

The South Pacific Forestry Development Programme¹

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Abstract: Only a few countries in the South Pacific are large enough for industrial forestry to be a key component of the national economy, but forests provide benefits to many people. The United Nations FAO South Pacific Forestry Development Programme was established in April 1988, at Port Vila, Vanuatu, with a \$385,000 budget, and 14 nations participating. The Programme's aim is to "upgrade the status of forestry in the participating countries." The Programme, which extended to December 1991 with a budget totaling \$1,046,121, has carried out a variety of development activities, including training, documentation, resource assessments, and species trials. Extension of the Programme beyond 1991 has not yet been decided. A number of projects that it could support have been proposed.

The countries in the South Pacific region vary considerably in land area, population, per capita income, and national and forestry development. Only a few countries, e.g., Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji, are large enough for industrial forestry to be an important component of their national economy. Most other countries are too small for industrial forestry to be practiced, and much of their timber requirements have to be imported.

Nevertheless, forests and trees play an important and even critical role in the socio-economic well-being of the societies in all countries in the region. Among other benefits, they provide people with shelter, food, fuel, medicinal and other traditional by-products. Forests serve to reduce soil erosion, including coastal erosion, and regulate water flow and quality. In many places, forestry has been integrated into traditional agricultural practices.

In most countries in the region, much of the natural vegetation has been or is being removed. In the larger countries, the motivation is usually to generate funds through the sale of logs or lumber, or to make way for commercial agriculture or food production. In the smaller countries, the motivation is usually simply to use the land for food production. In either case, the rate and methods of deforestation or devegetation have prompted concern over the long-term sustainability of forest resources and land for agriculture production, over the impacts on water resources, and ultimately, over, the quality of life of the people.

Forestry is usually accorded relatively low priority in most of the countries of the South Pacific region, particularly vis-a-vis the allocation of manpower and funds by governments. Forestry is also outside the effective ambit of the existing regional agencies, i.e., the South Pacific Commission (SPC), which is involved in agriculture development in the region, Forum

Secretariat, or the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP). Further, the provision of proper forestry support is often hampered by the land tenure system, under which land tends to belong largely to communities rather than the State or individuals. Although the priority rating for forestry may be improved as the negative impacts of reduced forest and tree cover are felt, it is unlikely that the countries will be able to afford the additional funds and manpower required to reduce, if not reverse, these impacts.

Despite these difficulties facing the "forests and trees sector," much can be done to improve the contribution of forests and trees to the general well-being of peoples in the region. One obvious way to do this is by harnessing the collective efforts, knowledge, and experience in the individual countries and sharing them among other countries in the region, and by regional collaboration in activities like training and research. This is particularly important because of the small size and wide geographical dispersion of the countries in the region, and of the many past, and on-going, bi-lateral aid programmes which would otherwise restrict their benefits to only a few countries.

Attempts to achieve greater regional cooperation have been mainly in the form of occasional ad hoc training courses, meetings, and seminars (Yabaki and others 1983), which invariably reiterated the need for further such cooperation. New Zealand has tried to fill this need by appointing its own regional forester, and Australia has also been urged to appoint a regional forester for the Pacific (Cameron 1986). However, no one country is able or willing to bear the cost of providing the level of regional services required.

In 1986, an Asia Pacific Forestry Research Directors' meeting in Honolulu recommended the formation of a Pacific Islands Forestry Council to "assist national forestry agencies and other forestry related organisations in the Pacific region obtain and share scientific and technical information needed for forest resource development, protection and management." But no further action on this recommendation was taken because of the proposal to establish a South Pacific Forestry Development Programme, which was designated as RAS/86/036.

This paper describes the development and outlines the history of the South Pacific Forestry Development Programme.

Formation of the Program

Because of the growing need for assistance to the forestry sector in the region, a proposal to establish a South Pacific Forestry Development Programme was tabled by United Nations Development Program at the forum of National Aid Coordinators of Pacific Islands Developing Countries in Suva, Fiji, in February 1986. It was then included in the list of priority

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projects identified by the meeting. The project proposal was later discussed at a South Pacific Heads of Agriculture meeting in September 1986 in Apia, which suggested that this development project should, as far as possible, serve the needs of small island countries, assist countries organize forest resources databases, and assist in encouraging the utilization of coconut wood.

Other on-going or pipeline regional projects with related objects then were:

- RAS/86/032: for coconut wood utilization (pipeline)
- RAS/86/035: Development of Agricultural Statistics
- RAS/86/048: Asia Pacific Forest Industries Development Group based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- RAS/86/144, Improved Government Information Systems

In December 1987, establishment of the South Pacific Forestry Development Programme was approved by United Nations Development Program and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with an allocation of \$385,000 for a 2-year duration. The Programme was based in Port Vila, Vanuatu, with 14 participating countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa (Western), Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. It was launched with the arrival of the project coordinator in April 1988. In April 1989, the Programme's budget was increased to over \$500,000. The Programme's long-term objective is to "upgrade the status of forestry development in the participating countries, and thereby contribute to the socio-economic well-being of the peoples of the South Pacific."

1988 - 90 The First Two Years

Among the activities undertaken by the Programme during its first 2 years were:

- Preparation of formats for collection and assessment of forestry data by participating countries (Field Document No. 1), and use of the formats for four selected project countries (in preparation)
- Study of use of forests in Vanuatu and Tonga (in preparation)
- Training courses in coconut wood utilization (3-13 April 1989, Tonga, 15 participants from nine countries); and forest sector planning (3-21 July 1989, Vanuatu, 11 participants from eight countries. The latter was organized and funded jointly by the Programme and the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB)).
- Funding of participants from Programme countries to relevant training courses, study tours and meetings
- Publication and dissemination of Project News (two issues in 1990)

1990 to 1991 (21 months)

In view of the initial budget constraints and wide geographical dispersion of Programme countries, the implementation of

Programme activities required considerable lead time. Subsequently, the Programme was extended for another 21 months to December 1991, i.e., the end of current UNDP 5-year budget cycle, with an additional budget of about \$500,000, bringing the total budget to \$1,046,121.

Among the activities implemented during this period (to date) were:

- Training course on remote sensing (23-27 July 1990, Noumea; five participants from two countries)
- Convening of South Pacific Heads of Forestry (HoF) meeting (26-28 November 1990, Suva, Fiji; attended by 8 HoF and 6 to 10 forestry or related agencies); and a Tripartite Review (TPR) of the Programme by Heads of Forestry (the previous TPR had been carried out by Heads of Agriculture, because of financial constraints)
- Preliminary study of manpower and training needs in Programme countries (report in preparation)
- Assessment of use of forest products by village communities in Vanuatu (report in preparation)
- Trial planting of commercially valuable rattans (*Calamus caesioides*, *C. manan*, *C. spp.*) in six selected Programme countries (report in preparation); and
- Publication of a quarterly South Pacific forestry newsletter

Among other activities planned for the rest of 1991 are:

- A review mission on the forestry staffing and training needs and facilities in the region. This review was identified as a high priority activity by the 1990 HoF meeting and is aimed at proposing a realistic forestry training strategy and programme for the countries in the region. It is being jointly funded by the USDA Forest Service, the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) and the Programme. The review will take 2 to 3 months, starting in June 1991.
- A study tour of forestry (particularly community, agro, and social forestry, high quality timber plantations, and non-wood forest products) activities in Indonesia and Malaysia for senior forestry personnel from the region. This would be in August 1991, and participants will be funded by the Programme and various aid agencies in the region.
- A Heads of Forestry and TPR meeting in early October 1991. The venue, actual dates, and agenda are being finalized.
- A training course on occupational health and safety in the logging and small/portable sawmill industries. This would be held over 2 weeks in September-October 1991 in Fiji in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO)/Fiji Ministry of Forests Forestry Training School.
- Publications on various aspects of agro-forestry and tree planting in the region through the use of authors' contracts.
- Compilation of forest plantation data and experience in the region in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service.
- Further development of the South Pacific forestry newsletter.

Several other activities, e.g., training courses in negotiation and communication skills, and in agro-forestry (in collaboration with the (German Technical Assistance Program) GTZ/Fiji Forestry Extension Project); compilation of land use experiences vis-a-vis forestry development in the region, etc., identified by the 1990 HoF meeting for implementation may have to be kept in abeyance in view of financial constraints.

Extension of the Programme

The further extension of the Programme beyond 1991 has not yet been decided. On the basis of experience gained to date, the following considerations should be borne in mind for any future support or assistance to the forestry sector in the region:

- Direct involvement of participating agencies in determining Programme activities and priorities.

One major drawback of the current Programme was the lack of funds to convene a Heads of Forestry meeting early in the Programme's life to discuss and determine the nature, scope, and priorities of activities. The usefulness and importance of such a meeting in fostering closer rapport, cooperation, collaboration and, perhaps even more important, a sense of involvement and participation among forestry agencies and foresters in the region, was clearly demonstrated by the 1990 HoF meeting in Suva.

The need for and importance of such a meeting is accentuated by the large number of countries in the region, each with its own national forestry priorities, and the invariably limited financial and manpower resources of the Programme. The meeting would be the best forum to discuss and decide on the optimal allocation of these resources.

As recommended by that meeting, another HoF meeting is scheduled for 1991, and every effort should be made to convene this meeting annually. These meetings should involve all interested countries in the region, and not only Programme countries.

- Provision of regular technical support services.

The small size of most countries in the region makes it unrealistic for them to develop capability in the various forestry or related fields, e.g., natural forest management, plantation forest development, forest products utilization, agro/community forestry, and research and development. However, there is an urgent need for such capability or expertise in all countries in order to develop and enhance the contribution of the forest and tree sectors to their respective economies.

This expertise can be effectively provided by a core of suitably qualified and experienced persons, through a regional forestry project. As continuity and personal rapport with local counterparts is a critical element of such technical support, this should be provided by full-time project staff instead of by

visiting consultants, who should be brought in to provide more specialized support when the need arises.

Areas of Support

Five main areas proposed for support by the program would be:

1. *Natural forests management, development, conservation, and policy:* This includes providing advice or studies on the above subjects, especially vis-a-vis national development plans and priorities, and watershed and environmental considerations.
2. *Forest and tree resources development:* This includes the establishment of species and provenance trials of multiple-purpose and high quality timber species for either local or industrial uses; development of rattans, bamboos and other non-wood forest products (e.g., honey, medicinal plants, essential oils, dyes, etc.) and of appropriate agro- and community-forestry systems; etc. Pilot trial plantings should be encouraged in selected countries, and used for training purposes, probably on sub-regional bases.
3. *Forest and tree resources utilization:* This includes the adaptation of appropriate harvesting, processing, and marketing systems and technology for timber from natural forests, plantations, coconut stems, and other sources, as well as for non-wood forest or tree products, e.g., bamboo, rattan, etc. Particular emphasis is needed on proper logging and small sawmill practices, including basic training and technical support on selection, use, maintenance and repairs of equipment; processing (including treatment) of rattans, bamboo, and other similar materials into furniture, and handicrafts.
4. *Information processing, collection, and exchange:* This activity has been initiated, but requires the active support of all countries in order to be usefully sustained. The regional forestry newsletter recently published by the Programme can and should promote closer communication among foresters and forestry agencies in the region. Other means of achieving this object are through the Project Field Document series of publications, authors' contracts, and meetings of Heads of Forestry (already started), other operational staff and research personnel (to be started).
5. *Institutional development:* The provision of adequate numbers of suitably trained and experienced staff in all countries is critical to the sustained and proper management, utilization, and development of the forest and tree resources in the region. In view of the small size of most countries in the region, this can be best provided through a realistic, long-term, and regional staff training and development strategy and programme. The three-person review mission mentioned above should lay the foundation for this object.

No single agency can provide all the support needed in the Pacific Southwest region. Therefore, all aid-donor agencies must work closely, not only to ensure that their aid resources are not wasted on duplicative activities, but perhaps even more important, to try to achieve synergism through their coordinated collective efforts. The value of such coordination and collaboration has been demonstrated by the joint activities undertaken by the Programme and AIDAB, USDA Forest Service, International Labor Organization (ILO), and GTZ. But much more can and must be achieved through further similar cooperation.

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