

Case Studies for conservation

Barakasi Tribe, Vella la Vella

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Background to logging dispute

Logging was occurring on neighbouring land under agreement with the Bolopoe Tribe.

Barakasi Tribe never agreed to logging on their land.

In 2007, Omex Ltd (Asian logging company) intruded into the Barakasi Forest Management Area while contracted by the Bolopoe tribe through Bolopoe Corporation (Licensee). Bolopoe argued that this was their land, and therefore part of the concession area.

Members of the Barakasi Tribe put up blockages on the main logging road that run into the Barakasi area. This involved women camping on five logging roads as well as in felling areas where logs were being taken.

In May 2007, Omex was also stopped from landing its logging boat when villagers from Leona blocked the reef and the shoreline to avoid the company machines coming onto the land. This was just one month after the tsunami hit Vella Vella in April 2007.



The women blockaded the roads and felling areas for six months in 2007. During this time, there were counter attacks by the company security personnel on the women and some children who were manning the blockage camps. Several members of the Barakasi members were wounded, mostly women.

The Police did not take any action on the matter. The Bolopoe Corporation took the Barakasi Tribe to the High Court to try and stop them blockading. The High Court issued an ex parte order against the Barakasi Tribe, which was

delivered to them by Bolopoe's lawyer. But the women didn't move.

Then the Bolopoe Corporation took the landowners to the High Court to try to prove ownership of the land. The High Court found in favour of the Barakasi Tribe, struck out the previous ex parte order, and made an order against the Bolopoe Corporation for legal costs of going to Court.

Through their perseverance, the Barakasi Tribe eventually succeeded in driving out the loggers from their land. Omex finally decided to withdraw because they were not able to continue with production for some months as a result of the unresolved dispute and continuous blockage.

In 2008, the landowners formed the Barakasi Land Association (**BLA**) which includes the Green Gold Forest Product (**GGFP**).

Forest degradation

When the company left, the forest at that part of the Barakasi land had been devastated. It therefore needed to be rehabilitated through the planting of native timber tree species.

Small diameter trees were felled along with the bigger trees thus creating a lot of open space in the entire forest. The gaps left in the forest are very detrimental for the young trees and especially new

regeneration emerging

seedlings. One of the biggest threats to young trees and regeneration seedlings in the open gap in the rain forest is the competition by engulfing creepers such as the *merremia peltata* which smother the trees and emerging regenerating seedlings.

Currently most of the logged over areas in the Solomon Islands are invaded by the *merremia* and thus engulfing the young trees and regenerating seedlings resulting in a very poor quality forest.

Local milling of timber

After the logging, the company left behind a large number of logs in the forest, felling areas and log yards that they could not retrieve due to the blockades.

The Barakasi Tribe has since begun milling the timber for sale locally. They do this through the Green Gold Forest Product (GGFP) – the business arm of the Barakasi Tribe. Most of the timbers milled are bought for rehabilitation work after the 2007 earth quake and tsunami disaster in the Western Province. Others are being used in Vella Vella and Ranonga for construction of schools and other buildings.



State of the forest after logging



Logs left behind by the company

Reforestation project

Dutch Millenium Foundation from Holland provided 10,000 Euro dollars to assist the tribe restore and continue to maintain their forest.

The funding of 10,000 Euro dollars was provided by the Dutch Millenium Foundation in Holland with the help of Mr. Martin Fitcher who with his long time relationship with the people of Leona had being so generous to source this type of funding.

The contract is a Voluntary One under the carbon offset agreement which the money is used to plant 10.6 hectares of high value timber tree species to rehabilitate the illegally logged portion of the Barakasi Forest Management Area.

A lot of positive things had being encountered during the cause of the project. These gains will be further utilized as the project continues and interest maintained and enhanced.

Trained forest officers



Some members of the tribe were trained as foresters. They were trained in selecting best mother trees, how to do wilding of timber tree species, nursery practices, transporting of young seedlings, land preparation and tree planting and maintenance.

These same skills were also taught to all the members of the tribe who participate during the forest restoration period and hopefully the members now have confidence in managing their own natural forest.

Mother Tree selection

As an exercise within the project, foresters were taught how to select proper mother trees. Mother trees provide the source for seedlings which foresters and tribe members collect seedlings from for the rehabilitation program. Criteria for selecting a mother trees are as follows:

- Tree vigorously growing in the forest.
- Tree bole straight and cylindrical
- No fork and less branching
- No physical defects seen on the outside of the tree

The mother trees are numbered and painted and they should not be cut down for milling. Each time seedlings are collected in the forest, collection should be done from the mother trees.

Nursery

A local nursery was built by the foresters using timber and other local bush materials. The nursery was a raised nursery model which had a



holding capacity of more than 10,000 seedlings. At the nursery the seedlings are raised from wildings – wildings is a name given to young seedlings removed from the mother trees in the bush (wild) and are cared for in the nursery till they are fully recovered from the uprooting shock and are ready for planting put in the field. At the nursery the seedlings are parceled with local ginger leaves which is used to wrap the seedling with a handful of fertile soil to sustain the young seedling during its nursery period – normally a period of one month or more.

Land preparation

This involves cutting lines through the bush at certain magnetic bearings so that precision is maintained for accuracy in determining the area planted. During the operation a magnetic compass was used for line cutting. The lines were established at 4 meters interval and therefore for one hectare there are 25 lines per block. Each line is cleared and visible by following stakes erected at 4 meter between each stake demarking each planting spot. The width of each line should be well beyond 1 meter.

Planting

The planting lines were planted by the tribal members under the supervision of the foresters. The seedlings were carried all the way from the village nursery site to the planting area. Each stake on the line demarks a planting spot there the planters have to dig a hole deep enough at each spot and plant the seedling.

For standard and quality only live and vigorous seedlings are to be planted in the field. To maximize the survival chances of each seedling the soil surrounding the base of the seedling must be properly firmed so as to help retain water and moisture lost.

Area planted

According to planting records as of today there are 10.6 hectares planted. These hectares are all high value timber tree species which grow very well in the logged over area. The planting were done according to the planting stock available thus some species are more than the others when they are planted out because planting is done with what ever stock is available.

Permanent Sample Plots were established within the planted areas to monitor the average growth rate of trees planted.

Maintenance

Maintenance will be crucial in the project area as creepers' competition is very vigorous due to high rainfall. The very nature of the damage in the forest with lots of gaps increase the chances for high competition by the merremia creepers especially. Maintenance is also very important for the success of the project in that it help the trees grow properly and weed free environment provides high chance for survival of the trees.

Timber Tree Species

The timber tree species chosen for the rehabilitation program were based on which tree species grow best in the concession area and that their seedlings are available for wilding. According to the seedlings collected, Pencil cedar seedlings are quite difficult to find in the forest. Pencil Cedar as known for its workable timber properties it is one of the candidates for the rehabilitation program. However at the time of wilding there were no seedlings sited in the forest.

Tree species planted include:

- Calophyllum vitiense
- Calophyllum kajewskii
- Pometia pinnata
- Vitex cofassus

- *Schizomeria serrata*

According to the distribution of species in the concession area the most common and fast growing timber tree species are the five species mentioned above. It is hope that they will eventually grow to replace the felled logs.

Benefits to the Community

Cash benefit

There was direct cash benefit given to the tribal members for tasks under taken during implementing the project. With the cash earned the family members were then able to pay for basic services they need. Others were able to pay for school fees while most of the money may go for food items etc. Generally the community welcomed the project and actively participated in the whole program thus making it a community focus program when it was implemented.

The next phase will be slightly different based on experiences gained from this program that is if some funding is obtained anywhere.

Knowledge

One of the long term and invaluable gains the community members received during the project was the amount of information and knowledge gain for rehabilitating their devastated natural forest.

Break down of beneficiaries

	Tree wilding	Nursery	Planting	Maintenance	Total
Men	80	5	9	7	101
Women	115	6	16		137
Youth	71	9	3		83
Total	266	20	28	7	321

Realized value of the forest

One of the valuable gains the Barakasi tribal members realized now is the diversity of their natural forest which was at stake during the logging activities. With the rehabilitation project the members are artificially intervention to help promote gradual recovering of the disturbed sophisticated ecosystem within the forest. It is also apparent that if the forest is left unattended after the logging activities, the invading weeds especially the merremia peltata creeper will smother what ever valuable timber tree species has germinated and struggling to grow in the gaps created in the logged forest.

Conclusion

It is hope that this project will certainly bring the tribal members together in a joint effort to rehabilitate their forest. While working together their dedicated effort to rebuild the forest will help them appreciate their forest much more than the pre logging days a mentality which is hard to comprehend in the Solomon Islands especially regarding the very high pressures exerted on land owners to allow their land for logging.

Along with the cash benefit the tribal members receive, a lot of knowledge and experience were also acquired which is now shared and become common knowledge amongst the tribal members that the forest can be managed to become sustainable for now and future generations' livelihood.

During the whole exercise of the implementation of the project, the main emphasis is to attract the participation of the majority of the Leona community. It was evident that during the project activities there was a good range of participation amongst the community members – youth, women and men alike participated in restoring their natural forest.

Now the quality of the forest will depend largely on the continuing maintenance of the rehabilitated forest. The tribal members will take this responsibility onwards as this is the most vital part of the success of the project.