



Forestry Focus

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Tuiwainunu an inspiration to all Fijians

When there is a will, there is a way 80 year-old Isikeli Tuiwainunu of Kanakana Village in Tunuloo, Cakaudrove with his seedlings

Isikeli Tuiwainunu is an inspiration to all Fijians, giving a message of hope, insight and courage to persevere, to plant, nurture and grow trees which to him represents life, growth, peace and nature.

In the face of unprecedented challenges faced by the nation, his solution is simple-plant and grow trees.

The eighty year old, Kanakana villager from the district of Tunuloo in Cakaudrove which is 82 kilometres from Savusavu Town has since last year started a nursery, potting sandalwood, vesi and other native tree species and fruit trees which he intends to sell to the Ministry of Forestry.

Despite being paralysed from the waist down due to an accident almost twenty years ago, Mr Tuiwainunu has continued to lead an active life. The avid gardener is encouraged by the

efforts of the current Government and the Ministry of Forestry and hopes that his nursery will contribute positively to the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative.

A nature enthusiast, Mr Tuiwainunu has watched lush forests disappeared to make way for the development of roads, bridges and the construction of homes and buildings, not only in his hometown but across Fiji.

While he perceives development as a positive step because it allows us to progress as a nation, the former civil servant, said that while development has taken shape previous Governments have forgotten to restock natural resources that have been removed over the years to make way for urbanization, agriculture and infrastructural development.

"While we sacrifice nature to give way for development, we should also be thinking of ways and means to

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replace what we have lost in terms of our natural resources," Mr Tuiwainunu said.

"From my point of view, out of all of Government's on-going initiatives, the tree-planting programme is one of the best initiatives because Fijians are urged to plant trees and mangroves for their future generations."

Mr Tuiwainunu, keeps tabs on local, regional and world news and is confident that nature-based solutions can help us solve our problems.

"With the COVID-19 global pandemic, I believe we in Fiji are very lucky as we have access to nature and fresh produce for food.

A team from the Ministry of Forestry had visited Mr Tuiwainunu's nursery and advised him they would return

once his seedlings reached a certain height whereby they would purchase them.

"Not only am I giving back to nature, but Government is also economically empowering me by purchasing the seedlings and this is a win-win situation for me," Mr Tuiwainunu said. The recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Assessment Report 2020 states that forest areas continue to decline at an alarming rate, protected areas are not concentrated in sites known for their biological diversity and species remain threatened with extinction.

The report further states that surging wildlife crime, land use changes such as deforestation, and habitat encroachment are primary pathways of transmission for emerging infectious diseases, including

COVID-19, threatening public health and the world economy.

Minister of Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu said Government is doing its best in terms of building back better.

"The Ministry of Forestry has identified 20 degraded sites around Fiji and Tunuloa District is one of them. The degradation of forest areas is caused by un-sustainable harvesting practices, which were not monitored for corrective actions to be taken."

"The degradation and loss of forests threaten the survival of many species, and they reduce the ability of forests to provide essential services such as clean air and water, healthy soils for agriculture and climate regulation," Minister Naiqamu said.

Tree Survival A Priority

Fiji's tree-planting initiative must be seen from a broader perspective where the priorities include the planting of the right tree at the right place at the right time and ensuring that the newly planted tree is nurtured, protected and grown. This is the only way we can achieve the ultimate goal of tree-planting to protect the environment and address climate change, enhance biodiversity and facilitate socio-economic development.

These were the sentiments echoed by the Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu as he visited the Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) sites in the Ba Catchment Area in the last week of September. Minister Naiqamu visited the villages of Tokoni, Mare and Nanoko in the district of Navatusila in the Nadroga/Navosa Province. He was



accompanied by staff from the Ministry and a representative from the SPC.

"Government, through my Ministry, along with the combined efforts of Fijians and visitors alike have planted 2.3 million trees since the initiative was launched last year. But, we have to ensure that these trees are monitored and most

importantly that they survive so that we can benefit from their full potential as we mitigate the impacts of climate change," Minister Naiqamu said.

The Ministry of Forestry is one of the implementing agencies with the R2R Project which is funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and administered

by the Pacific Community (SPC) through the Ministry of Environment.

"My visit around the Ba Catchment Area was to see the tree planting activities that has been carried out so far by Forestry officials and members of the community district of Navatusila," he said.

He said he is pleased that native and fruit trees planted at the Ba Catchment Area are growing well which means that villagers will have trees that will cater for both their timber needs and food security in the years to come.

"I am also happy to see that my Ministry and SPC have engaged members of the community to help plant trees and also incorporate agroforestry plantations. Sandalwood trees and fruits like pineapple are growing very well in some sites," Minister Naiqamu said.

"The inclusion and active participation of the communities gives them a sense of ownership that the trees they plant belong to them and these will benefit both them and their future generations."

Tokoni village headman Mr Luke Ceva said Fiji's tree planting initiative coordinated by the Ministry of Forestry is one of the best and they fully support it.

"There are just 12 families in our village and we have a population of 70. This is because we are part of one 'mataqali' which is Navakaboka," Mr Ceva said.

"We may be small in numbers but we own a lot of land up here in the highlands and we are just carrying on what our ancestors have been doing that is planting and growing trees and more so protecting our forests."

Mr Ceva said because of the lush forest cover that surrounds the village they have never experienced water cuts.

"The trees that were planted by our ancestors were planted for a reason and we are seeing the benefits today and we are happy that Government is encouraging us to continue planting trees in grassland areas so that our future generations can also benefit. We are also grateful to SPC and other stakeholders for the protection of the Ba Water Catchment through the R2R," he said.

The R2R project began in 2015 whereby four selected priority catchments were identified and these include the Ba and Waidina Catchments in Viti Levu and the Labasa and Tunulua Catchments in Vanua Levu. The project aims to cover all activities from the ridges through the catchments and out to the sea and reefs

Shahana Keeps Fiji's Sandalwood Fragrance Alive

Sporting a big smile and her zeal to achieve is an aura hard to miss. Shahana Shain a 28-year-old young entrepreneur who is the owner of Shahana's Nature Paradise aspires to be one of the leading Sandalwood nurseries in the country.

Her story is worth your salt as it teaches us that we should actively pursue our dreams and sometimes, those dreams aren't at the end of a linear achievement track that culminates in a college degree.

Shahana, like any other child growing up wanted to pursue her

education and have a white collar job but as fate would have it, her mother fell ill and being the eldest in the family, she took on the responsibility to herself by making that ultimate sacrifice and life changing decision twelve years ago to drop out of the formal education system at form four level (Year 14) to look after her.

Upon the full recovery of her mother's health and watching her parents hard work to be rewarded after they both attained awards for the Best Beef Farmer for her father and Best Sugar Cane Farmer for her mother, Shahana too also decided to actively follow her dream to redefine and work on her success story.



Fiji's Sandalwood Princess - Shahana Shain takes a break from planting with Ministry of Forestry staff to pose for the camera



Support network - Shahana with her parents and the Minister for Forestry Hon. Osea Naiqamu with ministry staff in the nursery

With the same ideology and following her parents exemplary footsteps - to toil the land and be a farmer, she decided to add a little twist to it by exploring the road less travelled especially for women and that is to venture into Sandalwood farming.

"I didn't want to be cattle farmer or a sugarcane farmer like my parents. I wanted to venture into something different. I wanted to establish my own nursery, a sandalwood nursery," Shahana said.

"My parents did not take me seriously at first but I told them I would leave home and find a job elsewhere if they did not support me in my new venture."

Not wanting their eldest daughter to leave the nest, Shahana's parents gave in to her demands and decided to invest in her new venture.

"My parents supported me financially by buying all the nursery materials from the saloon shade, polythene bags and other materials."

"I was also fortunate to have been advised by officials from the Ministry of Forestry who were frequent visitors to our farm when I started establishing my nursery last year." Shahana said without their support and advice, her thriving 24,000 sandalwood seedlings would have

all withered and died.

Exactly one year after establishing her nursery, Shahana's sandalwood seedlings which are more than 30 centimeters in height are being sold to the Ministry of Forestry at \$5 a seedling.

When purchasing seedlings a major requirement by the Ministry of Forestry is that seedlings need to have grown 30 centimeters from the top soil as it ensures a good survival rate when planted.

The Minister of Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu who was on tour in the Western Division on September 20th of this year paid the young lass a surprise visit to her nursery. Minister Naiqamu visited Shahana with his ministry staff who planted 500 sandalwood seedlings on 5 acres of land in their farm. The Ministry of Forestry purchased the 500 seedlings for \$2500 which is the first time Shahana has earned an income.

"Shahana is paving the way for Fijians and this is exactly what Government through my ministry is promoting through the 30MillionTreesIn15Years initiative," Minister Naiqamu said.

"She is sowing seedlings in her nursery and we are economically empowering her by buying those seedlings and planting it on their

land."

Minister Naiqamu said after 20 years Shahana will reap the benefits and probably will become a millionaire in years to come.

The Ministry of Forestry has purchased another 800 sandalwood seedlings from Shahana which will be distributed and planted in eight villages in the district of Malomalo this week as Minister Naiqamu continues with his 30MillionTreesIn15Years consultation tour in the Nadroga Province.

Feeling emotional after seeing her first income, Shahana is grateful to her parents for their support and also for her perseverance and determination to become someone in life.

"Today (Friday) I showed my younger sister studying law at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and my younger brother in high school that despite dropping out of school I am able to earn an income and become someone in life with the support of your loved ones and determination to succeed."

Shahana hopes to supply more sandalwood seedlings to the Ministry of Forestry as they continue to meet the 30MillionTreesIn15Years initiative and also play a part in

Agarwood Research Ongoing

The Ministry of Forestry is hoping to share its findings from a five-year research on the tree species Agarwood or Alpasita by the end of December 2021. This is after public interest in the scientifically named *Aquilaria* was introduced into Fiji from South East Asia about a decade ago.

Considered as the 'Wood of the Gods', this tree species has been mentioned from time immemorial in history and religious books including the Bible.

According to the Ministry of Forestry's Director for Silviculture Research & Development division Mr Jale Tauraga, people in Fiji have been saying that this tree species has a lot of monetary value when sold to overseas markets after the extraction of sweet-smelling oil.

"We want to clarify this and would like to urge members of the public to await the proper research and trial findings from the Ministry before they invest in the planting of this tree species," he said.

Mr Tauraga said that Agarwood belongs to the Thymelaeaceae family which is endemic to Indonesia and is considered a native tree to parts of South East Asia such as Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

"In Fiji, seeds are believed to have been brought from Vietnam about 15 years ago by a company known as World Forestry (Fiji) Pty Limited.

The seeds were planted in Dama Village in Ra and today the province has the largest Agarwood plantation of approximately 100 hectares," Mr Tauraga said.

He said the Ministry supported the introduction of Agarwood seeds 15 years ago based on the understanding that it is one of the potential short rotation crops that would provide economic, social and environmental benefits to the nation.

"In 2015, the Ministry's Research Division planted 40 Agarwood



Minister Naiqamu and his research staff at the Agarwood trial plots at Colo-i-Suva Forest Reserve

seedlings at the Colo-i-Suva Forest Reserve and is being currently used as a trial plot. With the trees' current annual growth, research findings state that some of these trees should be ready for inoculation (to be injected) by 2023 or 2025."

Mr Tauraga said that based on these findings, Agarwood farmers need to be patient as the current growth and development of these trees may not be what they expect it initially.

"Many people think Agarwood is good to harvest when they have grown 5-7 years when it is not. It takes at least 10 years to grow this valuable species in Fiji as this is when it reaches the minimum diameter for harvesting.

"Like other plants Agarwood plays an important role in greening our surrounding and absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere for climate change mitigation. Due to its economic value it also has the potential to have a negative and positive impact socially and economically."

Mr Tauraga highlighted that the Ministry, and therefore Government, has yet to complete its research findings and so any negative impacts encountered by those already planting will be at their own risk.

"Some of the concerns is that there is a high probability that Agarwood trees may not produce agar naturally as it needs intervention in three forms; physical, biological and mechanical.

"These processes will require the introduction of fungi and the use of chemicals which would have negative impacts on our biodiversity that would

be costly for Fiji as a Nation to contain and mitigate.

"Therefore, I am urging members of the public who are interested or already have Agarwood plantations not to assume things concerning Agarwood but wait for the final research result from the Ministry," Mr Tauraga said.

He said the failure or success of Agarwood is expected to be known by December next year if all necessary research and trials are on track.

Apart from the research trials, Mr Tauraga said the Ministry is currently working with one potential investor who has indicated significant interest on the down-streaming and value-adding of Agarwood through inoculation and oil processing.

"Further tests and research will be done to the 12 year-old Agarwood trees in Dama, Ra and this collaboration will set the platform and assurance to those interested individuals on the way forward in planting and the development of Agarwood in Fiji."

The Ministry of Forestry has a combined budget allocation of \$2.2 million in this new financial year for research and development both on silviculture and on timber utilization.

Minister Naiqamu said the ministry intends to strengthen its research capabilities through smart partnerships with research institutions locally and internationally.

"Research findings will help support the sustainable management of our forest resources, emphasizing the notion that our work must be informed by science."



Raviravi village headman Mr Emosi Qovina in front of the new look Raviravi Village with the vetiver grass and mangroves sea wall

Forestry Supports **Nature-Based Solutions** to Combat Effects of Climate Change

Nature-based solutions use the mechanisms provided by nature itself to offer protection from natural disasters, to help society to adapt to climate change and provide access to vital resources such as clean drinking water. For instance, these could be wetland-related ecosystems to prevent flooding at high water levels, coastal mangrove forests to protect coastal communities from waves, storm surge and coastal erosions and protect of watersheds for drinking clean water and ensure a sustainable supply.

In Fiji, Government's attempts to meet the challenges faced by rural and maritime communities are being met with the promotion of sustainable and innovative solutions as the effects of climate change become more evident with soil erosion sediments getting into the sea, sea level rise and salt water intrusion reaching village taps, and farms.

Concerted and synchronized efforts by Government Ministries like that of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Ministry of Forestry, to name a few, include tree planting activities inland to

avoid soil erosion into rivers and streams, building of hybrid coastal seawalls and planting of mangroves to protect the shorelines.

For the people of Viro in Ovalau, the Honourable Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama launched a village hybrid (Bio-engineering) seawall in July this year. Nature-based hybrid seawalls are a cost-effective solution that will last a lifetime as they have the capacity to adapt more effectively and sustainably to sea-level rise as compared to conventional grey infrastructure approaches.

Facing a similar fate for years, villagers of Raviravi in the district of Seaqaqa, Vanua Levu watched helplessly as the tides rolled in to claim land and displace homes and resting places of their loved ones, and their lives.

While most of the village population have moved to urban areas for education and work, 140 villagers remain. Being innocent casualties of coastal erosion, previous village headmen have sought assistance from Government in the past for this on-going problem but it has been to no avail, until now.

Supporting Government's collaborative efforts, the Ministry of Forestry provided mangrove seedlings and assisted the Raviravi villagers in planting along the shoreline.

Village headman Emosi Qovina said they had initially wanted a protective concrete seawall however he is grateful for the nature-based solution that Government has provided.

"I know that mangroves can help protect against coastal erosion and it is good we have this cost-effective nature-based solution to safeguard us against coastal erosion and sea level rise."

Mr Qovina said the tides have already claimed a few houses and also the resting place of some of their loved ones, but now there is hope in the village as Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu and other government officials led by the Commissioner Northern Uraia Rainima planted mangroves along the village shoreline this past Friday (11/9).

Minister Naiqamu said mangrove forests are some of the most productive and biologically diverse ecosystems on the planet.

"Mangrove ecosystems provide protection from the impacts of climate change by reducing wave energy and storm surges, adapts to rising sea levels, and stabilizes shorelines from erosion. The mangrove ecosystems are also an incredible source of carbon sequestration and storage, and are therefore important for climate mitigation," he said.

Working collaboratively with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, Minister Naiqamu said apart from the mangroves, planting vetiver grass alongside river banks will also help to absorb the overflow of water from reaching dry land as well as halt soil erosion into polluting the river which most naturally reaches into the sea.

"We hope you will see the benefits of these nature-based solutions as these will ensure that you can live without the fear of losing everything to coastal erosion and sea level rise."

Minister Naiqamu said that the Ministry of Forestry will work with other agencies across Government, civil society and the private sector to implement these nature-based solutions in other villages that are also facing the effects of coastal erosion.

Mr Qovina on behalf of the people of Raviravi village thanked the Government officials for not only heeding their plea for assistance, but for also visiting the village to help with the actual planting of mangroves.

"Government is not only providing scientific but also very practical and pragmatic options. It is also listening to the people. It is a real Government for the people," he said.

At the global level, nature-based solutions get increasing recognition as an indispensable part of global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Manifesto developed for the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019: "nature-based solutions are a vital complement to de-carbonisation, reducing climate change risks and establishing climate-resilient societies."



Mr Bukarau (nearest to camera) with USP students on his farm.

Government Promotes **Agro-Forestry** For Food, Nutrition And Income Security

SIXTEEN years ago Niko Bukarau was given 7 acres of land by his dad at Navikiwala in Dreketi, Rewa. At the time, Mr. Bukarau was 41 years-old and a soldier with the Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

"All my Dad told me was to develop the land and that Government services will be available for me along the way," Mr. Bukarau said.

Mr. Bukarau heeded his dad's advice and after building his home, he

started to toil the land by planting vegetables and other root crops which his family now consume fresh from the farm to the table. All surplus crops are sold to provide additional income for the family.

"Late last year, one of my relatives home burnt down and I witnessed first-hand the struggle he went through to rebuild. It was then that I decided to plant trees on my farm and to also learn more about, and practice Agroforestry."

After reaching out to various Government agencies and their different networks for advice, Mr. Bukarau managed to secure assistance from the Ministry of Forestry through its collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in relation to Agroforestry, and increasingly now with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Agroforestry is considered a sustainable and efficient land management system combining crops, trees, and sometimes livestock.

The recent Achieving the Global Goals through Agroforestry report by the International Institute for Sustainable Development states that agroforestry can contribute to food security, increase biodiversity, and combat climate change and more importantly attract policy attention and investment to fulfill its potential. The report presents evidence of how agroforestry can contribute to the implementation of 9 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Agroforestry has the strongest impact potential on poverty reduction (SDG 1) and hunger alleviation (SDG 2), as well as on climate action (SDG 13), and biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management (SDG 15).

Furthermore, the report states that agroforestry can contribute to other goals by improving gender equality (SDG 5) and health (SDG 3), as well as by increasing access to clean water (SDG 6), sustainable energy

solutions (SDG 7), and responsible agricultural production (SDG 12).

"Through FAO, students from the University of the South Pacific (USP) have been coming to the farm to assist with planting native and fruit trees for my future timber needs," Mr. Bukarau said.

Since 2019, USP students have been visiting the farm each semester to plant trees and vegetables.

On the recent Constitution Day public holiday, Alumeci Wara a second year Bachelor of Education student at USP was part of a group planting trees at Navikiwala Farm.

"I am so proud of myself today because I have never planted trees like this, even at my own home. As I planted trees on Mr. Bukarau's farm, I realised the importance of trees, forests and nature as a whole considering what is happening around the world with climate change and the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. All these have compelled many people to turn to natural resources," she said.

Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu said that food security is vital, especially in these challenging times, which is why the planting of fruit trees and the adoption of agroforestry practices is a key component of the 30MillionTreesIn15Years initiative that is being implemented across Fiji.

"We hope farmers will take agroforestry practices on board in order to improve food, nutrition and income security as well as improve their resilience to climate change while conserving biodiversity," he said.

He added that Government is responsible for the sustainable development, utilisation and

management of Fiji's natural resources – with forestry being one of the key resource-based sectors.

Mr. Naiqamu said that COVID-19 stormed the world and exposed the vulnerability of the socio-economic systems to external shocks, and that Fiji, like any other country, is trying its best to manage the devastating impacts of COVID-19 by looking at ways it can sustain the economy and support the livelihood of our people.

He said the Ministry of Forestry has a budget of \$15.7 million this year and with the help from its dedicated stakeholders the ministry is committed to helping the nation reignite economic activities and contribute to Fiji's green recovery that is climate-neutral, resilient, sustainable and inclusive.

In terms of agroforestry, the Ministry has eight pilot sites across Fiji where it is strengthening collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture to determine the best agro-forestry combinations.

In the meantime, the now 63-year-old, retired soldier and agroforestry enthusiast Mr. Bukarau said that he is grateful for the assistance he has received from Government and the FAO, and he looked forward to an ongoing collaboration through Government's extension services to the farmers.



Staff of Tropik Woods pose with their certificates along with Ministry of Forestry staff.

Ministry Assists Forest Industries In **Upskilling** Workers

As part of efforts to increase the forestry sector's contribution to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the Ministry of Forestry recently conducted a three-weeks training on key areas of harvest operations and timber processing to 45 Tropik Woods operators which began on September 7th and ended on 25th September, 2020.

The operators graduated with certificates in Competency Based Training (CBT) in areas of Timber Grading, Timber Preservation and Timber Seasoning.

This training will also allow the operators the opportunity to market Fiji's timber at international standard.

The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) of which Fiji is a member of had conducted a study on Raising the Standards of Monitoring the Technical and Environmental Standards of Tropical Timber Products in International Markets.

The study states technical and environmental standards have become important in the international trade of tropical timber products and that should countries wish to maintain or increase access to international markets, producers in tropical countries need to comply with the technical and environmental standards that apply in those markets.

The regular support therefore of the Ministry is to provide necessary training to forestry stakeholders to boost the quality and production of timber in order to meet the standards of both local and international markets.

Director Timber Utilisation Division (TUD), Tevita Bulai said the operators were trained on grading timber products into different groups - or stress grades as timber structural grading can be performed in a number of ways such as Visual Stress-Grading, Machine Stress Grading and Machine Proof Grading.

"The training is focused on maintaining quality timber standards under the National Timber Grading Rules. Before issuing a timber export license to any company exporting timber abroad the Ministry of Forestry requires to site an original copy of a timber grading certificate," he said.

Mr Bulai said the participants were also taught on timber seasoning which is the process of drying timber to remove the bound moisture contained in walls of the wood cells to produce seasoned timber.

"Seasoning can be achieved in a number of ways, but the aim is to remove water at a uniform rate through the piece to prevent damage to the wood during drying (seasoning degrade). This is done

before any further processing is undertaken."

Timber Preservation on the other hand, Mr Bulai said is the process of protecting timber from fungi and insects attack so that its life is increased. He said timber is to be seasoned well before application of preservatives.

"The workers were trained to adhere to the Forest Preservative Treatment Regulation which guides the standard of timber treatment in Fiji." Ministry of Forestry's Executive Director Research & Development (EDRD) Mr Semi Dranibaka who presented the certificates on September 25th said the training will not only to upskill workers of Tropik Woods but will also ensure the company meets local and international standards of timber processing.

"The Ministry of Forestry under the Government arm offers basic timber industry training to its stakeholders. Currently all basic training under the Ministry are being evaluated under the Fiji Higher Education Commission for accreditation (FHEC)," Mr Dranibaka said.

"These are competent-based training at certificate level which aims to motivate staff to further pursue their diploma or degree at other tertiary institutions like the

Fiji National University (FNU) in the forestry-related field if they wish to. "Employees who have training and development opportunities are happier in their roles and have a brighter outlook in their future with any organization they work for," he said.

Mr Dranibaka thanked Tropik Woods for investing in their staff and said the company will see their return of investment through the increase in productivity and efficiency in the whole timber processing chains.

"The training will also ensure compliance of operations to the Forest Act and meet local and international market standards. Complying with international timber processing standards will make it easier for the Ministry to issue any timber export license for overseas markets."

Mr Dranibaka said the returns in upskilling of staff will not only generate revenue for the company but will also help the forestry sector contribute more to the economy.

He added the Ministry would like to see formidable partnerships with its forestry stakeholders and other government ministries in Fiji and the region – a partnership to foster an environment for healthy economic growth in which workers have the best prospects for employment, earning sustainable wages and lifting living standards.

Loss of Totem Trees A Concern For Villagers

Villages in the island of Ovalau have committed to planting their totem trees to ensure that their children continue to have a sense of identity and belonging to the land.

This commitment came amidst the Minister for Forestry, Honourable Osea Naiqamu's 30MillionTreesIn15Years (30MT15Y) consultation in October. The villages include Rukuruku, Taviya, Yaravudi, Vatukalo and Nasinu.

Vatukalo village headman Mr Maikali Taqa said their totem tree is the 'Marasa' or scientifically known as *Storckiella Vitiensis*.

"When any Fijian is born, they belong to a yavusa or mataqali which also has its links to the fishes in the sea and the trees," Mr Taqa said.

"This link of having a totem tree or fish is a sense of identity for any Fijian and for us here it is a pity that some of our children do not know what a 'marasa' tree looks like." Mr Taqa said the visit by Minister Naiqamu is a blessing as they



Villagers of Rukuruku in Ovalau listen attentive during the 30MillionTreesIn15Years Consultation

will now be supplied the marasa seedlings to plant on their land.

"This will enable us to teach our children about their links to nature and what their totem tree is."

Minister Naiqamu thanked the villagers for their concerns and their interest in planting native trees and other tree species.

"One of the main objectives of the 30MillionTreesIn15Year initiative is to ensure our native trees are being replanted so that our sense of identity with nature is not lost," Mr Naiqamu said.

"We are not only planting these native trees for the sake of our children's cultural identity or heritage but at the same time we are also contributing to them having

a sustainable future. And this is critically important more than ever as the impacts of climate change and pandemics like COVID-19 are collectively placing significant pressure on the use of natural resources.

According to the United Nations 2019 Report titled Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating', nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history. The rate of species extinction is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely.

The report states that the health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend on is deteriorating more rapidly than

ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”

It further states that deforestation and desertification – caused by human activities and climate change – pose major challenges to sustainable development and have affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

Forests are vitally important for sustaining life on Earth, and play a major role in the fight against climate change. And investing

in land restoration is critical for improving livelihoods, reducing vulnerabilities, and reducing risks for the economy.

In their efforts to ensure they provide a sustainable future for future generations, the 12 villages in the districts of Levuka, Lovoni, Nasinu, and Bureta that Minister Naiqamu visited requested to have Nursery Attendant trainings.

The two-day training for each village will enhance their knowledge from sowing seeds to soil mixture and how to properly attend to their seedlings in the nurseries.

Mr Naiqamu said his tour of Levuka was quite different from other provinces as villagers were very receptive and showed great interest during the consultations.

So far the Ministry of Forestry has planted over 2.6 million trees and mangroves since the initiative was launched by His Excellency the President Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote in January last year. Since then Minister Naiqamu has travelled to 260 villages out of the 1194 registered villages in Fiji, conducting consultations on Fiji's tree planting revolution.

Fiji To Promote Bamboo, Joins INBAR

In its efforts to continue Fiji's fight against climate change, restore ecosystems services, and provide alternative livelihoods for Fijians, the Government through the Ministry of Forestry is promoting the research, planting and sustainable use of bamboo.

The planting of bamboo will also be part of Fiji's reforestation and afforestation programmes, which are driven largely by the national 30 MillionTreesin15Yearstree-planting revolution and the World Bank funded programme on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+).

Bamboo will also feature prominently in the sustainable management of non-wood forest products and will also ease the pressure on native forests.

On 1st September, 2020 Fiji joined Tonga as the second Pacific Island Country to become a member state of the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR). Two weeks ago on 27th October 2020, diplomats and policymakers led by Fiji's Ambassador to the People's

Republic of China, Colonel Manasa Tagicakibau, celebrated Fiji's accession to INBAR at a flag raising ceremony in Beijing, China. Find out more about Fiji's bamboo resources and membership of INBAR - <https://www.inbar.int/country/fiji>

Minister for Forestry Honourable Osea Naiqamu said Fiji's membership of INBAR will strengthen local capacity on the uses of bamboo, trade, markets, landscape restoration and income generation.

“Bamboo development in Fiji started as a project in the late 1970s in Vunidawa, Naitasiri with funding from the Government of the People's Republic of China. The project was to explore the utilization

of local bamboo species,” Minister Naiqamu said.

Minister Naiqamu added the project however was not successful due to the lack of appropriate technology, low interest from industry stakeholders and a consequential lack of investments or financial support and changing government policies.

“Now that Fiji is a member state of INBAR, it will definitely have a major impact on the forestry sector, economy, environment and the livelihoods of the people,” Minister Naiqamu said.

He said the Ministry is placing more emphasis on non-wood forest resources due to its magnitude, rotation, potential economic gain



and gender inclusivity. "We have identified some key species like bamboo, candlenut, mulberry tree, and sandalwood to name a few."

"Encouraging bamboo planting as part of a larger landscape, degraded lands could be restored to productive use, thereby alleviating some of the pressures on forests from development uses and providing communities with secure incomes."

Minister Naiqamu said with the membership of INBAR, the Ministry looks forward to the support of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), Ministry of Women and the Fiji Bamboo Association (FBA) to the establishment of the first Regional Bamboo Centre in Fiji where its membership with INBAR will play a key role in capacity building and institutional strengthening of research and development of our bamboo resources.

According to the INBAR website www.inbar.org and its report on its linkage to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 15 - Life on Land, bamboo and rattan play a key role in biodiversity conservation and land restoration. They contribute to SDG 15, which aims to protect terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests and combat desertification and biodiversity loss.

Forest Certification To Generate Economic Activity

Forest certification is not just a piece of paper ensuring forest management certification standard compliance is met but it is a document that can generate income in terms of international and domestic trade in the timber industry.

Minister for Forestry, Hon. Osea Naiqamu said that while the global pandemic caused job losses and the closure of operations for many companies, the Ministry is looking into possibilities of bringing about forest certification for companies in Fiji.

"The Ministry is exploring opportunities of forest certification to meaningfully engage some companies with recovery operations with the hope that this will help re-instate some jobs in the country," he said.

Minister Naiqamu said the Ministry will first work with Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) to achieve its forest certification as they are getting indications from lucrative overseas markets that want to buy their products.

"This is of vital importance because at this juncture when Fiji needs to enhance economic activity - our mahogany plantations are actually mature and ready to be harvested," Minister Naiqamu said.

"What we need is to open up the high end markets and majority of them would like to have certified products which is why we need to work on the forest certification."

Minister Naiqamu said with the \$15.7 million budget allocation, the Ministry will assist FHCL with its forest certification which focuses on



Villagers of Yawe in Kadavu with pine logs ready for their homes

the sustainable management of resources and chain of custodies.

“This will ensure our mahogany products can access lucrative markets which will in turn help increase the forestry sector’s contribution to Fiji’s economic growth.”

Minister Naiqamu said Fiji Pine Limited paved the way some years back in terms of forest certification where they were able to access markets in Japan and other countries.

“We hope to achieve the same fete with FHCL in the next six months as this is not an easy process but with more awareness we know the forest certification will be of great benefit to Fiji.

“So if we get the forest certification right it is a most welcome injection to the economy and to the livelihoods of our people,” Minister Naiqamu said.

Forest certification is a voluntary process whereby an independent third party (the certifier) assesses the quality of forest management and production against a set of requirements or standards predetermined by a public or private certification organization. It is a market mechanism to promote the sustainable use and

management of forests and to identify sustainably produced products for the consumer. Forest certification and associated labelling is a way of informing consumers about the sustainability of the forests from which wood and other forest products were produced.

To label an end-product as certified, both forest management certification and chain-of-custody certification are required.

Most forest management certification standards address a wide range of economic, social, environmental and technical aspects of forest management, including the well-being of workers and of families living in and around the forest area subject to certification.

Forest managers – such as forest owners, entrepreneurs, associations and timber companies – may voluntarily decide to apply for certification and they may do so in expectation of better prices for their products, to maintain or increase access to markets for their products, to improve their public image and to achieve social and environmental goals.

A certification label on a forest product informs potential buyers that the product was produced in a well-managed forest in accordance with a given set of standards.

Furthermore, the Ridge to Reef (R2R) project funded by UNDP and administered by the Pacific Community (SPC) for implementation by Ministry of Waterways and Environment and the Ministry of Forestry has a component on Forest Certification and Verification of Timber Supply Chains for plantation forest where Forestry is a lead agency and WWF is the Implementer.


The Ridge to Reef project, launched in 2016, aims to preserve biodiversity, provide 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.

One of its main goals is to ensure an integrated approach to land, water, forest, biodiversity, and coastal resource management in a way that helps reduce poverty and support sustainable livelihoods in local communities.

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

Simply

1. Download a QR Code reader app.
2. Scan this QR code every time you plant a tree so it adds to our national tally.
3. Log onto www.forestry.gov.fj for updates.



Follow us on



and help us trend

#30MT15Y



**For more information contact telephone 3301611
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