



Forestry Focus

Newsletter, January Issue 2023



Hon. Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Kalaveti Ravu (seated second from left), with the Ministry of Forestry staff in Nasinu during his familiarisation visit to stations in the Central Division in January.

More Positive Changes for Fisheries and Forestry, says Minister Ravu

There is much work to be done and newly elected Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Honourable Kalaveti Vodo Ravu says that there is no time to waste.

A former Ministry of Fisheries staff, Mr Ravu knows only too well the goals that need to be met to raise the profiles of both fisheries and forestry in the country.

With managerial experience in the field of aquaculture and agriculture, Mr Ravu says that the goal now is to have less turnaround time when it comes to service delivery.

Steadfast with Government goals

He believes that being a team player will certainly achieve the Ministry goals and the overall ambitions of Government.

"My strength would be in aquaculture and I believe that with over 20 years experience in that particular field, I am able to bring more to the table in terms of developing the aquaculture sector to another level," explained Mr Ravu.

"I have so many plans and one of them is to develop community fish farming. This will empower landowners to utilise their land and assist in growing Fiji's aquaculture sector," added Mr Ravu.

"The same concept will need to be introduced to communities for forestry and I must thank the Ministry for the work carried out so far. Many communities across Fiji have been actively engaged in tree planting

“There is much work to be done, there is no time to waste.”

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exercises and we must encourage them to continue,” added Mr Ravu.

“Government plans to re-introduce activities and programmes that will create an enabling environment for resource owners and all we need now is to embrace the changes that are taking place and move forward with it.”

Fisheries Sector Goals

“The Honourable Prime Minister, Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka has stressed on the importance of the two sectors in Fiji.

“All we need now is commitment and dedication to the tasks at hand so that we are able to execute the mandates by Government. There is so much resources available for both land and sea and this itself is the hope that we need to realise the greater opportunities before us.”

“The marine resources in this vast area can be commercially exploited to feed our people and generate foreign exchange from exports. The resources can be exploited for the benefit of all and in particular for the benefit of resource owners.”

“We also plan to assist and grow our private sector entities and I know that although this cannot be achieved overnight, there is hope for all involved in the sector. Fiji’s fisheries industry has been challenged by unequal competition from larger international entities. In addition to the dormant marine resources, there is huge potential for the development of aquaculture fisheries because of our favourable climatic conditions.”

“To mobilise and realise economic gain from these resources, Government will ensure that fisheries resources are managed well to benefit our industry, citizens and specifically the resource owners,” explained Mr Ravu.

He adds that there will be a review of the current fisheries laws with the aim of tightening the system of monitoring.

“Government will strengthen participation of resource owners in the management and exploitation of the fisheries resources and also ensure that economic gains are realized by our people from the exploitation of marine resources in Fiji’s EEZ, including those engaged through foreign owned operators.”

Forestry Sector Goals

Total forest stock covers 1.2million hectares and this comprises 81.3% of natural or indigenous species, 7.2% of pine plantation, 5.7% of mahogany (exotic) and 5% of mangroves.

“Government is committed to ensure that high value forest products are developed and exploited in a sustainable manner. To facilitate this, the government will encourage the effective participation of resource owners throughout the supply chain system. We will also raise awareness about conservation of the nature among all stakeholders to implement more effective climate change mitigation.”

Mr Ravu adds that Government will put in place the necessary legislation as a deterrence to minimize the risk of burning or misuse of forest resources; and also develop land use policies to conserve forest and other land based natural systems, including soil.

Further Plans

“We have been mandated to achieve our goals and I am confident in the experience and skills of the staff that we have on the ground. All we need now is renewed commitment and a lot of dedication so that we are able to achieve Government’s overall goals,”

Minister Ravu has begun his familiarisation tour with the Central Division offices for both Fisheries and Forestry.

“This will enable me to meet the staff on the ground and encourage them as well on the journey ahead of us. We are here to serve the people and that is exactly what we are going to do,” added Minister Ravu.

Minister Ravu was welcomed by the senior executives of the now merged Ministry on Wednesday and has also started his field visitations.

“I ask resource owners to please bear with us as we execute the mandates of Government and to also support us in the great work that lies ahead of us.”

“Let us continue to grow both resource based sectors and engage more through community empowerment programmes as well as continued dialogues.”



Minister Ravu Welcomed By Ministry Staff Up North

The Minister for Fisheries and Forestry Hon. Kalaveti Ravu was accorded a traditional welcome by the Ministry staff and their families in Labasa on February 10, 2023, during his maiden Northern Division tour. Minister Ravu stressed the importance of civil servants to work together and to persevere in their roles especially in assisting members of the public who seek out their services. He commended the staff for the work they had been doing and urged them to abide by the law, work guidelines and ethics at all times.



Removal and use of African Tulip a Win All Round

The African Tulip tree was introduced into Fiji in 1936 as an ornamental plant. It thrived in gardens due to its preference for moist soils in sheltered tropical areas in elevations up to 1200m.

Unfortunately, it has now become an invasive species that is aggressively outgrowing native tree species and threatening our forests' ability to recover from damage, traditional agriculture and biodiversity conservation.

Finding the best control has been challenging – biological control measures and experiments were undertaken by the Fijian Government through the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the Pacific Commission, then known as South Pacific Commission, but these have had limited success. Individuals currently resort to using chemical and cultural control measures such as uprooting and burning to contain the spread of the species.

Wood Biomass

The opportunity to sustainably remove and use African Tulip as wood biomass for energy production is now offering a promising alternative that can directly benefit agriculture, forestry and the natural environment, whilst contributing to the overarching climate change commitment on carbon emission reductions from the use of fossil fuel.

Wood pellets offer an alternative renewable energy source, replacing fossil fuel, particularly coal. Many coal-fired power plants in the developed economies are increasingly using wood pellets because of its low associated risk, low costs of production and neutral carbon emission.

In Fiji, the use of wood biomass for power generation will help achieve its commitment towards the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the United Nation Convention on Climate Change, particularly in terms of reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels for power generation by transitioning into the use of renewable energy, as per Fiji's Green Growth Framework.

This development on wood biomass for energy production provides an opportunity to sustainably remove and use the invasive African Tulip species.

Korean Investment in the Nabou Power-plant

GIMCO, a Korean Energy Company is exploring the opportunity to convert this low calorific wood biomass species into high value pelletized products for energy production.

GIMCO's first Fijian subsidiary, the Nabou Green Energy Limited established its power generation factory along the Queens Road in Nabou with a \$US40 million investment in 2017 to supply 12.5 megawatts to the national grid while ELTECH, the second local subsidiary company will be engaged in the wood biomass



supply.

ELTECH is currently establishing its short rotation wood energy plantation. However, noting that this will only mature after several years, its immediate challenge now is to provide alternative short term wood biomass supply.

Enter the African Tulip. The removal and utilization of this invasive species to supplement other wood biomass sources such as sawmill wood waste and logging residues for the immediate period while awaiting the maturity of ELTECH's energy wood plantation could be a win-win outcome for all concerned.

Even the landowners who have long lamented the negative effects of the African Tulip, which is known to be spread by the wind and birds, might cash in on the opportunity if current discussions between the company and the Ministry of Forestry progresses into the next phase. The company is proposing payment for the consistent supply of the species.

Forestry Support

Permanent Secretary for Forestry, Mr. Pene Baleinabuli, said the Ministry has recently taken on a more active approach to support Fiji's transition into renewable energy by collaborating with Nabou Green Energy Limited and ELTECH to find alternative fuel supply while also helping with the planting of short rotation wood species.

"We are already feeling the impacts of climate change. Some of our coastal communities have been relocated, and many more are waiting in line. Climate change is a real and present danger. Any efforts towards addressing climate change is crucial. This includes making the transition into renewable energy," he said.

"On this occasion, we have a foreign investor who has injected over 80 million Fijian dollars in establishing the Nabou Green Energy power-plant.

The same investor is now providing an alternative to using the highly invasive African Tulip, which is affecting our arable lands and natural forests. It makes absolute sense from an ecological and economical

perspective to find a win-win, no zero sum solution," he said.

The multiple benefits that can be realised from this programme will be phenomenal and will include employment opportunities as well as diesel import savings.

This will significantly contribute to emission reduction offset of around 120,000 tCO_{2e}, annually.

Managing the African Tulip Trees

A study from a project conducted jointly by Landcare Research (LCR), the Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII), and the Institute of Applied Science at the University of the South Pacific (IAS/USP) indicated that consistent with its status as one of IUCN's 100 worst invasive alien species, the African Tulip tree poses an enormous threat in Fiji. Not only does it potentially displace and harm biodiversity, but it also potentially affects the livelihoods and the Vanua of the Fijian people.

The cost-benefit analysis also revealed that an integrated approach (which incorporates hack and squirt, ring-barking, stump cutting, hand pulling, and mechanical extraction methods to target trees of different sizes and ages) is more cost effective than current management practices for controlling the spread of the African Tulip.

The challenge would be to remove them without compromising the environment they grow in, including soil, water and biodiversity within the micro-ecosystem in which these trees have existed over a considerable time.

The successful eradication of the African Tulip needs to be a collaborative effort between Government through its various agencies including but not limited to Forestry, Agriculture, Environment, the private sector, and the landowning communities including the iTaukei Land Trust Board.

We also need to strengthen collaboration with scientific and academic research institutions to ensure that our solution also include inputs from a scientific perspective." "That is the next phase for us, which we are also activating. We need the science, economics, and the logic, and we need to treat this with a sense of urgency," Mr Baleinabuli said.

Forestry MCS Ensures Checks and Balances in Sector



Forest law enforcement is an integral function of the Ministry of Forestry. In what is better known as the Forest Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) – the project aims to elevate the compliance capacity of forest harvesting practises to balance the socio-economic and ecological forests benefits to all forest owners and users.

Legislation and Awareness

The operations of the Ministry of Forestry are guided by the following legislations and policies; Fiji Forest Act - 1992, National Forest Policy - 2007, National Code of Harvesting Practice- 2013, Rural Land Use Policy-2002 and Environment Management Act-2005.

Apart from these, Ministry personnel work closely with relevant Government agencies and key stakeholders and has formalised partnerships with the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), Fiji Police Force (FPF) and the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) in order to ensure a united front against illegal forest activities like illegal logging.

Strengthening the legal approach to forestry crime in the country, 15 staff members were part of the prosecution and investigation training that was provided by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP) in June 2022.

Members of the public are also empowered to report illegal forest activities and pledge to "Say No to Illegal Logging". Launched a year ago in Labasa, the pledge has gained momentum in the community and amongst key stakeholders who have

made a commitment to uphold forestry law.

According to Forestry Executive Director Operations and Services (EDOS) Tevita Bulai, illegal logging is defined as "the harvest, transportation and purchase or sale of timber in contravention or violation of the national forestry laws."

He further added that "encroachment on forest reserve land is also illegal. Any violation of forestry law is punishable by up to a \$10,000 fine or 12 month imprisonment or both".

Illegal forest activities rob not only the landowners of fair and equitable returns but it also fuels activities in the black economy which reduces Government earnings and economic gain.

Mechanics of MCS

The main role of MCS is to ensure stakeholder compliance with all forestry legislation. Established in 2006, MCS has an annual budget of \$100,000. MCS checks include stamped logs, truck passes, spot checks and harvesting plans to name a few.

Apart from spot checks to contractors, MCS also works to mitigate the adverse environmental impacts of forest harvesting. As such, an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is one of the requirements when applying for a harvesting license. To ensure a balance between extraction and conservation, Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is practiced as contractors have to replant the area that they harvest from to ensure that future generations can also reap the same economic rewards from their forest

resources.

Commercial harvesting in Fiji largely follows conventional practices which allow the removal of all merchantable species in a logging coupe that have a girth of 35cm and above. To boost export demand and open up international markets, the Ministry is working on forest certification.

The adoption of sustainable forest management principles such as reduced impact logging, diameter limit tables and management of large areas of forest using sustainable principles will not only address forest degradation and deforestation, but will also contribute to livelihoods, income generation and employment, carbon sequestration, water, soil and biodiversity conservation.

Stakeholder Compliance

To ensure higher compliance from forestry stakeholders, awareness workshops have been conducted across Fiji. This provides an opportunity for stakeholders to interact with Ministry staff and also learn more about the requirements when applying for licenses and their obligations towards forestry laws and policies.

While the Ministry strives to ensure that licenses are issued within 48 hours, applicants are reminded that the licenses will only be issued once the check list requirements have been met.

To assist with compliance the Ministry provides training. Harvesting crews include chainsaw operators. The Ministry works with individuals and companies to provide this training and also ensure their annual license renewal. Requests for chainsaw operator training are received mostly from communities and land owning units who want to rip timber for personal use e.g. build houses and/or use this skill to gain employment.

Executive Director Bulai shared that "apart from compliance for systems and processes, the Ministry also works with agencies like FNPF and FRCS to ensure that individuals and companies are licensed to operate in the forestry sector as illegal operations not only refers to sourcing raw materials illegally but also to company operations."

Checks and Balances

Compliance in the forestry sector is a global issue. In Fiji, the Ministry is working to address this through the MCS Project together with forestry law and policies as increased compliance will boost investor confidence thus contributing positively to the social, economic and environmental aspects of the sector.



Forestry Partnership with US Climate Fellow Continues to 2023

THIS ARTICLE IS A FOLLOW UP TO THE ONE PUBLISHED ON MAY 17, 2021 AND IS AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. RANDY HAMILTON, US CLIMATE FELLOW ON THE WORK THAT HE IS DOING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY.

Climate Fellows is a U.S. Government technical cooperation program that promotes sustainable land use through targeted technical assistance to selected country partners. The program places technical experts in host country government ministries to address priority technical needs related to national greenhouse gas inventories, forest management, and/or forest monitoring. These experts work directly with host country counterparts to provide customized, long-term technical assistance to strengthen national capacities with respect to forest inventory, forest monitoring, and other systems for tracking and reporting changes in forest, agricultural, and other lands.

Provide a brief overview of the work that has been done since joining the Department in April 2021? Since joining the Department of Forestry, I have focused on the fight against climate change by supporting Fiji's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) program. This program aims to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions from the forestry sector by slowing deforestation; by restoring and conserving forests, which remove carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas, from the atmosphere; and by promoting sustainable forest management. Through the REDD+ program, Fiji will receive payments from international donors for demonstrating net reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through these efforts.

A key component of the REDD+



program is accurate monitoring to definitively demonstrate reductions in deforestation and increases in forest cover as compared to historical levels. Therefore, I particularly focused on helping the REDD+ team improve and also simplify existing monitoring methods, while simultaneously incorporating rigorous quality assurance/quality control practices, to produce high quality data. As a result, the team ultimately produced defensible data with significantly improved accuracy. I documented the procedures and steps for the team's future reference.

In parallel with my support to the REDD+ team, I initiated preliminary work with the Department of Forestry and other ministries to develop an expanded national land use monitoring system. This system will produce maps of six key land uses (forestland, cropland, grassland, wetland, settlements, and other land uses) and changes among them. The data from this system will support the REDD+ program, greenhouse gas reporting for land use conversions, as well as other initiatives.

What challenges (if any) have you come across while doing this work and what would you recommend that the Department do to close this gap? Fiji is on the front line of the climate change battle and is already facing serious impacts from rising sea levels, increased intensity and frequency of cyclones, and increased variability in weather patterns. Forests are critical in the fight against climate change. A significant challenge in Fiji is the daunting task of

protecting and managing the forests with limited financial and human resources.

Although Fiji's tropical forests represent a small proportion of the global forests, they are still very important for the world and especially for all Fijians. The trees in the forests remove carbon dioxide, a major contributor to global warming, from the atmosphere. Despite the critical importance of forests, there is tremendous pressure to cut the trees for timber, agricultural expansion, and various other purposes, which releases greenhouse gases back into the atmosphere.

To provide perspective of the magnitude of the impact of deforestation at a global scale, if it were halted across the world and tree cover increased through reforestation efforts, global net greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by up to 30%. In addition to the contribution of forests in the fight against climate change, they provide clean water, habitat for wildlife, food, medicine, oxygen, protection of the land from erosion, cooling and cleaning of the air, and regulation of weather patterns, among others things.

Despite its limitations, the Department of Forestry continues to champion the protection of existing forests, reforestation activities that increase tree cover, and sustainable forest and land management. The 30 Million Trees in 15 Years (30MT15Y) initiative is a great example of Fiji's commitment to increase forest cover and restore forests in degraded lands.

The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation



(REDD+) program is well underway and encourages landowners to conserve existing forested land, restore forests in degraded areas, and manage the land sustainably for future generation in exchange for financial incentives. Perhaps even more important than monetary benefits are the many co-benefits of improved forest ecosystem services. For instance, restoring forests to degraded lands could reduce erosion, improve water quality in streams, increase fish populations due to better water quality, prevent or reduce flooding, increase biodiversity, and protect coral reefs from excessive sedimentation.

The Department of Forestry is also working with local communities to encourage tree planting, agroforestry and sustainable food production, and

sustainable timber production and land management.

What areas will you focus on for 2023? In 2023, I will continue work already initiated with the Department of Forestry and other ministries to develop the national land use monitoring system mentioned above. Although the REDD+ program has already developed a system to monitor changes in Fiji's forest cover, the Department of Forestry recognizes the importance of expanding its monitoring to include other land uses such as croplands, grasslands, wetlands, settlements, and other lands. This expansion will provide data for a variety of other needs. Understanding the distribution and changes in Fiji's land uses is essential to inform and track the effectiveness of environment and

development policies, guide land use planning and land management, and inform decisions. It is also required for reporting for a variety of international initiatives and agreements such as REDD+ and greenhouse gas reporting for land use changes.

Apart from helping develop the national land use monitoring system, I will help the Department update its methods for conducting field-based forest inventories, which involve sending people to the forests for direct assessment of the forest conditions. Field inventories are needed for various purposes such as directly measuring the amount of carbon stored in the forests, which is important for climate change mitigation efforts. They are also used to determine the value of trees in forested areas to equitably compensate landowners who conserve their forests. These inventories can also help track the health of the forests and the biodiversity found within them. Specialists from the US Forest Service will meet with Department and other stakeholders to understand the information needs and then collaborate with them to update the inventory protocols. They will then provide training to Forestry and other stakeholders.

Finally, I will continue to support Fiji's REDD+ program as it continues to transition into full operation. During 2023, I plan to help the Department of Forestry formalize its standard operating procedures for the monitoring aspects of the program. I will also provide assistance during the first international audit of the program. Lastly, I will help the team generate data for the second monitoring period.

Hoteliers and Communities Boost IKI Project Progress

The Yasawa and Mamanuca islands are popular tourist destinations, and like other islands in Fiji, they are vulnerable to climate change-related risks such as cyclones, storm surges, sea level rise, coastal erosion, transport and communication, and decreased water supply.

With support from the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Ministry of the Environment, the Yasawa (Naviti district) and Mamanuca (Malolo district) islands were chosen to pilot the Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) project. The intention of this Project is to promote joint mitigation and adaptation approaches towards global and national restoration targets and provision of major carbon and non-carbon benefits such as water, biodiversity and livelihoods.

Under this project, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), as the project executing agency, is working in partnership with the Government through the Ministry of Forestry, the Mamanuca Environment Society (MES) and the Vinaka Fiji Yasawa Trust Foundation (VFYT), the project's implementing agents. They have so far restored 62 hectares (ha) of degraded land in the two districts through the initiative using various restoration

options.

10 of the 62 ha that were restored are community conservation areas; 40 ha are remnant dry forest conservation areas; 10 ha are for the protection of water sources; and two ha are for the establishment of household and mataqali woodlots (to be confirmed after the survival assessment).

The IKI Project Technical Working Group (TWG) that met at Somosomo Village in Naviti last week was informed of this when they discussed the status of the project's major deliverables in the two districts. The IKI FLR project's national and community component is implemented under the special supervision and guidance of the TWG.

The project focus includes the following:

- Establishing an enabling environment for forest and landscape restoration in Yasawa and Malolo;
- Restoring 240 ha of degraded lands in Yasawa (however, they have now dedicated an additional 260ha for restoration) and 160 ha in Malolo;
- Enhancing community monitoring capacity for both socio- economic and environmental benefits.

Fiji FLR Mechanism national project coordinator Maika Daveta said the project, which started in 2020, introduced forest and landscape restoration as an integrated

landscape management approach for multipurpose benefits.

The FLR approach is based on four principles:

- a) balancing ecological functions with human developments;
- b) enhancing the resilience of ecosystems/populations;
- c) continuous learning process; and
- d) engaging multiple stakeholders.

Mr Daveta informed the TWG members at the meeting that the progress during the two-year period was challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and movement restrictions, as well as other factors like prolong dry months and balancing priorities, i.e., restoration efforts with other developments such as tourism development or restoration efforts and the water needs of communities.

The project partners, which include Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, provincial councils, research institutions, the Natural Resource Committee (Yaubula Committee) of the respective villages and districts, and, most importantly, the combined efforts of communities, tourism operators and tourists, have stepped up to help the initiative gain momentum this year.

VFYT is implementing the project in Naviti district, while the MES is implementing activities in Malolo district, both of whom are being supported by the Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture respectively.

Support from tourism operators

Fiji continues to advocate for climate action and ambition in the major global discussion forums, not only on behalf of





“Village elders are encouraging youths and schoolchildren to participate in tree planting for their future benefits”

for their seedlings and including their staff and visitors in planting efforts.

Fijians and other Pacific islanders, but also for everyone who is vulnerable to climate change.

Tourism operators all over Fiji particularly in the Yasawa and Mamanuca islands, are helping build a sustainable tourism industry by greening their operations and supporting conservation and community initiatives.

IKI Project TWG chairperson and Ministry of Forestry Forest Resource Assessment and Conservation Division director Mr. George Vuki stated that while they appreciated these operators' help, they now more than ever, required it to boost the project process and upscale restoration efforts to other sites.

“With the tourism industry resuming after the pandemic, labour availability for tree planting has been impacted as villagers are now reemployed in hotels. Visitors to these hotels can also help plant trees to protect some of Fiji's most popular tourist destinations in the Mamanucas and Yasawas,” Mr Vuki shared.

“Village elders are encouraging youths and schoolchildren to participate in tree planting for their future benefits,” he said.

Mr Vuki said that because water accessibility was an issue for raising seedlings on the islands, the communities were collaborating with hoteliers to use hotel nurseries to raise seedlings for their reforestation project. MES senior project officer Ilisapei Narube said that they continued to work with resort staff to plant mangrove propagules to help increase carbon sinks and other trees in support of Fiji's landscape restoration initiative, which aims to plant 30 million trees in 15 years.

She acknowledged the role of tourism operators who have supported the project by providing nursery space

“Our primary project for MES is to plant 160 hectares of native trees, fruit trees, and mangrove propagules in the Malolo area. We haven't yet reached our goal due to COVID-19 and lockdown constraints, but that hasn't stopped us from communicating with the Yaubula Support Management Team in the four villages of Malolo District, who have been working with us in our efforts,” Mrs Narube said.

“As of now, resorts have been very supportive in terms of including staff in the tree-planting initiatives. Some of the resorts will ask us to set aside a date so that their workers can participate in our planting initiative there.”

Involving communities to take ownership

According to Mr Daveta, involving the communities in all project phases has provided them the opportunity and given them the ability to take charge of the effort to protect the environment for future generations.

“By building the capacity of the Yaubula Committee at the community and district level, from planning to hands on practical training such as seed collection, seed processing and propagation, nursery management and data collection on survival percentage and growth dynamics, we are letting community members take ownership of these activities, ensuring sustainability and upscaling of restoration efforts,” Mr Daveta said.

“In addition, with ‘communities at the heart of restoration,’ income generation projects like beekeeping would ensure that revenue generated would finance upscaling of restoration projects as well as financing other village development priorities.”

Mr Daveta added that such other income generation programmes are being planned, which they hope would improve food and nutrition security while also boosting the local economy

in these project sites.

For MES, Ms Narube said that they have IKI plots in the four villages that they look after, with fortnightly monitoring of progress.

“With the capacity building programme, we conducted the awareness programme with communities,

schools and even resorts in terms of spreading the gospel of terrestrial conservation and forest landscape restoration in the Mamanucas,” Ms Narube said.

Naviti District's Women's Representative to the TWG, Asenaca Ratudradra, said the women in the eight villages of her district were serious about planting more trees on degraded land because they were concerned about the effects of climate change and especially clean water sources for the future generation.

“The awareness brought by the FLR project has opened our eyes to the importance of trees and their functions and how we must plant more trees to save our environment, protect our water sources, and protect our food sources,” Mrs Ratudradra said.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Miriama Tubi, Malolo District's Women's Representative to the TWG, who also said that raising seedlings from nurseries, planting trees, and guaranteeing their survival were all crucial aspects of making sure this effort was successful and enjoying doing this in the process.

Meeting domestic and international commitments

Ministry of Forestry permanent secretary Pene Baleinabuli said the IKI Project supported Fiji's commitment to forest landscape restoration for both carbon and non-carbon benefits and that involving local communities must be central to developing equitable benefit sharing systems for forest stewardship and 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. As more investment goes into forest conservation and restoration, social justice and equity approaches can secure long term prosperity for forests and people.”

The IKI project is expected to end in June 2023.

Source: Ministry of Forestry

PM Launches New Guideline, ITTO Videos on restoring mangroves in Fiji and Books on Forestry Development



Launch of New Guideline, ITTO Videos on restoring mangroves in Fiji and Books on Forestry Development

Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Voreqe Bainimarama Speech

Mr Bainimarama spoke at the launch of the ITTO Mangrove Management Guideline, Project Videos and the Ministry Of Forestry - Compendium of Articles on Forestry Development in Fiji Volumes I and II on Friday, December 2022.

Your Excellency the Ambassador of Japan to Fiji, Ambassador Kawakami Fumihito;
The ITTO Project Manager Dr. Hwan-ok Ma;
Distinguished Representatives of the Forestry Sector;
Turaga ni Koro of Muanaira, Narocake, Natila, Waicoka, Naivakacau and Nasilai Villages;
Members of the Diplomatic Corp;
Senior Civil Servants;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening, Ni Sa Bula Vinaka and Kon'nichiwa.

It's wonderful to be with you this evening for both a celebration of what we have achieved together and an affirmation of what we are committed to deliver for our forests and the Fijians who depend on them.

Fiji and Japan are brought together today by a love for nature and an iron-clad commitment to make the preservation of our environment a more important part of our development. Here in Fiji, we walk amidst wonder. Our natural splendour is the great inheritance of every Fijian and -- as we understand more clearly every day -- our greatest defence against the ravages of climate change.

Our economy, our livelihoods, and our culture are tied directly to our environment -- and every ecosystem offers protection against the rising seas, worsening storms, and erratic weather brought by the climate crisis. Our forests are a climate solution. Our ocean is a climate solution. Our fields of seagrass and groves of mangroves are climate solutions. More and more the

world is waking up to the reality we in Fiji have known for generations -- if we protect nature, it protects us in turn.

I want to begin by thanking the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) who partnered with our Government, Conservation International, the Institute of Applied Science of the University of the South Pacific, and the Land Resources Division of the Pacific Community, for a project on Community-based restoration and Sustainable Management of Vulnerable Mangrove Forests in the Rewa Delta.

We began this project the same year in 2015 -- the same year the Paris Agreement was signed. We in Fiji weren't prepared to wait on the world to put the words of those accords into action.

The findings of past projects pointed us towards the Rewa Delta as our target areas for mangrove restoration.

To be frank, it only took one at the area back then to see the degradation due to the destructive demand for agricultural

land and fuel wood.

The driver of that degradation was the same in Fiji as it is everywhere. Our modern understanding of markets and economies only values trees and mangroves when they are killed and removed to make fuel or clear space for farmland. If it stays in the ground, a tree adds nothing to the way we have traditionally measured GDP.

My friends, that is a system that rewards degradation. And of all our forests, mangroves are by far the most undervalued. They are our front line defence against sea-level rise. They create entire ecosystems that supply our people with food. They clean the air we breathe and sequester the carbon we emit into the atmosphere – storing up to ten times more carbon than tropical forests.

To say that they have “no value” is an insult. They are invaluable.

We piloted the ITTO project at six Village sites in Muanaira and Narocake in Rewa and Natila, Waicoka, Naivakacau and Nasilai in Tailevu – my home Province. Under the project, a total of 20,200 mangroves were planted in over six hectares of land. In addition, another 437,250 mangroves were planted outside the six project sites but within the Rewa Delta and including the Nasese Foreshore and the Tikaram Park Foreshore in Lami covering over 137 hectares. Taken together, that is the size of 143 international rugby fields!



This policy has required we be firm and fair in our mangrove forestry management. Firm in that we’ve banned the harvesting and sale of mangrove firewood. Fair in that we’ve helped communities establish alternative livelihoods in bee-keeping, piggeries, water shrimp farming, sewing, and handicraft making while the restoration was underway.

I understand that a series of videos were also produced to document the progress and success of the project over the last six years — I look forward to seeing them. But tonight, isn’t only about what we’ve done — it is about what we are doing next.

The Mangrove Management Guideline – one of the documents that we are launching this evening – was developed to support the communities that rely

on mangroves for their livelihoods to better manage their mangrove forests.

The guideline is aligned to our National Forest Policy, which is a part of our legal framework for supporting community-based management of our biodiversity, sustaining livelihoods and improving the well-being of our people from the grassroots up.

Ladies and Gentlemen, apart from these strategic documents, I am also pleased to launch two volumes of a new collection of articles on forestry development in Fiji.

These articles tell the story of how this Ministry has grown a greener Fiji while creating livelihoods that our people can count on now and for generations to come. Our success is known to the people – we are constantly receiving requests from the public to help restore forests by replanting trees and mangroves in and near their communities. These volumes add to our national knowledge of sustainable forestry management — speaking to why we do this work, how it is done, what it means for our economy, our development, and our future. And they’ll make for some excellent holiday reading, so please don’t leave without a copy!

I thank you all for being here this evening and I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you and have a good evening.

“We in Fiji weren’t prepared to wait on the world to put the words of those accords into action.... They are our front line defence against sea-level rise. They create entire ecosystems with food.”

Natewa Villagers Actively Engage in Reforestation

A recent report from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization suggests that

the world must turn to forests to adapt to climate change.

The initiative “Forest-based adaptation: transformational adaptation through forests and trees,” which was introduced last Saturday (November 12, 2022) on the sidelines of the UNFCCC COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, emphasises how important it is for forests to protect human life and minimise the risks and adverse effects that come with climate change.

“Forests and trees can and should feature way more prominently in national adaptation policies and strategies to reduce climate-related risks and impacts, and help humanity adapt and thrive,” said Tiina Vähänen, Deputy Director of FAO's Forestry Division.

According to this new report, as temperatures increase and the weather becomes more unpredictable, forests and trees will become an ever more crucial part of humanity's life support system.

Water shortages are already severe in many areas of the world and could get worse to the point where they lead to war, hunger, and large-scale migration in the future.

However, the vital function that forests and trees play in preserving water resources and regulating regional climates is still not commonly acknowledged. They help protect surrounding communities from the effects of increasingly harsh weather by providing food, fuel, wood, and fodder for millions of people.

Fiji is not excluded from the global impact of climate change. Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama stated in his speech on November 7, 2022, while commissioning the Moturiki



Water Project, that as the climate crisis continues to wreak havoc across the Pacific and our beloved nation, the vulnerable are bearing the immediate brunt.

“From longer and more severe dry spells, where water becomes a scarce commodity, to brutal, intensifying cyclones that destroy everything in their path – it is no secret that the environment around us is changing rapidly,” Mr Bainimarama said.

This should serve as a reminder to every one of the value of conserving our forests, as water scarcity is now at the centre of global crises and conflict, accelerated by climate change.

Wakatu Natewa Nursery Project Training

Back in Natewa Village, Cakaudrove, Lanieta Vatege, said that a few years ago, the creek that she and other women used to bathe at and collect water for cooking and washing from was gradually drying up and it appeared muddy.

Additionally, they observed a drop in their catch when they go fishing near the shoreline of their village. Usually, their groups engaged in talanoa (conversation) on the changing weather patterns, the challenge in getting access to good drinking water, and the availability of food.

Today, she and her fellow villagers, have now come to understand the importance of forests and how to sustainably manage their land and

forests following a recent awareness and training by teams from cChange and Ministry of Forestry.

When it comes to pursuing community-led initiatives for improved natural resource management through reforestation and afforestation, the chiefly village of Natewa is paving the way for the other villages within the district. The women, men, youths and children of this village are actively involved in activities that will help them sustainably manage their land and forests.

Wakatu Fiji is a campaign to better support community efforts to sustainably manage their land and forests. The campaign was developed with support from FAO and cChange, a local communications NGO. The campaign (Wakatu which means tap root of a tree) aims to promote actions at all levels, and in all sectors, to sustainably use the land and forests, and ensure communities can continue to benefit from healthy natural resources.

Change communications officer, Alumeci Nakeke, explained to the villagers the value of the land, or vanua, to them, in particular the fact that they were responsible for it and that it belonged to them.

“The land is about growing the Fiji that we deserve because the land is life in Fiji. You can plant crops, build a house and support a family. The land and the forests upon it give us clean water to drink, medicine when we are sick, food to forage and materials to build our

house. The land supports our communities, our traditions and our culture.

"However, as our population has increased and our needs have also increased, our resources are being depleted. The symptoms are declining food crops, flooding to homes, lack of clean drinking water, declining fish stocks and less access to building materials, traditional medicines and foraged food," Ms Nakeke said.

The Sovatabua Women's Club, which has 20 members and is led by Ms Vatege, has developed an appreciation for their natural resources and now oversee the daily upkeep of their newly-constructed Wakatu Natewa Nursery Project.

In order to replant land that had been either burned for agricultural purposes, removed of trees for housing building, or logged for pine, the participants were taught on how to construct simple, low-cost nurseries utilising resources (bamboo, coconut fronds) that were easily accessible in their village.

Ms Vatege commended the Ministry of Forestry for educating their village elders, women, men, and youths



sea," she said.

Taniela Taukei, the village headman of Natewa, also shared similar sentiments, saying that sustainable forest management and nursery training had broadened their understanding of the value of their forests for future generations.

"We have potted vesi, dilo, tavola, yasi, teak, damanu and some fruit trees in our nursery and look forward to planting it, also contributing to the Government's

able to take control of reforesting areas that had been cleared for logging and burning, allowing them to restore water catchment areas and improve their community's access to clean drinking water while also reducing soil erosion along rivers and streams.

Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary, Pene Baleinabuli, stated that our extension team was out in the field creating awareness on the Ministry's Reforestation on Degraded Forest (RDF) Project.

Mr Baleinabuli said consultations with the community and efforts to increase public

awareness of the need to reforest damaged forest areas are also making a huge difference.

"As part of the Fijian Government's effort to sustain and improve community livelihoods, stimulate local economic activity and realise the forestry sector economic recovery and economic growth, the RDF Project is partnering with community land-owning units throughout the country to procure more land to establish more tree plantations in Fiji, through the provisions of community incentives.

"The land is about growing the Fiji that we deserve because the land is life in Fiji. You can plant crops, build a house and support a family. The land and the forests upon it give us clean water to drink, medicine when we are sick, food to forage and materials to build our house."

on how to construct nurseries.

"The training by these groups has opened our eyes to see how important protecting our trees and forests are and that there is no need to cut down trees unnecessarily.

"We learned that if we continue to use and abuse the resources around us, we will lose access to clean drinking water, there won't be prawns in our rivers, and there will be less fish in the

national tree-planting programme," Mr Taukei said.

Forester Extension, Josefa Matanagasau, who had conducted the training, elaborated on the importance of our forests, why we need a nursery, how to build it, seed collection, sowing and propagation and how to take care of it.

He explained that once they planted their own seedlings, they would be

"Engaging the services of land owning-units in this programme, will enhance the Fijian Government's initiative to plant 30 million trees in 15 years (30MT15Y). The involvement of landowners in the community incentive programme will increase the geographical area under forest and tree cover in the community lands in the villages and at the same time improve their socio-economic status by creating employment and income generation," Mr Baleinabuli said.

He commended the people of Natewa for their active participation in reforestation activities, which will benefit both the current and future generations.

Bamboo Provides Alternative Livelihood for Communities



For Sukulu Soko, the potential for bamboo is endless. One of the recipients of the inaugural forestry subsidy initiative in 2019, Soko has been using his knowledge of bamboo to identify species and train communities on its uses.

Community Development

Working with the Ministry of Forestry's Forest Products, Trade and Training (FPTT) division in Nasinu, Soko helps communities realise the earning potential of bamboo through the

awareness and product development training that he provides.

An independent consultant and bamboo expert in Fiji, Soko is the owner and Director of Sunnyville Bamboo, a company he started in 2010.

His passion for bamboo started in 2004 when he noticed a bamboo plant with yellow leaves. "I was curious to know if the plant would grow so I planted it in a pot plant and to my surprise it grew so I documented the propagating process."

Through the forest subsidy initiative, Soko was able to purchase equipment to assist in bamboo product development. At the training at Sote village, Tailevu in December 2022 villagers were taught to make utensils and handicraft items.

In Fiji and many other countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific, bamboo is a key part of life and culture and has been used for a range of purposes including cutlery, construction, rafts, and fish traps.

According to Soko, "bamboo is unique in that it matures within 3-5 years so it's a better natural resource for artisans than trees."

Located less than an hour by car from Nausori town, Sote village

is unique as it has a readily available supply of bamboo. Soko and the Ministry of Forestry research team have so far identified 4 species of bamboo including the "bitu dina" at the village.

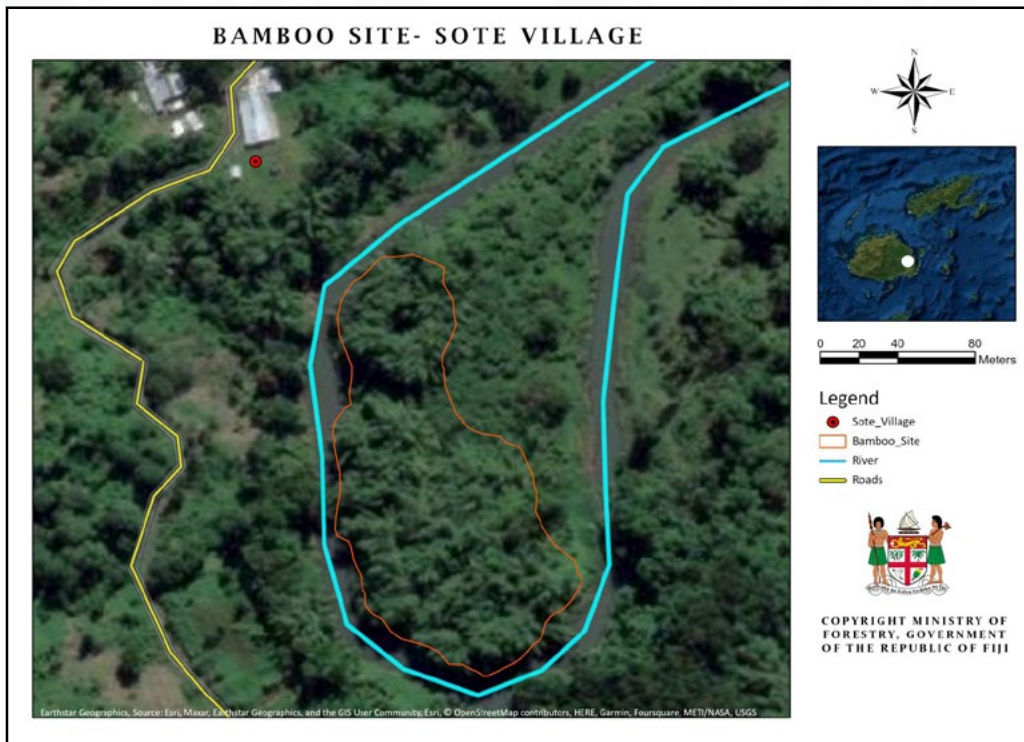
There are reportedly 20 bamboo species found in Fiji, of which only one is indigenous; *Schizostachyum glaucifolium*, which is locally known as bitu dina. The exotic bamboo species were introduced into Fiji in the mid-1800s and have been widely cultivated and have now become naturalized with Fiji Bamboo. Soko is also working on a book in collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry titled "Bamboos of Fiji."

A detailed report on bamboo stocks in Fiji will be available once the 2022-2023 National Forestry Inventory (NFI) is completed.

Local and International Use of Bamboo

Bamboo is a durable material that has been traditionally used in construction. Fijian bamboo bures are a common sight in villages but this material is also being used internationally.

For instance, the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas International Airport, the second largest airport in Europe has



been published by INBAR and is available on its website www.inbar.int for members use/reference.

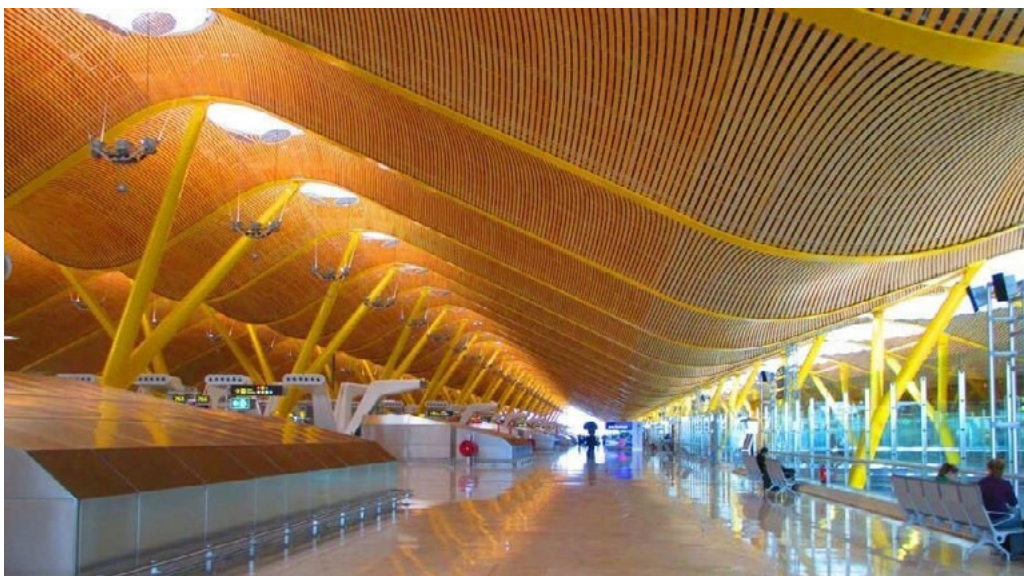
Bamboo Research

The Ministry of Forestry research currently includes exploring the preservative chemical treatment of bamboo where H3 treatment and bamboo samples are being trialed in sample plots at Nasinu.

These H3 treated bamboo samples will be assessed quarterly and reports of their service life/durability will be disseminated once all levels of preservative treatment trials have been completed.

The Ministry's research team is also collecting bamboo species that were previously located at research plot "P25" in Wainibuku.

Acting Director of Research Iliesa Koroi said, "we hope to collect all relevant bamboo species available locally, increase its stocking in our research, and distribute it to locations where we can extract samples/cuttings for propagation as required. We are also working in collaboration with the Fiji Museum, to document, demarcate and legislatively protect (Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Palaeontological Interest Act) a bamboo species locally known as the "bitu ni ceva" that is only found on Qoma island in Tailevu".



the largest bamboo reference project in the world to date. The curved bamboo ceiling in Terminal 4, was added during the renovation in 2005, and has become a landmark attraction for the airport.

Bamboo is also used locally as barriers on Vio Island in Lautoka. In a mangrove restoration project, to protect the island from the negative impacts of Climate Change, islanders use 400m of bamboo barriers to ensure 90% survival of the seedlings. Soko worked with the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) on this project and he says that "the barriers use the Herman design which is 2 layers of bamboo that breaks the impact of the waves thus ensuring the seedlings' survival".

Apart from Climate Change, the increasing demand for biomass energy

such as firewood and wood charcoal has been accelerating the loss and degradation of forest resources. Like woody biomass, bamboo and bamboo charcoal have high heating values and low ash content. Therefore, bamboo and bamboo charcoal are ideal substitutes for fuelwood and wood charcoal.

The International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR) projects and practices have effectively demonstrated the suitability of bamboo as sustainable biomass energy in Africa. The experiences and lessons learned from bamboo biomass energy will further promote affordable bamboo biomass energy to a broad population in Africa.

A "Manual for Bamboo Forest Biomass and Carbon Assessment" has

Bamboo Potential

The proper use and management of bamboo plantations provides ecosystem services, including climate-change adaptation and mitigation. Bamboo plantations create alternatives for rural and small entrepreneurs and reduce the vulnerability of agro-ecosystems. Due to its fast growth and annual regeneration, bamboo can take some pressure off from other forest resources and contribute to reducing deforestation.

Fiji Pine Group Tells of Ambitious Planting Plan

For the company's 2023 establishment programme, preparations are already underway for another massive season with a planting programme target of 8,000 hectares.

The pine industry in Fiji has come out of a state of insolvency through the many reforms undertaken since 2011. The Fiji Pine Group of Companies (FPGC) is a significant operator in Fiji's forestry industry.

The industry has been developing and growing at a remarkable rate for the past 11 years and it has continued to prosper and grow despite the increasing pressures it faces each year from the unpredictability of global chip market pricing, pandemics, and of course, natural disasters. The true partnership of trust between the industry's landowners, employees, and the Government is largely responsible for the industry's steadfast endurance.

The company's tripartite partnership aims to maximise the use of their base resources, which are primarily leased lands, through the planting of

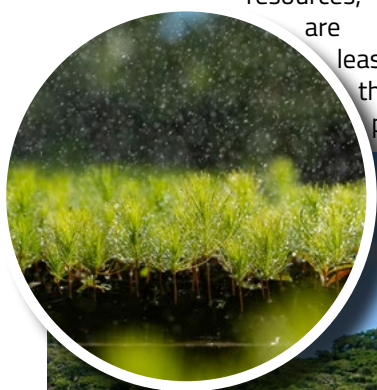
pine trees, the extraction of logs, the production of timber and other products such as chips, and the full realisation of returns by all of its landowning units.

In August this year, Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama handed over lease security bonuses worth \$6 million to landowners leasing land to Fiji Pine Limited (FPL) in Drasa. Mr Bainimarama said in his speech that this payment was an addition to the tens of millions of dollars that had been paid to landowners since they introduced lease security bonuses—making for \$36.5 million in dividend payments to landowners over nine consecutive years.

He said the company had paid fair

and reliable returns to landowners in addition to the Landowner Community Development despite cyclones, a global pandemic, and when the world economy was at its worst.

"...This all continued through the pandemic. Fiji Pine kept paying dividends, it kept employing its workers—even paying bonuses—it kept planting trees, it continued investing in infrastructure, and it even installed satellite internet in remote communities so that students could access educational materials even when schools closed. That, my friends, is a genuine commitment. It shows this enterprise isn't solely about making and sharing its profits; it is about forging partnerships and sharing prosperity with your communities," Mr Bainimarama said.



Ambitious planting programme

Since the inception of the industry back in the early sixties, the silviculture establishment programme and forest protection have been the main focus of the company's operation from the tree breeding programme at the nursery bays to land preparation and planting operations at the planting sites. Encapsulated within are processes and procedures that ensure quality work is maintained at all levels of their forest operations.

Forest protection is the second phase of the company's activity and it requires a higher degree of alertness with all-year round surveillance and protection, and management and tending of newly planted stands until the trees are capable of withstanding the environmental elements.

With the continuous support from the Ministry of Forestry, the FPGC has embarked on an ambitious planting programme.

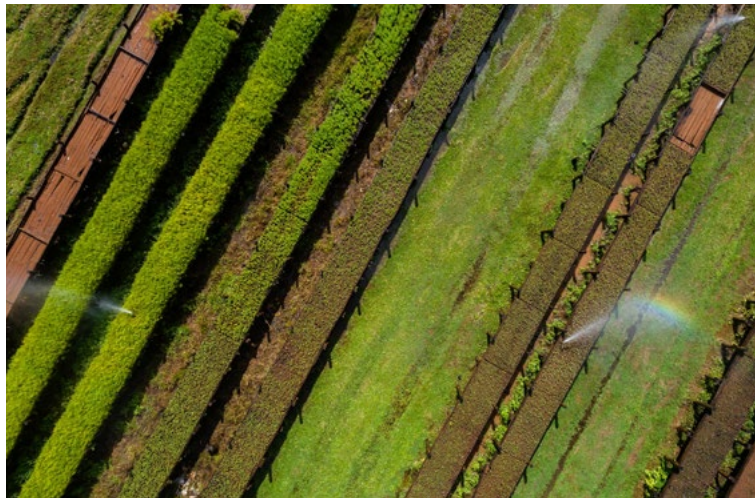
The Ministry through the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF) project, has been supporting Fiji Pine Limited (FPL) in a number of activities. For the 2022-2023 financial year, the Ministry has allocated a budget of \$700,000 for the following; eradication of invasive species such as Acacia, replanting of pine, construction and maintenance of logging roads, purchase of two fire trucks for fire breakers and the assistance in transporting pine seedlings to the planting sites.

For 2021, the FPGC achieved a record breaking coverage of 4,200 hectares of pine – the highest ever single-year record achieved by the FPGC in an operational year. This has pushed the team to a higher mode of planting for 2022 and a new target of 7,300 hectares was set for the team to achieve. To date, the FPGC has set another new record by surpassing its 2021 planting record.

To help with their planting activities, the company has established a new nursery, 'Gaunavou Nursery', in 2021 at Drasa, Lautoka, with a 1.5million seedling capacity.

With the leadership of the Group's chief executive officer, Vimlesh Kumar, spearheading the planting drive with decisive and well-calculated strategies, the team has managed to further its achievements and deliver as expected, most importantly with a strict emphasis on quality work.

Mr Kumar said as a result, the FPGC has now achieved 80 per cent of its planting target or 5,923.22 hectares and 100% of its nursery sowing programme. It is expected that all of the pine stations in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu will continue with their planting operations until the planting target is



achieved by December 31, 2022.

"The Pine Group's planting operations do not come easy; they come with their own costs in terms of infrastructure, tools, logistics and field operations. This is a huge investment that the Group will continue to focus on and it has spent quite a substantial amount of money on its planting programme for the last 10 years," Mr Kumar said.

He said for the 2022 planting programme alone, the establishment cost per hectare was around \$545.64 which was colossal. For the company's 2023 establishment programme, preparations are already underway for another massive season with a planting target of 8,000 hectares.

"All operations are purely funded by the Group and it will continue to invest to ensure that the sustainability of the industry is maintained, our pine landowners are well looked after and our forest stocking level per hectare will be maintained at 95 per cent per hectare come harvesting."

Government acknowledges reforestation supporters

The Fijian Government through the Ministry of Forestry, applauds the initiative by its stakeholders and especially the FPGC, in supporting Fiji's landscape restoration programme. The programme aims to plant 30 million trees in 15 years, but it has achieved half its goal in less than four years.

Forestry Permanent Secretary, Pene Baleinabuli said the achievement showed Fiji's dedication to managing natural resources like forests sustainably to contribute meaningfully to socio-economic development and the improvement of livelihoods for all Fijians who rely on the forestry sector, while also helping to protect the environment, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services, and combating climate change.

He acknowledged every Fijian and visitor that had contributed to this programme and especially stakeholders like the FPGC.

The Ministry assured FPL of its support since they would continue to submit their planting data to support the Ministry's planting programme and thus achieve the Ministry's target of two million trees a year.

"I am very happy to share with you that Fiji as a nation, in less than four years, has collectively planted 16.8 million trees and mangroves – that's a huge achievement for our country. The Ministry will continue to coordinate Fiji's land restoration and tree-planting campaign with the aim of expanding our forest cover, restoring degraded forest areas, and increasing our plantation species to cater for Fiji's timber needs.

"We thank stakeholders like the Fiji Pine Group for taking the lead in restoring our plantation forests, with the main focus being sustainability, which means planting more than its harvests.

"We also thank the landowning communities, schools, civil society organisations, religious organisations, and individuals who have actively contributed to Fiji's tree planting revolution," Mr Baleinabuli said.

FHCL Tells of Export Forecast, Planting Feats and Strategic Plans



Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) is a state-owned enterprise responsible for the sustainable management of Fiji's mahogany plantations in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

The company manages a total lease area of 75,223 hectares of plantation estate, of which 41,325 hectares consist of mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), also known as, American Large Leaf Mahogany, with an estimated volume to produce around 5 million cubic metres of logs processed for sawn timber exports.

The lease area covers 14 stations in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, and land is leased to around 200 landowners, or mataqali. The landowning units benefit through lease rental, log stumpage, and management fee payments from FHCL. FHCL is one of the Ministry of Forestry's key economic players in the forestry sector, which has never been more prosperous, more sustainable, or more important to our economy.

The company collaborates with the Ministry by addressing technical areas including research and development, plantation development, implementation of activities that reduce emissions from plantation forests, maximum utilisation of waste wood from harvesting, trade and product development.

Today's Question and Answer interview with SEMI DRANIBAKA, acting general manager of FHCL, covers the company's operations, contribution to Fiji's forestry industry, and business management.

The forestry sector achieved record-breaking export revenue of \$118.5 million in 2021, up \$41.9 million compared to 2020, and FHCL was a major contributor to this success.

Mr Dranibaka said the company was able to achieve a total annual production and sales of 38,000 m3 with a gross revenue of over \$11 million

in 2021. He added that this year the company forecasted to increase its production and sales to 43,000 m3, with an expected revenue of \$16 million.

This is in addition to the reaffirmation of the company's commitment to attaining Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification of its plantation management. This followed the launch of FHCL's Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report. The report was funded by WWF under the UNDP Ridge to Reef Project, with the Ministry providing technical support and authoring the report.

Below is an excerpt of the interview:

Q: Briefly outline the background/portfolio of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL)

Dranibaka: In 2010, the Government introduced reforms under the Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010 (MIDA) which enabled a framework for restructure of the Mahogany Industry to facilitate and enhance further development for:

- i. The interest of the iTaukei landowners;
- ii. Facilitating an enabling environment for current mahogany industries;
- iii. Also aligning the Company to the Government's reforms under the Companies Act of 2015

The Government also formed the Mahogany Industry Council (MIC) to oversee the function and roles of the Fiji Mahogany Trust (FMT) that looks after the landowner affairs and the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited engagement managing the mahogany plantations under the MIDA 2010.

The six key objectives of the MIDA 2010 were for the Mahogany Industry to be:

1. Sustainable: operated on a sustainable basis for the long-term including a comprehensive reforestation programme;

2. Value Adding: desirability of value adding of Fiji Mahogany in Fiji to realise its full potential;

3. A fair return to the landowners: whereby landowners are paid returns for use of their land and active engagement and empowering landowners to also participate in business ventures;

4. Interest of the Fijian people: the mahogany industry to generate increased employment activities and encourage skills that could create opportunities to promote mahogany utilisation and value adding locally and internationally;

5. Quality Assurance: Maintaining a high quality mahogany product that could compete in the niche international market;

6. Branding: the development of a recognised brand for Fiji Mahogany Timber and associated products.

In August 2020 the Government appointed a new Board of Directors which has made significant progress in a short span of time to the organisation as a whole to achieve good governance, transparency and accountability. This was considered a priority to enable FHCL to operate in a viable business environment.

Q: Outline FHCL's key strategic directions in the next three years

Dranibaka: FHCL is focusing on seven key strategic directions in the next three years:

i. Succession Planning

Identification of staff to fill senior positions, training and capacity building are part of an overall FHCL succession planning process.

ii. Improving genetic material

FHCL will continue to work on improving the quality of genetic materials for its mahogany plantation stock through the constant identification of trees with superior genetic characteristics throughout its 14 stations for the purpose of protecting such trees as potential future seed sources.

iii. Plantation development research

The mahogany plantation is a biological and naturally growing asset. Plantation assets consisting of live trees have a natural risk of deterioration due to natural aging and decay, genetic defects due to inbreeding, including threats from other sources such as natural disasters, pests and diseases. Silvicultural research will be conducted to improve knowledge about the characteristics of the



second rotation crop in order to improve its management prescriptions. Management strategies will have to take into account the risks of loss due to various natural disasters and biological threats, and improve plantation management strategies to minimise these threats.

iv. Diversification of business

Expanding operations to include the possibility of a joint venture, sawmilling, and the export of slabs and sawn timber.

v. Diversification of the customer base

FHCL will work towards the diversification and expansion of its customer base both locally and abroad.

vi. Encouraging innovation and operational efficiencies

Innovation in this context is the changing of the way things are done in order to make the operations more efficient, effective and sustainable, both environmentally and economically. FHCL will support a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. This will include addressing areas such as: methods for increasing productivity in all facets of the operations from tree planting, maintenance, and harvesting, annual review of log prices, maximising log utilisation where logs left in the forest can be further sorted for other products such as sawn timber, furniture industry and waste wood utilization cottage industries and residue into biomass fuel.

vii. Improving customer service

FHCL customers are vital stakeholders for achieving the company's vision and mission. FHCL will continue to build and improve its customer service, both internally and externally, through improving customer relations, meeting and exceeding customer expectations, and dealing with customer dissatisfactions promptly and holistically.

Q: Since the appointment of the new Board of Directors and management in 2020, please share the progress so far.

Dranibaka: Since the appointment of the new Board of Director members in August 2020, the Board has made some changes to the management, and some of the significant progress at FHCL has included:

1. Paying off the company's pending loans to the Fiji National Provident Fund with a total of \$601,882.00 in July 2021 (loan period of 15 years ending in 2019) and to the Fiji Development Bank with a total of \$1,269,469.64 in March 2022 (loan period of seven years ending in 2013);
2. Paying off three years' worth of lease rental arrears through the iTaukei Lands Trust Board, from a balance of \$1.2 million in September 2020 to zero by April 2021. The new management of FHCL has paid out all lease payments to the 230 mataqali up until December 2022. FHCL has also paid out pending stumpage fees from 2018 to 2021 totaling \$1.2 million to the respective mataqali.
3. The company was able to achieve a total annual production and sales of 38,000 m³, with a gross revenue of over \$11 million in 2021. This year, the company forecasted to increase its production and sales to 43,000 m³, with an expected revenue of \$16 million. The management was able to achieve these by improving the current field work processes and upgrading the company's financial management.

Q: What is the update of FHCL's Forest Certification Gap Analysis and Roadmap Report after its launch in June this year?

Dranibaka: FHCL has managed to appoint key positions within the organisation to progress the work on forest certification according to the roadmap in the report. It has upgraded its information system through its geospatial information system and mapping and strengthened its data and information storage system. It's planning to create a taskforce that will then progress the implementation of the roadmap so that FHCL could achieve forest certification within the next two to three years.

There is a tremendous need to get our mahogany certified to enable us to compete in the international market arena, adding niche value to place us

above other similar mahogany sources from Asia and Africa. To maintain our plantation's sustainability, we need rigorous reforestation activities in our harvested mahogany plantations so that a consistent supply is maintained for our export markets.

FHCL has reaffirmed its commitment to attaining Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification of its plantation management. FSC Certification values the social, environmental and economic benefits of forest management, a balance of these to communicate resource sustainability and its management, from the forest through the various processing phases to our shop shelves and maybe even further to promote responsible forest management.

Q: Discuss the company's reforestation efforts in all stations nationwide and your contribution to the Government's landscape restorative program, the "30 million trees in 15 years" initiative.

Dranibaka: One of FHCL's key roles is to maintain the sustainability of its mahogany plantation resources for the future, not only by harvesting mahogany for export markets, but also by continually reforesting harvested areas to ensure the sustainability of the resource.

FHCL has prioritised reforestation of its harvested mahogany plantations since 2017 up until to date. FHCL has replanted over 4,039 ha hectares of new mahogany plantations in Nukurua and Galoa Stations. This equates to 1.5 million mahogany trees planted on the ground.

In 2022, its target is to replant over 250 to 300 hectares of harvested mahogany plantations in Nukurua and Galoa Stations.

All reforestation and maintenance operations are given to the Fiji Mahogany Trust to employ landowners at Nukurua to replant mahogany forests within their land on a contract basis, and in return, they are paid for work undertaken. This will empower landowners to look after mahogany trees on their land and work closely with FHCL to benefit from the mahogany trees planted by FHCL on their land.

When you consider the numerous incentives the Government has provided for this industry, the mahogany industry (in Fiji) is one of the foundations of the country's forest industries. It is a crucial one, which is why the Government is pushing to assist the mahogany businesses in order to ensure that new or larger investments come into the nation, while also assisting the indigenous owners in the land aspect of investment. This is why the mahogany sector in Fiji is so important.

Source: Ministry of Forestry

Fiji Prepares to Implement Emission Reduction Activities for Carbon Trading



The forestry sector has followed the devastating impacts of climate change experienced globally and more so to small island developing states, a decision was made at the Conference of the Parties (COP) 16th meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Cancun, Mexico held from 29 November to 10 December 2010, encourages developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector under Article 70.

These actions include reducing emissions from deforestation, reducing emissions from forest degradation, conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

Article 71 of the Cancun Agreement requests developing country parties to undertake the activities referred to above in the context of the provision of adequate and predictable support, including financial resources and technical and technological support to developing country parties in accordance with national circumstances, to develop a national strategy or action plan, determine a national forest reference level, create a robust and transparent national forest monitoring system and put in place a system for providing information on how the Cancun Safeguards are being addressed and respected through the implementation of REDD+ activities while respecting the country's sovereignty.

Under the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Fiji was granted US\$5.8million in 2015 to help the country prepare for carbon trading through activities that would contribute to a reduction of carbon emissions, known as the readiness phase. The readiness phase ends on December 31, 2022, with the implementation of the national programme to reduce emissions known as the Fiji Forestry Emission Reductions (ER) Program.

In January 2020, the Fijian Government signed the Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA) with the FCPF for results based payments in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and increasing carbon sequestration. Fiji became the first small island developing state to sign an ERPA with the FCPF.

Fiji enters carbon fund

The World Bank's FCPF provided funding to 47 countries in the world to help them through their Readiness phase before entering into carbon trading. Out of the 47

countries, only 15 have made it to the carbon fund which means they have prepared well to be able to participate in the trading of carbon. Fiji is one of the 15 countries to participate in carbon emission reductions.

Permanent Secretary of Forestry, Pene Baleinabuli stated that Fiji's inclusion among these 15 countries is history in the making and something the country should be proud of as a small island developing state.

Mr Baleinabuli said that through the FCPF, Fiji is setting up national systems and processes that will allow the country to enter into carbon trading in 2024. "For the moment, Fiji signed an agreement under the FCPF to trade 2.5million tonnes of carbon from 37,282 hectares in the selected 20 districts," he said.

The 20 districts include eight from the Western Division, 10 from the Northern Division and two from the Central Division. The districts from the Western Division include Sigatoka, Cuvu, Namataku, Noikoro, Tavua, Savatu, Nalotawa and Saivou while the Central Division include Serua and Nabobuco. For the Northern Divisions, the districts include Taveuni, Tunuloa, Saqani, Wailevu, Vatuova, Dogotuki, Labasa, Seaqqa, Dreketi and Bua.

The Fiji ER Program period for the next two years will prepare the communities and all interested parties to understand the different processes involved so as to prepare them for future carbon trading markets.

Safeguards

Throughout the implementation of REDD+ from its humble beginnings in 2009 and up until now, there have been safeguards systems, processes and measures implemented at all levels of implementation in the country through the Ministry of Forestry and multiple stakeholders.

Safeguards in the context of REDD+ are measures to protect against or avoid risks while promoting the benefits of reducing emissions from deforestation, forest degradation, and fostering conservation, sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

Following the COP 16 meeting in Mexico, the Cancun Safeguards were derived as a means of ensuring the effective and full participation of all stakeholders, in particular local communities, in the REDD+ process.

Parties agreed that the following safeguards should be promoted and supported when implementing REDD+ activities:

1. That actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;
2. Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty;
3. Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
4. The full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, in the actions referred to in paragraphs 70 and 72 of this decision;
5. That actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that the actions referred to in paragraph 70 of this decision are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits, taking into account the need for sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities and their interdependence on forests in most countries, reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the International Mother Earth Day.
6. Actions to address the risks of reversals;
7. Actions to reduce displacement of emissions.

The implementation of activities under the REDD+ mechanism has the potential to deliver social and environmental benefits that go beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, but it may also entail potential risks to local communities, indigenous peoples, women and other marginalised groups that depend heavily on the forest resources for their livelihoods and other daily needs. Safeguards are principles or measures that aim to protect or to avoid risks ("do no harm"), while promoting benefits ("do good"). The term multiple benefits is used to ensure that all benefits will flow from a successful implementation of REDD+ and emission reductions and will include both the global climate mitigation benefits from REDD+ as well as environmental and social benefits, also known as non-carbon benefits or co-benefits.

Over the years the Fiji National REDD+ Programme has embarked on a series of analytical studies and assessments, to help the country reach "readiness" and implement the Emissions Reduction Program (ERP) in 20 districts in Fiji, which will assist in reducing carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation before finally engaging in carbon financing.

These studies are comprehensive and cross-cutting – ranging from social issues, to legal instruments and technical measurements. They include the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) study, the Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM), the Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation, the Carbon Rights Study, the Benefit Sharing Plan and the Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA), which includes the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and the Re-Settlement Policy, the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and Gender Guidelines and the Gender Action Plan. Currently, the Due Diligence study is being undertaken and will be completed by December 2022.

Without the implementation of Safeguards, Fiji will not be able to enter into carbon trading under the ERPA with the FCPF. Landowning units, farmers, women and youth are encouraged to actively participate in Fiji's Forest ER Program.

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