

RECOMMENDATION REPORT FROM THE STUDY TOUR IN FIJI 11TH – 20TH MAY 2013

1. OVERVIEW

The trip was an educational and very informative one. It is one that encourages me as an environmental lawyer to see where the legal system in Fiji may fit in with Solomon Islands context.

Thank you to UNDP for the opportunity provided.

2. TIMETABLE WITH LESSONS LEARNT

a. 1st day- Saturday 11th May

We travelled to Villa and then Nadi then to Suva. Got a bus and went to Town House Apartment.

b. 2nd day- Sunday 12th May

Checked out of Town House and went to Studio 6.

c. 3rd day- Monday 13th May

The team was transported to SPC office for the formal part of our study tour. Had presentations from the different officers of the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries in Fiji. We had morning tea. Continued with the session after morning tea. Had lunch again, and discussed further until afternoon tea. We then completed the sessions for the day.

We were informed that the powerpoint presentations would be provided to us through flash drives at the end of the week's study tour.

We had a debrief meeting after the day's session and all agreed on a few things to work on when returning to SI. These include:

1. Customary land recording and related issues
2. Forestry Bill
3. Some venturing into new projects like pine tree plantation like Fiji Pine

d. 4th day- Tuesday 14th May

Formal presentations continued but now from NGO's and other non-Governmental organizations. This was when we were informed in detail about the pilot site at Emalu-Draubuta Village.

e. 5th day- Wednesday 15th May

Got up early in the morning and transported to Sigatoka for several hours to prepare for the visit to Draubuta Village where the pilot site for Redd+ was located. 6-7am- around noon was on travelling by vehicle up on the mountains.

Got to the end of the road and walked down the steep mountain to Draubuta. We were welcomed by the village traditionally. Also had early lunch and the main lunch after that. We had a great discussion time with the villagers. These provided avenues for me to learn a lot from them such as:

1. The Draubuta people explained how they are involved in the pilot project
2. They explained how they are informed always through their representative
3. That the prior informed consent was an issue that they experienced encouraged them to accept the Redd+ activities and all related issues.
4. The pilot project is 100% owned by the landowners

After the discussions with them, we then faced the hugest challenge of walking up the steep mountain which took more than 20 minutes minimum. From there we then travelled back by vehicle to Sigatoka and then to Nadi to sleep over.

f. 6th Day- Thursday 16th May

We got up early again at around 5-6am and prepared to leave for Fiji Pine Limited at Lautoka.

Got to Fiji Pine Limited at around noon and we were welcomed by Mr. George Vuki who was the Group General Manager Operations. Learnt that it is owned by the Fiji Government. And has contracts with other businesses such as Tropik Wood Industries Limited, Fiji Forest Industries Limited and others. These other businesses assist in the area of expertise they possess. The different landowners who have land where the plantations are grown also have benefits and shares in the Pine industry.

We then went to a village where they worked on nursering the Pine trees. There were millions of seedlings already planted for other hectares of land already secured for planting. The locals around the area make up the workforce and the landowners themselves also

have royalty payments from the income earned from the use of their land for pine plantation.

On our way back we observed some of the pine trees being slit open to collect raisins which we learnt later were to be exported to the United States and abroad which worth millions of dollars.

We were then welcomed by another village involved in this production. They explained how they got involved in this business which was very interesting. Thus I learnt that just from the pine trees, a lot of income can be earned from the tree. One is logging, sawmilling where they also provide it for domestic buyers, it also assists in producing energy and finally has the raisin product where the people also export it overseas for income. The interesting thing about this raisin production is that though the trees are cut, it does not harm the growth of the tree or its quality at all.

We then had the opportunity of observing their energy plant which gives out about 12 megawatts while Solomon Islands uses about 3 megawatts. Thus was very interesting and challenging. They try to utilize all resources including the waste or off cuts from the pine trees they sawmill as firewood for their generator that produces the energy.

After this, we then travelled for few more hours to Fiji Water industry. We observed how the Fiji water is manufactured and bottled. We also were informed of how they get water deep down from the ground and then it goes through a process of purification before it is bottled and put in cartons. Major needs would be machines to produce and extract water from deep within the ground, cleaning processes and then the machines to bottle them.

We were given a gift of 2 cartons for our visit and started again to travel back to Suva. It took about 3 hours to travel back.

g. 7th day- Friday 17th May

We got up early again and went to Novotel Hotel to observe how the steering committee of Fiji Redd+ does their meetings and discussions involved. The observation was an opportunity again as the stakeholders were like ours, from different important stakeholders around the country. Interestingly there was no legal officer that I am aware of being involved. I was informed that that there is only the environmental lawyers association but unaware if any of their representative attended then or not.

The main focus found in their discussions in my view was for policies to assist them with the Redd+ initiative in Fiji. And some mentions of legal framework as well to assist in the Redd+ initiative. Another interesting fact learnt was UN confirmed 8.2 million dollars' worth of fund for Redd+ activities with strict monitoring and evaluation for the use of the funds.

We were excused after having gone through the morning session. We then left and organized for a meeting in the evening at 430pm. At about 530pm we had the meeting and some presented on what they had learnt so far from the week long study tour. Others agreed to do more detailed one later.

We then attended a closing dinner where we had Mr. Jalesi and Ms Fung with us for the dinner. Informal discussions were on and after dinner, the official study tour ended with the team returning to Studio 6.

h. 8th day- Saturday 18th May

Free day so all went on their own way to do their own businesses. We later had an informal meeting to collect our flash drives gifts from SPC which still did not have all the powerpoint presentations from the presenters, and t-shirts for each of us while Jennifer K and I received a bag each as well. We then ensured that all team members must be ready for tomorrow early morning flight to Nadi.

i. 9th day- Sunday 19th May

We got picked up by a public transport arranged already and went to Nausori airport. From there we then flew to Nadi and found out that our flight has been cancelled and may fly out the next day. Thankfully Solomon Airlines arranged our accommodation and meals and transportation to and from the airport.

j. 10th day- Monday 20th May

We flew back to Honiara.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

From the exposure with the Fiji Study Tour, I have learnt the following:

- a. There is a need for Solomon Islands to be encouraged to have the political will in place so thing can move forward and in a faster mode.
- b. There may also be a need for SI to have a centralized office which has records of customary landowning groups and their land and boundaries so it is easier to access the rightful landowners for negotiation and projects and discussions of Redd+ activities. LALSU can assist in keep informing the customary landowners of this need and see how

best they prefer recording their customary land as LALSU has already come up with a process which we understand is also agreed to as a model by the Land, Research unit looked after by Genesis Kofana.

- c. There is need for better coordination between the relevant environmental ministries and other stakeholders like LALSU office so work can move forward faster. Sharing of information is important as it provides the checks and balances for the different procedures in development operations applications and monitoring of their operations in the customary land areas.
- d. Landowners should be informed of many alternatives on what to do with their land to generate income and also assist them in the long run like the Fiji Pine industry in Fiji where they sawmill the pine trees as well as collect raisins to export. LALSU may take this into consideration and present to the landowners when doing its awareness programs.
- e. Through the stakeholder engagement meetings that UN Redd+ in SI has been organizing, it is the best forum for sharing ideas to explore better ways and strategies to address these issues.
- f. The gifts obtained such as the flash drive and bag has been handed over to my office for office usage instead of my personal property since I represent my office when I attended the tour.

Hopefully with the above impartation and contribution to SI, things may change for the better and in effect also assist the Redd+ initiative in Solomon Islands.

Compiled by

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