



WWF

FACTSHEET

2011



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WWF Priority Places- Southwest Pacific

Kabara Island-Fiji

Conservation Focus



KABARA WAS THE FIRST SITE PROMOTED UNDER THE CLIMATE WITNESS PROGRAMME IN THE PACIFIC

WWF primary conservation effort on the island has been to address the unsustainable harvest of the threatened tree species *Intsia bijuga*, locally abundant and mainstay for island household income via the local woodcarving industry. This native tree vesii (*I. bijuga*) has been identified as seriously overexploited in Fiji, as is in many parts of the Asia-Pacific region. The rapid depletion of this tree locally has been due to the poorly regulated commercial timber and carving trade. The species possibly faces an imminent disappearance as an economic and cultural plant resource due to a number of factors which include; unsustainable and poorly planned logging and tree harvest, lack of awareness to which the diversity of value such trees provide, and the failure of recent generations to protect and facilitate the regeneration of native trees in comparison to commercial timber exotics such as Pine and Mahogany. The tree species is classified as “Vulnerable” to extinction on the IUCN Red List. The Kabara island cluster has been identified as an area of national significance both for its unique island terrestrial and marine coral reef ecosystems.

Site Profile

Kabara is one of a hundred islands in the Lau Island archipelago spanning the eastern maritime boundary of Fiji. Predominately limestone, covering an area of 32.75 km², the island lies 250 km south-east of Suva, Fiji’s capital. There are four coastal villages on the island, Naikeleyaga, Tokalau, Lomati and Udu and has a resident population of roughly 500 people. The island being part of the larger maritime Kabara District also includes the single village islands of Komo and Namuka.



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Lomati village, Kabara

Conservation- Safeguarding Nature and Community Interests

In 2003 and 2004 through socio-economic and biological surveys WWF determined the extent and impact of the islands local woodcarving industry on its local forests, specifically on the tree, *Intsia bijuga* or *vesi*. The results indicated heavy household dependency (96%) on *vesi* timber for carving as their main or only source of income with poorly developed alternative sources to ease pressure on *vesi* harvest. As the tree is slow growing (80 years to mature) and with increased demand, stock on the island has been greatly diminished. Of the islands 28 km sq forested area only 8% was calculated as remaining in natural strands in 2004. This scenario, if the community continued at the current rate of exploitation, will most definitely lead to the collapse of the industry on the island.

This posed a serious problem from a conservation perspective and an even more serious problem for a community solely dependent on the tree for their income livelihoods. Realizing the economic repercussions in future for the Kabara community, WWF began to undertake actions to address the situation, through awareness, developing management systems for their forest resources, developing alternative livelihood options to reduce pressure on the *vesi* stocks and to work with the local carvers to explore the use of other woods apart from the *vesi* timber that they could use to produce pieces for the tourist market.

As an extension of its work on Kabara, WWF also utilised the site to promote Climate Change awareness through the Climate Witness Programme in Fiji and the Pacific region. One of the very first WWF Climate Witnesses promoted on a international platform came from the Kabara community, Penina Moce from Udu Village. Extensive work has been also undertaken with regard to the islands marine environment, which will be consolidated into an ecosystem based conservation approach within the islands long term development plan.



Conservation and climate change adaptation activities carried out by the Kabara community

WWF Community Assisted Achievements at a Glance

- Community Resource Use Plan (Forest and Marine) and a demarcation of community forest reserves, covering 5km² or roughly 1/6 of the island.
- The installation of a community forest nursery, with over 3,000 *vesi* (*Intsia bijuga*) transplanted into forest reserve areas
- Kabara Island woodcarvers trained in utilising *vesi* timber off-cuts and other local timber for alternative and high market value carving products
- Skills diversification training for Kabara women and youth to enhance alternative household income livelihoods
- Secured Industrial level carving machinery for the development of a District Woodcarving Workshop- based in urban centre and a long term investment for sustaining income for the Kabara Community
- Increased rainwater harvest and storage facilities- 60,000 litres, as part of Kabara Island Climate Change Community Adaptation Plan Implementation.
- Community Marine Conservation awareness and monitoring through Sea Grass Watch (Kabara Island Schools) and Friends of the Reef (Kabara youth)

For more information

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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