



Fijian Government Focusses on Nature-Based Recovery

Children of Nailou Village in Tunuloa, Cakaudrove help take seedlings to the village for tree planting

As countries around the world recalibrate their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fijian Government is stepping up its strategies for a nature-based recovery.

Among the financial allocations to various agencies towards environment-friendly and sustainable measures is a two million dollar budget for the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF) programme which is coordinated by the Ministry of Forestry.

"This money will enable the scaling up of efforts towards Fiji's tree-planting revolution which now has a target of 30 million trees in 15 years (30MT15Y)," says the Minister responsible for Forestry, Honourable Osea Naiqamu.

He said that Fiji's tree-planting initiative which was launched by the President

His Excellency Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konrote in January 2019 is gaining traction.

"With the support of the communities, private sector, civil society organisations, sporting bodies and development partners, Fiji was able to plant a million trees and mangroves in just 10 months last year."

Seeing the importance of the initiative, Government allocated one million dollars for the RDF programme in the 2019-2020 budget.

"That allowed the planting of an additional one million trees and mangroves to bring the national total up to more than two million," Minister Naiqamu said. Specifically, the two million trees and mangroves cover an area of more than 2,000 hectares. This includes 31 hectares of mangroves.

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Villagers of Nailou in Tunulou, Cakaudrove plant fruit trees around the village

Mr. Naiqamu said that with the onslaught of COVID-19 early this year, Government has demonstrated great wisdom in doubling the tree-planting budget to two million dollars.

"This demonstrates political will, and the strong belief in nature-based solutions. It is unparalleled commitment to appreciating the value of trees, mangroves and forests in addressing both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change," he said.

And this is not an effort in isolation. Fiji's tree-planting initiative is in effect part of the global movement and plan of action for forests and people which is enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Strategic Plan for Forests 2030. It is an extension of the global movement to protect our forests and pristine natural environment and to restore ecosystems balance.

Cash for Tree-Planting

Minister Naiqamu said the new budget allocation will also enable the Ministry to continue the implementation of the 'Cash for Tree Planting' programme which provides the opportunity for Fijians who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 to earn some cash by planting trees in their communities.

He said this complements the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funded Ridge to Reef (R2R) programme which the Ministry is also

implementing. The R2R programme has already paid out \$300,000 to members of the communities.

"These cash for tree-planting programmes empower people economically and ignites a passion and deeper appreciation for nature," he said.

Additionally, the Ministry has helped establish more than 150 community nurseries. It intends to double the number of nurseries which are managed mainly by women and youth groups.

The Ministry complements the knowledge of these communities by providing training opportunities on nursery management. It helps establish nurseries and provides ongoing advisory services.

"The aim is to keep the interest in trees and forests alive in the hearts and minds of our people," Mr. Naiqamu said.

He said Fiji's tree planting revolution includes developing greener towns, cities and communities. Government is supporting the blue town model, for instance, which is being trialed in Savusavu.

The Ministry of Forestry will review its tree-planting programme to determine how it could add value to the blue town

model, which is led largely by the private sector.

"Trees not only add to the aesthetics of urban centers, but they provide much needed fresh air," he said.

"The Ministry is collaborating with the ministries of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Agriculture and Environment, among others, to support our green recovery and food security."

"The COVID-19 pandemic doesn't take away the fact that climate change still poses an existential threat to our people. This simply means that we have to build back smarter by building back greener."

"The ultimate intention is to provide an assured future for our children and future generations," Mr. Naiqamu said. This is part of greening Fiji. We hope to raise the morale and heighten the pride of our people about their surroundings and country.

"COVID-19 and climate change have given us the opportunity to press the reset button. To bring a greater focus on green-blue and nature-based recovery."

This is part of the obligation we have as a Government. We are looking long-term sustainability," he said.

Tree Planting is important to combat the effects of climate change

For 85-year-old Unaisi Logawai of Rauriko Village in the district of Dogotuki, Macuata climate change and its impact are real. She has witnessed first hand the reality of how the change in weather patterns and the change in climatic seasons has affected her community.

Speaking in iTaukei language, Unaisi says that while growing up she can definitely see the differences that climate change has brought about. For more than eight decades she has seen the drastic impact climate change has caused in her island home.

"I feel that we have limited time on our hands to address the effects of climate change. We need to work together now to combat this issue as a community and I believe we also need to work with Government," she said.

She is of the view that in order to plant a lot more trees will surely help absorb carbon dioxide and so there are less emissions into the earth's atmosphere which is causing global warming and in turn the change in weather patterns.

Unaisi made the comments during a recent official visit in June by the Honourable Minister for Forestry, Mr Osea Naiqamu to Rauriko village where he encouraged villagers to participate in Fiji's 30MillionTreesin 15Years (30MT15Y) initiative.

Minister Naiqamu was in Vanua Levu for 2 weeks where he visited Qaranivai Village in the district of Udu. He had also visited Lagi, Nukudamu, Nabuono, Vunikodi, Yasawa, Gasauva, Waqaitakea, Tawake, Wainigadru, Rauriko and Namuka-i-Lau villages in the districts of Udu and Dogotuki.

Relaying recent experiences, Unaisi said that the village is situated beside a river and they now experience frequent flooding each time there is heavy rain or during a cyclone. She said the village is also facing sea level rise as the shoreline continues to move further inland.

"Trees that bear fruit in the months of December to January and other months no longer do so and I believe these are because of the change in weather

patterns. Birds that used to fly around our village when I was young can no longer be seen today. We have had to rebuild or relocate our homes a few times because of flooding in the village."

These she said were challenges faced now, to which she did not encounter while growing up.

Considered one of the matriarchs with an outspoken personality, villagers often seek Unaisi's advice on village matters. She also held the post of village headman (turaga-ni-koro) at one time for 10 years.

"We are the last generation with the opportunity to save our communities from the impact of climate change. The Ministry of Forestry's reforestation plan is a good idea as villagers will be able to have a tree planting plan for the short-term, mid-term and long-term."

Fiji as a small island developing state (SIDS) in the tropical Pacific region is proud to be leading the initiative of planting 30 million trees in 15 years with 2 million trees being planted annually.

Communities are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and these impacts are projected to further intensify under the anticipated global warming trajectory and impacts which poses a threat to Fiji's sustainable growth, placing large economic, social and physical stress on local communities and ecosystems.

Fiji's Emissions Reduction Program (ERP) has been designed to assist communities in reducing carbon emissions, to maximise climate co-benefits and integrate existing local initiatives that address vulnerabilities of local communities and contribute to the effort of building a more resilient nation.

The ERP will begin implementation next month (July 2020), with a focus



Ms Unaisi Logawai meets Minister Naiqamu at Rauriko Village after planting a tree

on 20 districts in Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni with an area totalling about 1,685,742 ha of critical terrestrial biodiversity. There is an estimate of 734,307 people in these districts who live on hilly areas, coastal plains and undulating rolling hills of peri-urban areas.

These 20 districts are at high risk of forest loss and degradation and are areas with large communities and settlements at the forest edge and areas with high poverty and known biodiversity hotspots. Fiji's ER program has targeted to develop and implement 20 Integrated District Land Use Management Plans with the support of 120 communities and 40 community level integrated Land Use Plans of which will significantly include tree planting initiatives and forest conservation efforts.

The overall impact of Land Use Plans is anticipated to result in avoiding deforestation in 9,500 ha, enhance forest carbon stocks through tree planting initiatives at community level in 11,750 ha and enhance forest carbon stocks involving plantations in 7,532 ha and reducing forest degradation by implementing sustainable harvesting of Fiji's native forests in 8,500ha.

Fiji's ER Program will more importantly contribute to the 30MT15Y initiative and for this Minister Naiqamu has said the renewed massive tree-planting programme signifies the Fijian Government's commitment to elevate the importance of trees and forests as it is critical to nation building, whilst reviving our kinship with nature and its relevance to our very own existence on this Planet.

He said Fiji's tree-planting initiative is also part of the global reforestation movement to increase the Planet's ability to absorb carbon, and ultimately address climate change.

Wasavulu Women Empowered To Fight Climate Change

Championing the fight against Climate Change, Prime Minister Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama announced Fiji's commitment to plant 30 Million Trees in 15 Years at the United Nations Heads of State Climate Change Summit in New York in September 2019.

Accepting the challenge to do their part for humanity, the planet and Fiji, a 15 member women's group from Wasavulu (a small settlement in Labasa) wasted no time in brainstorming what they could do to fight climate change.

Working with the resources available to them, the group decided to set up nurseries in their own compounds. Using coconut fronds and shade from the grown - 15 backyard nurseries were set up.

Wasavulu Women's Group advisor Mr Esiri Lebaivalu, 64, said each member started their individual nursery projects with the hope that one day they could collectively sell their seedlings and use their earnings to support their families.

"It was hard at first as we started by gathering seeds from the Sandalwood trees that were already growing in our settlement. Now some of us travel to as far as the district of Udu to get other seeds especially native trees like vesi so that we have a variety of seedlings," Mr Lebaivalu said.

It has been more than a year since the group set up their nurseries and they are pleased with how well it has progressed.

Mr Lebaivalu said he always advised the women to talk to their plants daily as they are also living things.

"Like human beings nature are also living things and we also need to talk to them and speak life unto them."

Group member Lalini Deo, 44, who has been a resident at Wasavulu for 22 years, said she started off with vesi, sandalwood and citrus seedlings.

"I went around the settlement asking the other group members for seeds and I moved on from there," Mrs Deo said.



Mrs Lalini Deo with her Vesi seedlings



A family affair - children of Wasavulu Settlement also take the time to help their mothers out in the nurseries

With her eldest child in University and two at primary school, Mrs Deo said looking after her 2000 seedlings has become a family affair.

“My two younger children help me out with potting and I am also grateful to other group members for their support and help as we always share whatever seedlings we have.”

“With the Minister for Forestry visiting us today (Wednesday June 17th, 2020) am sure we will take a step further in ensuring our seedlings generate income for us.”

The Wasavulu Women's Group collectively raised 20,000 seedlings between them and with Minister Naiqamu's visit in June they were able to gather first-hand information of steps they need to take in order for the Ministry of Forestry to purchase their seedlings.

In thanking the group, Minister Naiqamu said their efforts will be a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and also play an integral role in the mitigation of climate change.

Minister Naiqamu has so far visited close to 150 villages around Fiji since the tree planting initiative was launched at the State House by His Excellency the President Major-General Jioji Konusi Konrote in January 7th, 2019.

Minister Naiqamu in his 30MillionTreesIn15Years Consultation tour around Fiji has encouraged Fijians to establish their own nurseries because Government will need to plant 30 Million Trees in 15 years.

Government needs your help in ensuring we achieve our tree planting target. We are also encouraging communities to establish nurseries to economically empower you because Government will purchase your seedlings as the tree planting initiative progresses.

Members of the public are encouraged to log onto the Ministry's website www.forestry.gov.fj each time they plant and to record their tally of trees planted with the Ministry as everyone's contribution to the **30MT15Y campaign** counts.

Tree Planting Initiative Consultations To Target Informal Settlements



Youths of Vatulovona Settlement in Labasa pose for a drone picture with Minister of Forestry after planting trees

Consultations on Fiji's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years (30MT15Y) tree-planting initiative will take a slight shift towards the urban areas and informal settlements around the country.

This is after the Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu completed visiting over 200 rural and remote villages across the 14 provinces in the past 18 months.

"Tree-planting is one of the tangible nature-based solutions to addressing climate change, to protecting nature, and in the post-COVID era, it is also part of our green recovery measures," Minister Naiqamu said.

He said the rural and remote communities have openly embraced the concept of tree-planting.

"They have a deep appreciation for plants and trees because their lives are dependent mostly on what nature provides. It is also becoming an economic empowerment especially for those who have chosen to establish nurseries," he said.

"It is now time to spread the tree-planting gospel in the urban areas and informal settlements. Even though they may not have easy access to large tracks of land, their contribution to Fiji's tree planting initiative using whatever available land

they have – even their backyards – could still make a huge difference," Minister Naiqamu said.

The Ministry of Forestry will begin discussions with the Ministries of Local Government and Housing and Community Development to see how the tree-planting initiative could be rolled out in the urban areas and informal settlements.

"Tree-planting should not be limited to rural areas. In fact, I would like to encourage the communities, especially the youth and women's groups in urban areas and informal settlements to be part of the national initiative."

He said Fiji could start promoting small urban forests to boost biodiversity and fight climate change.

"Apart from contributing to the beauty of towns and cities, those who have land can even establish their own nurseries as a form of economic empowerment," he said.

He said that Government, through the Ministry of Forestry, could help teach the communities the techniques of raising seedlings and to help build their nurseries.

The important thing is for as many people as possible to have a deeper

appreciation of the value of trees and forests and to know how taking care of nature could assist with addressing climate change.

Minister Naiqamu began his consultations in the provinces immediately after the President His Excellency Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote launched the tree-planting initiative at the State House in January 2019.

"Visiting these landowners and encouraging them to plant trees has been worthwhile as we have managed to plant about two million trees covering over 2000 hectares in the past 18 months.

"My visits to villages have really been an eye opener and I wish to acknowledge and thank all the landowners who have generously taken this tree planting on board and even given land to plant trees," Minister Naiqamu said.

"The communities understand that climate change is not some far-off problem because they are experiencing the effects right at their doorsteps. For instance, villagers of Nukudamu in the district of Udu in Vanua Levu have had to relocate inland due to sea level rise and salt water intrusion and frequent tidal waves as well as the numerous tropical cyclones."

Minister Naiqamu said Fiji's very own teenage climate change warrior Timoci Naulusala who hails from Naivicula Village in Tailevu described the impact of climate change in Fiji at the COP 23 in Germany in 2017 as like a 'thief in the night.'

He reiterated the words of 14-year old Timoci who said: "the sea is swallowing villages, eating away at shorelines,

withering crops. Relocation of people, cries over loved ones dying of hunger and thirst. It is catastrophic, it is sad, but it is real.'

Minister Naiqamu said there are many more examples of villages he visited that are being affected by climate change.

"This is why it is important to promote tree-planting to every citizen of Fiji. We plant trees today for the future of our generations to come. This is why we also need to encourage people in the urban areas and informal settlements," he said.

Mereisi **Aspires** For Forestry Top Job

The sky is the limit when it comes to dreaming big and, Mereisi Lewaniceva is proving the power of that dream. Setting her sights on the top job at the Ministry of Forestry, she is ensuring that failure has no part in her aspirations by learning and growing in knowledge.

Her innate love of nature and the outdoors is the driving force behind her motivation to pursue a career with the Forestry sector and the 26-year old Nalele villager is willing to work from the bottom up to prove her worthiness.

From Malomalo in Nadroga, Mereisi is a Sawmill Operator with the Ministry of Forestry's Timber Utilisations Division (TUD) in Nasinu, who graduated with a Trade Diploma in Wood Processing and Value Adding in 2017 from the Fiji National University (FNU). By completing a one-month course on Basic Indigenous Timber Seasoning, Basic Indigenous Timber Visual Grading, Basic Sawdoctoring and

Basic Sawmilling at the Ministry's TUD on Friday, 17 July 2020, she further adds to her qualifications in as many aspects of the trade as possible.

In presenting the graduates with their Certificates, Ministry of Forestry's Conservator of Forests, Ms Sanjan Lal, who is the first Indo-Fijian to hold the post in the Ministry, said that the Ministry needed more females like Mereisi. "Today is confirmation that you have wood processing proficiency. As the Ministry takes a lead role in this area, we are relying on you to give us your best," Ms Lal told the graduates.

"Before you only had practical experience but now you have the formal qualifications to go with it and be rest assured that by having you all on board, the Ministry is setting a bench mark for our stakeholders as you go out into the forestry industry sector with confidence." Ms Lal encouraged the graduates to be prepared for the industry and to put what they have learnt into



The only way is up. Mereisi Lewaniceva has her feet grounded in the forestry sector

practice. She challenged them to 'get your priorities right, plus work hard and work smart'.

For Mereisi, who was a Wood Processing student at the Timber Industry Training Centre (TITC) in 2014, the highlight of her studies had been sneaking out to the TUD shed which was next to the training centre to watch staff operate the machines.

"I was fascinated by the sound of the machines, the smell of sawn wood, the atmosphere and the creative freedom to mould wood into something beautiful. From there, I made up my mind that I wanted to be a Sawmill Operator."

"I later went on to study at FNU before coming back to the Ministry of Forestry as an attachee where I had the opportunity to work at various divisions within the Ministry. Apart from being

at the sawmill, I have also worked and learnt a lot at the nursery in Colo-i-Suva. Watching the seeds grow and sprout their first green leaves is very rewarding and worth the challenge of getting the soil mix right. I really enjoyed working in the nursery,' she shared.

In September 2019, Mereisi was confirmed to the position of Sawmill Operator, making her one of 72 females employed by the Ministry. Under the Government's Open Merit Based Recruitment Selection (OMRS), Ministry staff are employed based on merit rather than solely on gender.

Having an older brother, Mereisi as the second child in the family was always regarded as a 'tom-boy', looking up to her older brother as an example. "I think being a tom-boy also has helped

me a great deal in my work," she added.

With the encouraging words of the Conservator of Forests, Ms Sanjana Lal, Mereisi is further determined to achieve more. "After graduating today, I have set my sights on becoming the next Conservator of Forests or even the Permanent Secretary or Minister for Forestry. This is my goal for the next fifteen years. God-willing, I will achieve this," she said. "I love what I do and, I will continue to push myself and work hard to achieve my goals and dreams, as I know my future with the Forestry Sector and the Ministry of Forestry is bright."

New Forestry Budget to Help Communities and Businesses **Build Back Stronger**



One of the portable sawmills already in operation in Kadavu

Timber for home construction is one of the main products derived from trees that have for time immemorial become a basic necessity for humankind. This emphasises not only just the importance of trees, but also of entire forests and nature in providing innumerable benefits from ecosystem services right through to food security.

In Fiji, community-based forest plantations were initiated by Government in the 1970s to transform barren grass lands or 'talasiga' landscapes with the hope that the trees could provide benefits such as the restoration of ecosystem services, enhancing biodiversity, and supplying timber for the construction of homes, with trade being an option for any surplus.

The planting of mostly pine trees was accomplished largely through traditional community practices or 'solesolevaki'

where work was done in groups on a voluntary basis. The pine plantations were managed under the concept of community-based or 'vanua' schemes to strengthen governance issues and the coordination of community support.

The majority of the pine plantations in the maritime islands have matured and are ready for harvesting. However, numerous attempts to harvest the mature pine trees and to ensure optimum returns to the landowners have been largely unsuccessful due mainly to the geographical disposition of the islands which meant exorbitant harvesting, processing and transportation costs.

"In fact, over the years, several 'giants' of the logging industry went to the islands well resourced, but returned empty handed," Forestry Minister Honourable Osea Naiqamu said.

"The cost of operations right through to shipment were the main challenges," he said.

Some of the islands, Kadavu for instance, also lay in the path of many tropical cyclones. This meant that their pine plantations were damaged in various proportions each time a cyclone passed.

These setbacks resulted in some resource-owners becoming doubtful of their chances to gain maximum returns from their resources. Many were just able to harvest trees for their homes, but again the lack of technical know-how and the absence of proper treatment facilities meant the houses were not durable.

Government noted the challenges the islanders faced and in recent years started to consolidate information on the resources. A 2019 assessment revealed about \$29 million worth of stock in the islands of Kadavu, Lakeba and Gau.

Table: Pine Resources in three Maritime Islands

Island	Scheme	2016 Area (Ha)	Stocking Density (m ³ /Ha)	Est. Volume (m ³)	Log Profile (m ³)				Log Value (\$)				
					Sawlog	Poles	Post	Pulp	Sawlog (\$91.30)	Poles (\$74.56)	Post (\$55.11)	Pulp (\$55.00)	Total
Gau	Narocake	313.1	228	71,386.80	64,248.12	4,283.21	2,141.60	713.87	5,865,853.36	319,355.99	118,023.80	39,262.74	6,342,495.88
	Lamiti	27.9		6,361.20	5,725.08	381.67	190.84	63.61	522,699.80	28,457.46	10,516.97	3,498.66	565,172.90
Scheme Total		341		77,748.00	69,973.20	4,664.88	2,332.44	777.48	6,388,553.16	347,813.45	128,540.77	42,761.40	6,907,668.78
Kadavu		943.4	124	116,981.60	32,754.85	26,905.77	32,754.85	24,566.14	2,990,517.62	2,006,094.06	1,805,119.67	1,351,137.48	8,152,868.84
Lau	Lakeba	1,490.00	116	172,840.00	98,037.00	48,504.00	23,271.00	3,028.00	8,950,778.10	3,616,458.24	1,282,464.81	166,540.00	14,016,241.15
GRAND TOTAL		2,774.40		367,569.60	200,765.05	80,074.65	58,358.29	28,371.62	18,329,848.88	5,970,365.75	3,216,125.25	1,560,438.88	29,076,778.77

Source: Ministry of Forestry 2019

Government, through the Ministry of Forestry, recently started to actively re-engage with the islanders through the Fiji Pine Trust, which was formed to look after the interests of the pine scheme owners. Together they started to put together plans for the sustainable management of the respective pine schemes. These plans were on the verge of being rolled out when TC Harold struck.

Minister Naiqamu said the interception of TC Harold, just like many previous natural disasters, should not be allowed to derail the efforts for the resource-owners to reap what they have sowed.

"On the contrary, we should now escalate our efforts to assist the communities, and especially now with the widespread destruction caused by TC Harold where close to 600 houses were completely destroyed in addition to hundreds more that were partially damaged," he said.

"Government, in its wisdom, has allocated funds for the maritime pine schemes in the new financial year, thus continuing its mandate to assist all Fijians" he said.

In the 2020-2021 Budget, the Ministry of Forestry has been allocated \$1.5 million for the maritime pine development. Additional funding have also been provided for the purchase of harvesting machines and equipment.

"The rehabilitation of houses is the priority now and the new budget will complement the work that has started immediately after TC Harold. In just one month after TC Harold struck in April, the Ministry deployed equipment like harvesting machines, portable sawmills, trucks, and staff to help with re-purposing fallen and damaged trees, with housing rehabilitation being the priority," Mr. Naiqamu said.

Nine portable sawmills are currently on Kadavu trying to harvest the damaged trees in the 11 pine schemes.

"In about 11 weeks and working with the islanders in Kadavu, we have managed to re-purpose timber for close to 200 houses. The new budget will accelerate the efforts to ensure we re-purpose timber for all the damaged houses within the next few months," Minister Naiqamu said.

The Ministry also managed to purchase four additional portable sawmills just before the 2019-2020 financial year ended. It is now enlisting the support of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to help build roads to ease the extraction of trees.

"Now is the time to improve our recovery from TC Harold. We could build houses that are stronger and cyclone resistant. The Ministry is collaborating with other agencies including the Ministry of Rural

and Maritime Development and the Ministry of Housing and Community Development to start re-building houses of up to Category-4 cyclone standard," Mr. Naiqamu said.

The Minister said that Government is also focusing on facilitating and securing some economic returns for the pine scheme owners.

"Government could help ensure that the scheme owners realise their aspirations and what they have been dreaming of since their plantations were established over 40 years ago," he said.

"The Ministry of Forestry in collaboration with Fiji Pine Trust will set a stumpage rate for the pine trees. This means that Government could arrange for the harvesting of pine trees, provide

material for housing and then trade any surplus. The returns could be given back to the scheme owners on a cost-share basis," Mr. Naiqamu said.

The Ministry is also looking at opportunities to engage the private sector in a public-private partnership. This could help re-establish jobs that have been lost through the COVID-19 global pandemic.

"Government's current focus nationwide is to help address the impacts of COVID-19 and TC Harold on jobs, livelihoods and trade," Mr. Naiqamu said.

"It is therefore vitally important in the forestry sector to work with the communities and businesses to immediately rehabilitate damaged

houses and grow the economy. It is also crucial that we improve capacities in sustainable forest management and improve fundamental issues like transparency and accountability," he said.

With Government's belief that all Fijian families matter and no one should be left behind, Minister Naiqamu said the Ministry will effectively mobilise its allocated budget to deliver an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic, improve its mandatory functions and ensure it helps the communities and businesses to build back stronger and better both in rebuilding houses and the economy.

R2R Project Provides Hope for Families

Strong, determined and humble are three words that come to mind when you meet Mesake Dralolo.

A casualty of the lay-offs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mesake did what most Fijians are doing and that is to go back to his roots.

Mesake, who worked in the Tourism sector, took this set-back into his stride and returned to his village of Koromakawa, Wairiki in Labasa. Through sheer will and determination, the 40-year-old has resolved to make things work on the farm.

Mesake urgently needed an interim source of income to make ends meet before his farm produce could be ready for harvest. His prayers were answered in the form of Fiji's Reef to Ridge Program (R2R).



The R2R program are co-funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Secretariat of Pacific Communities and managed by the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Forestry is one of the implementing agencies responsible for delivering the program outcomes. With the objective of trying to preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods through a ridge to reef management of priority water catchments on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu,

the program empowers communities to plant trees and pays them for their efforts.

Mesake is one of several individuals who are part of these R2R tree planting groups. The income that he earns from this work helps him to sustain his family.

"I am very lucky to be able to take some money home just by helping to plant trees and it is not only that, I know what I have planted will benefit my children

and those that come after them," Mr Dralolo said.

"I know I am doing my part to keep Fiji green and to fight climate change. I thank SPC, UNDP and the Fijian Government for thinking of people like me who have lost our jobs. I am definitely not left behind and I know this Government cares for all Fijians," Mr Dralolo said.

Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu met with Mr Dralolo during his visit to Koromakawa Village in Labasa in June. "The R2R program under UNDP is part of the Fijian Government's green recovery strategy to restore nature," Minister Naiqamu said.

He added that Fiji's R2R project has come in leaps and bounds as it will bolster Fiji's national system of marine protected areas (MPA's) through an enhanced, representative and sustainable system of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA) including greater protection of

threatened marine species as part of the "R" of R2R. "How we manage our Ridges and catchments determines the health status of our Reefs," Minister Naiqamu said.

The R2R program will further negate the impacts of land-based activities through the development and implementation of integrated catchment management plans including mangrove protection, the adoption of appropriate sustainable land use practices and river bank restoration in adjoining upstream water sheds as well as restored and rehabilitated forests.

These terrestrial protected areas, coupled with an increase in the permanent native forest estate, including through assisted natural reforestation and degraded grasslands will contribute to Fiji's REDD+ strategy through enhancement of carbon stocks. The protected area networks rehabilitated through this program will help conserve threatened ecosystems

such as lowland and tropical moist rainforests and endangered species of plants, amphibians, reptiles and freshwater vertebrates and invertebrates.

As the name implies, the Ridge to Reef project aims to cover all activities from the ridges through the catchments and out to the sea and reefs to ensure a system of high biodiversity, rehabilitated, well managed and protected flow of ecosystem services.

Under the R2R program which started in 2015, four selected priority catchments were identified and these include the Ba and Waidina Catchment in Viti Levu and the Labasa and Tunuloa Catchment in Vanua Levu.

27 villages from around these four catchment areas will benefit directly from the R2R project and the indirect benefits will filter down to all Fijians and our beloved nation.



Minister Naiqamu meets villagers of Koromakawa Village last month

Ministry invests in **Online innovations** for stakeholder convenience



landowning company in Kasavu were the first landowners company to receive their export license using the final official approved online system thus allowing them to export 26.0m³ of kiln dried mahogany products valued at \$FJD 37,552 to New Zealand.

The Ministry of Forestry has been testing the system since July last year and in the process used dummy licenses for test runs.

Company secretary Mr Jone Siqila said their core activity is to purchase mahogany logs from the Fiji Hardwood Corporation, arrange for their milling to the required specifications and then sell the sawn timber to local and overseas buyers.

"Earlier in trying to secure a Timber Export License to export mahogany decking to New Zealand took a lot of time as we had to lodge our documents manually," Mr Siqila said.

"Travelling back and forth from the Timber Utilisation Division in Nasinu to the Ministry's headquarters in Toorak was time consuming."

Mr Siqila welcomed the introduction of the online licensing system and thanked the Ministry of Forestry for the initiative as it saved them a lot of effort and money this time around.

The online licensing system is the first of many technological innovations that the Ministry will be launching in the

coming months and parallels the Fijian Government's COVID-19 safe recovery framework which allows economic activity to safely resume without compromise to health and safety.

Minister for Forestry, Honourable Osea Naiqamu further added that the ministry's allocation of \$1.7million in the 2020-2021 budget for the Research and Development Division will see additional investment on Forest Resource Assessments, Research as well as the development of a new web link.

"The new web link will provide the ministry with key geographic information to assist in planning and decision making. As such, the Ministry's Forest Resource Assessment and Conservation (FRAC) Division is currently undertaking a mapping project where 2Dimensional and 3Dimensional dynamic web maps containing relevant information are created and presented in web applications for easy analysis and understanding.

Essentially, what this means is that the maps are available online and show real-time information in 2D and 3D views on harvested areas, Forest and Nature Reserves and Planted areas to name a few. The FRAC Division which is the data hub of the Ministry updates the web maps daily thus providing almost real-time information to the Ministry's management and staff for planning and decision-making purposes.

Doing business in the new normal is now easier with the Ministry of Forestry's export and import online licensing system. Applications can be done conveniently from the office, with licenses being issued within 24 to 48 hours. The licensing system is available at www.forestry.gov.fj

This is part of Government's ongoing efforts to improve the ease of doing business. It is also part of Government's response to COVID-19 in helping to generate economic activity in the forestry sector.

On Monday 3rd August, Yavutu ni Vanua Investment Pte Limited, a mahogany

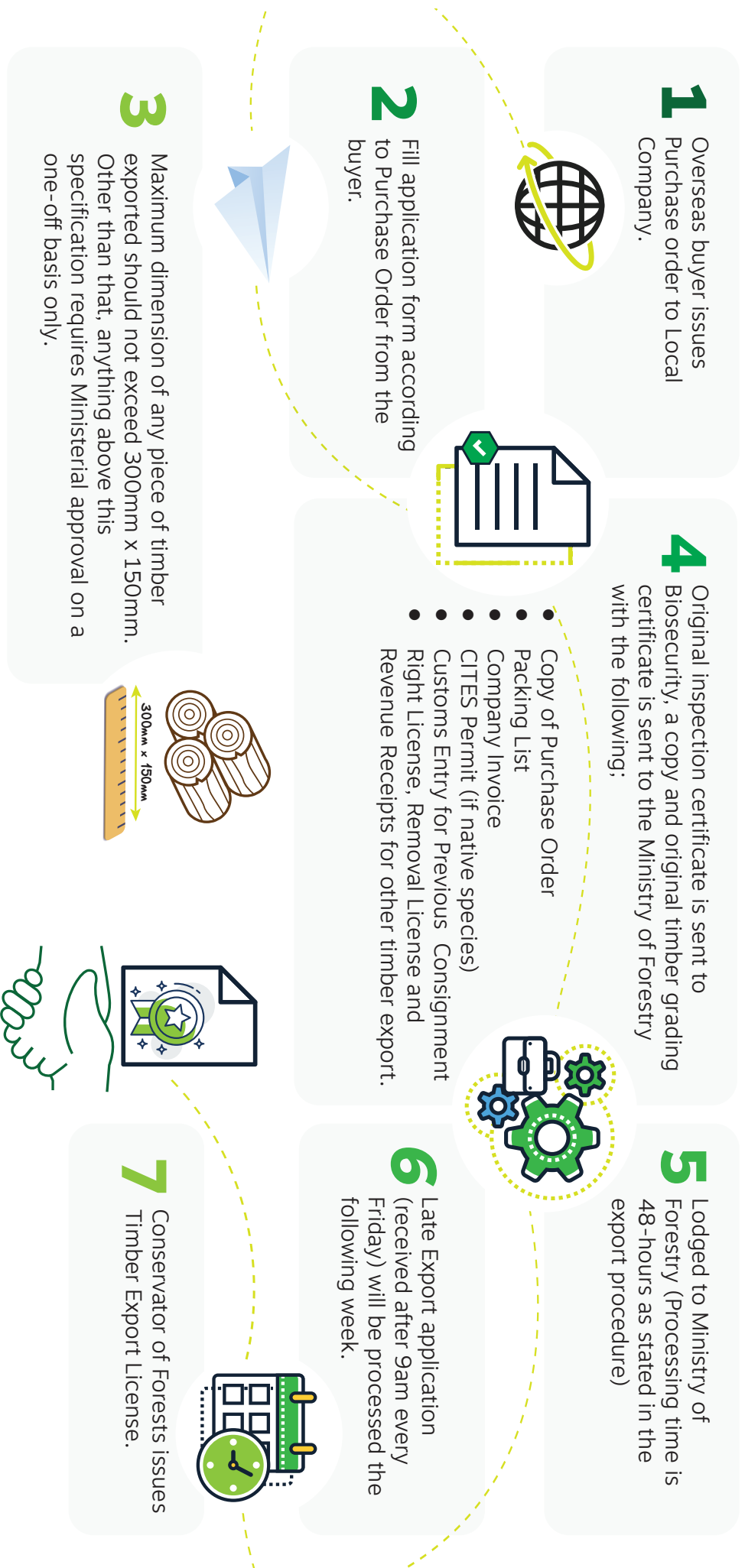
Additionally the Division has set up an online dashboard which highlights all planted area locations with details such as the number of trees planted, species planted and spacing in between planted trees. The dashboard could be accessed by the public for two specific reasons vis-à-vis to report on the details of trees or mangroves they have planted or to get an update on Fiji's tree planting revolution which now has a target of 30 million trees in 15 years.

According to Minister Naiqamu, the Ministry will continue to add to the online licensing system by extending the service to include applications for harvesting, sawmilling and treatment plants.

"The investment in technology will assist the Ministry's facilitation process to ensure that the private sector spends more time generating economic growth and creating employment opportunities. These will cushion the impacts of COND-19 on our people and Nation," Minister Naiqamu said.



Steps On How To Get A Forest Export License



For more information contact the Ministry of Forestry on 3301611 or email forestrycomms@gmail.com or visit our website: www.forestry.gov.fj

Koro Youths Help Combat Climate Change



Youths of Cawa District in Koro enjoy their tree planting sessions

Helping to save the world from the drastic impacts of climate change, Julian Hennings has turned to the youths of Cawa district to help plant trees on Koro Island.

Mr Hennings who is the manager for Taveuni Development Company, the parent company that looks after Dere Bay Resort gathered 13 youths to assist the Ministry of Forestry team that toured Koro Island for the 30MillionTreesIn15Years initiative last week.

"It is the initial vision of the directors of Dere Bay Resort to reforest Koro Island even before Government made the commitment to plant 30Million Trees in 15Years. After Tropical Cyclone Winston struck in 2016, we have been very active in the preservation of the native trees here on the island," Mr Hennings said.

"Our core business is land development and real estate and having said that, one of the conditions when we sell land is to selective clear properties and not eradicate all trees.

So there is controlled clearing. Therefore we are keeping the natural beauty of Koro."

Mr Hennings said they are very much in support of Government's commitment because looking at a world wide scale there are millions of trees that are cut down every year.

"Having this commitment will enforce our young generation to be more committed, to understand and also to appreciate the investment by Government and other organisations. It is not only for our benefit but for generations to come," Mr Hennings said.

"For us even though our business is profit driven we try and keep a balance between profit and also empowering people, which is why we have engaged a group of youths here in the district of Cawa to assist the Ministry for Forestry team."

The youths were presented with their certificates in Plantation Establishment on Monday 13th July, 2020 and they will also be the eyes and ears of the Ministry in Koro Island.

Tavua Village youth Mr Lote Mulo who is the leader of Cawa District Youth said he has learnt a lot during the tour and it has encouraged them to support Government's initiative and plant more trees.

"This is the first time for us to work with a Government ministry and during the first day we thought we would have theory lessons indoors but we have been learning out in the field doing line cutting, polling and learning about tree spacings. We also learnt how to construct a semi-permanent nursery which requires the use of natural materials like bamboo," Mr Mulo said.

"We have definitely learnt a lot and we are grateful that we have our certificates because most of these youths are school drop-outs and this will be a stepping stone for them in securing a job if not here locally than abroad."

Mr Mulo said the youths are determined to continue advocating the message of 30MillionTreesIn15Years initiative as they reach out to other villages in Koro.

Vision

Sustainable forests, our future.

Mission

To be a leader in sustainable forestry.

Values

Responsible ~ We will discharge our duties with responsibility.

Resolute ~ We will discharge our duties with determination and be firm and fair in our decisions.

Respectful ~ We will be sensitive to individual needs and diversity of views.

Resourceful ~ We will be practical, creative, effective and efficient and maintain uncompromising integrity in our daily work.

Reliable ~ We will do and deliver what we have committed and promised to our customers.



Ministry of Forestry

We need your help in ensuring we achieve our tree planting target. We are also encouraging communities to establish nurseries to economically empower you because Government will purchase your seedlings as the tree planting initiative progresses.

Members of the public are encouraged to log onto the Ministry's website www.forestry.gov.fj each time they plant and to record their tally of trees planted with the Ministry as everyone's contribution to the **30MT15Y campaign** counts.

Protect our Future, Plant a Tree

**And support the 30 million
trees in 15 years initiative**

Your contribution counts
Everytime you plant a tree scan
this QR code to let us know



and help us trend #30MT15Y



For more information
contact telephone ☎ 3301611 or
email ✉ forestrycomms@gmail.com

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