

# Forestry Certificate Training in Fiji – Issues & Challenges

## Background

Forestry Training in Fiji is embedded in the, 1950 and the revised 2007 Fiji Forest Policy which directs the Conservator of Forests (Head of Forestry in Fiji) to train subordinate staff in appropriate knowledge and skills relevant to forestry work.

The first training program was offered in 1969 with the aim of building the capacity of forestry officers to work for the Government of Fiji for the activation of Forest Policies and Legislation. The practice has continued through the provision forestry technical training to school leavers for the award of Forest Technician Certificate. Graduates are recruited into the Civil Service as Forest Guards.

To date, the Fiji Forestry Training Institution (FTC) has awarded a total of 260 graduates with Forest Technician Certificate. Past students of FTC are not only from Fiji but from other smaller Island States in the South Pacific region as indicated in Figure 1.

With the down sizing of the civil servants, the need for training subordinate staff has become scarce with demands for training occurring every 3 – 5 years. However, given the growing size of the private sector in the timber trade coupled with the shift in focus on the production of high

quality export products, the need for setting high quality standard assurance is inevitable, increasing the demand from the forestry sector for training of technical skills at all levels of forestry operation.

## Employment in the Forest Sector

The latest published record of employment in the sector indicates a rapid growth of an estimated 102 workers per annum over a period of nineteen (19) years from 1987 to 2006.

The portion of workers for each sub-sector is shown in Figure 2. Workers in the forest sector are categorized into the Public sub-sector, consisting of staff of the Department of Forestry; Primary Processing, consisting of logging and haulage operations and Secondary Processing, consisting of Sawmill and downstream processing.

Current efforts in capacity building across the forest sector would thus be targeted to a collective total number of workers conservatively estimated at 3000 in 2004. The Forestry Training institution at Colo i Suva, Suva, Fiji, however, would only target approximately 11% of that population with the remaining being the main target group for the second Forestry Institution established in 2006 as the Fiji Timber Industry Training Centre. To date a total

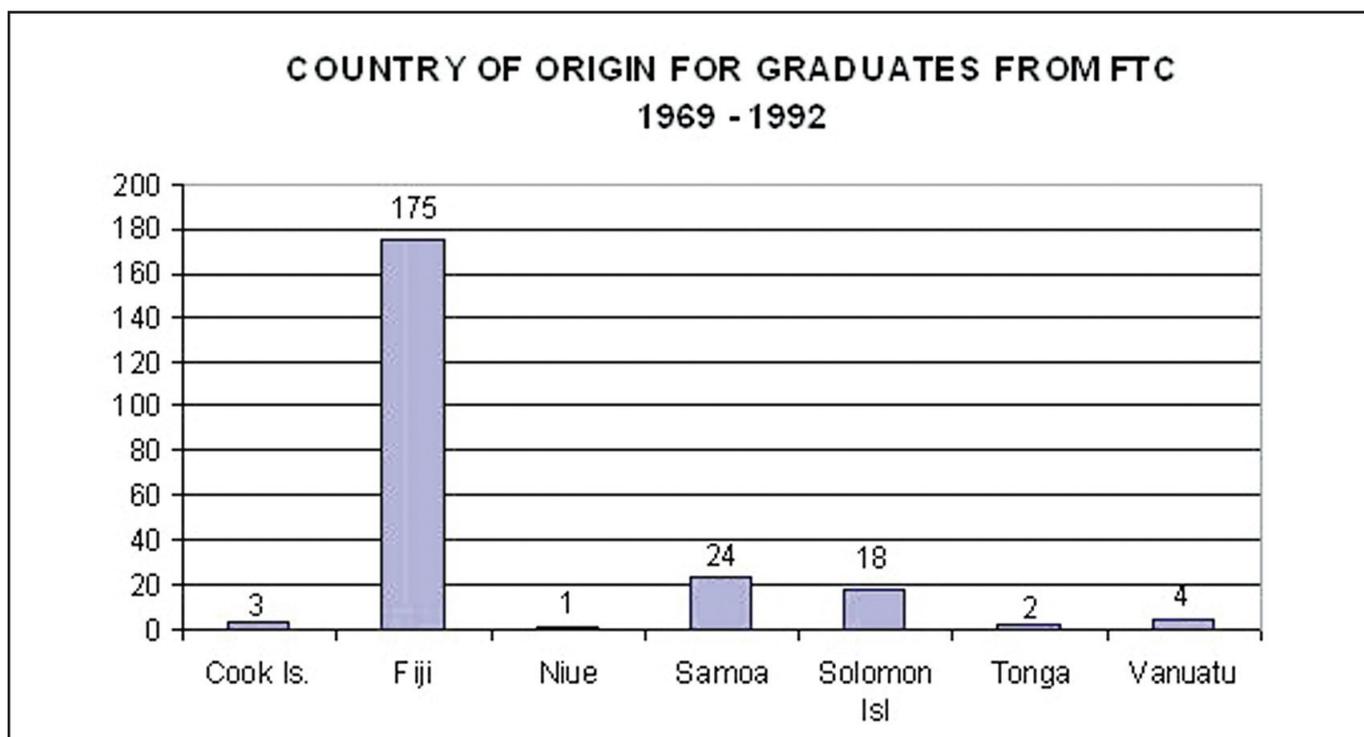


Figure 1: Country of Origin for Students trained at Fiji Forestry Training Institution

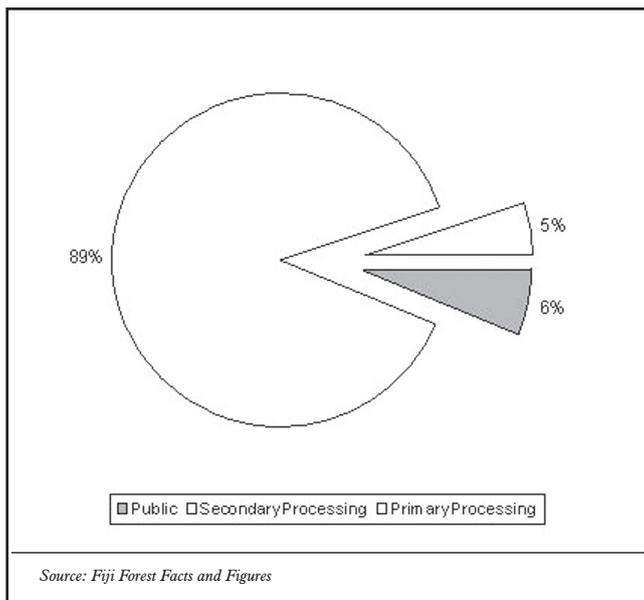


Figure 2: Level of Workers in the Forestry Sector (1996)

of 1031 (or 78%) of workers have been certified in the primary forest sub-sector. The figure may be misleading given the high turnover rate of people in the sector that leave for greener pastures.

### Economic Contribution of the Forest Sector

The forest sector contributes about 2.5 percent of National Gross Domestic Product (Fiji Today 2003). Forestry makes an important contribution to the economy of rural areas. Pine forests support an industry, which has harvested an average of 270,000 cubic meters of exported woodchips annually for the last ten years. Over the same period, production of sawn timber for both export and local markets from all types of forests averages 70,000 cubic meters per year.

Total earnings from wood products are on average FJ\$43M per annum. In 2002, it totalled \$F40, 358, 797.00 (excluding furniture)<sup>1</sup>. This represented a two percent increase from 1999. Pine chips accounted for 60% of the export earnings followed by sawn timber and plywood at 17% and 14% respectively.

The domestic market is saturated, as the growth in consumption is minimal and determined by economic growth. At the same time, local demand is focused on sawn-timber and veneer. For instance in 1997, the total volume of native species logged was 151,941 cubic meters<sup>2</sup>. Assuming the national average saw-log recovery of 45%, a total of 68373 cubic meters of sawn-timber were produced. At the same time, a total of 27,831 cubic meters of sawn pine was produced. Of the total sawn-timber produced in 1997 at 96,204 cubic meters, some 72% were consumed locally while 28% was exported.

<sup>1</sup> Draft Annual Report – Department of Forestry 2002.

<sup>2</sup> MAFF and SPC/GTZ; 1999; *Forestry Facts & Figures; Quality Prints, Suva.*

### Training Facilities and Programs Offered

There are two forestry training centres in Fiji, the third being the Fiji National University which offers a local Diploma in Tropical Forestry program. The two Government owned Forestry Training Centres, Colo i Suva near Suva and the Timber Industry Training Centre, Nasinu, Suva are products of Government's commitment to building the capacity of the forest sector to enable the full realization and delivery of the recommendations of the Forest Sector Review (1988).

In 1988, the FAO Sector Review had recommended that in order for the sector to meet its socio-economic obligations, the industry required a "virtually complete reversal of direction from its present status quo, concentrating exclusively on specialty, high quality products and secondary processing tailored to specific customers in a targeted narrow range of market niches". It further recommended, "institutional and infrastructure reforms be undertaken so that it is able to deliver the products to the stringent standards applying in export markets for quality timber and added value manufactures."

These recommendations alluded to important areas that were deficient and impeding growth within the sector. These were:

- the need to change the attitude and working habits of the current processors,
- the lack of skill and craftsmanship that could ably meet the demands of the upper-end export niche markets,
- the need for institutional reform and physical infrastructure development to support the development of the sector.

A Training Needs Survey instituted under the Pre-project co-sponsored by the International Tropical Timber Organization supported these findings, culminating in the formulation of a full project proposal that will finance the strengthening of the present Timber Industry Training Centre.

Given the anticipated boost in log production from our hardwood Mahogany and softwood Pine plantations and the current trend in the rapid turn over in skilled workers in the primary forest sub-sector, there is an urgent need to instigate training in all aspects and at all levels of the workforce in the sector.

The two training institutions have a vision to pioneer forestry education in Fiji and the smaller Tropical South Pacific Islands. Its mission is focused on the drive to be recognized as a pre-eminent Forestry training provider enabling forest communities to make informed decision on forest management while producing competent workforce for the forest sector that will result in the production of:

- high quality logs from native and plantation forests and

- high quality Fijian Timber and wood based products that compete successfully against alternative sources of supply and material in the domestic and export markets.

The goal of forestry training in Fiji is thus to train professionally qualified personnel in terms of knowledge and technical skills required in forestry activities bringing about attitudinal changes that will result in improved standards of forest management while maximizing utilization of forest products within the next ten years.

## Issues and Challengers

- a. Apart from the Tropical Forestry Diploma program offered by the Fiji National University there is currently, no other product in the local education market focusing on forestry issues hence competition is expected to be very low. However, this does not mean that the Department can become complacent, on the contrary, the Department at present ensures that standards set for each course is internationally recognized and accepted.
- b. One of the major shortcoming of the forestry programs in Fiji is there is no Qualification Framework set nationally to benchmark the quality of programs against recognized qualification framework in Australia and New Zealand. Eventhough, Government has prioritized the setting up of a National Qualification Framework, it has been a while that this issue is in the pipe line
- c. Delivery of forestry training in Fiji on the Certificate Level is heavily reliant on Government subsidies providing the funds to execute the trainings with a total of \$F500, 000 annually. Government will have to contemplate a user-pay system whereby a pricing strategy has to be formulated for the sustainable delivery of training in the long term.
- d. There is a need to extensively market the programs at the two forestry institutions to all stakeholders of the forest sector. The marketing strategy will have to be tailored to attract young and talented people into the sector. This is imperative to support the drive for high quality timber export products as the sector aspires to achieve its \$1 Billion target by 2014. The market for the forestry training program is assumed to be ready for the delivery of the product. However, there still needs to be careful marketing strategies in place to capture the full support of the industry. This is important as we are dealing with a fledging industry with an ambitious plan.

The underlying philosophy of all the programs offered at the two forestry institution is based on the assumption that learning is a process that occurs continuously in ones livelihood and thus endeavors to provide basic knowledge, skills and attitudes to participants to create an awareness of the continuing need to acquire new knowledge, develop

new skills and work independently and responsibly in the primary forest sector. It also believes that communities must be empowered to make informed decision while having full ownership in guided development initiatives aimed at sustainable livelihood for present and future generation.

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