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Natural Resources Development Foundation Newsletter December 2012



"Empowering landowners to say NO to destructive land use and say YES to sustainable land use!"

WELCOME to the latest news of the Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF). 2012 has been an excellent year in terms of achievements of our organisation and community partners. The most notable of these is NRDF's October 2012 Forest Stewardship Council (FSC[®]) accreditation, after two years of preparatory work. NRDF currently works with six community groups (partnerships) to manage and protect 24,000ha of unlogged forest in the Choiseul and Western provinces. NRDF has assisted these communities to set up five portable sawmill operations for sustainable timber harvesting and gain alternate income streams from their land, such as honey and coconut oil production. In November 2012, the NRDF team was happy to sign a new conservation agreement with the Boeboe community. Another exciting activity is a developing ecotourism project on Vella Lavella.



SUSTAINABLE SAWMILLING

Through sustainable forest management, NRDF is actively working with Choiseul and Western communities to set up sawmilling businesses through infrastructure, training and networking. This type of timber harvesting is much more sustainable for the communities than logging. For an average tree, a community can earn approximately 20 times more by milling it, compared to selling it to a logging company. These high profits can continue for generations if the forest is properly managed.



FSC MILESTONE!

A major boost is NRDF's 2012 Forest Stewardship Council (FSC[®]) accreditation. FSC[®] is an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation established to promote the responsible management of the world's forests. FSC[®] is the world's highest standard of sustainable timber, which means that a higher value can be gained for these timber resources. By the end of 2013, all NRDF sawmill operations should be FSC[®] certified under the NRDF group certificate.



BOEBOE CONSERVATION

In the Choiseul Province NRDF is working with the Boeboe community to set aside 2000ha to become a national park, to protect this land from destructive land use. In November 2012, a five-year agreement was signed with NRDF to support the establishment of the Guerre National Park. Due to the exploration interests of a nickel mining company, the protection of this unique ironwood forest land was a huge priority. The best way for the Boeboe landowners to protect this unique ecosystem, was to register this land as a national park. Ironwood is a protected tree under Solomon law. Choiseul has been described as containing some of the largest remaining stands of lowland rainforest in the Pacific and these forests support a greater biodiversity than any other province in the Solomons.



Many species of plants and animals in Solomon Islands are still unknown to science, and tragically at the current rate of large scale logging many will be destroyed before they are discovered. As part of NRDF's FSC[®] forest management system, partners are encouraged set at least 10% of their land aside for forest conservation. Some of these NRDF conservation activities are supported by the Rufford Small Grants Foundation in the United Kingdom.



REFORESTATION & FOREST RESTORATION

In 2007, a logging company began to illegally clear forests in one of the NRDF's Vella Lavella project areas. After chasing out the logging company, the community involved has now replanted 10ha of the felled area to help in the regeneration of the forest and try to reverse the compaction and creeper overgrowth that has occurred in other logged areas of the Solomon Islands. With support from a voluntary carbon offset program from the Dutch Millennium Foundation (DMF), the community aims to replant a total of 40ha with some 20,000 local trees (mainly *Vitex*, *Calophyllum* and *Pometia*).

CASHING IN WITH CARBON

Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguard was the theme at the 6-8 November [REDD+](#) Workshop in Honiara. At the workshop, NRDF's Stephen Suti (pictured) presented "Experiences of stakeholder engagement at the local level in the Solomon Islands – opportunities and challenges". More than 30 people participated in the workshop, where a national task force was set up to coordinate the work on REDD+ activities.



NRDF is now working with organisations, such as [Live and Learn](#), to explore Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) as a potential income source for these communities through sustainable forest management and conservation. REDD can create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests, offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development. REDD+ goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation, and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

ECOTOURISM ADVENTURES

Research facilitation and ecotourism are other strong possibilities for income generation and knowledge capture. One NRDF priority is supporting the development of the Barekasi Rainforest Reserve's (BRR) ecotourism project on Vella Lavella Island in the Western Province. By sharing the natural beauty of the BRR with tourists, the community has a unique opportunity to sustainably generate income. Tourism must be managed carefully to reduce impacts on the culture and ecosystem.

This ecotourism project will involve 2-3 day treks to accommodate 4-6 tourists into the reserve. This project involves: managing the visitors' eco-lodge compound and the tourist activities; constructing environmentally-friendly facilities for visitors, including use of local materials, solar power and rain water collection; and developing activities for visitors, such as walking trails that minimise the impact on the environment and ecosystem.

The BRR is the last intact lowland rainforest area on Vella Lavella, as large scale logging has devastated most of the island over the last decade. The BRR covers approximately 800ha of rainforest. The reserve lies in a valley, surrounded by hills and mountains, and houses a wide variety of plants, trees, birds, mammals and insects. The reserve contains a large freshwater system catchment area, on which Leona Village is dependent. A number of sacred Tambu sites are found in the area, which are of great importance to the cultural heritage of the Barekasi Tribe. The Reserve has been protected since 2009.

AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEER

A background in environmental resource assessment/management and having founded and managed an Australian business, was a perfect background for 2011/12 Australian volunteer Anna Price. In August 2011, Anna began working for NRDF based in Sasamunga (Choiseul), supporting the local sawmill business and the community-based organisation. To reach further project areas, Anna moved to Gizo in January 2012, working with NRDF community partners at Leona, Pine, Rarakasi, Ngorabara and Boeboe.

Anna (pictured third from left) was instrumental in developing the honey production project in all six NRDF project areas. With Stephen Suti, Anna explored the Women in Business Inc model in Samoa for marketing and exporting community produced goods.



Another highlight of her NRDF work, was hosting the March 2012 visits of Public Solicitor's Office lawyers and Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation staff to several communities. This was the first time that a number of customary landowners learnt what their legal rights were in relation to logging, mining and protected areas. This tour aimed to build the confidence of landowners to realise their rights in their land and resource development.

In Anna's words "I have made lifelong friends in the Solomon Islands and hope to come back to visit. I thank everyone for their hospitality, friendship and care of me during my time there."

ABOUT US NRDF is a Solomon Islands non-governmental organisation that is committed to promoting and supporting sustainable natural resource management by local landowners, in turn protecting social, economic and environmental assets. NRDF is determined to empower landholders to say no to destructive land use and say yes to sustainable land use, supporting their legal rights and ensuring the longevity of their forests for future generations.



Key NRDF funding partners are the European Union and the Church Development Service (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst – EED).

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