



Forestry Focus

Newsletter, April Issue 2023



Private Public Partnership to Grow Ministry's 30 Million Trees Campaign

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On April 28, 2023, Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) and British American Tobacco (BAT) Fiji were recognised for their efforts to champion

forest landscape reforestation through a win-win partnership that will soon be formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The idea of the partnership was first initiated in 2022 when BAT Fiji approached FHCL for mahogany fuelwood materials to test their newly installed steam boilers at their Leaf Division at Votualevu in Nadi.

Replacing the diesel-powered steam boilers will require BAT Fiji to source approximately 300 cubic metres of mahogany fuelwood for the new boilers to generate sufficient steam to process and dry the tobacco leaves.

Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, says that this is indeed a win-win partnership because while BAT Fiji was looking for a reliable fuelwood source, FHCL was looking at ways to maximise its rate of utilisation and reduce wastage during their plantation harvesting operations.

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"Furthermore, under the partnership, BAT Fiji will also assist in the replanting of mahogany seedlings, contributing to the long-term sustainability of FHCL plantations. I once again applaud the foresight of BAT Fiji and FHCL in pursuing the partnership approach, which we are here to witness," said Mr Ravu.

"I am pleased to learn that the Reforestation Partnership will involve nine 'Mataqali's within the Nausori Highland Forest Based Trust. The

Ministry of Forestry stands ready to provide the necessary support and assistance that will enable the participating mataqalis to secure fair and equitable returns from their fuel wood harvesting and replanting contracts. This would be an additional source of income, over and above what FHCL is already paying, including land rentals, stumpage and land management fees."

Mr Ravu added that by sourcing fuelwood from the Nausori Highlands, BAT Fiji would reduce its importation of fossil fuel by 60 percent, thus

establishing a greener footprint by using this renewable fuel substitute.

"For FHCL, the removal and purchase of forest residues for fuelwood has created an opportunity for the company to increase its product range and also assists in clearing the land for replanting. All seedlings planted under the Reforestation Partnership will be added to the Ministry of Forestry's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative."

The reforestation programme is an excellent example of Private Public Partnership in the forestry and agriculture sub-sectors.

Government Empowers Landowners to Improve Forestry Production

Address



Hon. Kalaveti Ravu
MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Hon. Ravu spoke at the FPTT cottage industry event on April 26, 2023, at Nasinu.

Vugalei District Representatives, Managing Director for the Vision Investments Limited, Forestry Industry Stakeholders, Invited Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning and a Bula Vinaka to you all.

It's a great pleasure to be here today - to celebrate this key milestones for the Ministry on the back of our Governments' 100 day achievements.

I extend a warm welcome to key forestry stakeholders that are here for this event - your continued commitment to and investment in the forest community/industry is

the reason for the empowerment and economic success that we are celebrating today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, capitalizing on emerging opportunities, delivering services that are inclusive and impactful on the lives of all Fijians, and effective engagement and collaboration with partners is KEY to promotion of MSMEs in the forestry sector.

The Government through the Ministry of Forestry is committed to Fiji's National Development as highlighted in its 13-year Strategic Plan to "Improve the socio-economic impact of the Forest and its People".

Forest Subsidy Assistance

Ladies and Gentlemen, to provide you with a bit of background, 2015 saw to the birth of a Forest Subsidy initiative through the Ministry of Forestry's Wood Utilization Project.

The project provides empowerment to landowners for the establishment of small forestry related business, to improve production and quality for existing small forestry related business, purchase tools, equipment and machinery for value adding required for a small forestry related business and training.

The training component teaches participants to create value added products from harvesting and wood processing residues as an alternative resource to sustain them now and into the future.

Mahogany landowners from Sote,

Savu and Naimasimasi village in the Vugalei district whose land is located in the Nukurua Forest Station are part of the skills training and empowerment of communities and individuals that the Ministry of Forestry is facilitating. I trust and hope that you have found these trainings useful.

With the exception of the pandemic period, the Ministry of Forestry's annual budget includes the forest subsidy allocation. The allocation demonstrates Government's commitment to ensuring that its development work is reflected in the lives of the people and communities it serves.

Government continues to promote the improved utilization of waste wood for high value products for the local and overseas niche markets. Since 2010, Government has invested a total of \$1.2 million dollars in the Wood Utilization Project with the objective of finding ways to maximize waste wood utilization through value adding and downstream processing.

Community Empowerment

Fiji is a country rich in natural resources yet apart from logging, the landowners are not empowered on how to use this resource to support themselves. Through the training at the Ministry, women, youth and landowners are empowered to make use of residues from logging operations and timber processing facilities to ensure zero waste from harvesting.

The growing travel and tourism industry has provided vast



opportunities to local artisans and handicraft manufacturers to produce commoditized products and sell them to local business and tourists who are willing to spend significantly on souvenirs and other craft items.

The Ministry of Forestry works closely with the Biosecurity Authority (BAF) to ensure that wooden artifacts that are taken out of Fiji by tourists and locals alike are inspected for Non-Commercial Value (NCV) which certifies that the product (s) are safe and free from harmful pests.

Wood artisans and cottage industries empower forest-based communities to generate revenue and contribute to economic recovery while reducing waste from forests.

Nineteen young men and women from Sote, Savu and Naimasimasi Village will graduate today after completing a three-six months training programme with the Ministry. Congratulations to you all - I thank you for your determination to pursue this course of training and I guarantee that your patience and commitment is a living testament to the deep connections you have back home - with your forests and what it offers. The training is an investment in your future and that of



your loved ones.

The graduates will continue to engage with the Ministry for another one to two years before operating their cottage businesses independently. With assistance from the Department of Cooperatives, the 19 graduates have collectively registered a business called the Gaunavou Cooperative. Today, they will receive \$30,000 worth of value adding equipment to assist with their wood crafting business.

Partnership

Apart from providing participants with wood crafting skills, the Ministry also assists by securing markets for their products. The Department of Cooperatives likewise provides support with business registration, grants and marketing of products through branding and business training.

Today, I am happy to announce that we will also formalize a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Public Private Partnership between the Landowners, the Vision Group and key Government Agencies. This means that wooden products from the Cottage industries will be marketed and available for purchase from Courts Fiji Ltd - a subsidiary of the

Vision Investments Ltd. Valid for one year, the MoU allows Courts to directly support the livelihoods of the village communities and will be renewed on an annual basis.

Thank you very much Vision and Courts for the partnerships that have been forged and we trust and hope that this is only the beginning of many good times ahead of us.

Moving Forward

Ladies and Gentlemen, once again my sincere thanks to you all for joining us today.

The impact of the Ministry's Strategic Goal that I spoke about earlier is evident by the support that the Ministry provides in managing sustainable forest based economic activity with forest based industries, increased participation of small forest enterprises and the empowerment of local communities to create employment opportunities.

I thank you for turning out in numbers to experience this milestone achievement.

Vinaka Vakalevu and thank You.

Celebrating 'Healthy Forests for Healthy People'

Address



Hon. Kalaveti Ravu
MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Hon. Ravu spoke at 2023 International Day of Forests on 21 March, 2023, at Korotari Forestry Station, Labasa.

Representatives from the Government, and Provincial Councils, Forest Industry Stakeholders, Invited Guests and Students, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It is my pleasure to join you here in the Friendly North to celebrate the 2023 International Day of Forests.

With the theme "Healthy Forests for Healthy People", this year's International Day of Forests focuses on Sustainable Development Goals three (3) on Good Health and Wellbeing and fifteen (15) on Life on Land.

Forests are often linked to many things including the environment, conservation, climate change, socio-

economic development, employment, and national development.

Trees and the planting of trees play a vital role in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen, through our national thirty million trees in fifteen years initiative, more than sixteen million trees have been collectively planted across Fiji by youths, schools, civil society organisations, church groups, individuals and communities.

Your Government will not only look at achieving the number of trees to be planted but will closely look at the monitoring and evaluation of these trees to ensure high growth and survival rate.

Healthy forests help keep global warming in check: forests contain six hundred and sixty-two billion tonnes of carbon, which is more than half the global carbon stock in soils and vegetation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, forests and trees are a solution to most of our problems – they help buffer exposure to heat and extreme weather events caused by climate change, they purify the water, clean the air, capture carbon to fight climate change, provide food and life-saving medicines, and generally improve our well-being.

Spending time in forests increase positive emotions and decreases stress, blood pressure, depression, fatigue, anxiety and tension.

Trees in cities also absorb pollutant



gases from traffic and industry and filter fine particulates such as dust, dirt and smoke, which help shield urban populations from respiratory diseases.

We, therefore, must make it our business to safeguard these precious natural resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry of Forestry has twenty-three forest and nature reserves including the Colo-i-Suva Forest park which is located about thirty minutes out of Suva City and is open to visitors seven days a week.

At the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry held two weeks ago in Nadi, Heads of Agriculture and Forestry from Fiji and the Pacific region all committed to remain steadfast in our resolve to harness from and safeguard our natural

resources for the well-being of our children and our future generations.

In ensuring that forests and our natural resources are available forever, this year's International Day of Forests will be marked with the establishment of a Climate Smart Agriculture initiative here at the Korotari Nursery with the support and assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Climate Smart Agriculture is an approach that helps to transform the agri-food system towards green and climate resilient practices.

This pilot site at Korotari is part of the Ministry of Forestry's 2023 plan, and if proved successful, will be replicated on a number of Ministry's reforestation sites as the benefits is far much greater than its establishment costs.

The sustainable management of our forests cannot be achieved by the forestry sector alone. You and I have a role to play! The decisions we take today is critical to the future of our forests and for our health.

Given that the main drivers of deforestation are outside of forestry,

we need to work together with other land-based sectors to deliver the desired outcomes for our forests. Working together with agriculture, therefore, in this CSA initiative will, hopefully, be the start of our pursuit for an integrated approach to how we manage our natural resources for the benefit of all our people.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge with sincere appreciation the participation of schools in the International Day of Forests celebrations in the West, North and Central Eastern divisions.

I also wish to thank all our partners in development who have supported (21.03.23) today's events and the Ministry's work to ensure we sustain

our forests for the present and future generation.

Your attendance, interpretation of the theme through posters, quizzes and oratory contests is a good indication of the appreciation that the current generation has for forests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for joining us in celebrating the International Day of Forests. I wish to also remind us that the theme calls for giving, not just taking, because healthy forests will bring healthy people.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyavad, and Thank You.



21 March
International Day of Forests

**HEALTHY FORESTS
FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE**



Ministry Hands Over Coconut Seedlings



The Ministry of Forestry delivered 2500 coconut seedlings to 25 villages (100 seedlings per village) throughout Ovalau's four districts of Levuka, Bureta, Lovoni, and Nasinu.

The handover of seedlings was done by the Hon. Kalaveti Ravu and our team on Thursday and Friday, April 13–14, 2023.



A mix of short-term and long term species of coconut seedlings were presented to the villages at the request of the residents during Hon. Ravu's recent visit to the island.

When he handed over the 100 seedlings to Nasinu Village elders, Hon. Ravu said coconuts can be regarded as a sustainable crop because one can harvest them three or even four times a year from a tree, and the tree can survive for decades. He urged them to plant the seedlings for food security, especially for the benefit of the future generation.

Hon. Ravu also emphasised the Ministry's work and progress, particularly the Government's commitment to not just planting trees to combat climate change, but also to ensure that the seedlings planted grow. This will also contribute to Fiji's tree planting programme's target of growing 30 million trees in 15 years.

On Thursday, April 14, 2023, during his tour in Ovalau, Hon. Ravu, handed over 100 coconut seedlings to the Tui Levuka, Ratu Etonia Seru, and village elders in the presence of key Government officials.

Also accompanying him in the handover of the seedlings was Attorney-General Hon. Siromi Turaga.

Hon. Ravu had joined the Attorney-General and his team of Government officials at Levuka Vaka-Viti who were on a public awareness trip to Ovalau. He also took part in the talanoa sessions. This awareness drive by the Attorney-General aims to provide rural residents with access to services that they would otherwise have to travel long distances to receive.

Hon. Ravu used the occasion to discuss the progress of the forestry and fisheries departments' efforts since taking office, as well as to hear firsthand villagers' concerns.

Korotari Nursery Pilots Climate Smart Demo Plot

The Korotari Forestry Station's Nursery, located outside Labasa Town, has designed and piloted a Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) initiative.

This is an integrated landscape management method that aids in the adaptation of agricultural systems, livestock, and crops to the effects of climate change.

The CSA demo plot is a Ministry of Forestry initiative at our Korotari Nursery and is supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, as the two ministries work towards transforming the agri-food system towards green and climate resilient practices.

Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, launched the Climate Smart Demo Plot on March 21, 2023, in conjunction with the International Day of Forests.

This more than half-acre pilot site at Korotari is part of the Ministry's 2023 plan, and, if proved successful, will be replicated on several Ministry's reforestation sites as the benefits are far greater than its establishment costs. Staff have planted sandalwood trees integrated with fruit trees like guavas, avocados, pineapples, cassava, and vetiver grass.

The Ministry intends to extend the area covered and will even incorporate short-term vegetables.

Hon. Ravu said sustainable management of our forests cannot be achieved by the forestry sector alone.

"Given that the main drivers of deforestation are outside of forestry, we need to work together with other land-based sectors to deliver the desired outcomes for our forests. Working together with agriculture, therefore, in this CSA initiative will hopefully be the start of our pursuit of an integrated approach to how we manage our natural resources for the benefit of all our people," Hon. Ravu said.

Ministry's Forester Extension, Josefa Matagasau, said climate-smart agriculture integrates not only certain varieties of crops but also soil, agro-inputs and farming systems.

"Climate-smart agriculture is an



approach that helps guide actions to absorb shocks, stress and transform agri-food systems towards green and climate-resilient practices," Mr Matasau explained.

CSA aims to tackle three main objectives:

- Sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes;
- Adapting and building resilience to climate change, and;
- Reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.



Crown Princess of Denmark Supports Tree Planting Programme in Fiji

Her Royal Highness (HRH) Crown Princess Mary Elizabeth of Denmark, participated in planting mangrove propagules today at Taiperia beach, a coastal settlement in Lautoka.

She was accompanied by the Danish delegation, as well as executives from Fiji Airways and Ministry of Forestry staff.

Forestry Director Officer West, George Vuki briefed Her Royal Highness on Fiji's landscape restoration project, which aims to plant 30 million trees in 15 years.

Mr Vuki also discussed how people, non-governmental organisations, schools, communities, and corporations such as Fiji Airways have incorporated tree planting into their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts.

The team from Fiji Airways have also requested to plant 1000 mangrove propagules next week for the May CSR event.

The Ministry acknowledges Her Royal Highness and her delegation for their support of Fiji's tree planting campaign in the battle against climate change.

Minister Ravu visits pine wood chip factory, Wairiki Port

During his travel to the Northern Division this week, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, made a visit to the Tropik Wood Products Limited (TWPL) factory in Wairiki, Bua.

Hon. Ravu met with senior management and staff of the factory March 20, 2023, and held a talanoa session on the operations of the company. He also took a tour of the mill and port facility.

TWPL Wairiki Factory operations manager, Zahid Begg, expressed his gratitude for the Minister's visit on Monday.

"This factory is the life of Bua province. The livelihood of our landowners in Bua and also in Macuata depends on this facility, and that places a huge responsibility on us. For us, every step that we take, we take it carefully having landowner aspirations into consideration," Mr Begg shared.

Despite the facility's challenges over the years, Mr Begg stated that the company would continue to invest in and upgrade it. He expressed their concern about forest sustainability. In light of this, the factory,

which has a capacity to do eight shipments of wood chips per year, has reduced that to only four this year.

Mr Begg also highlighted the company's parent company, Fiji Pine Limited's vigorous replanting efforts and a record planting of 7300 hectares of pine with a survival rate of 90 percent in 2022.

Hon. Ravu stressed that the Government was here to support local business aspirations and stood ready to guide them, including TWPL.

"We are here to encourage you to work harder, give your 100 percent for the betterment of the company, the Government and ultimately, our resource owners and communities that rely on us.

"The land has eyes, the land has ears and it is also watching us closely, so let us work together and put the needs of our people, the resource owners, a priority," Hon. Ravu said.



Ministry aims to revive coconut industry

The Ministry of Forestry and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) have signed a Sub-Contract Agreement (S-C Agreement) for the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) project for coconut and other non-traditional wood and forest products.

The signing took place at the Sofitel Resort and Spa in Denarau, Nadi, on March 8, 2023 at a side-event for Senile Coconut Palm Utilisation for Engineered Wood Products during the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry.

The agreement was signed by QDAF's research facility and project manager, Dr Rob McGavin and Fiji's acting permanent secretary for Fisheries and Forestry, Atelaite Rokosuka, witnessed by ACIAR's

research programme manager for forestry, Dr Nora Devoe.

Fiji's Cabinet had agreed on this S-C Agreement on February 15, 2023. ACIAR had funded the installation and commissioning of a research spindle-less lathe facility at the then Timber Utilization Research and Training Division facility in Nasinu.

With the decline in native forests' production, the Fiji Forestry Ministry has identified non-wood forest products like coconut as having the potential to fill in the gap and meet market demand. Through the QDAF, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC) and ACIAR, made a significant technological breakthrough by demonstrating for the first time that high density, senile coconut stems can be reliably peeled into quality veneer using relatively low-cost, spindle-less lathe technologies before being manufactured into Engineered Wood Products such as plywood.

Mrs Rokosuka said the Fiji Ministry of Forestry and the Australian Government have had a long lasting relationship that has culminated over the years

through several development projects, reaping benefits that include technology transfer and capacity building.

She said the issue of senile palms needs to be effectively dealt with to support Government's efforts to revive the coconut industry.

"We witnessed another milestone in our Vuvale partnership with the signing of the Subcontract Agreement for Engineered Wood Products in collaboration with the Pacific Community and the ACIAR, through the QDAF," Mrs Rokosuka said.

"This project is one we see promoting value addition in the industry and would certainly support the Ministry's goal of supporting economic recovery and alternative livelihoods for Fijians."

She added that this project has positive social, economic and environmental impacts, including a source of income for farmers as well as ticking the box for sustainable forestry by using senile coconut trees.



“This project is one we see promoting value addition in the industry and would certainly support the Ministry's goal of supporting economic recovery and alternative livelihoods for Fijians.”

Call for Continued Partnership to Transform Forestry, Agriculture Sectors Through Research

Address



Hon. Kalaveti Ravu
MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Hon. Ravu spoke at the 3rd FAO And SPC Joint Pacific Ministers Of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting on Friday, 10th March 2023 at Sofitel Spa & Resort, Nadi, Fiji

- Honourable Ministers for Agriculture and Forestry
- Deputy Director-General for the FAO, Mr. Laurent Thomas
- Director General for SPC, Dr. Stuart Minchin
- Ambassadors and High Commissioners, Members of the Diplomatic Core
- Development Partners
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Ni sa bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all and a warm welcome again to Fiji.

First and foremost, I must extend to you the sincerest apologies of our Prime Minister, Honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka who could not be here this morning as he had to attend a very moving occasion in our nation's history – the installation of the new Vunivalu Na Tui Kaba on Bau Island after nearly 64 years.

Our Prime Minister also just returned yesterday (07.03.23) following a successful meeting at the 2023 Panama Our Oceans Conference.

Despite his inability to join you today (10.03.23), the Prime Minister has asked that I pledge to you all this morning our Government's continued commitment to working with other Pacific Island countries as we transform Pacific agriculture and forestry through research.

The meeting of Ministers is always an important part of the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry and I trust you've had fruitful discussions over the past few days. The meeting provides a valuable opportunity for Pacific partners and leaders to 'talanoa' and share ideas.

As you deliberate today, I remind you of our obligation as leaders in such an important sector. I hope you will remain steadfast in your resolve that we are merely guardians of resources – for the well-being of our children and our future generations.

As we all know, global food systems are failing to deliver sufficient and nutritious food. Agriculture and forests are part of the global food system and they are essential to solving challenges like food and water security.

A lot has happened since the Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry meetings three years ago in Samoa.

The Global Health crisis unlike any in history crippled our global economy and upset people's lives. This was therefore followed by rising food, fuel, feed, and fertilizer prices.

Moreover, we were concurrently struggle with threats of food insecurity, protracted conflicts, recurrent cyclones, and the worst locust infection in decades.

To mitigate the risk, Fiji's Agriculture and Forestry sector implemented various food security, growth, and expansion plans

aimed at raising our national income.

The 2023 PWAf meeting and today are platforms that provide the opportunity to discuss and explore how Pacific nations can leverage the agriculture and forestry sectors as part of our national and regional efforts to reshape food systems that better support healthy diets and environment sustainability in the Pacific.

Challenges

Honourable Ministers and distinguished guests, while we may be Small Island Developing States, we are also diverse with varying natural wealth. Countries like Fiji can grow an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables and have a good forestry resource base with the potential to expand.

On the other hand, atoll islands like Kiribati and others have limited natural resource bases.

Despite this, we all face common challenges such as a lack of financial and human resources, limited capacity and poor infrastructure, our dependency on imported products, loss of forests and biodiversity and high level of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to name a few.

The fact that our region has the highest rate of NCDs in the world is very worrying. NCD is the leading cause of death in Fiji where about 80 per cent of deaths are NCD related.

I wish to highlight here that according to a World Bank report in 2021, the world's food systems will have to become much more productive to feed a projected global population of nearly 10 billion by 2050, while at the same time reduce emissions and protect the environment.

Studies estimate the cost of food systems transformation would be about \$300 billion per year over the next 10 years.

Transforming the Agriculture and Forestry Sector

Ladies and Gentlemen, trees and forests can contribute to health and sustainable food systems but we need to acknowledge the tensions and trade-offs between the different agriculture and forestry agenda.

We need to enhance the discussion with stakeholders and share an understanding of the main challenges and adopt common strategies to overcome them.

Furthermore, any action or solution must contribute to building resilience and must be sustainable.



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We must explore how innovation, technology and digitalisation can contribute to accelerate achieving Sustainable Development Goals that leave no one behind.

Additionally, they must empower and engage women, youth, and vulnerable groups.

You will agree with me that collaboration is needed to make sure the right incentives are in place and financing

is mobilised to make that happen.

We must therefore continue to build on, partner with, and complement the most relevant global initiatives, networks, and coalitions.

At this juncture, I would like to thank all our development partners, academic and research institutions, particularly the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Pacific Community (SPC).

The FAO and SPC have continuously worked with Pacific Island Countries to achieve food security and support necessary transformation in the agriculture and forestry sector.

With those words, I declare the 2023 PWAF Meeting of the Ministers open and I wish you all success in your deliberation today.

Thank you, Vinaka Vakalevu and Dhaanyavaad.

Pacific Ministers Meeting a Success, Tonga to host next in 2025



Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, says the Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry's meeting was a success as delegates were able to discuss and explore how Pacific nations could leverage the agriculture and forestry sectors as part of our national and regional efforts to reshape food systems that better support healthy diets and environment sustainability in the Pacific.

The meeting, held on March 10, 2023, at Sofitel Resort and Spa, Denarau, Nadi, was hosted in person for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic by the Government of Fiji, with assistance from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Pacific Community (SPC).

Hon. Ravu who co-chaired the meeting with Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Hon. Vaimi Rayalu, thanked FAO and SPC for their reassurances in their commitment to continue supporting the Pacific Island Countries in their efforts to address the challenges of climate change, food insecurity, and environmental degradation, and build a better future for all.

He told delegates that collaboration was needed to make sure the right incentives are in place and financing is mobilised to make that happen.

"We must therefore continue to build on, partner with, and complement the most relevant global initiatives, networks, and coalitions. At this juncture, I would like to thank all our development partners, academic and research institutions, particularly FAO and SPC. The FAO and SPC have continuously worked with Pacific Island Countries to achieve food security and support necessary transformation in the agriculture and forestry sector."

According to a FAO report on the outcomes of the meeting, the delegates recognised the devastating impact of climate change on Pacific food systems, and the need for better climate information to support food system planning and decision-making and emphasised the need for collaborative and coordinated data collection and sharing among countries to enable the development of sustainable and resilient food systems in the Pacific.

Tonga to host next meeting

Tonga will host the fourth meeting of the Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry in 2025, in association with the Pacific Week of Agriculture. This was agreed to by the Pacific Ministers.

Tonga's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forests, Lord Fohe, expressed his Kingdom's interest in hosting the meeting after sharing the experience of the HungaTonga-HungaHa'apai marine volcano eruption in January 2022.

Lord Fohe stated that the HungaTonga-HungaHa'apai disaster

had a significant impact on its people and agricultural livelihoods, with initial estimates of US\$20 million (FJ\$44.5m) in agricultural damage and 12,000 agricultural households, or 85% of the total population, affected.

He said the importance of the agricultural sector to the economy and the livelihoods of the Tongan people was clear as it contributed nearly 14 per cent of Tonga's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2015/16 and represented over 65 percent of exports.

"The opportunity for Tonga to host the next meetings of the Heads and Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry will be an opportunity for Tonga to share all the lessons learned, the recovery, rehabilitation, rebuilding and resilience," Lord Fohe told the leaders.

The Ministers' meeting concluded the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PWAF) 2023, a five-day event that brought together governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations, and the private sector to help chart a future for agriculture and forestry in the region.

This followed the 8th Regional Meeting of the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (PHAFS) on Thursday. These meetings were convened during the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PWAF) on March 6-10, 2023, under the theme Growing Together: Transforming Pacific Agriculture and Forestry.

Fisheries and forestry sectors can assist Fiji's road to national economic recovery: Ravu

Address



Hon. Kalaveti Ravu
MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Minister Ravu's opening address in response to His Excellency the President's opening address on the opening of Parliament 2023 on February 15, 2023.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise to respond to His Excellency's most gracious speech delivered in this August House to mark the opening of the new Parliament under the People's Coalition Government.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in this August House and his guidance throughout my campaign trail. I also congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of this August House and also congratulate Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua on her appointment as Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I wish to thank the Honorable Prime Minister for the confidence and trust placed on me to be part of your candidate listing and to be on your line-up of Ministerial portfolios. I am deeply honoured Honourable Prime Minister Sir.

I wish to thank all my supporters nationwide who voted for me here and I wish to assure you all, that I will be your voice in this August House.

"Vinaka sara vakalevu na nomuni digidigi kei na nomuni veivakabauti".

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge and extend my sincere appreciation to my immediate and extended families. I thank my wife, Elenoa and my children for their never ending support during my campaign trail. I also thank all my extended families nationwide for their confidence and trust.

I share the sentiments of His Excellency the President, that the outbreak of COVID-19 has disturbed the global political, social, economic, religious and financial structures.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as the nation regrouped to take a grip of this crisis, the People's Coalition Government is determined to elevate Fiji to greater heights with proactive planning and smart partnerships. The Government is of the people, by the people and for the people. We therefore must be united as one nation.

The national debt has widened, putting all our eggs in one basket is not the solution. The potential of natural resource-based sectors like fisheries and forestry, and others; cannot be further undermined.

The Ministry is working hard to shift its strategy to ensure a balance between protection and production, equitable benefits, and community empowerment through relevant capacity building and training.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the scope of such resources is wholesome and integrated - from the ridges of our mountains to the trenches of our oceans. I hold a portfolio that is most dear to the people of Fiji. Your Coalition Government's ambition is to build on the efforts of those who have served before me, so that I may play my part in creating something even greater for those who have yet to arrive.

Mr. Speaker Sir, fisheries and forestry are two natural resource based and economic service sectors that can assist Fiji's road to national economic recovery.

The Ministry was one of the few that developed an economic recovery plan to help cushion the impacts of the crisis. In addition to the economic contribution, the Ministry also strives to make a social and environmental impact as well.

The Ministry recognises the need to strengthen its laws and policies. This will support and guide the vision of the coalition government, in providing a capable environment that will allow the

sector to advance to greater heights.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative was very encouraging as we were able to engage with communities - women, youth etc. to set up nurseries and sell seedlings that were used for planting efforts across Fiji.

Now, with your Coalition Government we will look to not only plant, but ensure the survival rate is successful.

During my maiden tour of the Central, Eastern and Northern division, I had the opportunity to present cheque payments for seedlings in Tailevu, Ovalau, Taveuni and Vanua Levu.

Your Government, thanks all Fijians for your commitment to this national initiative and encourage you to continue to plant trees as your efforts not only helps in the fight against Climate Change but also contributes to Fiji's climate commitments.

Mr. Speaker Sir, forestry research seeks to develop new technologies that can be used to assist in economic development programmes designed to improve human well-being, while protecting the natural resource base and the environment.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we will inject more resources and efforts towards the research of non-wood forest products namely sandalwood, bamboo, sikeci and dilo.

This will ease the pressure on the native forest, provide opportunities for diversification, and will benefit communities directly through engagement, training, seedling sales and products from mature trees.

As a result of the above, reliance on timber and chips for economic growth will be reduced.

Mr. Speaker Sir, on the same note of industry assistance and development we have our forestry sector boasting the largest mature mahogany plantation in



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the world. The Ministry is keen to work with the mahogany industry to facilitate the needs and boost the sector to greater economic contribution.

Mr. Speaker Sir, one of the ways to achieve this is through Forest certification. The Ministry in consultation with Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) will complete work on this process under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

This preparation of FHCL to target entry into the Certification Scheme is vital for the premium market positioning of Fiji's mahogany products.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the forestry sector aims to reposition its current objectives in the pine industry. The Ministry will strengthen partnerships with all stakeholders and primarily the landowning units at the heart of every decision making process.

Pine forests currently leased already have a certification in place as a requirement from their timber and chip markets.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the health of Fiji fisheries is a matter of national importance because of three reasons;

fish provide an important food source for Fiji's population; mitigate the effects of natural disasters including the effects of climate change; and The interconnectivity of fishing, aquaculture and tourism is an economic driver that generates revenue for Fiji's economy. This being said, and as clearly articulated in His Excellency's address, the diversification of our resource based sectors, to strengthen the growth of our economy, increase the "size of our pie" and furthermore increase our potential to trade, is a change that this Government will give rise to, as we start afresh.

Fisheries sector

For this, Mr. Speaker Sir, we cannot and must not remain complacent, in the face of more challenges ahead of us, we must continue to seize every opportunity we have to grow our economy.

At this point Sir, I would like to speak briefly on areas that the Ministry of Fisheries will focus on and strengthen, to growing our resource based sector.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in the context of regional fisheries, our tuna resources are key drivers of our small island economies and have always provided a solid revenue and economic base for Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

The development and implementation of international and regional fisheries management framework have ensured we as Pacific

Island Countries (PICs) manage and use our tuna resources sustainably and also ensure that our fish stocks remain healthy and viable.

Your Coalition Government values its development partners and stakeholders in driving targeted investments within the domestic fishing industry. This includes upgrading the fishing vessels to fish in the high seas, invest in satellite technology to monitor our Exclusive Economic zone (EEZ) and reposition our investment and loan policing capacity.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the value of coastal fisheries to our nation is understated. The production from this fishery offers extensive benefits to our communities, including employment and nutrition, as well as social and recreational values.



Mr. Speaker Sir, the well-being of all Fijians is the ultimate priority for the Coalition Government. The Ministry is working to provide alternatives for an ever increasing population. It will review current capital projects and engagement with other government agencies to empower communities to benefit economically and socially.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry will continue to collaborate with development partners to strengthen investment in the culture of high valued commodities to boost the fisheries sector.

The Ministry of Fisheries will refocus its current objectives of developing seaweed, edible oysters, pearl oysters, mabe pearls and giant clams to ensure these commodities reach their optimum levels of production to meet consumers demand.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry in partnership with the private sector will work on mass production of selected species in communities and work to identifying high end markets for these commodities.

Mister Speaker Sir, as stated in His Excellency's most gracious speech, the new efforts that will be directed to revitalizing the co-

operative movement, is welcomed. This is aligned to the Ministry's work in establishing Fishermen Cooperatives to foster greater participation by resource owners and to empower them in elevating and expanding their fishing businesses.

Your Peoples' Coalition Government will be steadfast in its efforts to ensure Fijians are food secure and have their needs provided for.

Mister Speaker Sir, the Ministry will review the scope of assistance to Food Security and Commercial Aquaculture Development programs to focus on large scale communal co-operative assistance.

We will aggressively work with farmers to assess their production as this will be a critical time for aquaculture in Fiji.

As a result Mr. Speaker Sir, this strategy will produce and supply the maximum number of Tilapia fry's and Shrimp post-larvae to encourage large scale intensive farming, as well as to support small scale aquaculture Fijian farmers.

The intensifying impact of climate change on our oceans, for instance, is compelling us to review our approaches to managing our oceans and our fisheries resources.

Mr. Speaker Sir, manpower and financial support have always played an important role in sustainable fisheries and forestry management.

If we are to ensure progress, we must invest in our workforce and identify appropriate funding to support their work.

Your Coalition government through internal and external partners, will address these needs immediately.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we all share the benefits of our fisheries and forestry resources. We are honored to have inherited these blessings from our forefathers who have protected these resources for us.

It is our time now to do the same. We must change the narrative.

Mister Speaker Sir, it is my prayer that we will exercise wisdom in every front of our deliberation in this august house, to guarantee progress for the present and future generations.

I would like to end by stating the last line from the poem "Invictus" and I quote "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul", unquote. We all have a part to play in steering this ship of change.

May God Bless You, and May God Bless Fiji

Mr. Speaker Sir, Vinaka vakalevu, dhanyavad and Thank you.



Families around the country have a reason to smile after reaping the rewards of their hard work under the Ministry of Forestry's Community Seedling Purchasing Programme.

The Ministry has handed out \$399, 719 to community nursery vendors and individuals, of which \$167, 869 was paid out in the Western Division, \$131, 450 in the Central Eastern Division and \$100, 400 in the Northern Division.

One such farmer is Rafael Vuniwai of Korovou Village, Wainikeli in Taveuni, who is now supplying quality planting materials or seedlings to the Ministry. The seedlings purchased from nursery vendors are used for the plantation drive to reforest degraded land, a Government tree planting programme.

Like many others, Mr Vuniwai has big dreams for his family, especially his children.

The father of 11 was overwhelmed when he received his first payment of \$3,500 personally from the Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, earlier this month. Another \$15,000 was paid out last week – in just six months of hard work, sacrifice and patience.

When presenting the money, Mr Ravu praised Mr Vuniwai for his commitment to raising native trees and hardwood seedlings, not only as a means of earning money but also because of the positive environmental effects it has.

Since his appointment, Mr Ravu has so far presented cheques for seedling payments in Tailevu, Ovalau, Taveuni and Labasa.

Testimonial

Mr Vuniwai, a former casual labourer at the Ministry of Agriculture, left his job to venture into the nursery business from scratch. The 42-year-old said that before starting his new 'passion,' he sought the village headman's approval and the head of their mataqali's blessing.

He didn't have any money at first, so he built his nursery using coconut fronds, empty snack packages, chicken packaging and plastic bags as a substitute for polythene bags.

The Ministry later provided him with shalon shades and polythene bags. Mr Vuniwai encountered difficulties during

Community Seedling Purchasing Programme Supports Fijian Families

the first phases of propagating; at least 3000 of his 4000 plants were destroyed by unforeseen circumstances.

But he persevered; he started again from scratch, selling around 6000 seedlings so far.

Mr Vuniwai said, "I am so thankful for the support and advice from the forestry staff in Savusavu and Labasa. They believed in me despite all odds. I left my dalo and yaqona plantations to concentrate on this nursery, and today I am reaping the benefits of my hard work and the sacrifices I made for my family."

"In addition to this, it has been the blessing from God that has given me the strength to pursue my dreams and make them a reality."

Mr Vuniwai plans to expand his nursery and construct an adjacent area for a mini-supermarket. He has purchased building supplies to extend his home.

In addition to this, he now employs villagers to help him with potting his soil for sowing – a ripple effect of this programme.

"My priority is to provide for my children's education and to provide a better living standard for my family so that they can live in comfort," Mr Vuniwai added.

Divisional Forestry Officer Northern, Maleli Nakasava, said Mr Vuniwai's story is an outstanding example of the positive effects that Government support and direction can have on ordinary citizens.

"Our role is to guide the people we serve and follow up on their progress, as we did with Rafael (Mr Vuniwai)," he explained.

Other smaller vendors made similar remarks about how beneficial the seedling payment has been for their family.

Ilesia Qirolele of Matainadoli Village in Namuka, Macuata, who received \$2,003, said he was able to continue with the construction of his house. The payment arrived on time, allowing him to purchase the urgently required building supplies.

Mereoni Mece, also from the same village, said she was able to purchase building supplies to complete their house after receiving \$2,075.

In order to meet her financial needs, she said that she would keep maintaining her nursery and heed the recommendations of forestry officials. For Solomone Tubuisuru, he was able to prepare for his daughter's needs as she joined the nursing school in Labasa.

Ministry engages community nurseries

The Ministry and Fijians care deeply about nature and are planting more trees to fight climate change. Fiji's forests, mangroves and wetlands help clean our air, safeguard our water, provide

important wildlife habitat, and are vital to our economy and quality of life as Fijians.

Studies at the global level show that natural climate solutions, like planting trees, restoring wetlands, protecting grasslands, and creating incentives for farmers to plant cover crops, can also help us get closer to reaching our Paris Agreement targets. Investments in natural climate solutions can create jobs and improve the sustainability of the forest and agriculture sectors, while also safeguarding water sources, providing habitat conservation, and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The Ministry, under the Reforestation of Degraded Forests Project (RDF Project), has budget provisions to assist community groups and individuals engaged in raising tree seedlings in their nurseries.

The RDF Project is a government-funded project promoting the reforestation of the degraded forest in Fiji, which involves planting 30 million trees in 15 years. One of their major tasks is the coastal rehabilitation and construction of community nurseries.

RDF Forestry Officer Aporosa Ramulo Livani said the plantation drive to reforest degraded lands with two million trees per year had increased the demand for seedlings.

"Securing the services of community nurseries will thus increase the availability of planting materials at the beginning of the planting season," Mr Livani said. "This saves the time and efforts of the state nurseries to raise all the required number of seedlings for the RDF project," he said.

In his maiden speech in Parliament, the Minister said: "Your Government thanks all Fijians for your commitment to this national initiative and encourages you to continue to plant trees as your efforts not only help in the fight against climate change but also contribute to Fiji's climate commitments."

According to him, like many other nursery vendors, buying seedlings from community nurseries would raise public awareness of the need to offer high-quality planting materials and enhance stakeholders' socioeconomic status because they will be assured employment and income.

"The Ministry's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years (30MT15Y) initiative was very encouraging as we were able to engage with communities – women, youth, etc. to set up nurseries and sell seedlings that were used for planting efforts across Fiji. With your Coalition Government we will look to not only planting, but ensuring the plants growth rate is successful," Mr Ravu said in Parliament.

Sorokoba and Nayarabale Youths Reforest 3 Hectares of Land, Minister Applauds Act



Nayarabale Village in Vaturova, Cakaudrove, is creating ripples across the country with what they have been achieving through hard work and dedication in the use of their land.

It was an Easter long weekend with a difference for the village located in the heart of Cakaudrove. They celebrated the Holy Week by learning more about sustainable forestry approaches and how to be good stewards of God's creation.

To put into practice what they learnt, members of the Methodist Church in Fiji Youth Fellowship of the village participated in a massive tree planting exercise with their counterparts from Sorokoba, Ba, as part of the groups' cross rally programme.

They were assisted by the Ministry of Forestry staff and landowners as they planted 912 teak seedlings over a three-hectare area on Easter Saturday (April 8).

Divisional Forestry Officer Northern, Maleli Nakasava, who also joined with his family, shared that after an early morning fellowship on Easter Saturday, the tree planting activity was carried out and it was a success.

Mr Nakasava said his team enlightened the youths about the importance of sustainable forest management practices based on the three pillars of sustainability – that sustainable forest management creates outcomes that are socially just, ecologically sound and economically viable.

"We all must be inspired by the passion these young people have, where they put God first before carrying out their daily activities and making a commitment to reforesting their land for the benefit of future generations," Mr Nakasava said.

The trees planted contribute to the "Noqu Kalou, Noqu Wacawaca Reforestation and Investment" project, a community initiative, established, following the 'solesolevaki' system, with the assistance and direction of Reverend Ilitomasi Nute.

Mr Nakasava said the Ministry continues to work with faith-based groups to share information on the importance of preserving the environment by planting trees. The focus is on being good stewards of God's creation and ensuring that future generations inherit a promising future and a better planet.

He praised the youth's parents, advisers, supporters, Reverend Nute, and the Ministry staff member, Lekima Bose, for their unending assistance in carrying out the project.

Minister praises youths, staff and landowners

Minister for Fisheries and Forestry Hon. Kalaveti Ravu applauded the work by the youths from Nayarabale and Sorokoba in putting into practice what they had learned about conserving the environment to fight the effects of climate change.

Hon. Ravu says the Ministry recognises the importance of sustainable forest management and has taken steps to ensure that the country's forests are managed in a way that is both environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

The extension staff of the Ministry play an important role in sending out this message in the areas or communities they serve.

"One key aspect of sustainable forest management is teaching our children and youths about the importance of our ecosystem and sustainable practices that ensure that we maintain a healthy environment for our future generation."

Hon. Ravu had visited the village last month and witnessed for himself the huge effort that the youths and villagers have put into reforesting their land.

Speaking at Nasinu Village in Levuka yesterday, Hon. Ravu gave an example of the success story of Nayarabale, where youth and their elders have taken ownership of funding their own village development plans through a reforestation programme.

He shared with them the villagers' foresight in choosing to plant trees on barren land, which would provide both financial and environmental benefits.

The trees planted will also add to the target of Fiji's tree planting campaign against climate change.

He said the Nayarabale youths have set a platform for Vanua Levu and the whole of Fiji, and that 'solesolevaki' or working together, is still the way to go for development to take place.

The Ministry had reached an agreement with four landowning units (mataqali):

Nayarabale Villagers Focus on Reforestation Project

Villagers of Nayarabale in the district of Vaturova, Cakaudrove, have taken ownership of funding their own village development plans through a reforestation programme.

Within weeks of embarking on the tree-planting project in collaboration with the Government through the Ministry of Forestry, the village school, Domonisavu District School, will now have a new teacher's quarters.

Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Kalaveti Ravu, was at Nayarabale Village on March 22, 23, to officiate at the ground-breaking ceremony of the quarters. Hon. Ravu praised the villagers' foresight in choosing to plant trees on barren land, which would provide both financial and environmental benefits.

The trees planted will also add to the target of Fiji's tree planting campaign against climate change.

The "Noqu Kalou, Noqu Wacawaca Reforestation and Investment" project is a community initiative establishment directed by Reverend Ilitomasi Nute, where the 'solesolevaki' system is practiced.

The Ministry had reached an agreement with four landowning units (mataqali): Nasuwaga, Buca I Ra, Vunisaiki, and Wacawaca, in which they agreed to reforest 350 hectares of idle land under the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF) Project.

The reforestation contract is for five years, and the Ministry's focus is to assist the landowners in achieving this.

A nursery in the village provides tree seedlings for the forestry project. The committee is working on expanding the nursery.

The Ministry purchases tree seedlings to reforest the designated area, and the money obtained help to fund the project.

Divisional Forestry Officer Northern, Maleli Nakasava, said on the 350-hectare mataqali land, a total of 97,300 tree seedlings are intended to be planted.

The construction of the quarters is the first of many other projects in the near future.

This project is an example of a project that is aligned with strategies created to achieve Fiji's long-term development goals at the international, regional, and national levels.

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This project is an example of a project that is aligned with strategies created to achieve Fiji's long-term development goals at the international, regional, and national levels.

Foresters Trained on MRV to Assist in Carbon Emission Reduction



The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry held a workshop on Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) on the week of April 19, 2023, in the Northern Division for foresters as part of efforts to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainable forest management in the forestry sector.

Through the Department of Forestry's REDD+ Unit, the one week training involved officers from the Central, Western and Northern divisions.

Both communities have been participating in tree planting activity through the Department's Restoration to Degraded Forests (RDF) project and have given up portion of their land with an agreement with Forestry to plant on 350 hectares in Nayarabale and 100 hectares of land in Vuniqalutu.

These three villages lie within the 20 districts in Fiji's Reducing Emissions and Enhancing Livelihoods Program (ERP) namely Nayarabale in the district of Vaturova, Vuniqalutu in the district of Dreketi and Navunievu in the district of Bua.

Having visited these three villages during the week-long training, the communities now have a fair perception of the ER Program and are looking forward to the detailed awareness that will be carried out consecutively.

Within the Fiji ER Program, there is a total of 1000 hectares for Climate smart agriculture earmarked for the Dreketi district and of which targets have to be achieved. These were reiterated to forest officers during the week long training and also relayed to the communities in Dreketi.

From this week, the MRV officer Viliame Tupua with the Forester TP will be visiting other ERP selected sites to discuss about the ERP and reporting on the MRV.

With the one week training in the North, officers were able to link to Fiji's Reducing Emissions and Enhancing Livelihoods Program (ERP) and the MRV component of measuring, collecting data and reporting. The templates provided to the officers will enable them to simplify and detail activities and report specific outputs of carbon emission reductions. Their daily operations will all be recorded and reported using the templates.

What is the MRV in REDD+ implementation

REDD+ refers to mitigation actions in developing countries relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, with the "plus" signifying conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

Under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), developing countries wishing to engage in REDD+ activities need to ensure that they have the necessary capacity to implement climate change mitigation actions in the forestry sector using a three-phased approach.

Successful implementation of such actions relies on robust capabilities to routinely and reliably monitor changes in forest areas, carbon stocks, and

associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals through the establishment of a Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system. Reporting and monitoring for REDD+ specifically refers to a country's forest and associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals, including their changes over time. The reliability of the generated information depends on whether data are transparent, consistent, complete, accurate and can be compared over time.

The reliability of the generated information depends on whether data comply with defined quality criteria: transparency, comparability, consistency, completeness, and accuracy. Overall guidance on how to adhere to these criteria has been provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at the invitation of the UNFCCC.

With support from the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to the Department of Forestry, the MRV study led to a breakthrough in land use change analysis indicating an annual deforestation rate of 1 percent equivalent to about 10,000 hectares per year. Such data are extremely helpful in highlighting why and how to protect forest resources, through recognising the drivers and impacts of deforestation. Through MRV work the Department of Forestry is in the process of completing the National Forest Reference Level to be submitted to the UNFCCC.

U.S Forest Service, Ministry of Forestry Collaborate in Assessing Methodology and Forest Inventory Needs

Forests are essential to the well-being of our planet. They serve as a source of food, shelter, and medicine for both humans and animals, and they play a crucial role in regulating the earth's climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

However, with the growing global demand for wood, other forest products, and agriculture products (which lead to forest land conversion) due to the rising population and its demands, the world's forests are facing unprecedented pressure. This is a concerning issue as the forests are not only the habitat of countless species but also serve as carbon sinks, providing oxygen, and mitigating climate change.

In Fiji, the Ministry of Forestry recognises the importance of sustainable forest management and has taken steps to ensure that the country's forests are managed in a way that is both environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

One key aspect of sustainable forest management is the regular monitoring of forest resources through forest inventories. Forest inventories involve the systematic collection and analysis of data on the composition, structure, and productivity of forest ecosystems.

This information is then used to inform forest policy and management decisions, such as the annual sustainable allowable cut, when and where to conduct timber harvests, how to protect endangered species and habitats, and how to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Additionally, Forest Inventories can be used to quantify compensation of standing trees only though equally important would be to have a valuation of the ecosystem services provided by that group of trees.

In Fiji, forest inventories have been conducted for many years, but requires regular update and improvement as well as reviewing standard operating procedures to improve standards and ensure continuous training to users of this tool. This standardisation of methodology is required to avoid inconsistencies in the data collected and analysis of the same, while comparing data from different regions or over time.

To address this issue, the U.S Forest Service, through the Climate Fellows Programme, has offered technical assistance to the Ministry of Forestry to review, update, and standardise forest inventory methodologies in Fiji.

The two day workshop was to develop a Needs Assessment which will be followed later by theoretical and practical training workshops and then the development of these standard methodologies and their documentation for wider dissemination and awareness and understanding of all stakeholders on how forest resources are valued.

The workshop

The first step in this process was the Forest Inventory Needs Assessment Workshop, which took place in Suva from March 28 to 29, 2023.

The workshop brought together stakeholders from the Ministry of Forestry and its stakeholders such as Fiji Pine Ltd (FPL), Fiji Hardwood Corporation Ltd (FHCL), iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) and academics, among others, with expertise in forest inventory.

The workshop aimed to identify current and future information needs that require forest inventory data, and to share inventory methodologies that have been or are currently used in Fiji.

Over the course of two days, participants in the workshop shared their experiences with forest inventories in Fiji and discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with collecting and analysing forest inventory data.

They also identified a range of information needs that require forest inventory data, including the determination of timber volume and value, the assessment of forest health and productivity, and the monitoring of carbon stocks for climate change mitigation.

It also became clear that there was a strong consensus on the importance of conducting forest inventories to support sustainable forest management practices. Stakeholders emphasised that accurate data on the forest inventory was critical for effective decision-making, particularly when it came to planning and resource allocation.

There was also a recognition of the need to ensure that inventories are conducted in a standardised and transparent manner, with clear methodologies and guidelines in place. This would help to ensure that the data collected is reliable and can be compared across different regions and time periods, enabling better monitoring of changes in the forest ecosystem.

The participants also highlighted the need to improve communication and coordination between different stakeholders involved in forest inventories, including the Ministry of Forestry, FPL, FHCL, and academic institutions.

They recognised that collaboration and information-sharing would be essential in developing a comprehensive and effective forest inventory system that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

By conducting a comprehensive forest inventory and utilising standardised methodologies, the Ministry will be able to more accurately assess the extent and health of Fiji's forests, as well as monitor changes over time. This information is crucial for developing effective management strategies that balance economic development with environmental sustainability.

Improved data collection and analysis will also allow the Ministry to identify areas of high conservation value and prioritise their

protection. This is particularly important in Fiji, where many forests are home to endangered species and provide critical ecosystem services such as water filtration and carbon storage.

Furthermore, standardised inventory methods will help the Ministry to better understand the economic value of Fiji's forests and to develop sustainable forest management practices that support the livelihoods of local communities while protecting the long-term health of the forests.

USFS's involvement

The U.S Forest Service's involvement in the workshop is a significant milestone for Fiji's forestry sector. The agency has made available its experts in forest inventory design, who have worked in more than 20 countries around the world, to assist the Ministry of Forestry in this important endeavour.

These experts bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the table, ensuring that the inventory methodologies developed for Fiji are of the highest standard and based on best practices from around the world.

This collaboration with the US Forest Service highlights the importance of international partnerships in advancing sustainable forestry practices and promoting the conservation of forest resources for future generations.

Following the workshop, the U.S Forest Service and the Ministry will collaborate to formalise a standard set of forest inventory methodologies for Fiji. This will involve developing documentation, including a general document on how to design and implement forest inventories, a field manual that outlines field data collection procedures, and guidance on how to analyse the data. They will also deliver technical training sessions covering all aspects of forest inventory from planning and sample design to field data collection and analysis.

Improving forest management

Overall, the Forest Inventory Needs Assessment Workshop marks an important first step in the process of improving forest management in Fiji. By implementing standardised inventory methodologies and improving data collection and analysis, the Ministry of Forestry will be better equipped to balance the economic and environmental needs of the country and ensure that Fiji's forests remain healthy and productive for generations to come.

It is hoped that these efforts will result in improved data quality, greater transparency and accountability, and better decision-making in the management of Fiji's forest resources. With the threat of climate change looming large, there has never been a more important time to prioritise sustainable forest management practices, and the outcomes of this workshop represent a significant step forward in achieving this goal.

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