



Sandalwood – a fragrant tree with great potential

The Sandalwood trade in Fiji dates back to the 1700s when Europeans first began trading with Fijians. In the early 1800s there were major trade imbalances developing between China and Great Britain, due largely to Britain's newly acquired taste for tea drinking. Sandalwood was one of the few commodities of high value that China was interested in trading with the West. The increased demand for the fragrant wood almost drove the wild "yasi" populations to extinction, thus bringing an end to the trade in 1816.

High value tree

The first South Pacific sandalwood species to be exploited was *Santalum yasi*, also known as Yasi ni Viti which grew naturally in certain parts of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and few islands in the maritime zone including Kadavu, Lakeba, Ono-i-Lau, Vanuabalavu and Oneata.

The selling price at that time was unspecified. However, it is estimated to have been approximately FJD

\$2 per kilogram. The price of Sandalwood now ranges from \$100 to \$120 per kilogram. An auction about five years ago saw the price shooting up to slightly more than \$300 per kilogram. The owner of the sandalwood tree that was auctioned received a hefty \$60,000 for his 40-year old tree.

Due to the high value and great potential of this natural resource, the Fijian Government through the Ministry of Forestry has been working with development partners and research institutions on sandalwood conservation and development programmes to ensure preservation of its genetic base and the long-term sustainability of the industry.

In 1996, the Ministry began conducting conservation programmes with assistance from the AUS-Aid funded South Pacific Regional Initiative on Forest Genetic Resources (SPRIG) project to develop techniques on methods of growing

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S. album and S. hybrid yasi and to also re-establish santalum yasi (Yasi ni Viti) plantations. To this end, the Ministry has thus been supplying seedlings to communities and individuals interested in growing and selling yasi as a source of income. Since 2011, the Fijian Government has continued to promote the expansion of a sandalwood footprint outside the sandalwood areas of these 3 species. These conservation efforts have progressed from having sandalwood growing in selected parts of the country in the past to a now widely grown tree in other provinces and districts.

Interest from communities

The interest and demand in sandalwood planting is overwhelming as shown by individuals, communities, schools, church groups and others. To date, a total of 141,511 sandalwood trees covering a total area of 353.4 ha can be found across Fiji. These figures do not include stock from private nurseries and plantations.

As of 2020, the Ministry has developed a database on Sandalwood and continues to reach out to farmers to have an appreciation of the existing resources and to also consider the next phase in the development of this species.

The promotion of sandalwood planting is now part of Fiji's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years tree-planting programme. Specifically, through the Government funded sandalwood project, community sandalwood nurseries have been established thus, empowering men, women and youths

in these communities to develop their own sandalwood plantations and generate an income through the sale of seeds and seedlings.

Multiple Uses of Sandalwood

Sandalwood has medicinal and both traditional and cultural uses. Sandalwood shavings/dust is commonly used in Fijian Weddings to anoint the heads of the bridal party and is also used as a scent in oils and soaps. Globally, the oil is used as a base for perfumes in the fragrance industry.

The Ministry is encouraging people who own or lease land whether native, freehold or State land to invest in Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) plantations like sandalwood to ease the pressure on our native forests.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) defines NTFP as forest products consisting of goods of biological origin including fuelwood and small woods, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests.

Future Projections

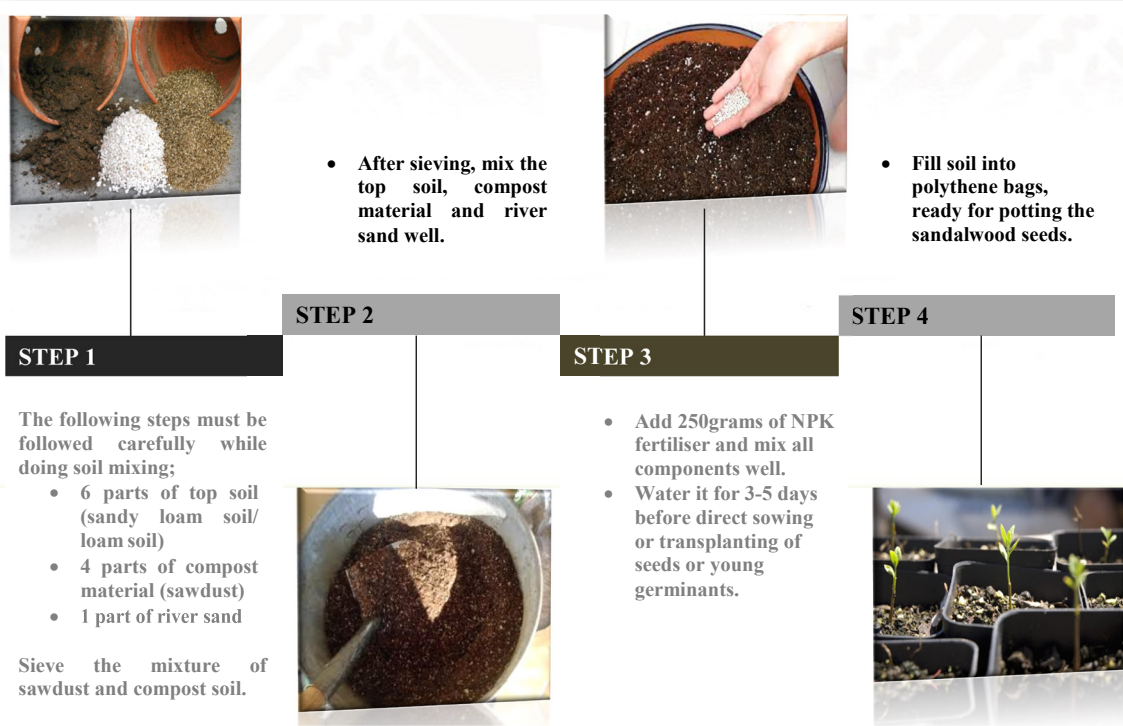
- Fiji is expecting a huge harvest of sandalwood in 2030. The last major export of 511 metric tons was in 2006-2008. Knowing our sandalwood and its socio-economic and environmental value, the Ministry is investing in the following sandalwood research areas:
- Valuation of sandalwood species (heartwood variation) by different age groups of 5 years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years.

- Oil assessment for the 3 local existing sandalwood species at different age groups of 5 years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years.
- Cost benefit analysis of all sandalwood products such as oil, handicraft/carving and whole sale.
- Establishment of Sandalwood Growers & Buyers Association
- Sandalwood Regulation

This research will enable farmers to know the relationship between stem size, tree height, stem form, taper and heartwood percentage by species, to know the heartwood oil chemistry of different species by age and of various segments of the tree, to understand the maximum economic value of different downstream and value-adding processes, and most importantly safeguard farmers and ensure that they receive maximum benefits from their sandalwood.

Sandalwood can be a medium to long-term investment. Farmers could plant the tree together with other short-term crops. With Government support to re-establish this valuable resource, the future looks bright for Sandalwood as the foundation has been established for a lucrative comeback!

Steps to Grow Sandalwood



Action Against Desertification lays Foundation for Land Restoration



AAD Handover – FAO representative Joann Young and Permanent Secretary for Forestry Pene Baleinabuli

With funding assistance from the European Union under the framework of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), a \$1.6m project on Action Against Desertification (AAD) was implemented in Fiji through the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and partners over the last 4 years. The AAD Project is an initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), [now referred to as the "Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States" (OACPS)] to restore drylands and degraded lands in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific and to tackle the detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts of land degradation and desertification. The project builds on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, established in 2007, which had become Africa's flagship initiative to combat the effects of climate change and desertification and brings together more

than 20 African countries, international organizations, research institutes, civil society and grassroots organisations. Fiji was fortunate to be the only Pacific Island Country to participate in the AAD project. According to Ms Joann Young, FAO Representative in Fiji, the project was in response to a request from the Fijian Government for assistance towards the implementation of Fiji's Action Plans under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Tangible Results

Since 2017, the project has made the following impacts;

- Reforested 1133 hectares of land which has contributed to Fiji's 30 million trees in 15 years (30mt15y) initiative;
- Assisted with the setup of backyard gardens in rural schools and communities with the provision of

farming tools and seeds;

- Provided beehives and relevant harvesting and value adding equipment which has contributed to sustainable livelihood and revenue generation for communities including women and youths;
- Established 35 project sites across Fiji which have directly benefited about 3360 Fijians and indirectly benefited up to 2940 more Fijians in 29 neighbouring sites;
- Supported the ministry's natural disaster rehabilitation programme with the provision of planting materials and gardening tools.
- These achievements parallel some key national initiatives, notably the national development plan which the ministry has adopted in its strategic and annual operational plans.



- This week, at the formal closure and handover of the aad project, the permanent secretary for forestry pene baleinabuli received the terminal report and project assets to support the ministry's on-going forest and land restoration efforts.
- Mr baleinabuli said that the aad project has helped provide tangible results that have benefitted the environment, nature and humanity.
- "This has been a successful project in empowering communities, especially women and youth, by providing them with livelihood opportunities and renewing their appreciation of, and active participation in protecting nature."

It is evident that the aad project concepts and objectives have been adopted by communities as they have taken ownership of the work through the development of women's groups and the birth of community natural resource committees which are locally referred to as the "yaubula natural resource

committee."

Mr baleinabuli said this is a huge achievement for the project, the ministry and indeed for the country as the success of all nature-based projects are dependent on the commitment and dedication of resource owners.

Expanding fiji's forest cover

He said the reforestation of over 1133 hectares of land under the project has added to fiji's efforts to expand its forest cover.

The last forest inventory in 2007 noted that Fiji had a forest cover of about one million hectares out of 1.8 million hectares of land.

Mr Baleinabuli said this is likely to have changed and the Ministry is conducting a national forest inventory to inform us of the current status of forest cover.

In the meantime, the Ministry is working with various development partners to reforest as much land as possible.

"This is why the national treeplanting

programme is a critical development as Fiji ramps up efforts to address climate change through nature-based solutions to protect the environment and biodiversity, while also contributing to our people and Nation's socio-economic development," Mr Baleinabuli said.

"We are indeed grateful to the FAO for projects like AAD which has helped with our land and forest restoration efforts," he said.

"Additionally, the Ministry acknowledges that the project has contributed to the initiation of other projects including the International Climate Initiative (IKI) Project, Global Environment Facility (GEF) 6 Project and the United States Forest Service Pacific Island Forest and Restoration Project.

"We certainly look forward to strengthening our collaboration with the FAO and other development partners, especially learning from the lessons of the AAD to ensure that the new projects are successfully implemented," Mr Baleinabuli said.



Acting Prime Minister and Acting Minister for Forestry Hon Inia Seruiratu and Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli with Forest Sector stakeholders at the Fiji Forest Sector Outlook Study Consultation

Significant Challenges Still Exist and needs to be Addressed: Seruiratu

The following is the address by the Acting Prime Minister and Acting Minister for Forestry Inia Seruiratu at the Fiji Forest Sector Outlook Study Consultation Workshop on November 5 at the Holiday Inn, Suva.

The COVID-19 pandemic had also played a part in restricting our movements, and so we are grateful to the many

Fijians who have since become fully vaccinated, which have allowed us to open our domestic borders, and very soon our international borders.

I would like to sincerely thank all of you for availing yourselves to attend this very important consultation workshop on Fiji's Forest Sector Outlook Study.

The main purpose of the study is to gather information and examine the evolution and trends in key forestry issues mostly in the past 10 years. It is also aimed at providing an outlook scenario towards 2030 and even up to 2050, focusing on reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing the resilience of our communities and landscapes.

An important aspect of this study is that it will provide us with the information of where things are right now, compared to where we really want to be in the future. This opportunity will enable us to analyze possible future scenarios for planning purposes.

As for developments in the past 10 years, Government has produced a number of strategic documents which include the Fijian Constitution 2013, the 5 & 20-Years National Development Plan 2017-2036; the National Climate Change Policy 2018 – 2030; Fiji's Nationally Determined Contribution 2020; the Low Emissions Development Strategy 2018-2050; the National Green Growth Framework 2014; the Ministry of Forestry's 13-year Strategic Development Plan 2017-2030; and the recently enacted Climate Change Act, which sets Fiji apart as one of the few countries with such legislation.

All these documents, and others that impact national life, are all indications of our intentions for the future. Most of the documents reflect our commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and other international conventions. Some documents even plans and commits us up to 2050. I encourage you to draw inspiration from these documents as we contribute to the forest sector outlook study.

Our own assessment over the past 10 years reveal that significant challenges still exist and need to be addressed.

For instance, while more than 50 percent of our land mass is covered with forests – in fact the last national forest inventory in 2007 indicated that Fiji still has 61% of forest cover equivalent to 1.1 million hectares, deforestation and forest degradation is still a growing concern and poses significant challenges for the future of the forestry sector.

Conservation of biodiversity

Similarly, the conservation of biodiversity, and the provision of forest ecosystem services had started to become a priority in many of our development strategies.

As responsible and concerned stakeholders, we play a key role in our own various ways in the setting of policies, resource planning, management, training to ensure the sustainability of our forest and land resources.

Additionally, developments over the past decades show us what our business as usual looks like. Significant commitments, and massive paradigm shifts are needed to create the transformational change that will pave a new way forward that will ensure

sustainability as we move into 2030 and even moreso as we move into 2050.

For this workshop, we will need to address two key questions:

- What will forests and forestry look like in 2030 and 2050?
- What robust actions should be taken to realize an aspirational future for forests?

We also need to decide on the actions required to realize a sustainable future by exploring three scenarios:

- business-as-usual
- aspirational and a future full of disruptions from elements such as frequent and intense natural disasters as a result of climate change, global pandemics, economic challenges and many other emerging issues; and provide options for robust actions that will address these challenges in forest and landscape management.

Your expertise and contributions will be greatly valued, and appreciated.

And this is why I am honoured to open your consultations today. I wish you well and success in your deliberations, and I look forward to hearing of the outcome.

Thank you, Vinaka vakalevu, and Bhahoot Dhanyavaad.

Sapra Revives Family Legacy Through Reforestation

Abhishek Sapra grew up travelling the world. He left our shores some 27 years ago with his parents Dr Sharad Sapra and Mrs. Uma Sapra. Abhishek's father is the former Director for United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Global Innovation Centre and he dedicated himself to the betterment of the lives of children and their families around the world. Due to the nature of his father's work, Abhishek lived in various countries like the Maldives, Iran, Kenya, Bangladesh and India, to name a few. Abhishek always cherished his childhood memories on their family estate in Taveuni,



Abhishek Sapra (right) with Apolosi planting trees at the Kalougata Estate in Taveuni

and hoped to one day return. "My earliest childhood memories are of my maternal grandparents waking me up at 4am and my grandfather putting me on his shoulders and taking me out to the forest". It is memories like these that brought Abhishek Sapra back to Fiji.

Growing Up With Nature

Returning to the family estate Kalougata in Vuna, Taveuni, 12 years ago, was a heart-touching moment for him. The 38-year-old shares that the 80-acre estate has been in the family for over 145 years. "I remember waking up and going out with my grandfather and waiting for the chickens to lay their eggs in the bush so we could collect what we needed for breakfast." Abhishek remembers going into the forest and seeing hundreds of Kula birds, parrots and wild pigeons, orange and multi-colored fruit doves in the daytime and around dusk there would be a cloud of fruit bats leaving their daytime homes to search for food. "In the sea, we had crabs, eels, hermit crabs, sea snails and numerous other creatures which we would collect and snack on while the older children fished in preparation for the next meal." "We even turned to the forest in search of cure for ailments." Abhishek added that when people were sick, his maternal grandmother would pluck the leaves of a tree or scrape its bark and use it to treat the specific illness. "It was a different world back in the 1980s," he said.

A Sore Sight

After graduating with a degree in Public Relations and Advertising from City College of New York, Abhishek decided to return home to Fiji. But, the family estate was not as he remembered. "I was heartbroken to see so much forest being cut to make way for farming. "The estate seemed dead, a long, silent stretch of mono-cropped land devoid of insect life, birds, and

bats." Abhishek added that much of the ground was exposed, cracking dry and where there used to be soil you could see protrusions of volcanic rock. "It was harder to farm kava because the sun would heat up the surrounding rocks and kill the sensitive kava nodes in the ground. Strong winds would leave our older kava plants twisted and damaged and heavy rains would wash away the remaining topsoil," he said.

Rebuilding through Fiji's national tree-planting programme

Abhishek did not waste any time and began work to restore the estate to what it used to be. "To date, we have planted over 9000 trees on our own, which we collected from the existing forests," he said. "A friend of ours saw what we were doing and told us about the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative and we jumped at the opportunity to be part of this as the trees could help us to rehabilitate our property." On Wednesday 15th September, 2021 staff of the Ministry of Forestry delivered over 5000 seedlings including native trees namely bauvudi, cibicibi, tarawau, kaudamu and kavika to Kalougata estate. "So far we have been given about 10 species of trees and have planted over 600 of the trees already. With favorable weather, we hope to plant the entire stock of trees before the end of this year," Abhishek said. Efforts to rebuild and reforest Kalougata Estate has taken a lot of work and sacrifice but Abhishek has not been doing this alone. "I started replanting trees with this lad Apolosi who was 12 years old at the time. He dropped out of school and no amount of persuasion would make him go back. He helped me start everything and I taught him everything I know." Apolosi now manages the estate projects along with the water supply for 200 people living on the estate. "Apolosi and his family are central to my success along with other families

living with us. I am truly blessed and so is the estate which is aptly named Kalougata, which means blessed in iTaukei," said Abhishek. "I understand the success of this sort of project and the idea behind it was mine but I do feel a better story for Fiji would be that of Apolosi and his success through his own hard work to help replant thousands of trees to create a better environment and standard of living for his family and encouraging his family back in their village to save their trees and forests." "He is, in my view, the real future we want to see for our children - one of perseverance, growth and success alongside being the guardians of our natural heritage." "Apart from Apolosi, I employ six locals, who reside with their families on the estate," he said.

Continuing the Family Legacy

Apart from his reforestation efforts, Abhishek also established Vuna Enterprises (Fiji) Limited four years ago. The business manufactures body products like soaps, lotions, balms and shampoo which are hand-made from locally home grown and wild harvested ingredients found on the estate. "Soaps were first made by my great-grandmother just for us to use during the colonial days because we wanted to save money." "Now I have continued the family legacy and at the same time I feel proud to be able to also contribute to Fiji's economy." The products which carry the brand name 'Vuna' are being exported to New Zealand and the United States of America. "My advice to people who think that going overseas will broaden minds and opportunities is that the same opportunities also exist right here at home, more greener and nature-based - all it requires is hard work and perseverance." Abhishek concluded.

*To date, we have planted over 9000 trees on our own,
which we collected from the existing forests*

My Mangroves, My Livelihood

The International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2015 and celebrated each year on 26 July, aims to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems as “a unique, special and vulnerable ecosystem” and to promote solutions for their sustainable management, conservation and uses.

Mangrove forests are essential and productive ecosystems that provide numerous goods and services to the marine environment and local communities.

Mangroves are trees or shrubs that are found in the intertidal zone of coastlines, or that area between the coastal environment and the terrestrial environment. These plants are well-adapted to living in salty and brackish environments, which is one of the reasons that they are so unique.

Fiji has over 45,000 hectares of mangroves which is approximately 4% of Fiji's forest cover as detected by the Ministry of Forestry in 2019.

Mangrove trees are equipped with impressive filtration systems that allow them to filter out salt altogether. Perhaps their most notable feature, mangroves have complex root systems that extend above and below the water line.

These roots allow mangroves to stabilize themselves and prevent erosion to the coastline, and also provide habitat, nurseries, and feeding grounds for a vast array of fish and other organisms.

Yet mangroves are disappearing three to five times faster than overall global forest losses, with serious ecological and socio-economic impacts.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, globally mangrove area is estimated at 14.8 million hectares; Asia has the largest area (5.55 million ha), followed by Africa, North and Central America, South America, and Oceania. Mangrove areas in some Pacific Island

countries are high relative to their land area, such as 12% of the Federated States of Micronesia, and 10% of Papua New Guinea and Palau.

Mangroves are critical ecosystems for promoting and supporting biodiversity. The unique role of the mangrove forest as the interface between coastal and terrestrial ecosystems enables it to provide a wide array of habitats and thus support a huge diversity of species, including terrestrial, estuarine, and marine organisms.

Uses of mangroves

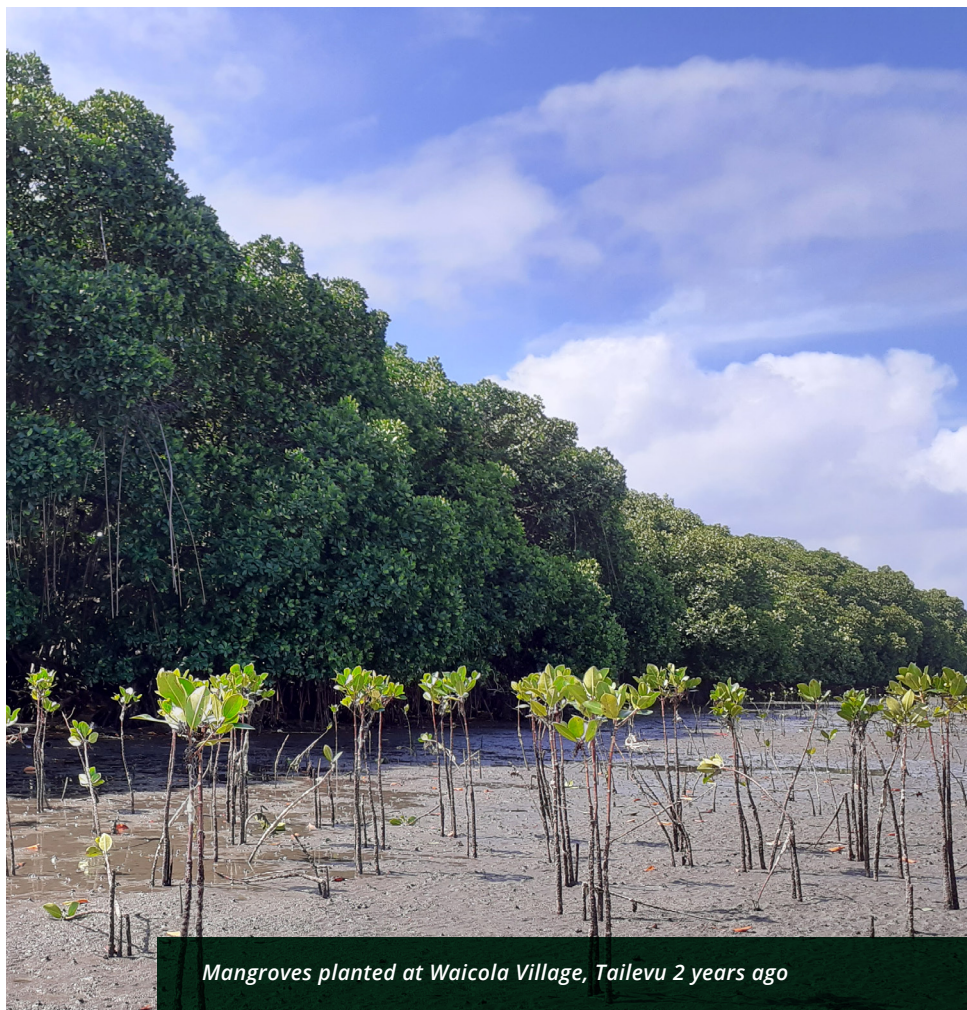
Mangroves contribute significantly to the human wellbeing of the coastal communities that they adjoin. First, mangroves help to provide food security for local communities.

Mangroves serve as nurseries for many fish and other marine species, without which many fisheries, including local coastal fisheries as well as commercial coastal and offshore fisheries, would not survive.

In addition to their contribution to food security, mangroves also contribute significantly to local livelihoods, providing employment for a significant coastal population across the globe via the fisheries and tourism that they support.

Mangroves also provide valuable timber for firewood and construction in local communities. Mangrove forests also provide water purification services and aid in the detoxification of wastes. Importantly, mangroves also provide significant buffering against coastal erosion, storm surge, and sea level rise. It is estimated that mangroves help to reduce wave heights by 31%, protecting homes, property, and infrastructure from dangerous flooding.

Mangrove forests serve a critical role in climate regulation and climate change mitigation. The trees/shrubs themselves, as well as the soil beneath them, serve as highly effective carbon sinks and storage sites.



Mangroves planted at Waicola Village, Tailevu 2 years ago

Mangroves absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere during photosynthesis and are able to store this carbon, often referred to as “blue carbon,” for extended periods of time, in the plant structure and in the soil beneath them. Blue carbon, the carbon that is captured and stored in coastal ecosystems, can be locked away in the soils beneath mangroves for hundreds to thousands of years, if left undisturbed.

Threats to mangrove ecosystems

Mangroves are disappearing at an alarming rate with serious ecological and socio-economic impacts.

In the latest report by the Global Mangrove Alliance, an estimated 67% of mangroves have been lost or degraded, and an additional 1% is lost each year putting mangroves at the risk of being destroyed completely.

More people are living along coasts than ever before and consequently pollution runoff has risen, threatening nearby mangroves which act as natural filters of runoff to the ocean. Pollution may come from sources like urban runoff, agriculture and oil spills and can interfere with the exchange between mangrove roots and the atmosphere and soil. Oil can, for example, suffocate mangroves by coating their roots.

Mangroves are also indirectly affected by the agriculture industry, affected by the chemicals and fertilizers used on plantations that runoff into the environment. Another threat to remaining mangrove forests is coastal development. As coastal populations continue to grow and coastal tourism increases, mangroves are cleared to make way for infrastructure, businesses, hotels, and homes. Development in the coastal zone leads to mangrove destruction. Coastal development can be sustainable when it is well-planned, innovative, and integrates the surrounding ecosystems, livelihoods, and needs of all stakeholders.

Partnerships for the sustainable management of mangroves

In recognition of the importance of Mangroves, the Fijian Government through its various agencies has included mangrove planting, protection and conservation as part of their deliverables.

Specifically, the planting of mangroves is included in Fiji's 30 million trees in 15 years tree-planting programme that is coordinated by the Ministry of Forestry. The Ministry has so far recorded the planting of 421,244 mangroves since January 2019. The Ministry has further invested in software and drone

technology to help map key biodiversity areas including mangroves.

Government is also developing blue-carbon projects of which mangroves will feature prominently.

The partnership among Government, the private sector, civil society organisations, members of the community, academia, and development partners are an important inclusive platform for Fiji's socio-economic development and the sustainable management of natural resources, including the protection and enhancement of mangroves.

The next time you visit the beach, take your time to observe our mangrove forest and you will be surprised at the many services it provides: from preventing coastal erosion to providing food, fibre and medicine.

Let's give back to nature. Take a stand, together we can protect, conserve, restore and sustainably manage our mangroves.

Source: The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Ministry of Forestry



Coastal Rehabilitation...staff of IUCN planting mangroves in 2019



Staff of Fiji Airways planting mangroves at the Suva Foreshore in February this year before COVID-19 restrictions came into place

Knowledge is Power for Forester Shorab – a recipient of the prestigious Chevening Scholarship



Forestry Officer Mohammed Shorab paid a courtesy visit to Ministry of Forestry's Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli a week before he departed for the United Kingdom

Growing up in a small town didn't stop Mohammed Shorab from having big dreams. Mohammed was born in Labasa and grew up with a fascination for geography and computers. It's this interest that mapped his career in Geographic Information System (GIS).

A geography graduate, Mohammed joined the Ministry of Forestry in 2019 as Forestry Officer – Resource Monitoring (GIS) within the Forest Resource Assessment and Conversation (FRAC) unit. The FRAC Unit is responsible for the management of forest information systems and databank, management of natural forests through permanent sample plots, mapping and surveys of forest boundaries and the facilitation of forests international and regional conventions and agreements.

Since joining the Ministry, Mohammed has introduced advanced technology that has enabled the Ministry to develop live 2D and 3D web maps and an online planted areas dashboard which allows staff to keep track of the number of trees planted and locations.

The web maps are integrated into web applications that contain all of

the Ministry's first-hand mapping information which enables senior management to make timely decisions on forest operations.

Permanent Secretary for Forestry Pene Baleinabuli said "this innovation has proved invaluable especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when movement was greatly restricted, but thanks to the maps, management was still able to have access to forestry information".

Another innovation that is popular with Forestry worldwide is drones. As Drones are able to monitor tree populations, landscapes and access hard to reach areas, the Ministry of Forestry has also invested in this technology with Mohammed adding Chief Remote Pilot to his list of responsibilities.

Not one to shy away from challenges, Mohammed was always looking for opportunities to realise his dreams.

Last week, the Labasa native formally started his on-line studies as a recipient of the Chevening Scholarship funded by the Government of the United Kingdom. And he is doing this while waiting for confirmation of his flight to Wales

where he will be studying for his Master of Science majoring in Environmental Conservation and Management.

The Chevening scholarship provides the opportunity for scholars to pursue their Masters programmes in the UK for a year. Successful Chevening candidates come from a diverse range of countries and backgrounds, but they all demonstrate the passion, vision and skills needed to shape a better world.

"I'm grateful to the Ministry of Forestry for believing in me and I know that the knowledge I gain over the next year will enable me to further advance the forestry monitoring systems and conservation".

Mr. Baleinabuli said that the Ministry shares in Mohammed's excitement.

"The Chevening Scholarship is a prestigious and among the highly sought-after scholarships around the world. And to have one of our very own receiving this is such a huge thrill," he said.

"This essentially means that Mohammed has done exceptionally well as an

individual to secure the scholarship. And the scholarship board has recognised the value of his work in the Ministry and the potential for him to add even greater value to Fiji when he completes his studies.

“So, Mohammed and his family will be the first beneficiaries of this scholarship followed very closely by the Ministry and Fiji as a Nation,” he said.

The Ministry is proud to continue profiling its staff who are helping promote Fiji's forestry agenda. We focus on Mohammed this week.

1. Can you tell us about yourself?

My name is Mohammed Abdullah Bin Shorab, I'm 27 years old. I was born and brought up in Labasa and am happily married to Sehana Shorab.

2. How long have you been with the Ministry of Forestry?

I have been working for the Ministry of Forestry for almost 3 years now as Forestry Officer – Resource Monitoring (GIS) and as the Chief Remote Pilot.

3. Please describe the work you do at the Ministry?

My work involves the monitoring, reporting and verification of Fiji's forests using satellite imagery, drones, and the latest available technology. I support the senior management's decision-making process and international reporting obligations with evidence from satellite imagery, drone imagery and ground verification. I also manage the overall drone operations of the Ministry.

4. What are some of your key achievements while working for the Ministry?

I believe that my achievements in the Ministry have been an achievement for

Fiji. Two of my milestone achievements in the Ministry are the development of dynamic 2D and 3D web maps with near real time data and the introduction of drones for sustainable forest management.

5. Congratulations on your Chevening Scholarship. Can you please tell us what you will be studying and how it will benefit Fiji?

I will be studying for a Master of Science in Environmental Conservation and Management Degree at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Wales, United Kingdom. My studies will be mostly around Environmental Management and Environmental Conservation.

I will bring back new and advanced knowledge which will help us conserve and manage Fiji's natural resources in a sustainable manner. This will help Fiji to meet global targets in tackling the impacts of the climate change. My dissertation will allow me to research on the latest technological innovations which Fiji can adopt to help address climate change.

6. The Chevening Scholarship has a year-long selection process. What was your experience like in applying and getting selected for the scholarship?

Through my work experience I was able to identify the knowledge and skills gap that needed to be filled in Fiji. Knowing this and the urgent need for Fiji's development gave me much confidence which helped with my application screening questions. I have very clear short-term and long-term goals and they involve contributing to fighting climate change and to serving the people of Fiji and I believe that the Chevening Scholarship was looking for these attributes.

7. What is your advice to youths of Fiji who will one day take the same career path?

Respect everyone. Have your parent's blessings and in whatever you do, do it for Fiji not for yourself because your greatest success is your service to the people of Fiji.

I would like to thank the Government of Fiji and the Government of the United Kingdom for giving me this opportunity to upgrade my qualification. Importantly, I would also like to thank my parents through whose blessings I am what I am today.



Forestry Officer Mohammed Shorab

*Respect everyone. Have your parent's blessings and in whatever you do,
do it for Fiji not for yourself because your greatest success
is your service to the people of Fiji.*



From left-right Seravina, Lusiana, Nunia and Melaia are ready to put their new skills to good use.

Breaking Barriers – Bua Quartet Undergo Carpentry Training

Four women from Lekutu District in Bua are breaking barriers by taking part in a two-week carpentry skills training for building cyclone proof houses that ended last week in Votua Village.

Seravina Masitabua, 28, Melaia Tabuamotu, 32, Lusiana Kelera, 50, and Nunia Loga, 24, returned to their homes well equipped with new skills to pursue new livelihoods.

For Lusiana, her age and her gender was an issue for her but encouragement by fellow villagers to participate in the training provided by carpenters from the Ministry of Forestry, enabled her to take a chance.

“The two-weeks training was an eye opener for me and I am very grateful that I took part,” Lusiana said. Lusiana, who resides in Votua Village with her parents indicated that it was the first time women were allowed to participate in skills training set aside for males in the village.

Fellow villager Nunia said the training was a good learning experience for her even though she thinks more time could have been allocated instead of the two-week time frame.

“I enjoyed the training very much but I think they should extend it to three weeks or even a month considering the number of participants outweighed the two carpenters,” Nunia said.

Nunia said there were about 25 participants in total attending the training which included both theory and practical classes.

Hearing about the carpentry skills training through word-of-mouth from villagers motivated Seravina to participate.

“I took carpentry skills training at Australian Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) last year before coming to the village and what I learnt here during the two-weeks further enhanced the knowledge,” Seravina said.

“Upon returning to the village, I never thought of putting my carpentry skills to good use but after this training and with my fellow female colleagues I want to pursue my skills further and maybe the four of us can start our own carpentry business.”

For Melaia, being allowed by village elders to participate in the training boosted her morale during the two-

week training. “Times are changing and I am grateful village elders have allowed the four of us to take part in the training as this never happened before,” Melaia said.

“I am also grateful to the two carpenters from the Ministry of Forestry for their patience in teaching us – especially the four of us and yes we will definitely put our skills to good use as we will assist other villagers in rebuilding their homes.”

Gender Equality

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Assessment Report 2021 on SDG5 Gender Equality states that the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected progress towards gender equality.

It further states that violence against women and girls has intensified and child marriage, on the decline in recent years, is expected to increase; and women have suffered a disproportionate share of job losses and increased care work at home.

The report adds that the pandemic has highlighted the need to act swiftly to address pervasive global gender

inequalities. Women have played a central role in the response to COVID-19, as frontline health workers, care providers and as managers and leaders of recovery efforts.

Yet they remain under-represented in leadership positions and their rights and priorities are often not explicitly addressed in response and recovery measures.

The crisis presents an opportunity to re-shape and rebuild systems, laws, policies and institutions to advance gender equality.

The report states that the pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and

threatens to undermine progress on women's empowerment.

More than ever, women are needed as equal partners in crafting gender-responsive laws, policies and budgets to build back better and ensure a gender transformative agenda in both private and public sector spheres.

Carpentry Skills Training - Progress

The two-week training is part of the Housing Rehabilitation Project facilitated by the Ministry of Forestry in Vanua Levu so that people Fijians are empowered with skills to build back better.

The project started after back-back tropical cyclones namely TC Harold in April last year, TC Yasa in December last year and TC Ana earlier this year struck Fiji leaving homes partially or completely destroyed.

The Housing Rehabilitation Project team have so far rebuilt more than 70 partially damaged homes in Vanua Levu and look forward to the support of villagers like Seravina, Melaia, Lusiana and Nunia to put their skills to good use and assist Government in building other partially or fully damaged homes in the province of Bua.

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.**



Ministry of Forestry

Natural Disaster Advisory
from the Ministry of Forestry

BE PREPARED CYCLONE SEASON is from November to April



It is advisable that you check your compound, and prune branches and/or cut down trees that can block roads and/or damage property. You can either prune or cut the tree branches yourself or contact a tree surgeon for assistance.

ONCE A CYCLONE WARNING HAS BEEN ISSUED

Nursery owners are advised to dismantle nursery structures, remove shalons cloth and ensure seedlings are stored out of the rain and strong winds. Those out in the field are advised to suspend operations, dismantle logging camps and remove machines from forest areas.

DURING A CYCLONE

Members of the public are cautioned not to attempt to clear fallen debris by themselves but to contact the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and or the nearest divisional Commissioner's office for assistance. The Ministry works closely with these offices during a natural disaster and will be able to provide support as needed for the clearing of fallen trees.

Stay safe and continue to adhere to the public advisories issued by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Fiji Meteorological Service.



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