



Villagers of Drawa in Macuata are one of first in Fiji to be engaged in carbon trading

With the vision, Sustainable Forests, our Future, the Ministry of Forestry is grateful to its stakeholders, corporate organisations, individuals and communities for their collective efforts in championing this objective.

In April, we highlighted the sustainable and conservation efforts of Drawa Village through the Drawa Forest Conservation Project and the Drawa Block. The Drawa Block is located in Central Vanua Levu, within the provinces of Cakaudrove and Macuata, which is made up of mountainous terrain, covered with indigenous old-growth and secondary forest.

Working in partnership with Live and Learn Fiji, the Drawa Forest Conservation Project, with support from the Nakau Programme, addresses climate change mitigation, ecosystems-based adaptation to climate change and rural livelihoods and provides a solution to the challenge of financing long-term maintenance of protected areas.

The Drawa project aims to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions by changing forest management from timber extraction to forest protection. The communities within the Drawa block voluntarily gave land for this project almost 20 years ago, making it the first REDD+ carbon trade project to be implemented in Fiji.

Championing the cause for sustainability and conservation, the Drawa landowners gave up their rights to logging timber on 1549.29 hectares of their land in exchange for the opportunity to sell rainforest carbon offsets as a way of generating revenue for local economic development.

In a talanoa session last month at the Grand Pacific Hotel, former school teacher and Drawa Block Forest Community Cooperative (DBFCC) board member, Mr Aminiasi Veisaci reflected on the community experience of the Drawa Project.

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Drawa villagers continue to plant trees in order to offset carbon emissions.

"I know our forefathers made the right decision 20 years ago, when they gave some of our land for the Project and I thank our village leaders at the time for their foresight," Mr Veisaci said.

"Our forests have not been touched since that decision was made to have our village be a model for forest reserve".

Proving that sustainable forests is definitely for the future, the current generation of Drawa villagers were able to reap the rewards of their forefathers conservation efforts when in May 2018, they became the first village in Fiji to trade carbon under the voluntary carbon market. The eight landowning units received \$20,700 in proceeds from the trade. Mr Veisaci said that since 2018, they have continued to be receive payments for eco-system services (PES) for their steadfast efforts in conserving their forests.

In January 2021, Fiji became the first small island developing state (SIDS) to sign an Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA) with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).

FCPF is a global partnership of governments, businesses, civil society, and Indigenous Peoples focused on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, forest carbon stock conservation, the sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries, activities commonly referred to as REDD+.

The FCPF works with 47 developing countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, along with 17 donors that have made contributions and commitments totaling \$1.3 billion. The FCPF supports REDD+ efforts through its Readiness and Carbon Funds.

Minister of Economy Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum had signed the landmark agreement with FCPF a global partnership housed at the World Bank, that will unlock up to US\$12.5 million (approx. FJ\$26 million) in results-based payments for increasing carbon sequestration and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

The five-year agreement will reward efforts to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation under Fiji's ambitious emission reductions programme and both the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Forestry will have lead roles in this initiative. In signing the agreement, Minister Sayed-Khaiyum said the emission reduction programme area includes over 37,000 hectares spread over 20 districts on the islands of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni, with the potential to expand to other areas that express interest.

"The contracted volume of greenhouse gases that Fiji is expected to sequester from these forest activities in the next five years is 2.5 million tonnes, for which a result-based payment of USD 12.5 million will be paid upon verification by the World Bank," Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

Typical approaches to forest protection often fail if they do not address the need for income generation that can replace the 'opportunity cost' of rejecting unsustainable developments. As part of the Nakau Programme, the Drawa project demonstrates the potential to finance forest protection and all of its associated co-benefits through production and sale of carbon credits.

"Our forests have not been touched since that decision was made to have our village be a model for forest reserve".

Sawene Villagers Reap The Benefits From Forests



Sawene villagers investing in vehicles to further help them with income generation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been a harsh wake-up call for humanity. It has caused the closure of businesses resulting in the massive loss of livelihoods, the closure of schools, and has put an end to virtually every public or social gathering. Within 19 months, many countries are facing the challenging task of progressively re-opening businesses to allow for some form of economic growth whilst they continue to address the pandemic from a health perspective.

A recent study by the United Nations Forum on Forests found that the pandemic has left forest-dependent populations continuing to face job losses, reduced income, diminished access to markets and information, and women and youth, in particular, are experiencing a contraction in seasonal employment.

The Global Forest Goals Report 2021 which was released in April comes at a time when economic contraction and disruptions to global trade and local commerce are continuing to impact the global workforce. There is now a call for greater investments in nature, in the land and specifically in forestry.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Liu Zhenmin in his statement for the United Nations Global Forest Goals

Report 2021 stated that 'investing in forests is investing in our future'. "We must strengthen our global efforts to protect and restore forests and support the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. Only then can we realize our shared vision for a more just, equitable and sustainable world," Mr Zhenmin said.

Forest-dependent communities tend to be from marginalized and vulnerable groups, and many of them, including indigenous peoples, are finding themselves even further sidelined from socio-economic safety nets. Indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as returning migrants and urban workers, are now being pushed deeper into the woods to seek food, fuel, shelter, and protection from the risks of COVID-19, placing additional stress on the ecosystems.

The Global Forest Goals Report 2021 is the first evaluation of where the world stands in implementing the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030.

Reaping the benefits from forests

Here in Fiji, the villagers of Sawene in the highlands of Nadroga/Navosa, are now reaping the benefits of investing in forestry. They recently harvested some trees, and are now consolidating their plans to expand their investment in the land and in nature.

On Wednesday 23 June 2021, members of mataqali Nakasi of Sawene village in the district of Namataku took ownership of two three-tonne trucks, three tractors and a twin cab all valued at \$0.2million. The purchase of these vehicles was made possible through royalty proceeds after harvesting 5910 cubic meters of raintrees (vaivai) grown on their mataqali land.

The villagers were also appreciative of the advice by the Ministry of Forestry staff that assisted them with harvesting their natural resources.

Mataqali Nakasi licensee Mr Ilisoni Tabuyalewa said the advice was to further invest in their land and plant both trees and agricultural cash crops in order to generate more income for their immediate needs while also ensuring that they protect their lands and water sources and allow biodiversity to grow in their forests.

"I am thankful to Government through the Ministry of Forestry for their assistance not only in harvesting our raintrees but also providing sound advice on how we can better utilize our natural resources for economic empowerment and for the ongoing protection of nature," Mr Tabuyalewa said.

Mr Tabuyalewa said the tractors would be used on their farms while the trucks will be used to cart villagers and their crops down to the markets.

"We will charge both cargo and passenger fares for those intending to take their crops to the markets or if they head to town so that way extra income is also earned."

Encouragement to resource owners

Mr Tabuyalewa added what they have achieved today may seem impossible for Fijians considering the difficult times we are facing with this global pandemic.

"If we keep dwelling on the impossibilities than we will sit idle and have a total reliance on Government assistance.

"I want to encourage all resource owners to think long and hard about how we can utilize our resources for the betterment of our people, village, district, province, and nation.

"Nothing is impossible if we put our hearts and minds into it," Mr Tabuyalewa said.

Holistic approach in managing natural resources

Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli in commending the villagers of Sawene on their initiative said the Government has taken on a more holistic approach to managing Fiji's natural resources. It is continuing to seek a balance between the use of resources for economic growth, while also importantly ensuring that communities, through their actions, help protect the environment and nature.

It is a fundamental balance that we must appreciate and achieve to ensure socio-economic growth is not realised at the expense of the environment.

But this means connecting with the communities, creating greater awareness on the importance of nature and actually providing tangible support such as planting trees.

This is where the tree-planting initiative is considered a crucial component in the grand scheme of things.

"We have to plant trees. We need to plant trees to harvest just like the villagers of Sawene are now experiencing, and we need to plant trees to protect our native forests, enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services," he said.

"Tree-planting must be done consciously. We cannot just be harvesting resources without planting. This will take us nowhere," he said.

Mr Baleinabuli added that the Ministry recognizes the role of the stakeholders in the forestry sector as partners for both economic development and for the protection and enhancement of nature.

Many of the stakeholders are helping to plant trees. In the span of two and half years, Fiji has collectively planted about seven million trees – thanks to the communities who have allowed planting on their lands, and also to the stakeholders who are actively supporting the tree-planting initiative.

This partnership is critical especially as the global community continues to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The villagers of Sawene have demonstrated that the foresight of their forefathers in planting trees is serving them well during such challenging times.



Sawene villager admires one of the tractors to be used for cash crop farming.

"I want to encourage all resource owners to think long and hard about how we can utilize our resources for the betterment of our people, village, district, province, and nation.

Forestry Strengthens **Resolve** Against Illegal Operators



The recent wave of tropical cyclones that hit our nation has seen an increase in the demand for timber to rebuild and repair homes and buildings. Unfortunately, it has also seen an increase in illegal operators in the forestry sector.

Against a backdrop of pressure to earn a living and put food on the table for those that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for quick cash pushes resource owners into bad deals with logging contractors.

As the Ministry mandated to conserve, manage and develop Fiji's forestry resources to ensure long term sustainable use for the benefit of all Fijians, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Forestry to act in the best interest of the Nation and the resource owners to ensure fair and equitable returns from the forestry sector.

In this regard, the Ministry's Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Division is working with key stakeholders to crack down on these illegal operators.

According to the Permanent Secretary for Forestry Mr Pene Baleinabuli, "these bad deals include forfeiting proper documentation like timber

statements and the stamping of logs that enables the logging contractors to buy logs easily and thus bypass paying royalty and other fees to the iTaukei Lands Trust Board (TLTB) and the Ministry of Forestry respectively."

Businesses that rely on our natural resources have a duty of care to the resource owners, and as such, logging contractors are bound by the Forestry Harvesting Code which clearly states that "Unstamped logs and other forest resources that are sourced illegally will be confiscated by the Ministry of Forestry and the contractor is liable for a fine of up to \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding twelve months or to both such fines and imprisonment."

"We will not hesitate to impose heavy fines and issue stop notices to operators that are found to be involved in these illegal activities. We are stepping up our operations on the ground with Ministry staff checking log truck passes as well as doing snap checks and monitoring sawmill operations around the country," continued Mr. Baleinabuli.

Additionally, we have also strengthened our resolve towards illegal operators by joining forces with the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and the Fiji

Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) to ensure proper prosecution of cases of illegal logging. Our work is making a positive impact as the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) Economic Review 2020, indicated that the forestry sector's contribution towards the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased compared to the declining trend in previous years.

Mr Baleinabuli said that Fiji's forestry sector injected about \$66 million net income into Fiji's economy last year and this included export earnings of \$76 million and an import value of \$9.3 million. He further added that export revenue generated in the 12 months to December 2020 is largely from the sale of pine chips to Japan and pine timber of all sizes by the Fiji Pine Group of Companies.

The revenue also includes mahogany products like sawn timber, decking and flooring which are exported to the Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America. They also include some native and exotic timber species.

Monitoring systems are an important part of the Ministry's Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) vision and overall industry contribution to the Nation's economic growth.

Logging Contractors Harvesting Guide



Step 1

All harvesting licenses can be obtained from the Ministry of Forestry. This includes harvesting in Native, Freehold, Crown Land, Non-Timber Forests Products as well as Firewood or Fuelwood.



Step 2

After logs are harvested they need to be scaled and stamped. Failure to do so may warrant a fine and also confiscation of logs from the contractor.



Step 3

Valid truck passes are issued by the Ministry of Forestry for transporting of logs from harvesting sites to sawmills. Failure to carry valid truck passes warrants a fine.



Step 4

Forest resources sourced illegally are confiscated by the Ministry of Forestry and the contractor is liable for a fine of up to \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding twelve months or to both such fines and imprisonment.



Youths gather at the Ministry of Forestry booth during the National Youth Climate Action Summit.

Fighting Climate Change A Defining Factor For **Youths**

"You were born into a world in which storms batter our shores with intensity that, just a few decades ago, would have been unimaginable. You were born into a world in which entire ecosystems, from Pacific reefs to Amazonian rainforests, may not last beyond your own time on this planet."

"Act Later", the mantra of politicians for far too long, is no longer being tolerated – especially among the world's young people. You know that we must act

Mr Bainimarama told the youths their passion is precisely what the world needs and their activism and ideas will be what finds solutions to the problems that those before them have created.

The size of the youth population matters greatly in the context of sustainable development. The age structure of a population and the relative size of the youth cohort are important because they serve as determining factors in the growth of the labour force and pressures on the economy in terms of job creation

Messages to world leaders posted by youths of Fiji at the National Youth Climate Action Summit.

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Local Business Owner Has Confidence in the Mahogany Industry

Fiji is blessed with an existing forest cover of 1.1 million hectares covering approximately 61 percent of our total land area of 1.8 million hectares or 18,000 square kilometres. Sustainably managing our forests to cater for natural ecosystems including environmental and climate-change mitigation on the one hand, and economic development on the other hand, is extremely important and can never be over-emphasised. This balance is always at the top of the national agenda.

From an economic perspective, the forestry sector is integral to Fiji's economic development and has over the decades

supported increased export earnings and employment.

As part of Government's ongoing efforts to support the private sector, which is recognised as the Nation's engine for economic growth, the Ministry of Forestry is reaching out to the companies in the forestry sector to talk about their journey including their challenges. The ultimate aim is to better understand the companies and to see how the Ministry could facilitate the ease of doing business, while ensuring that both the private and public sectors contribute to the sustainable management of Fiji's forests.

In this series, we talk to Mr. Uluibau Tabete, proprietor of TABS Investments, a locally owned business that is considered a rising star in the forestry sector.

Humble Beginnings

Mr Tabete recalls with fondness how he came across an antique shop selling mahogany furniture while living in England.

"I first saw an old antique mahogany furniture and interior décor in 1986 at Windsor Castle in London when I was 10 years old during my primary school excursion. My father served as a career civil servant and was posted to the Fiji High Commission in London at the time."

Having returned to Fiji many years after that, Mr, Tabete shared how in 2007 his family was struggling to make ends meet and could not keep up with the payment of their family home. He recalls that it was in the midst of this family financial struggle, that he saw an opportunity to trade Fiji's locally grown mahogany to traders in the United States of America and Europe, as local producers and traders in Fiji lacked access into these overseas markets.

TABS Investments was established 11 years ago as a limited company specializing in manufacturing mahogany guitar dimension parts known as 'Billets'.



"Our major production line provides for guitar timber pieces as well as body facility of the musical equipment. We have also entered into local-based production line of ukulele under the Marau brand. The musical equipment

is produced from mahogany waste wood off-cuts thus ensuring that Fiji reduces any waste from this high-value tree," Mr Tabete said.

Collaboration with Stakeholders

Now with two directors, five board members and 68 staff, TABS Investments makes the effort to consistently collaborate with stakeholders across Fiji to help ensure a sustainable forestry sector.

"Our immediate stakeholders are our 68 staff members and local service providers. An example of how we impact our local services providers can be seen in how each of our saw millers employ up to 50 staff each."

TABS Investments currently mills at four sawmills namely Vitiana in Nabua, Yarawa in Serua, Mahesh in Vuda and A. Jan in Ba. "Government through The Fiji Hardwood Corporation (FHCL) is an extremely important stakeholder for us and our mahogany industry. FHCL holds a vital and important position in our industry as the entity responsible for the overall sustainability of our mahogany plantations, environmentally friendly, best logging practices and the need to appreciate Fiji's valuable mahogany markets for continued high value supply through close quality control," Mr. Tabete said.

Mr. Tabete added that provided FHCL and TABS Investments are successful in supplying Fiji mahogany for high-value guitar parts and dimensions, their 2021 projections will see the company contribute greatly to the economic growth of Fiji's forestry sector through harvesting, land lease payments, reforestation, licensing fees and administration services.

"We trust and rely on Government through the Ministry of Forestry and FHCL to use funds that we pay through log purchases for reforestation and other associated activities pertaining to ensuring a sustainable forestry sector which is carried out accordingly and in line with the Mahogany Industry Development Decree and Forestry Policy and Guidelines," Mr. Tabete said.

He added that as a growing company, they rely on Government to nurture and support TABS Investments marketing activities and help bring high-value returns for Fiji's precious mahogany species from regions of the world who really appreciate Fijian mahogany for its high quality.

"Mahogany has a special historical trade significance in western society and this is one of the reasons the species was introduced here in 1890s before large-scale mahogany plantations started in the 1950s."

In September 2018, TABS Investments contributed \$80,000 to the Fiji Mahogany Trust's (FMT) private company Mahogany Landowners Company Limited (MLCL) for the initiation of timber operations to supply to TABS Investments as their local market.

MLCL continues to function today also producing timber for export to their own New Zealand markets.

"Provided our export deliveries are efficient in 2021, we plan to make more

funding available for FMT to boost their timber operations from August 2021."

"A small number of our staff are also landowners who have been working for our company for almost 10 years now. We also engage in commercial and service trade relationships with many landowning communities for the ripping of mahogany using portable sawmills."

"We don't deny that we have had challenges with some of our community projects in our early years, but we have always remained true to getting through those challenges. We are a local company striving to grow and develop against all odds. Humility has a mainstay and a big part of our lasting relationships," Mr. Tabete said.

Challenges

Mr Tabete said that due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the supply of their monthly log requirements is facing some challenges.

"But we are working very closely with FHCL to iron out some of these challenges including identifying opportunities for strategic logging and delivery to our designated sawmills.

We are also experiencing hikes in operational costs for managing staff to work within their containment zones while adhering to COVID-19 protocols and using the relevant Personal Protective Equipment."

Mr. Tabete said this also includes costs for independent transport such as hiring minibuses to pick and drop 68 staff from their homes and drop them off at various sawmills across Viti Levu. He said that despite these challenges, TABS Investments has not laid off any staff.

Forecast for 2021

For this year, TABS Investments forecasts a timber production volume of 6700 cubic metres, 80 per cent of

which is expected to be exported while 20 per cent is expected for domestic or local trade.

"Our forecasted targeted revenue for this year stands at FJD\$13.6million compared to FJD\$4.2million last year with new markets in Germany, France and Australia. All to support our local industry and economy," Mr. Tabete said.

TABS Investments' current export markets are the world renowned guitar brands Taylor Guitars, Fender, Gibson and Martin in the United States of America and other markets in the European Union, Japan and New Zealand.

The company also has a growing local market and is well serviced by Vinod Patel's timber division.

Despite the challenges, Mr Tabete is confident, TABS Investments will continue to grow because of its binding industry relationships and will continue to play a pivotal role in regaining economic growth for Fiji's forestry sector.

Confidence in the Mahogany Industry

With the confidence of the Fijian Government in the mahogany industry, Mr. Tabete is adamant that increased mahogany exports will significantly contribute to Fiji's economy. It is with this confidence that Mr Tabete chooses to believe that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the support of Government and other major players is what will keep his local business afloat.

Mr. Tabete says that an appreciation for mahogany as a high-end and globally recognized species is also an important motivation to stand their ground and have faith in Fiji's forestry sector during these trying times.

Ministry Introduces Staff Behind Forestry Agenda

The Ministry of Forestry is pleased to introduce its staff and consultants who are helping drive both of Fiji's specific and broader forestry agenda in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the coming weeks, the Ministry will bring to you, our readers and followers, the background of our staff and consultants who are helping make things happen for the greater national good.

We start today with Mr Ilaisa Tulele, a senior forestry executive who is currently a consultant with the World Bank. Mr Tulele is the Programme Team Leader for Fiji's REDD+ program and works very closely with the Ministry of Forestry. He has three decades of professional experience in native, coastal and plantation forest development and management, forest harvesting, timber processing, grading, research and marketing, terrestrial biodiversity conservation and protected area development, alternative livelihood programs for local communities, and project development and management.

After serving in the Ministry for over a decade, Mr Tulele ventured into the private sector and then as a consultant. He joined the REDD+ program in 2019 and helped coordinate the remaining requirements before Fiji was able to sign a carbon trading agreement with the World Bank making it the first Small Island Developing State in the world to do so.

1. What work do you do at the Ministry of Forestry?

I am the Program Team Leader of the REDD+ Unit and managing the REDD+ Readiness Project that is funded through a grant issued to the Fiji Government from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) under the World Bank. The project basically supports the necessary transformational reforms required within the Ministry of Forestry, as the lead agency, in readiness for the implementation of the 5-year national Emission Reduction Program, i.e. 2020 - 2025. The project had started in 2015 and I am one of the many successors, having joined the REDD+ Unit in September of 2019.

I've been blessed and very fortunate to have worked under great leaders, who were visionary and inspiring, and played very influential and definite roles in shaping who I am today. So, I wish to take this time to



acknowledge and thank them. Incidentally, many of my former bosses have passed on, but nonetheless, I thank them.

2. What motivated you to want a career in forestry?

Forestry was never my first choice as a career. I had always wanted to pursue a career as an engineer and had done the necessary Bachelor of Science undergraduate training at the University of the South Pacific. In the late 1980's, the Fiji Government, I suppose, was encouraging young professionals to pursue a career in natural resource sector and I was one of four that was selected and offered an undergraduate scholarship to study Forestry at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. Initially, I was on the verge of turning down the offer but it was through my father's insistence and behest that I accepted, and I am thankful. I went on to study at ANU from 1989-1992 immediately after graduating from USP. During this time, my perception of Forestry changed and I realized the diverse nature and vast opportunities that existed within the sector. I've never looked back since then.

The greatest motivation is the changes and the opportunities in forestry in elevating the simple lives of the forest dwelling communities, who really have modest needs.

Forestry had in no way motivated me but it was a career that grew on me and of which I'm proud to be part of.

3. What are some of your memorable achievements in this role?

- Prior to leaving the Ministry of Forestry in 2004, I was the Deputy Conservator

of Forests in charge of Operations. Joining the Fiji Pine Limited in 2005, I was appointed as the General Manager Operations until 2009, when I was then appointed as the Chief Executive Officer until I resigned in 2010.

From 2012 - early 2019, I managed the GEF 4 Project, which was really the first development project funded under GEF.

- The memorable achievement during this period was scaling Fiji's highest peak, Mount Tomaniivi (formerly known as Mount Victoria), which took me at least 5-hours to get to the top and even longer to return to ground-level...a feat I promised never to repeat!
- I accompanied the scientists from USP during the Bio-Rap Assessment of Mount Delaikoro on Vanua Levu, which was really an education for me, particularly understanding the important functions of Fiji's cloud-forest systems as the primary source of drinking water. Indeed, a marvel to behold and worth the effort!
- Through work, I've been able to tour the world in an official capacity, visiting many countries in Asia, Central and South America, Trans-Tasman countries, New Zealand and Australia including most of the Pacific regional countries. The many encounters and experiences are memories that I will forever cherish as it has moulded me into the person I am today.

4. What have been some challenges you have faced in this role?

During my career, the main challenge is relocating due to work and this usually means leaving behind friends and loved ones. But I believe it has been good changes, especially for my children, who have had a better perspective of Fiji's landscape and lifestyle. What I often worry about the most is the different schools they've had to attend, making new friends and quickly adapting to new environment.

One of the worst and most devastating experiences for the family was the flood of 2009 in Nadi when our entire home was submerged underwater and we basically lost everything. The biggest lesson though was understanding what the less fortunate families had to endure and to be grateful for what little you have. The experience also taught me about community and how people, regardless of race and social standing, often forged together to overcome a situation that rendered everyone powerless, like this flood.

Workwise, my current role has been very demanding as ever since I took up my current role, I have been trying to bring the project "back on track" in the shortest possible time available. It has been even more challenging when you're trying to make the transitional and transformational changes from a project framework into institutionalizing a program through the government machinery and within a Ministry.

To achieve this will require the breaking down of the "silos of thinking and mental attitude" and "pre-programmed work culture" that often exists so that all staff, beginning from the top tier of decision making down to foot-patrols on the ground are aligned, attuned and ready to take out the Emission Reduction Program message and prepared to confront and guide the general public during its implementation.

If the Ministry's staff are not convinced, then changing the behavioural patterns of the community and the public at large, will be a mammoth and unyielding task.

5. In your role who are your immediate stakeholders and how well do you work with them in achieving the deliverables for a sustainable forestry sector in Fiji?

The Ministry of Forestry is blessed to have a very active and supportive stakeholders and partners in the form of Conservation Groups, Non-Government and Civil Society organizations, both locally and internationally based.

These organizations have been at the forefront of most of the development within the forest sector and should be commended and appreciated for their unwavering support.

It is also indicative of the global extent of the "forestry family" and the importance of trees, forests and ecosystems, and the various forms and applications through which they impact the lives of individuals, communities and the general public.

The work of the Ministry is basically about fostering partnerships, building bridges and providing guidance along the "straight and narrow path" of sustainable development. We are not expected to carry the entire load, for if we do "no one will be the wiser," that is no one will know what has happened.

The lesson for the younger crop of the Ministry of Forestry staff is to always solicit the support of these organizations when confronted with a situation that is really beyond you BUT never feel that, because of your limitations, whether it be expertise, time or funding, it can never happen - it can and it will, all you have to do is "shake the tree the right way" and see what fruit you yield".

6. What are some of the activities in which you have worked with communities to promote the forestry sector?

During my tenure under the GEF 4 Project, we developed the "WAKATU" Awareness Campaign that was co-launched by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Forestry in 2017. There are lessons learnt during this development: -

a) "Leave the work to the Experts" - I recall that in the past, the Ministry developed its own awareness messages and brands that contained jargons and language that, I've come to realize, only the presenter knew, and in the process, may have confused the audience more than convinced them!

I wish to acknowledge Mr Scott Radway of cChange (formerly Seaweb) that educated me on the "dos and don'ts" of messaging, particularly for awareness raising. cChange guided the development of the WAKATU awareness campaign material and also the training of facilitators on its use.

b) "Use of Local Champions" - this approach involved employing local farmers, community reps and even Sport Icons to champion the campaign, instead of the norm that is government or civil servants. The community reps, when understanding the simple but genuine gist of the campaign message, were so enthused that they volunteered to champion the concept themselves.

The impact of campaign was astounding! Within a year of campaigning, we had secured the formal consent of the landowners for the protection of Mount Delaikoro, Mount Tomaniivi and Mount Uluiqalau (Taveuni) under the Protected Area management framework.

I recall that during the Ministry's Mahogany Plantation Development Program, it took

at least 2-years to secure a mataqali/clan consent. So it goes to show that "there are ways of doing things, then there is the right way of doing it!"

7. In light of the COVID19 pandemic what are some of the new norms or ways of working that you've had to cope with?

The COVID-19 pandemic is viewed differently by many. For some, changing from the normal way of doing business can be difficult, costly and stressful. But I believe that the only one true thing in life, other than death, is "change".

I have been working from home, which has been difficult at first with the children out of school and also at home and coupled with the demands of everyday family life and nonetheless, I've had to make the adjustments.

Thank God for the virtual platform! This set-up works well for my current position, given that the majority of the supporting experts and consultants are based offshore. The demand, however, is the time zone differences. A number of recent and important virtual forums occur around 11pm (Fiji Time), which, for me, means an increase in my caffeine and nicotine intake although it adds to the "effects of the virtual experience", it doesn't do you any good the next day, when you lumber along in a "zombie-like" trance.

The biggest lesson from the present situation is that it makes you think of how precious time is and how fragile life can be and we must all "take the time to smell the roses"... God is Good all the time, All the time, God is Good!

8. What would be your advice to those who want to join the Ministry of Forestry?

In one sentence - take it up and enjoy it!

Forestry is basically a lifetime commitment as one will be looking at the life cycle of a single tree as it takes over 80-years to reach full maturity or its apex during which it would have borne and dispersed seeds for regenerating, a number of times during its life cycle.

Forestry will also continue to play an integral role in nation building, as it has done in the past. Fiji's land tenure system dictates that the welfare, rights and interests of the communities and resource owners will remain in the central domain of all discussions on national development.

So, when you talk about land for development purposes, you are actually entering into the realm of trees and forests and thinking about the interests of people.

In doing so you would have completed the cycle of nation building - so for whatever career path you choose - Forestry will have a place for you.

Forestry in his Genes – Ratu George Vuki carries on Father's Legacy

Choosing a career path in the forestry sector was something that came quite easily for Ratu George Vuki as he grew up seeing his father's passion for work as a Forest Guard in the Ministry of Forestry in the 1950s. As landowners who leased their land for pine plantations, the family's active involvement in forestry was a natural transition. Given this setting, Mr. Vuki, who hails from Vunamoli Village in the province of Ba, grew up around nature - mainly pine trees. Since then, Mr Vuki has not looked back and hopes to continue the journey which his late father started, especially towards achieving socio-economic development for his people and towards the sustainable management of Fiji's forestry sector.

What do you do at the Ministry of Forestry?

I am responsible for managing the Ministry's operations in Vanua Levu where I currently hold the post of Director Forestry Operations – North. I started in this post in January this year.

Before that I was Director Forestry Operation for the Central/Eastern Division based in Nausori since September 2019. Prior to joining the Ministry, I was General Manager of ELTECH (Fiji) Limited from 2015 to 2019 and before that I was General Operations Manager for Fiji Pine Limited for eight years. This current post comes with its share of responsibilities particularly to be on top of things and to be well versed with issues pertaining to the forestry sector, and the national imperatives.

What motivated you to want a career in forestry?

My late father was a former Forest Guard with the Ministry of Forestry in the 1950s and his love of protecting Fiji's forests and helping communities plant trees, rubbed off on me. When I was young, we also leased our land to Fiji Pine Limited and I constantly saw staff from Fiji Pine Limited carrying out their work from planting, weeding and even putting out forest fires. I believe these childhood memories together with my late father's passion for his work motivated me to work in the forestry sector. Today I hold a Director post within the Ministry and I am deeply honoured, wishing my father was alive to see me.



What are some of your memorable achievements so far?

I believe achieving Fiji's national tree planting target of 2 million trees last year and 1 million trees in 2019 is one of the most memorable achievement as I was still holding the Director Forestry Operations – Central/Eastern post. Having to plant 2 million trees in a year is a mammoth task and great team work saw the Ministry achieve this target with the help of the communities, the private sector, faith-based organisations and numerous civil society organisations. We are now making good strides towards Fiji's 30 million trees in 15 years target, which the Prime Minister

Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama, who is now the Minister for Forestry, set during the United Nations Climate Change Summit in New York in September 2019.

The initial national target was 4 million trees in 4 years which was launched by the President His Excellency Major-General Jioji Konrote in January 2019. The progression to 30 million trees was made possible when Fiji's REDD+ programme identified specific highly degraded areas throughout the country. As a Nation, we have now planted over 7 million trees in the past two and half years and we acknowledge the contribution of our key

stakeholders including Fiji Pine Limited and companies in the both the forestry sector and externally for their commitment.

Another memorable moment for me is leading the Ministry's housing rehabilitation project that is currently underway in Kadavu and other maritime islands, and in Bua, following the recent series of tropical cyclones. Seeing the villagers rebuild their homes – and lives – brings a huge sense of relief and satisfaction. I get emotional seeing families moving into their new homes.

What are some of the challenges that you encounter?

With the back-to-back tropical cyclones and the success of the housing rehabilitation especially in the communities that have planted trees some decades ago, plus the fact that Government is actively promoting tree planting throughout the country, the Ministry has been inundated with requests for tree planting in the remote villages here in Vanua Levu, which is only accessible by boat.

Not being able to meet their demands due to communication problems and the location of their villages is a challenge that I am trying to find a way around. The COVID-19 global pandemic has made it more difficult for us to visit these villages due to movement restrictions. The encouraging news is that Fijians are now more conscious of the importance of trees and forests not only for their socio-economic needs, but also for environmental, ecosystems and climate-change mitigating purposes. They continue to request for seedlings to plant on their land. We try our best to meet the demands especially of those villagers situated in COVID-19 non-containment areas. We will certainly reach out to the rest when the opportunity is available.

Please describe your key stakeholders and how you work with them towards achieving a sustainable forestry sector in Fiji?

I would rate the main stakeholders to include the landowners – these are natural resource owners who are key stakeholders in the grand scheme of things. Our staff in the divisions work towards ensuring that resource owners receive proper advice on how to sustainably manage their resources and to avoid having their resources exploited. The harvesting contractors and sawmillers also play an important role not only in driving economic growth, but also in economically empowering landowners. The Ministry is strengthening its relationship with the forest-based companies to help contribute towards the sustainable management of our entire forestry sector.

Recently, we have been renewing the call for contractors to replant trees in the areas that they have harvested. This is part of the harvesting license and the Ministry will ensure this is implemented.

What are some of the activities in which you have worked with the communities to promote the forestry sector?

Apart from the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative we also have the Ridge to Reef Project (R2R) which focuses on reforestation of catchment areas, establishing community nurseries and identifying alternative livelihood projects.

Fiji is privileged to have international, regional and local organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Secretariat of Pacific Communities (SPC) who work closely with Government to support policy and national initiatives through knowledge creation and awareness to enable better land-use practices through all levels of governance.

The R2R project's objective is to preserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience and sustain livelihoods through a ridge-to-reef management of priority water catchments on the two main islands of Fiji. The project objective is being implemented in the Tunuloa and Labasa Catchments here in the Northern division.

Similarly, the REDD+ Programme has seen the Ministry implement REDD+ related activities and sustainable forest management awareness programmes in combination with climate change issues such as carbon emission reduction and carbon trade.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic what are some of the new norms or ways of working that you have had to cope with?

First and foremost, the Northern Division has less number of COVID-19 cases compared to the Central and Western Divisions. However, in ensuring that Fijians in the North remain safe from this virus outbreak, we are currently restricting community involvement in our work and practicing COVID-19 safety protocols at all times.

My staff here in the North also rely on technology so that virtual communication continues with our colleagues in other divisions of the Ministry and most importantly with forestry stakeholders in order to ensure forestry operations continue during this pandemic.

What advice would you give to those who want to join the Ministry of Forestry?

I will never forget the proverb that was eloquently projected in the movie "The Land Has Eyes" that was shot in Rotuma. Essentially, it means the land has eyes and teeth and always knows the truth. It is always vigilant, watchful and knows when injustice has been done to people who own the land.

Bearing this in mind, I believe a good forester is a tremendous asset to any landowner as trees can be an economic asset given their monetary value. But forests also have other very important values that money cannot buy and it is important for a forester to understand the history of any forest, who owns them, and how we can harness this knowledge to benefit the nation as a whole, not only economically, but also environmentally, culturally and spiritually. This in my view is the way forward for the sustainable management of Fiji's forests.

Qualifications and work experience

Mr. Vuki holds a Master of Forestry Science with Honours from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from the Australian National University, and a Certificate in Forestry from Fiji's Forestry Training Centre.

He has over 27 years of experience in the forestry sector having started with the Fiji Pine Limited in 1994 and worked his way up to General Manager Operations/ Company Secretary from 2001 to 2004 before taking on the role of General Manager Operations/Special Projects with Tropik Wood Industries Limited - a subsidiary of FPL - from 2005. From 2011, he was appointed Group General Manager Operations for the Fiji Pine Group of Companies. He joined Eltech Limited, the South Korean company investing in renewable energy. He was the General Manager Biomass until he joined the Ministry of Forestry in 2019.

Permanent Secretary for Forestry Pene Baleinabuli said the Ministry is very pleased to have senior officers of Mr. Vuki's caliber join Government with a wealth of experience from the private sector. Mr. Vuki and Mr. Ilai Tulele who was featured a few weeks ago, together with other senior staff whom we will feature in the coming weeks, are all helping to drive the national forestry agenda which includes contributing to Fiji's economic growth whilst promoting a strong balance with forest conservation for biodiversity, ecosystems and environmental purposes to cater for the current and future generations.

FAO Partners with Government to Boost Forest Landscape **Restoration**



The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is continuing to strengthen its partnership with the Fijian Government, this time on forest landscape restoration.

An agreement under the International Climate Initiative (IKI) Project was signed this week by the FAO Assistant Representative in Fiji Ms. Joann Young and the Permanent Secretary for Forestry Pene Baleinabuli.

The agreement is aimed at restoring degraded forests in four villages in the district of Malolo in the province of Nadroga. The project will see partnerships between the FAO, various Government agencies, and two Civil Society Organisations – the Mamanuca Environment Society and Vinaka Fiji.

Ms Joann Young said as part of their commitment and partnership with Fiji, they will support sustainable and climate-smart practices promoted to help build resilient agriculture, fisheries and forestry production systems in the country.

“Fiji’s forests and coastal areas play an important role in providing

valuable ecosystem services. With over 60% of Fiji’s land area in forest cover. The maintenance of forested landscapes is capable of reducing some of the likely impacts of climate change while essential adaptations are needed in coastal areas to reduce the impacts of climate change for coastal communities,” Ms Young said.

“In recent years Fiji has been struck by devastating climate events while facing key environmental problems with deforestation and land degradation in forests and peripheries of forest frontiers.”

She added poor agriculture and forestry practices in the past have contributed to degradation of agricultural lands and their productivity in the vicious cycle of resource depletion and land degradation.

“In order to combat climate change, Forest and Landscape Restoration is a very important eco-system based option,” Ms Young said.

Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Mr Pene Baleinabuli said the IKI Project will support Fiji’s

commitment for Forest Landscape Restoration.

“The project is aligned with strategies developed to reach the goals for sustainable development defined by Fiji at the international, regional and national levels. This focuses specifically on sustainable and climate smart practices promoted to help build resilient agriculture, fisheries and forestry production systems,” he said.

The project is an initiative of the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) that has been financing climate and biodiversity projects, in developing and newly industrialising countries, as well as in countries in transition. The Initiative places clear emphasis on climate change mitigation and adaptation; conserving natural carbon sinks with a focus on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and conserving biological diversity.

In the funding area for conserving natural carbon sinks, the Initiative supports partner countries in particular in implementing the international

mechanism for REDD+ in developing countries as well as projects to support the approach of Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) as part of the Bonn Challenge; especially within the framework of the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The IKI funding represents a great opportunity to support Fiji's commitment towards climate change mitigation and the reduction of land degradation.

The total budget of the Project is 4.8 million Euros which is for three regions, six countries and a global component over a four-year period. Of the 1.5 million Euros allocated for the Pacific Islands, 450,000 Euros is targeted for Fiji. 345,000 Euros is to be given by FAO to Fijian partners through Letters of Agreements and the remaining funds are dedicated to coordination and technical assistance provided by FAO.

Whilst thanking the project partners at the signing ceremony, Mr. Baleinabuli said the agreement is yet another indication of Fiji's continuing efforts to progress commitments towards the various international conventions and treaties it is a signatory to.

"These include but are not limited to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), among others."

He added these conventions and treaties are embedded in Fiji's national strategic documents including the National Development Plan (5 Year and 20 Year), National Adaptation Plan (2018), and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2017-2024).

"I am also pleased to state that these plans form the basis for the Ministry of Forestry's Strategic Development and Operational Plans and which we are amending to cater for the new normal brought on by COVID-19," Mr Baleinabuli said.

The IKI Project is expected to benefit approximately 3,000 individuals from ten villages in the Yasawas and Mamanucas through the implementation of the following activities:

- (i) appropriate training and support provided towards income generating activities to reduce poverty and generate rural employment;
- (ii) introduction and supply of resilient crops as well as revitalisation of traditional knowledge and practices for food and nutrition security and build community resilience;
- (iii) restoration of up to 400 hectares of degraded ecosystem with approximately 108,000 multifunctional and diverse seedlings, under agro-forestry, enrichment, afforestation,

reforestation, coastal and mangrove restoration and plantation systems;

(iv) conservation of endangered crested iguana through rehabilitation and restoration of breeding and feeding ground; and

(v) empowerment of community members, especially the inclusion and engagement of women, youth and children on sustainable land management.

Mamanuca Environment Society Project Manager Mrs Marica Vakacola said villagers of Tavua, Yanuca, Solevu and Yaro will now progress with their reforestation efforts as they have been encouraged to conserve their natural resources beginning from the ridges to the reefs.


"Our target is to reforest 160 hectares of degraded land in the district of Malolo in the next three years and after thorough consultation with villagers they now realize that climate change is real and they need to act now," Mrs Vakacola said.

Mrs Vakacola added majority of villagers in the district laid off work in the tourism sector due to COVID-19 will benefit from this project as funds will economically empower them as they participate in forest restoration efforts in their district.



Ministry of Forestry staff, FAO representatives and forestry stakeholders at the IKI Project agreement signing on Wednesday

Protect Our Future, Plant a Tree

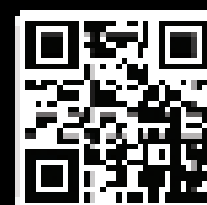


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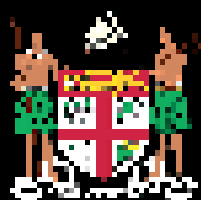


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