pine plantations.

"In addition, we have connected the Narocake Pine Scheme to a market in Suva, to which they are supplying timber as we speak," Mr Bainimarama added.

Lomaiviti Pine Scheme is one of 49 schemes under the Fiji Pine Trust. Under the Lomaiviti Pine Scheme falls the Narocake Pine Scheme in Gau, which includes Lovu, Vadravadra and Yadua villages, and the Lamiti and Moturiki Schemes. Collectively, the schemes have a pine forest spread across 485 hectares of

land.

Improving living standards
Since 2017, the Government has assisted the Narocake Pine Scheme with harvesting a portion of their plantation to generate sawlogs, posts and poles valued at approximately \$100,000.

Mr Bainimarama said in partnership with the Fiji Pine Trust, the Ministry of Forestry had helped construct 46 houses with a total value of \$152,915.

In Fiji, community-based forest plantation was initiated by Government for maritime areas to make use of the 'talasiga' landscape and supply timber, mostly for the construction of homes. The pine resource owners in the maritime islands can improve their living standard in the provision of sawn timber to improve their housing needs through renovations or building new houses.

"This has helped improve living standards and even lift Fijians out of poverty. And it has helped make communities more resilient. We've



Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Voreqe Bainimarama meets a council member at the Lomaiviti Provincial Council Meeting at Nasova, Ovalau, on June 8, 2022. Photo: Office of the Prime Minister

completed house framing for 55 houses in Moturiki, five houses in Bureta and 49 houses in Koro,” the Prime Minister said.

In the financial year from August 2019 to July 2020, the Government purchased a seven-tonne truck, a post peeler, and a 4x4 vehicle for the Narocake Pine Scheme at a total cost of \$400,000.

However, in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Harold in April 2020, these vehicles were deployed to communities impacted by the storm, and was later used during the COVID-19 vaccination drive and services.

The Prime Minister officially handed over the vehicles and thanked the province and its people for their patience.

“In the aftermath of TC Harold, we made the call to first deploy these vehicles to communities impacted by the storm. We then dispatched them to aid our national COVID-19 vaccination drive and deliver root crops and vegetables across containment areas borders to reach markets. Now, they are here to serve you,” Mr Bainimarama said.

The Government also constructed a timber treatment plant in Narocake at a total cost of \$50,000.

Tree-planting and Carbon trading Fiji’s national tree-planting initiative is gaining traction.

Mr Bainimarama told the meeting that the Ministry is preparing to plant more trees in the province as part of Fiji’s 30 million trees in 15 years

planting target.

He acknowledged the commitment of communities and landowners by announcing the establishment of 21 nurseries in the province of Lomaiviti, which would provide a regular supply of seedlings for the forest restoration operations.

“I also acknowledge your efforts so far to build homes on the island, and I am proud to see that you will be dedicating portions of the plantation to carbon trading -- a sector we are unlocking through our Climate Change Act. So, rather than cutting down forests to keep people employed, people will be paid to maintain and expand forests as carbon sinks in recognition of the service they provide to the planet and all of humanity,” he said.

The Prime Minister stated that his team was preparing to do another ground survey to determine the current stock of pine in order to help them plan their next steps.

“New trees do more than keep the landscape beautiful -- they prevent soil erosion, preserve ecosystems, and actually absorb emitted carbon -- which is the root cause of climate change. We look forward to working with you all in restoring your island landscape - a win for your province and the planet,” Mr Bainimarama said.

Forest Conservation with Fiji’s Forestry ER Program

Following the REDD+ readiness phase is the implementation phase of the Fiji Forest Emission Reductions (ER) program in which Fiji signed an agreement on January 28, 2021 with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), a global partnership of the World Bank, of US\$12.5 million (approx. FJ\$26 million) in results-based payments for increasing carbon sequestration and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Fiji is the first small island developing state to sign an Emission Reductions Payment

Agreement (ERPA) with the World Bank’s FCPF. The five-year agreement will reward efforts to those who participate in reducing carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

To assist with greater public understanding of Fiji’s ER Program, the Ministry of Forestry will continue to publish a series of articles detailing the different aspects of the Program.

An article published on April 16, 2022 highlighted the customer

driven afforestation and alternative livelihood initiatives. Today we will look at Forest Conservation as an activity within Fiji’s Forestry ER Program.

Forest Conservation
According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), forests are influenced by climate, landform and soil composition and they exist in a wide variety of forms in the tropical, temperate and boreal zones of the world. Each forest type, evergreen



and deciduous, coniferous and broadleaved, wet and dry, as well as closed and open canopy forests, has its own uniqueness and together these forests complement one another and perform the various socio-economic, ecological, environmental, cultural and spiritual functions.

The importance of forests cannot be underestimated. We depend on forests for our survival, from the air we breathe to the wood we use. Besides providing habitats for animals and livelihoods for humans, forests also offer watershed protection, prevent soil erosion and mitigate climate change.

According to Conservation International, Fiji contains some of the richest natural communities of all the Pacific oceanic islands. The archipelago is known for its high levels of endemism: at least 900 vascular plant species are endemic, and it is a hotspot for endemic palms, amphibians, skinks, geckos, iguanas, bats and birds. Twenty-seven bird species occur only in Fiji, 26 of which are land/forest birds. Fiji's forests are critical for the conservation of its endemic biodiversity, but about half of the forests have already been lost through clearance for agriculture, unsustainable logging, and fires.

As a result, many of Fiji's endemic species are threatened, including at least 8 of Fiji's palm species, Fiji

Flying-fox; Crested Iguana; Banded Iguana; Fijian Burrowing Snake; Tree Frog; Ground Frog; and 11 of the endemic 26 land birds. Fiji's forests also contribute substantially to the quality of life of the rural people, providing timber and non-timber products and environmental services such as soil conservation, water catchment, and carbon sinks. They also have important traditional social and cultural values. Over 80% of Fiji's land and forests are owned by family clans, called mataqalis, for whom these forests are their main source of livelihood.

Fijian Government's Commitment to Forest Conservation

Fiji faces its share of challenges in maintaining and expanding forest cover and Government recognizes the need to skillfully balance pressures for economic development and conservation of both the country's forests and oceans. Fiji has set a high ambition for protecting and expanding its forests cover. Fiji is proud to share some of the most pristine tropical forests with the rest of the world. These forests are our heritage – but more so they are a heritage of the world.

For the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector, Fiji is committed to afforestation of an area of 77,400 ha and the reduction of deforestation by 80%. Fiji's forest cover will be increased by 40 percent as a result.

To strike a balance between conservation and development, the Fijian Government recognized the need for the sustainable management and development of forests in Fiji in the 5 years and 20 years National Development Plan and most recently the Climate Change Act 2021. It also initiated and continues to fund the national tree-planting and growing programme of planting 30 million trees in 15 years. These developments, among others, commit Fiji to ending deforestation, restoring degraded forests and substantially increasing afforestation. The overall approach Fiji has taken is to one that transforms conservation into development. Fiji has moved away

from either-or to an approach where the more you protect and expand forest cover, the more you achieve economic development.

Fiji's Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) also has identified the potential that our forests have to offset carbon emissions.

Fiji's political commitment to support forest conservation is also demonstrated when it successfully submitted the Emalu REDD+ national pilot site and the Colo-i-Suva Forest Park to be part of the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy raises awareness within the Commonwealth of the value of forests, including especially indigenous forests. The unique network of forest conservation projects brings collective credibility and integrity to individual Commonwealth initiatives. As part of this network, Fiji highlighted the role of REDD+ actions, including the ER program, in ensuring the long-term conservation of Fiji's indigenous forests.

In Fiji's submission to the UNFCCC Talanoa Dialogue's third question "How do we get there", the need to "Enhance National Carbon Sequestration" was identified as one of the key priorities to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 and there is the stated intention to identify more areas under the National REDD+ Program. This stems from the strategies outlined in the Ministry of Forestry's strategic Development Plan (NDP) 2017-2036 where it clearly articulates the development of the ER program and where the stated targets in the forestry sector (increased reforested and forest conservation areas) will rely largely on the ER Program.

Forest Conservation in the Context of the ER Program

The Fijian Government is fully committed to promoting conservation to perpetually support basic needs for clean water and air, and thus enhance livelihoods for communities and all Fijians.

Government is implementing the Emissions Reduction (ER) Program under the National REDD+ Program to protect and enhance Fiji's forests and determine the value of carbon credits.

The four activities proposed within Fiji's Forest ER Program include Sustainable Forest Management - through the Diameter Limit Table and selective logging practices, Sustainable Land Management or Climate Smart Agriculture, Forest Conservation & Tree Planting - community planting, and plantations establishment by the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) and Fiji Pine Limited (FPL), coupled with alternative livelihoods that will be of benefit to the communities who choose to participate.

With the Fiji ER Forest Program, it has been planned that through forest conservation, the country will be able to protect 9,500 hectares of not only forests but also the biodiversity which

exists within.

Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Forestry, Pene Baleinabuli said Fiji has been losing an average of 4,000 hectares of forests per year, and while Government has initiated a national tree-planting campaign to plant 30 million trees in 15 years – a movement which has caught on exceptionally well with the communities and key stakeholders in the forestry sector who have collectively helped plant about 12 million trees since January 2019 when the then President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote launched the initiative, it was crucial to explore further options to strengthen Fiji's capacity and capabilities in managing its forests.

“The 30 million trees campaign is one of Fiji's major strategies to address climate change, which is even more critical now as part of Fiji's green recovery following the exacerbations caused by COVID-19 and the

increasing number and strength of natural disasters.”

“There is an even greater and urgent need to press the re-set button and explore more options with development partners to enable Fiji to continue to do its part in addressing climate change, enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services, whilst also ensuring that its natural resources are sustainably harnessed to contribute to Fiji's socio-economic development needs,” Mr. Baleinabuli said.

Individuals and organisations, including landowning units, farmers, women, youth, children, private sector, civil society, religious groups, academia and anyone interested in forest conservation, environmental protection and addressing climate change are encouraged to actively participate in Fiji's Forest ER Program. For more information contact any nearest Forestry Office within your vicinity.

Seoul Forest Declaration Calls for Shared Responsibility towards Sustainable Forests

The Seoul Forest Declaration 2022, which is one of the major outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress (XV WFC) in Seoul, Republic of Korea, underscores how forests can help combat the multiple crises humanity faces, including climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, hunger and poverty.

It further highlights that future sustainable forest management responsibilities should be integrated among agencies and stakeholders.

Priority areas for actions under the Seoul Forest Declaration 2022 are - Forests, forestry and forest stakeholders should offer major solutions to the challenges the world currently faces; Investment in forest and landscape restoration globally

needs to triple by 2030 to meet internationally agreed commitments and targets on restoring degraded land; Innovative green financing mechanisms to upscale investment in forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use and highlighted the potential of sustainably produced wood as a renewable, recycle and versatile material; Healthy, productive forests must also be maintained to reduce the risk of future pandemics and to provide other essential benefits for human physical and mental health; and Development and use of emerging innovative technologies and mechanisms to enable evidence-based forest and landscape decision making.

World Forestry Congress
The World Forestry Congress (WFC)

which started in 1926, is a significant forestry event held every six years allowing the exchange of ideas, experiences and recommendations amongst forestry experts from around the globe. With the XIV WFC held in 2015, the XV WFC which was initially scheduled for 2021, was postponed to 2022 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations and hosted by the Korea Forest Service (KFS) and the Republic of Korea, the XV WFC was held from 02 – 06 May in the City of Seoul, welcoming over 15,000 participants from 146 countries. With the theme “Building a Green, Healthy and Resilient Future with Forests”, the Congress provided an opportunity for dialogue amongst global forestry experts to progress the forestry agenda in the new norm whilst striving to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amongst other major agreements such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Global Forest Goals.

Re-emphasising the Importance of Forests

The XV WFC was opened by the President of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Moon Jae-in, who pledged to work together with the international community to conserve forests as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has proven the importance of coexisting with nature. He urged countries to find ways to transform the 2021 Glasgow Forest Pledge into action and committed the Republic of Korea to double its forest restoration efforts and overseas development assistance to developing countries.

The 5- day meeting adopted a hybrid approach demarcating various programs, sub-meetings, side events, networking events, poster and exhibition sessions that were aligned to various thematic areas that would best suit the needs and preferences of country representatives.

A total of 30 thematic dialogue sessions were held and organised under six sub-themes on issues relating to forests, and the products and services they provide. This included reversing deforestation and forest degradation; Nature-based Solutions for climate change adaptation and biodiversity

conservation; forests and human health; green pathways to growth and sustainability; data and knowledge; and enhancing management and cooperation.

Several key events from the XV WFC included the high-level roundtable on the Peace Forest Initiative (PFI); the launch of the FAO's State of the World's Forests 2022; the Ministerial Forum on Financing; the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) dialogue; the Ministerial Forum on Sustainable Wood; the launch of the Assuring the Future of Forests with Integrated Risk Management (AFFIRM) Mechanism for fire management; and the Sustaining an Abundance of Forest Ecosystems (SAFE) initiative.

Fijian Representation

Representatives from Fiji included Forestry Executive Director for Research and Development, Ms Deborah Sue; Forestry Principal Economic Planning Officer, Ms Olivia Vakaloloma; and FAO National Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) Project Coordinator, Mr Maika Daveta.

The Congress was an opportunity to gain insights on sustainable development and management

of Fiji's forests, and to learn from best practices adopted by Forestry agencies around the world.

The team also delivered presentations on (i) seeds for trees, highlighting the importance of quality seeds and seedling supply for effective and resilient restoration; (ii) community forestry from a government perspective; (iii) how Fiji will develop FLR for Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation; and (iv) participated in the plenary session on Global restoration programmes during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

During the plenary session, Ms Sue highlighted the need for Fiji to scale up its reforestation efforts with good supporting governance framework to ensure good quality forests exist to provide the various ecosystem services needed to sustain the livelihoods of forest dependents.

Apart from the Seoul Forest Declaration, other key outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress include action proposals following the six sub-themes of the Congress; a Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood; and a youth call for action.

Forestry skills training open door to opportunities



Attorney-General and Minister for Economy Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum (centre) and Conservator of Forests Sanjana Lal with participants who graduated with forestry-related skills at Nadi District School on July 23, 2022. Photo: Department of Information

Forestry skills training open door to opportunities (cont.)

Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum handed over Certificates of Participation to trainees who recently graduated from a three-week Forestry training workshop in Nadi.

Eighty nine youths, men and one woman from Narewa, Nakavu and Namotomoto villages in Nadi are now better equipped with forestry skill sets, giving them opportunities for job success and improved lives. This is after a strenuous three-week training on basic skills in chainsaw operations, silviculture and nursery training, portable sawmill training and sustainable forest management was facilitated by the Ministry of Forestry.

The Ministry's priority is on providing technical assistance to all Fijians who need and want training, and community empowerment is a crucial part of that effort.

The 89 participants were awarded their Certificate of Participation by the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum last Saturday.

In his remarks, Mr Sayed-Khaiyum acknowledged the participants for devoting their time to improving their knowledge and abilities.

He highlighted that the Government has invested around \$1 million annually in short-course training programmes, including sustainable forest management as well as forestry related skills needed to acquire jobs locally and/or overseas.

The A-G reminded them that while there were employment prospects in Australia and New Zealand, Fiji also needed people with these skill sets. He encouraged them not to stop learning or up skilling themselves after this phase.

"Remember one thing, when you up skill yourselves, whether it is a certificate, a Diploma, Degree or a masters or whether it is a certificate

one, two, three, or four, whichever one it is, it is yours forever. Once you get a qualification, it is yours. Nobody can take it away from you," Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

Narewa/Nakavu/Namotomoto youth coordinator, Asinate Dawai acknowledged the Government through the Ministry for supporting people, especially youths, through such training.

She also commended Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama for providing equal opportunities for all Fijians. These trainings were requested during the Prime Minister's tour in late June and was approved upon.

"It was a difficult training for us to absorb so much information in three weeks, but the hard-working team from the Ministry of Forestry helped us to achieve our ambitions," Ms Dawai said.

"This programme, through training and work experience, will prepare the participants for a wide variety of forestry-related jobs, putting them on the path to better opportunities wherever they go."

She said some participants also came from other provinces to be part of the training.

The majority of the participants are either farmers or unemployed, and they were brought on board to provide them the opportunity to accomplish something that would enable them to provide for their families.

Ms Dawai said the participants would also be available to assist communities in Nadi and nearby areas during natural disasters, making these skills a valuable investment.

They could assist with clearing, sawmilling, and other rehabilitation tasks involving chainsaws.

The first two trainings had been

conducted in November last year to 20 participants. Out of the 20 trained last year, 19 have already left our shores and are now employed in the forest industries in New Zealand, and providing for their families in Fiji. So Fiji's economy also benefits through these remittances.

Meanwhile, with reference to empowering rural and maritime communities with forestry training, Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said the Government had been investing in portable sawmills in provinces with large pine plantations.

He said the reason for this was to help villagers to improve their living standards by sawing their own timber to improve their housing needs through renovations or building new houses.

In addition, they can market their timber in Suva and other markets on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

The Vanua of Nadi was largely represented, coming in to support their trainees and to show appreciation to the Government for the training support rendered by the Ministry of Forestry to their people.

Source: Ministry of Forestry



Korovou crafts his way to teach others value-adding skills at Ministry

Business had been thriving for Mikaele Korovou, who worked closely with his father in a small wood carving family business in Nadi.

But all that changed in April 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, shutting down international tourism and hurting the economy, particularly small niche enterprises that relied on it. The pandemic created new challenges for Mr Korovou, who went on a quest

in search of a secure future for his young family.

He clung to his creative ability to carve a marketable product out of wood. This was his strength that landed him a job with the Ministry of Forestry.

This week we profile Mr Korovou, who joined the Ministry in October last year and has been thriving in his area of work.

Mr Korovou, 35, is from Muanaicake, Fulaga in Lau, and works as a wood turner/carver at the Ministry's Timber Industry Training Centre in Nasinu. He is in charge of teaching trainees the skills they will need to add value to their crafted product and make it marketable.

Humble beginnings

Mr Korovou started carving at the age of 10, following in the footsteps of his father, Laijia Leuta, who is a master wood carver based at Maqalevu, Nadi.

He said they were a major supplier of woodwork products and art to nearby hotels and retail stores, including Jacks of Fiji.

"Once I held the traditional carving tool and started carving, following my father, I did not have to think twice as carving came naturally to me," Mr Korovou shared.

He dropped out of school in Form Five, swayed by the money he was making selling woodworking products at such a young age on the streets in Nadi.

"My greatest source of inspiration is my father, whom I adore. He taught me all I needed to know about the trade, and he was quite knowledgeable. Most of our younger generation learn the skills just by watching the older men do it," he said.

Mr Korovou worked briefly as a mechanic at a resort in the Yasawas after earning an Automotive Engineering General Class III qualification from the Centre

for Appropriate Technology Development (CATD) in Nadave. He didn't feel at ease in the profession, so he returned to his father's workshop. Then he tried out other jobs, but yet he found no passion and kept returning to wood carving. This made him realise that woodcarving was his true calling and that he needed to devote more time to it.

Ministry's contribution to GDP The Government, through the Ministry of Forestry, is focusing on bringing some of the country's informal industries, such as wood carving and artifact production, into the formal sector and fully realising their potential in adding to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

At the training centre, landowners are being taught to make use of wood residues from logging operations and timber processing facilities to ensure zero waste from harvesting.

According to the Acting Director of Forest Product Trade and Training, Taniela Whippy, cottage industry trainings empower forest-based communities to generate revenue and contribute to economic recovery while reducing harvesting residues from forests. This is particularly for high value wood such as our native trees which take close to 100 years to mature and with mahogany which is among the most sought-after wood finishing products in the world.

Mr Whippy believes this cottage industry, which also generates revenue for the Government, has a promising future.

"Harvesting residues is another alternative to primary raw material or even an export commodity in the not too distant future. Parts of these residues are branches, stumps and even roots which are not fully utilised," Mr Whippy said.

This is where Mr Korovou's role in working with the Ministry under the Wood Utilization Programme comes in. He guides trainees through the basic wood-turning skills to an artistic level as well as how to



maximise the value of wood products while also reducing waste.

Currently, six participants who are mahogany landowners from the district of Vugalei in Tailevu and are part of the cottage industries programme are under his supervision. For precise design and patterning of finished products, he uses a combination of old carving processes and modern tools.

Mr Korovou is a descendant of skilled Fulaga wood carvers who

are recognised as some of the most skilled in Fiji, with their crafts highly sought after.

“I am grateful for the Ministry’s job opportunity, which has allowed me to put food on the table for my family, especially during this difficult period,” Mr Korovou added.

“It’s gratifying to pass on knowledge to individuals who are eager to learn, and I strive to assist them in any way I can. I am confident that if I can assist one or two trainees in mastering the value-

adding aspect of their products, it will benefit them socially and economically,” Mr Korovou said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry’s Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli said they would continually embrace community empowerment through the provision of appropriate training and assistance to Small Micro Enterprise (SME) and identification of alternative livelihood schemes that would further increase profit margins of small income generating business such as wood carving and artifacts.

Economic empowerment

Father and Son Entrepreneurs Pave Way for Candlenut Industry, Inspire Youths to Follow Suit



Father and Son Entrepreneurs Pave Way for Candlenut Industry, Inspire Youths to Follow Suit

Abhay Chaudhary and son, Averyl are greatly involved in a community partnership arrangement with the Yavusa Navitilevu Youth Club in Tailevu to help them create economic opportunities.

Businessman, Abhay Chaudhary is on a mission to invest in non-timber forest products in order to assist local communities, particularly young people, with economic prospects for a sustainable future.

And he is achieving this through candlenut (sikeci) farming with the youths from the Yavusa Navitilevu from Veinuqa, Namalata in Tailevu. Mr Chaudhary and his son, Averyl are greatly involved in this community partnership arrangement with the youth club, who belong to three mataqalis.

He believes that entrepreneurs like himself can contribute to the Government's emphasis on youth development programmes to address concerns regarding unemployment and economic empowerment.

Today, the youths have 17,000 candlenut trees on the ground, which are around two and a half years old in an area of 15-acres. They have also planted around 100 teak trees and intend to plant more.

Candlenut (*Aleurites moluccanus*)



is locally known as sikeci, toto, lauci, tuitui, qereqere and waiwai. Within three years of planting, the seeds may be collected and processed for oil which could be used for a range of purposes including cosmetics, medicinal and other uses such as cooking, preparation of paints, varnishes, wood polish and linoleum, soap manufacture, among others.

Additionally and importantly, the trees are not necessarily felled for wood and timber products, but they can also be part of Fiji's carbon trade, thus providing additional income to the youths who farm them, providing them a revenue generation stream to improve their lives and livelihoods and that of their families.

"Apart from the money made from selling the mature candlenuts, the youth who are also landowners and even their elderly can also participate in the carbon trading space and earn

an income. It is an opportunity to get paid to keep the trees in the ground and I won't be getting a cent out of that but them," Mr Chaudhary said. He added that there was a lot of demand for candlenut oil overseas due to its qualities, which were rated the best for cosmetics and with medicinal properties. He claims that the candlenut sector is a billion dollar global enterprise.

"In Australia and Hawaii, candlenut cultivation is a multibillion dollar industry that contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of both nations. We want to accomplish that in Fiji as well, but in order to process and grow our market, we need a steady flow of candlenuts," Mr Chaudhary said.

In addition to this farm with youths, he said they have another 50-acre farm in Waidalice that has 25,000 candlenut trees on the ground owned by Keresoni and Susana Ramuwai and supported by his son Averyl. With the support from the Ministry of Forestry, Averyl, who owns Averyl (Fiji) manufactures candlenut charcoal soap, body oil and sugar scrub, dilo soap and oil and other value-adding products at his little factory in Ba.

The father-son entrepreneurs not only sell their products locally but have been marketing them to Australia, New Zealand and China through a fully locally owned Fijian company, Loaloa Naturals.



Empowering youths
Yavusa Navitilevu youth adviser
Semisi Ravutu strongly supports the partnership understanding between Mr Chaudhary and the youths as he said they have big dreams for a bright future.

He had advised the youths to engage in farming projects in order to productively utilise idle land owned by their mataqalis. There are around 28 youth members.

Following a visit to the village by the late former Minister for Forestry, Hon. Osea Naiqamu, during a tree planting awareness, he advised them to plant candlenut as it would benefit them and their future generations. “The goal of our project is to grow sikeci trees to improve our quality of life and generate revenue. We made the decision to plant on the vacant land that was returned to us,” Mr Ravutu said.

“Additionally, through the Ministry of Forestry’s initiative to plant 30 million trees in 15 years, we are helping the Government meet its tree planting goal.

“Planting started in March 2020, and when the first wave of COVID-19 hit our shores restricting movement, the youths committed themselves extensively to the planting programme.”

According to Mr Ravutu, the club has decided that members will build their homes from the proceeds during the first three years of harvesting.

Replanting, crop diversification and carbon trading

Mr Chaudhary’s pilot candlenut farm project in Telau, Tailevu, was recently visited by a group of government officials led by the Ministry of Forestry’s Permanent Secretary, Mr Pene Baleinabuli.

To maximise impact, the Ministry is encouraging farmers and landowners to prioritise restoration techniques that create the most benefit for rural development, biodiversity enhancement, climate resilience and

a myriad of ecosystem services. For example, landowners to grow native trees and non-forest timber species alongside their crops can improve biodiversity, sequester carbon and boost income — ensuring trees remain in the ground for the long run.

“By integrating trees and crops, you can produce higher yields, leading to greater self-sufficiency, which may also offer the potential to sell the extra crops while you wait for your candlenut trees to mature,” Mr Baleinabuli said.

This was evident on the Telau farm where the youths have planted cassava and duruka in between the rows of candlenut trees.

He discussed the Ministry’s emphasis on research on minor forest products and non-timber forest products with the landowners and youths in order to develop economic opportunities for the communities.

He mentioned the abundance of fruit and nut trees in Fiji that have the potential to grow for both domestic and international markets, such as candlenut and dilo.

Mr Baleinabuli urged them to work together to achieve their common objective of prosperity and sustainability.

“I kindly request that you cooperate with this investor, Mr Abhay, on the pilot project so that you can experience firsthand the benefits of using your land to generate revenue. You will gain from this today, as well as for future generations,” Mr Baleinabuli said.

“To the elders, I thank you for allowing your young men and women to be part of this pilot project. The advantage of planting candlenut is that in a short span of time, which is within three years, you can start selling the nuts for processing. And from research, the same trees can survive for up to more than 60 years. Furthermore, you can actively participate in Fiji’s forest emission reduction programme.

“We are hopeful that these minor products will boost the forestry sector’s economic contribution to the country’s Gross Domestic Product.” According to Mr Baleinabuli, the programme will provide an alternative income stream for youths via carbon (monetary) payments. Following discussions with the Ministry officials, the youths have also expressed their interest in participating in carbon trading by planting more trees that they will be able to conserve and sustainably manage.

Mr Ravutu said they agreed to this, seeing the benefits it would bring to them and the community as a whole. “Involving our young people in such initiatives helps them stay out of trouble, improve their standard of living, and shift their perspective to prioritise entrepreneurship. “We appreciate the Government’s ongoing assistance and stable supply of planting material, which we receive through the Forestry Ministry,” Mr Ravutu added.

Source: Ministry of Forestry

FACT BOX: CANDLENUT

Candlenut tree has both medicinal as well as edible uses;

- Candlenut oil/soap used has been used for skin and hair treatment.
- Improved digestive system
- Relieve of fungal infections
- Reduced heart disease risk
- Overcome insomnia
- Unleash the constipation
- Medicine fever in children
- Healthier joints and stronger bones
- Treat tooth ache
- Culinary uses
- Heals insect bites
- Bigger muscles and reduced weight
- Almost all parts of the candlenut tree are useful for human use