

## **Regional Forest Inventory Training in the Pacific**

Forests provide many products and services that are vital to the well-being of Pacific communities. They, however, need to be managed in a sustainable manner for these contributions to be maintained and/or enhanced for the benefit of future generations. This now has become more critical given the Pacific islands' vulnerability to climate change and the important role that forests play in both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

But sustainable forest management regimes can only be effective if accurate data and information about one's forests are available and maintained. This has not been possible up to now as most Pacific Island Countries (PICs) have not been able to undertake their own national forest inventory at all or not having it done regularly due mainly to the lack of capacity and resources.

In response to the above, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) through the UN-REDD Programme, started implementing a project in May 2014 on “*Strengthening Regional Support to National Forest Monitoring Systems for REDD+ in the Pacific*” with the main aim of strengthening technical support to Pacific small island developing states on forest inventory and monitoring.

The capacity building activities of the project are being delivered by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) through its Land Resources Division (LRD) and the Geo-science and Applied Technology Division (AGTD). Among other things, the project is supporting SPC to establish a forest inventory facility that will provide training and technical backstopping to assist and support PICs establish and maintain their national forest monitoring systems for REDD+ activities.

From 15<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2014, the first regional forest inventory training workshop was held in Labasa, Fiji, and was attended by 22 participants from six PICs, which included Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

The workshop focused on providing participants with a common understanding of the international context of REDD+, and the UN-REDD Programme and its approach to National Forest Monitoring Systems. Training on inventory systems and activities covered a range of ecosystems including native forests, grasslands, mangroves and plantations. During the five day field-based component of the training course, participants visited a range of locations in Northern Fiji, including field sites in the vicinity of Labasa, Drawa, Seaqaqa and Waiqele. Participants also had the opportunity to share their own experiences in implementing National Forest Inventory (NFI) activities. A major outcome of the event was the compilation of information on technical gaps and needs for forest inventory in the Pacific. The final session of the workshop focused on appropriate methods for inventory data analysis.

The second regional training workshop was held in Makira, Solomon Islands from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, and was attended by 26 participants from six PICs, and from FAO and SPC. Unlike the first regional training workshop held in Labasa, Fiji, where participants were mainly technical/field personnel, the Makira workshop had a mixture of both management and technical/field personnel involved in NFIs.

The main objectives of the Makira workshop was to provide participants with a full review of the range of knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to consider, plan and implement a pilot NFI in their home country. In addition, the workshop aimed at getting the regional participants to contribute to a draft manual that will serve as a guide, to address the necessary components of an NFI design, and to provide participants with the exposure of the capacities required to complete the task.

The workshop programme included plenary presentations and discussions, group work and field exercises focusing in developing and enhancing the skills needed to address NFI requirements. Activities in the workshop focused on areas of decision making in defining NFI objectives through management's ability to work through stakeholder issues and budgetary limitations in making the most uniform decisions, detailed understanding of how to create and plan plot and field survey designs, data processing, analysis and reporting to meet both national and international standards.

A two day intensive field work was carried out in both highland and lowland forest areas where the formulated plot design, field protocol and data forms were put to test. Data collected from this were then analyzed during a data analysis session.

A representative from the Fiji Ministry of Culture and Heritage also made a presentation on cultural mapping in forestry with the possibility of integrating this aspect into the NFI. This received positive feedback from the participants as it was viewed as a possible solution to land ownership issues and cultural/traditional hindrance in establishing NFI plots.

Overall feedbacks towards a regional NFI manual were positive with progressive recommendations from participants on what was needed in a regional NFI. Participants also expressed their gratitude for the opportunity provided as the workshop had broadened their knowledge on NFI.



Participants from Samoa and the Solomon Islands measuring the diameter at breast height (dbh) of a *Litsea* timber tree species on the lowland unlogged rainforest areas of Makira in the Solomon Islands.



Participants were shown how to lay out a sample plot to measure carbon from extracted soil samples in the grassland area of Seaqqa, Labasa in Vanua Levu, Fiji