

# Forest Certification in Solomon Islands

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## ABSTRACT

A systematic assessment of the role and effects of forest certification in Solomon Islands was carried out from January to May 2004. It was conducted through a literature review and interviews with various stakeholders involved both directly and indirectly in forest certification. Only a few NGOs, supported through external funding, are promoting forest certification among landowners at a time when unsustainable commercial logging of forest resources of Solomon Islands is the major economic activity.

Although certification is market driven, NGOs see it as an additional tool for implementing sustainable forest harvesting by landowners. NGOs' pro-certification programs target landowners and village communities because they own 90 percent of the total forestland in the country under customary tenure. NGOs have invested time and resources in training and building the capacity of selected landowner operations for certification.

However, adoption of and compliance with certification standards by landowners has been slow. There is limited awareness or knowledge of forest certification among responsible authorities and decision makers. Consequently, policy change towards forest certification at the national level, and government support for its implementation at the community level, will take a long time.

Certification has had very little effect at the provincial and national government level or on the forestry industry at large. KFPL is currently the only FSC-certified commercial forest plantation in the country. Areas under commercial forest plantations are small. The major players in the forestry industry in Solomon Islands are the logging companies and SIG, and none of them are directly involved in certification. Domestic support for certification will require donor funding, international markets, and commitment from international and local NGOs and government agencies. Moreover, to raise interest in forest certification there must be a firm commitment from the government to promote sustainable forest harvesting.

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## INTRODUCTION

Forest certification in Solomon Islands is being championed by a few national non-government organizations (NGOs) with international donor funding support. It is being promoted by NGOs to landowners as an additional tool to achieve sustainable forest management (SFM). This is in response to current illegal, unsustainable and destructive logging practices. Unsustainable logging is carried out mainly by foreign logging companies (mostly Malaysian companies) in partnership with local landowner companies and contractors. Exports consist mostly of raw logs going to the Chinese, South Korean, Japanese, and other Asian markets. Except for the Japanese, these markets are relatively insensitive to SFM and forest certification. Logging companies are aware of forest certification but are not prepared to adopt it because of the additional work and cost involved and a lack of demand for certified wood from existing markets.

Logging is the major economic activity in Solomon Islands. Log exports earn about 80 percent of the country's foreign exchange and account for approximately 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (CBSI 2003). The current extraction rate of 700,000 m<sup>3</sup> per annum is unsustainable, with depletion of merchantable natural forest forecast by year 2018 at current rates (SIG 2003c). Although logging is important to the national economy, it has conferred few direct economic benefits to landowners and communities (Bennett 2000) and is also causing degradation to the environment, loss of biodiversity, and social antagonism among communities.

Forest certification was started in the early 1990s by a few NGOs working with a small number of landowners. Two small family operations in Malaita Province were the first to be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in 1995, followed by Solomon Western Island Fair Trade (SWIFT) in 1996 and Soltrust in 1998. Kolombangara Forest Products Limited (KFPL), a forest plantation company, was also certified in 1998 and remains the only current FSC-certified operation in the country. Forest certification initiatives experienced problems during the ethnic tension between 1999 and 2001, with Soltrust and SWIFT ceasing operations.

Progress in forest certification has been slow because of:

- (1) a lack of demand for certified timber in pertinent export markets;
- (2) close relations and dependencies between the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) and the export-oriented and foreign-owned timber industry; and
- (3) the cost of taking action to move in the direction of SFM, which could prove unpopular due to the important role logging plays in the Solomon Islands economy (job provision and revenue through profits and taxes).

Efforts to establish certification also encountered difficult domestic circumstances, particularly during the period of ethnic tension when many early initiatives stalled.

Despite the slow pace of forest certification development, it has had some impact at the community level in reducing or even stopping commercial logging in certain

areas, in building capacity and skills of landowners in SFM and small business management, and in increasing village income.

It has had little impact, however, at the national level. Solomon Islands Government (SIG) has no policy on forest certification and is not directly involved in its development. To address the current unsustainable cut rate of 700,000 m<sup>3</sup> per annum to a sustainable level of around 150,000 m<sup>3</sup> per annum (SIG 2003c), SIG plans to enforce the 2002 Code of Logging Practice (COLP) through the new Forestry Act 2004 (the Bill). The Bill, which will ensure mandatory COLP implementation by logging companies (SIG 2003c), is now before the legislature for enactment. Effective enforcement of the Forest Act and monitoring of COLP will remain a major task for SIG, which could lose popularity due to the important role logging plays in the Solomon Islands economy and the strong influence of the logging companies.

This case study presents a systematic assessment of the role and effects of forest certification in Solomon Islands. It is based on a review of literature, personal interviews with various stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in forest certification, an analysis of primary documents, and personal experiences.

## **BACKGROUND FACTORS**

### **Historical Context**

Solomon Islands lies about 1,800 km northeast of Australia, between 155° 30' and 170° 30' E longitude and between 5° 10' and 12° 45' S latitude, forming a scattered archipelago of 900 forested, mountainous coral islands covering a total land area of about 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>. About 350 of the islands are currently inhabited. The islands were first populated about 6,000 years ago by a Neolithic Southeast Asian population – the first proto-Melanesians (Smit 2002) – who settled in tribes under chiefly rule. About 86 percent of the population is still governed through a tribal chiefly system of traditional governance. The family is the basic social unit; members of extended families live together in hamlets and villages as clans. The total population of the Solomon Islands is around 410,000 people comprising 94.1 percent Melanesian; 4.0 percent Polynesian; 1.4 percent Micronesian; 0.4 percent European and 0.1 percent Chinese (SIG 2000). About 80 different tribal languages and dialects are spoken in the country. Pidgin is the lingua franca, while English is the official language for business and communication. All formal education is conducted in English.

When Solomon Islands was declared a British Protectorate in 1893, British administrators took control of the political, economic, and social activities of the country. This arrangement continued until Solomon Islands gained political independence from the British in 1978 and adopted a parliamentary democratic style of government based on the Westminster model. There are three tiers of government – the national government, nine provincial governments each led by a Premier, and area councils (local councils). Local councils were suspended in 1998 during a review of the provincial government system. The Legislature consists of the single chamber National Parliament, which has 50 elected Members of Parliament (MPs) each representing a

single constituency. General elections take place every 4 years. The Executive, comprising the Governor General, the Prime Minister and 20 Cabinet Ministers, formulates policies and action strategies for implementation by the public servants, some of whom are seconded to provincial governments. The national government is based in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands.

At the provincial level, elections operate under the same set of rules and procedures as the national government. Provincial representatives are elected every 4 years and the number of provincial members depends on the number of wards (a smaller political boundary) in each province. The process of electing both national and provincial representatives has contributed to a culture whereby politicians divert resources to a select minority of citizens/communities to reward them for their support during elections. The Multi-donor Economic Governance Mission (MEGM) stated in a recent report that it was evident that a number of politicians have become “rent seekers,” seeking payment in return for favors undertaken for vested interests (MEGM 2002). At the national and provincial levels, poor leadership, corruption, inadequate service delivery and lack of participatory decision-making are major governance issues. Some of these issues have existed since colonial times, with “modern” governance (Westminster model) long considered a threat to the traditional governance structures and authority practiced by 86 percent of the population. There is much dissatisfaction by landowners (who own most of the resources) over “modern” governance, and the alienation they experience from its heavy-handed, top-down approach.

The dissatisfaction with modern governance alienation was partly responsible for the ethnic tension that surfaced in late 1998. The state’s inability to deal effectively with the militant activities compounded the problem and resulted in an armed confrontation between the Guadalcanal militants, later known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and a reactionary force called the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). The MEF joined with a group of sympathizers within the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) and forced the democratically elected Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) government led by Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu out of office in a coup on June 5, 2000. The armed conflict between IFM and MEF forces from 1999 to 2000 led to many deaths, the destruction of infrastructure, and the collapse of the national economy. Development initiatives came to a halt and investor confidence evaporated. These difficulties exacerbated already existing problems in the forestry industry, with illegal logging increasing following the breakdown in law and order.

### **Forestry Problems**

Unsustainable and illegal logging, deforestation and loss of forest biodiversity; lack of natural forest management, and over-harvesting of forest non-timber resources are the major forestry problems in Solomon Islands. Logging companies, considered by many to be unscrupulous, are extracting unsustainable quantities of logs. Deforestation and loss of biodiversity through logging, shifting cultivation, and forest clearance for plantation agriculture and forestry are going on at an alarming rate. Existing legislation and land use plans to address these problems are out of date or

non-existent. Moreover, the SIG lacks resources and capacity to provide effective enforcement and monitoring.

Certification has the potential to address unsustainable and illegal logging, curb deforestation and loss of forest biodiversity, and promote SFM, but it is not effectively addressing these forest problems at the present time.

The effects of forest certification have been minimal because of:

- (1) a lack of demand for certified timber in pertinent export markets;
- (2) close relations and dependencies between SIG and the export-oriented and foreign-owned timber industry;
- (3) the unpleasant economic consequences of taking action to move in the direction of SFM (which include decreases in jobs, company profits and government revenues); and
- (4) a lack of support by the SIG in promoting certification.

At current forest extraction rates, the primary rainforest will be exhausted by the time forest certification gains a strong foothold in the country. Landowners require market pressure to start demanding certified timber from loggers to help save their forest.

### **Traditional/Existing Policy Responses**

Weak central government administration, lack of capacity, and no enforcement of current out-of-date legislation are some of the factors contributing to Solomon Island's forest problems. Despite these problems, SIG aims to decrease the current logging rate to sustainable levels and strengthen sustainable management capacity through the implementation of the Code of Logging Practice (COLP), with punitive powers to prosecute violators for non-compliance. This tougher approach will become mandatory with the passage of the new Forest Bill 2004. SIG is also encouraging reforestation of logged-over sites by providing an enabling environment to private sector investors to invest in forestry plantations. Provisions include security of land-tenure and attractive taxation provisions. NGOs, meanwhile, are targeting landowners at the village level to raise awareness of sustainable resource management, small-scale forest enterprises, and forest certification.

## **STRUCTURAL FEATURES**

### **Ownership and Tenure**

About 90 percent of the land area in Solomon Islands is in traditional or customary ownership. During colonial times, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the government alienated about 10 percent of customary land, some of which has subsequently passed to forestry or agricultural companies. About 2 percent of the alienated land area is held by the forest industry and most of this is under reforestation. Traditional or

customary ownership means that the land belongs to a tribe (communal ownership) or an extended family grouping or clan. This traditional or customary ownership is a form of private rather than state ownership. This is in contrast to many other countries whose natural forests are in public ownership and therefore under the jurisdiction of the government to manage in the national interest (SIG 2003c), a situation especially characteristic of the Eastern European countries. Most landowning groups or tribal members live in rural villages, which comprise 86 percent of the total population (SIG 2000). There is no distinction between land and forest ownership, since forests are considered an integral part of the land; therefore the word “landowner” is used throughout this chapter instead of forest owner. Tribal members have the right to use the land. The fabric of the customary tenure system and decision-making process over use of land has been impacted by the introduction of a cash economy, especially through commercial logging.

Although tribes own the land and have strong bargaining and negotiating power through this ownership, commercial logging activities have not worked in favor of traditional landowners. For example, in the logging agreements with companies, royalty payments to traditional landowners amount to 15 percent of the total log value or less, since many companies deduct the cost of road building from the landowner royalty. Solomon Islands’ government receives 35 percent of the total log value through export duties and levies, while production costs and service charges incurred by the logging companies account for 20 percent. About 30 percent in the form of excess profits after production costs (this varies with log price) goes to logging companies (World Bank 1995).

Both the provincial and national governments play central roles in brokering and approving logging licenses. The national government issues timber rights after agreements are made between logging companies and landowners. All too often, the agreements work in favor of the logging companies.

Nowadays a few compliant landowners together with their foreign logging partners apply for timber rights (the right to extract timber from the land) and sub-contract their timber rights to foreign logging companies because they lack the capital to meet the high cost of machinery. In most cases, only certain individuals within a tribe or landowning group are granted timber rights by the government, either legally according to the procedures specified by the current Forest and Timber Utilization Act (SIG 1969) or, as is more often the case, illegally due to the government’s failure to implement the legislation effectively.

In some cases, forest officers act on political directives to issue timber rights. These corrupt practices often end up in disputes and lengthy litigation, causing a lot of disturbance and division among tribal members because benefits go to individuals rather than the whole tribe or community. For example, in March 2004, landowners on Billy Island, Marovo in the western part of Solomon Islands were startled when logging commenced on the island and applied to the high court for an injunction to halt logging by two companies, Bulo and Metro. Bulo, a logging company owned by a few landowners from Marovo, holds the timber rights. It subcontracted Metro, a Malaysian logging company, to carry out the logging operations on Billy Island. The

landowners argued that the timber rights granted to Bulo by the SIG Forestry Department breached the Forest Resources and Timber Utilization Act of 1969 because the Forestry Department did not consult all of the landowners during the timber rights hearing. The majority of them want Billy Island to be a conservation area rather than be logged. There are many similar cases but the majority do not go to court because of the lack of financial resources by landowners.

The forest industry in Solomon Islands is comprised of the SIG Forestry Department headed by a Minister, the provincial government, logging contractors, and landowners. Timber rights are issued by the Forestry Department on the advice of the provincial government and landowners. This is done after going through a timber rights process where landowners consult each other to allow their timber to be harvested. In the timber rights process landowners apply to the Commissioner of Forest (COF) for consent to acquire timber rights. The responsible provincial government executive in the province where the landowners come from holds a public, timber rights hearing to determine the landowners' right. After confirmation of the timber rights hearing by the COF (on the advice from the provincial government), individuals opposed to its granting of Timber Rights may appeal to the Customary Land Appeals Court (CLAC) within thirty days. If there is no disagreement then the COF will grant the timber rights and the provincial government will issue the business-logging license. In most cases, however, no timber rights hearings are held or consultation processes followed; rather, a few individuals within tribal landowning groups secure timber rights under their names and proceed with logging to the dissatisfaction of the rest of the tribe.

In the last 15 years, a number of landowners have taken the initiative to develop small-scale saw milling operations that directly involve all tribal members in an effort to attain maximum benefit from their forest. Some landowners favor this option over industrial logging as they can earn up to three times more for sawn timber per cubic meter. Certified sawn timber may earn them even more.

Plantation forestry is also beginning to play a role in the country's economic development. Current forest plantations are located in various areas in the country and have an estimated combined commercial area of 28,000 ha, mostly on government alienated land. Recently, landowners began to establish significant areas of plantations on their customary land. These plantations, despite being small (on average 0.25-1 ha), have the potential to become a significant source of cash income and building materials. As of September 2003, there were about 1,600 individually owned stands, which are estimated to represent around 60 percent of total plantation area (SIG 2003c). Reforestation is currently being encouraged by the government since this will contribute to government revenue and relieve the pressure of natural forest exploitation.

**Table 1 Current status of the forest sector in Solomon Islands**

Features	Status
Forestland (as % of total land)	78
Plantation (as % of total land)	<2
Proportion (%) of area suitable for commercial logging	21
Total production per year (logs & sawn timber)	700,000 m <sup>3</sup> (3 times the sustainable level)
Amount exported (as % of total production)	90
Main export markets	75% to Japan & China (China has become the main log buyer), 25% to other Asian countries and Australia (sawn timber) and New Zealand (sawn timber)
Wood products export (as % of exports)	80
Wood products (as % of GDP)	30
Employees in Forest Sector (official)	3,600 (1/3 of official employed labor force)
Enforcement of Code of Logging Practice	Weak / non-existent.
Logging companies status	Foreign with some landowner companies

Source: Olivier and Siwatibau 1999

Solomon Islands does not have a land use planning system in place and there is no adequate network of parks and protected areas for biodiversity protection. Most of the lowland rainforest has been logged, resulting in environmental damage and social disharmony amongst communities.

In 2002 SIG approved the Code of Logging Practice (COLP), which is aimed at ensuring that where selective logging takes place, the ecological and cultural functions of the forest and its productivity in terms of wood and water production are protected.

The code applies to all forest harvesting operations in Solomon Islands and sets forth twelve key standards. These relate to:

- (1) protected and exclusion areas
- (2) roads and landings
- (3) road line clearing
- (4) road drainage
- (5) landing size and number
- (6) felling and skidding within buffers
- (7) temporary crossings
- (8) skid track width
- (9) log value maximization
- (10) weather restriction,
- (11) decommissioning skid tracks
- (12) decommissioning landings and log ponds (SIG 2003a).

The logging operations are assessed against the twelve standards criteria on a scale of 1 to 10 for each standard. Any operation that has a total score of 60 or less is considered unsustainable and will have their logging license suspended. The enforcement of the COLP will however become mandatory under the new Forest Bill 2004, which has yet to be enacted. SIG remains passive about forest certification since any strategy to promote SFM by the government would drastically affect its major revenue source. At the same time, the forestry industry also has strong lobby groups like the Solomon Islands Forest Industries Association (SIFIA). SIFIA members are mostly foreign logging companies and their local counterparts. It has a lot of influence on government at the political level; some parliamentarians and members of the provincial governments are licensees who sub-contract to foreign logging companies. This close relationship makes it relatively easy for logging companies and SIFIA to influence policy. As an example, in 1997, SIFIA lobbied the government to reduce the export duty from 35 percent of total log export value to 20 percent, which it did. Currently, the duty is being raised back to 35 percent.

### Markets

Most forest products are exported in the form of round logs, extracted through conventional commercial logging using heavy machinery including crawler tractors, bulldozers and skidders. Table 2 shows log and sawn-timber exports from 1990 to 2003. Of all commodities exported from Solomon Islands, logs were the largest by value, which shows the importance of the forest industry to the economy. Although commercial logging is unsustainable, any sudden decline in current log production will have a significant impact on the economy.

**Table 2 Volume and value of logs and sawn timber exports from 1990 to 2003**

Year	Log Volume ('000 m <sup>3</sup> )	Log Value US\$('000)	Sawn Timber Volume ('000 m <sup>3</sup> )	Sawn Timber Value US\$('000)
1990	399.0	7,536.8	8.2	571.3
1991	291.8	6,594.0	6.1	546.9
1992	543.1	13,869.1	8.5	858.7
1993	591.1	29,563.2	11.0	1,332.1
1994	659.3	35,609.6	12.4	1,304.5
1995	748.5	35,948.9	12.4	1,778.1
1996	833.0	44,861.7	12.0	1,720.0
1997	690.3	37,094.1	9.5	1,662.4
1998	513.0	20,254.0	8.0	1,731.6
1999	611.2	33,421.1		
2000	536.1	29,922.9		
2001	533.6	25,394.3		
2002	550.4	33,886.5		
2003	740.5	48,094.1		

Note: No records are available for sawn timber exported from 1999 to 2003, which included some certified timber (Source: CBSI 2004).

No high-quality certified timber is sold locally in the domestic market. However, certified timber that does not meet quality standards is used to construct churches, aid posts, schools and petrol-sheds within communities. Producing good quality timber is a major problem for producers, despite being trained in timber production and grading. Most of the exported certified timber is used in joinery, furniture work, and all kinds of wood products for houses.

Solomon Islands imports wood products like veneers and plywood for house construction, hand tools with wooden handles, and some finished furniture. Most imported timber products come from Japan and Australia but there are no detailed records to show the actual value of the timber. Wood products account for 30 percent of GDP and the forestry sector employs 3,600 people, one-third of the total labor force in the formal employment sector.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF FOREST CERTIFICATION**

### **Initial Support**

Initial support for forest certification came from NGOs because of their experience at the community level. They witnessed firsthand the problems caused by unsustainable commercial logging, including conflict and land disputes among landowners, land degradation, and sedimentation and pollution of river systems, catchments, wetlands and marine environments. Unsustainable logging also undermines traditional economies and values, and adversely affects the livelihoods of people living adjacent to logging sites. Most of the companies involved in logging are foreign and some landowners and NGOs view them as having no regard for the unique environmental, social and cultural setting of Solomon Islands. Some landowners and NGOs are demanding that the government develop adequate environmental regulations and codes of conduct to control logging activities and put in place an adequate and effective monitoring system. With external funding they became proactive in addressing unsustainable logging.

National NGOs like Soltrust and Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) were established in the early 1980s and assisted landowners to obtain information and make decisions regarding destructive logging practices. More NGOs came in the 1990s, including international NGOs like Greenpeace Pacific and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

They joined in the concerted effort to inform citizens about the negative impacts of commercial logging and unsustainable resource development through a number of conservation and sustainable resource management programs that operated in selected vulnerable communities. These included (1) village-based eco-forestry involving selective harvesting and sawmilling; (2) marketing of processed forest products from sustainable sources; (3) support for other village-based and managed activities including eco-tourism and insect farming; and (4) environmental conservation and environmental awareness.

Despite this effort, commercial logging operations continued to increase and consistently spread to almost all island communities. The lure of small but fast cash

from logging royalty payments and promises of the provision of social services through schools, clinics, roads and water supplies convinced a number of landowners to grant timber rights to logging companies. A decade of village education and awareness-building by NGOs, notably SIDT, up to the early 1990s failed to make any significant impact on landowner and community perceptions of resource use. People did not put the NGOs' ideas and information into practice. The NGOs then realized that information alone, although undisputedly important, is insufficient. The requirement is to actually show landowners an alternative but sustainable way of using their own timber resources; in this case how to harvest their forests to get the maximum benefit from it. With continuous external funding, Soltrust and SIDT both set up eco-forestry divisions/units and taught landowners how to harvest their forests and sell the produce to earn more income than they could through logging companies.

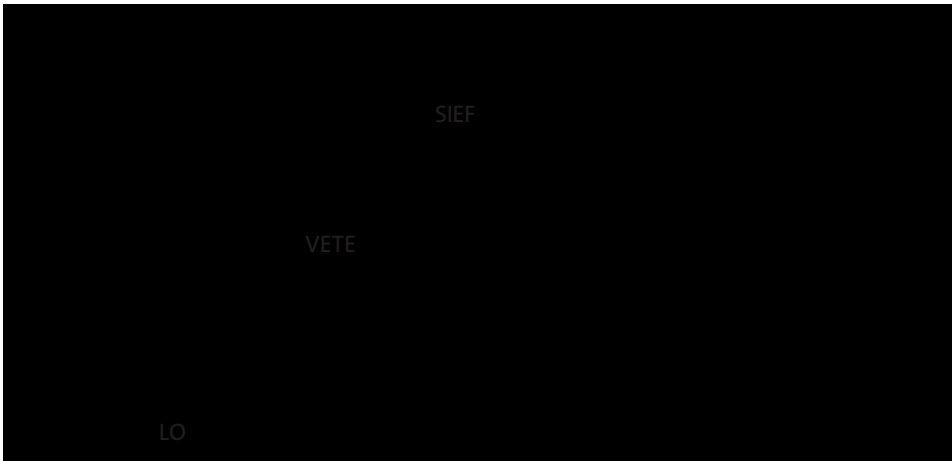
At the same time as NGOs were promoting sustainable timber milling with landowners, export markets for certified timber emerged. The NGO's openly adopted and promoted forest certification as an additional tool to achieve sustainable forest harvesting. The Isabel provincial government, through Isabel Sustainable Forestry Management Project (funded by the European Union (EU)), collaborated with SIDT eco-forestry program. Soltrust and Solomon Western Island Fair Trade (SWIFT) adopted FSC certification standards using the Group Certification process, which included all of FSC's principles and criteria. Both NGOs requested that they be assessed and certified as Group Managers and their individual community-managed forest projects be assessed and certified as Group Members. The group certification scheme was appropriate for Soltrust and SWIFT, because they were dealing with small forestland areas under individual tribes and communities, for which individual certification is not feasible and cost-efficient.

The SIDT Eco-forestry Unit, in collaboration with the Imported Tropical Timber Group (ITTG)—a consortium of timber merchants in New Zealand, and Greenpeace Pacific—started the Solomon Islands Eco-Forestry (SIEF) program in 1995. They jointly developed a standard called Eco-timber. The principles and criteria of the Eco-timber standard were, however, similar to FSC's. The parties to the Eco-timber standard recognized that FSC certification was very expensive and that it would take time for landowners to adopt and fully implement FSC standards. The Eco-timber standard is a private arrangement between ITTG, Greenpeace Pacific and SIDT, which uses second-party verification to start landowners on the path to eventual FSC certification. The SIEF's Eco-timber standard therefore complements rather than undermines FSC.

The market had a lot of influence on promotion of certification by NGOs. NGO eco-forestry programs would not have expanded or been readily accepted by landowners in the absence of secure, reliable markets and high prices for their timber. For example, timber produced by SWIFT before 1996 was exported to Netherlands, but the organization faced difficulties in finding markets with reasonable prices (Wilko 2004). Certification as a guarantee of 'good' forest management was seen as the key to establishing market outlets and higher prices for the timber.

NGOs tried to capitalize on this market by increasing sustainable timber production but landowners, being predominantly subsistence-based, were unable to maintain a consistent, regular supply to meet market demand. Landowners only produced timber when they needed money and this lack of regularity in supply is one of the major problems experienced by the certification program.

**Figure 1** Diagram of the SI Ecoforestry Program operation showing links to donors, the market (ITTG), NGOs (Greenpeace, SIDT), Village Ecoforestry Timber Enterprises (VETE) and Landowners (LO)



The NGOs worked through the 1990s within their respective eco-certification programs to build capacity and enhance landowner's skills in SFM. The landowners are politically weak, however, and have been marginalized under current forest exploitation arrangements; moreover, there are no avenues for continuous dialogue between landowners and the government. Landowners are alienated from government, which is located many miles away in the capital of Honiara. Because of this, landowners have very little influence on policy at the national level. Some influential members and political representatives of landowners are bribed by logging companies to convince the rest of the tribe to grant timber rights for logging. They use their influential role in the system to meet their own needs rather than those of their tribes.

### **Institutional Design**

There is no national body in place to coordinate and promote forest certification and no government involvement. An early attempt to set up a national standard body called Solcert also failed. Certification is being promoted by individual NGOs because they see it as a tool to achieve SFM and some landowners are participating in certification because they get greater monetary benefit through milling their timber compared to the 15 percent royalty they get from logging companies. The NGOs and other stakeholders directly involved in forest certification include Soltrust, SWIFT, SIDT, KFPL, and the Sawmill Owners Timber Producers Association (SOTPA).

Soltrust was registered as a national NGO in 1989 and established as an eco-forestry division in 1992. It provided training to landowners in the preparation of forest area management plans. Six out of the 48 landowners trained and assisted by Soltrust were assessed by Smartwood/Rainforest Alliance in 1998 and became FSC certified. (However, they were later decertified due to non-compliance and non-payment of certifiers' fees). With external funding, Soltrust provided continuous training, extension and support work, and monitoring of local timber producers. It later established a marketing arm called Umi Togeta Holding (UTH), which purchased milled timber from landowners and exported them to European markets. Despite this marketing initiative, Soltrust experienced technical and financial problems in its operations prior to the ethnic tension and ceased operation altogether in 2000 during the height of the troubles when its office was destroyed by militants.

The Integrated Human Development Program of the United Church of Solomon Islands set up SWIFT in 1994. Dutch foresters developed SWIFT's Forest Area Management Plan program (FAMP) and its standards, translating and transferring FSC requirements to Solomon Islands community forestry conditions. The first landowners, who experienced marketing problems in 1994, discovered that the market opened up when they were certified by SWIFT in 1996. SWIFT's forest certification program was funded by the International Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) based in Netherlands. Due to incompatibility between church and business affairs, and other management problems, SWIFT's program stopped in 2001 and no certified timber has been produced since.

SIDT was founded by Dr. John Roughan and Abraham Baeania in 1982. Both are educators and thus the focus of SIDT was on village education and awareness-building in improving village quality of life. SIDT started its SIEF operation in 1995, with external funding for different phases of the program coming from the European Union (regional funding under its tropical forest budget line), New Zealand High Commission in Solomon Islands, Pacific Conservation Development Trust (PDCT) in New Zealand, ITTG NZ, UK Foundation and Greenpeace International. SIEF's partners established a set of principles, criteria and indicators for good tree harvesting. To meet environmental, social and economic standards for responsible forestry management practices, these principles formed the cornerstone of SIEF's village level work. SIEF is currently working with 24 landowners and supplies eco-certified timber to ITTG in New Zealand and to some market outlets in Australia. The SIEF program depends on external funding to make it viable, but EU regional funding stopped in 2001. Although it received funding recently from Oxfam Australia, this money is only for training purposes. SIEF partners have submitted a new funding proposal to the EU under its bilateral mechanism and a decision is pending.

In mid-1997 SIDT set up a marketing body called Village Eco-Timber Enterprises (VETE) with membership from landowners participating in the SIEF program. VETE exports timber on behalf of the landowners. VETE is a not-for-profit organization and retains only 15 percent of the total export value to meet its operational and handling costs, which is not sustainable at the current low export volumes. According to the SIDT's 20th anniversary report (2002), VETE exported 715 m<sup>3</sup> to overseas markets

between August 1997 and April 2002, mainly to ITTG in New Zealand. The volume of timber exported was worth US\$220,000 and the money went directly to landowners. If this volume was sold as logs domestically to logging companies, it would fetch only US\$74,710 and landowners would only get US\$8,030 as a royalty payment. During the same period, an additional amount equivalent to about half of the exported volume of eco-timbers was either sold domestically or used directly in the construction of timber/petrol sheds, furniture and housing for project members.

KFPL is a joint venture company between the SIG and the UK Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) and is managed by CDC. KFPL was the first forest plantation in the Pacific region to be certified under the FSC scheme in 1998. KFPL has maintained its FSC Certification with a 5-year certificate valid until 2004 for all plantation logs and timber. Woodmark, a program of the UK Soil Association, assessed KFPL's operations for FSC certification. It was the idea of greater market access and better prices that attracted KFPL to certification and the company has greatly expanded its sawn timber production and output in recent years. Their certified logs and timber kept them afloat during the period of ethnic tension and the consequent economic crisis. Apart from market benefits, KFPL adopted certification because certification is about long-term sustainability and its goal is to provide plantation-based timber and products that meet the highest international standards of sustainability whilst promoting economic and social development for the people of Solomon Islands. The company has under its stewardship 16,000 ha of planted tropical hardwoods, principally *Gmelina aborea* ("White Teak") and *Eucalyptus deglupta*, together with 20,000 ha of protected rainforest most of which is virgin, and 4,000 ha of unplanted areas, making a total 40,000 ha of FSC-certified forest management area. Current production is about 80,000 m<sup>3</sup> per annum at a value of around US\$5 million (SB\$35million).

The Sawmill Owners Timber Producers Association (SOTPA) was established in 2000 to address the problem of inconsistent and irregular timber production and supply by landowners. Landowners agreed that regardless of which eco-forestry program they registered with they must pool their sawn timber together to meet the market quota for Solomon Islands. Landowners under Soltrust's eco-forestry program initiated the formation of SOTPA and Soltrust supported the initiative by providing office space and technical advice to SOTPA's secretariat. SOTPA was to organize marketing on behalf of its members. Unfortunately due to closure of Soltrust in 2000, SOTPA was not able to function and suffered the same fate as Soltrust, leaving certified landowners confused and uncertain about future activities. Landowners are very keen to restart timber production but maintain that they require assistance of the kind that Soltrust provided in the past. This reflects the heavy reliance of landowners on NGO support.

**Table 3** Entities producing certified timber for export

Management Organization	Marketing Arm	Period of Export	Volume of Export (m <sup>3</sup> )	Value of Export (USD\$)	Market
Soltrust [FSC-certified but revoked]	UTH	1998-2000	600 (approx.)		Europe
SIDT-SI Ecoforestry Program	VETE	1997-2002	715	\$220,000	ITTG* NZ, Australia
United Church (SWIFT)	SWIFT	1996-2001	1,140		Netherlands
KFPL		1998-2004	80,000 (per year)	\$4.7 m (per year)	Vietnam, China

Note: Soltrust and SI Ecoforestry Programme exports are not third party certified (Source: Personal Communication, Soltrust, SIDT and Wilko 2004);

\*New Zealand Imported Tropical Timber Group.

### Standards

NGO certification programs were designed to address illegal logging by commercial timber companies and to prevent more community forestland being granted as concessions through dubious logging agreements with landowners. The focus of NGOs was on encouraging landowners to get alternative benefits from forest use rather than granting timber rights to commercial loggers. In 1998 NGOs initiated a national standard called SolCert (Solomon Islands National Certification) with membership from SIDT-EFU, Soltrust, SI Government Forestry Department, SI National Union of Workers and SI Forest Industries Association. SolCert's purpose was to build awareness of forest certification, set national standards for forest certification, and be the contact office and umbrella body for certification in Solomon Islands. It was planned that SolCert would complement and support SOTPA to promote and market certified timber from Solomon Islands. SolCert failed to get off the ground, however, and individual NGOs thus continue to carry out their work independently. Soltrust and SWIFT adopted FSC standards and became FSC-certified, while SIDT uses the SIEF standard. As noted above, the SIEF standard is similar to FSC's and includes such issues as defining protected areas, forest use, forest management plans, the needs and rights of customary owners, method of harvest, and verification and monitoring.

In the standard-setting process, Soltrust developed FAMP in partnership with landowners and incorporated the FSC standards into the plan to meet local needs. The FAMP was developed on site during a three-month training program in forest resource planning. The plan contained all the standard practices in line with FSC's principles and criteria and landowners were assessed on their implementation of the FAMP. SWIFT's whole forest management system was set up by forestry experts from Netherlands, but it has also adopted Soltrust's approach in identifying landowners and

communities (Wilko 2004). SIEF has developed its own standards in collaboration with its partners. They translated FSC principles and criteria into simple practices and terms for ordinary people (tribes and communities) to understand. SIEF takes landowners step-by-step towards FSC standards; it is a first step towards FSC certification.

## **THE REACTION TO CERTIFICATION**

Forest certification has been in evidence for 8 years and many village operations have been exposed to it. However, the general village person has not heard of it and there is limited knowledge among those in government. It is promoted and implemented by only a few NGOs through selected communities and has not had any impact on the forest industry. Therefore, the reaction to certification has been minimal.

### **Forest Policy Community and Stakeholders**

SIG has no policy on forest certification but aims to reduce the current logging rate to sustainable levels and strengthen management capacity through its Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS), which will ensure environmentally sound practices and growth in village incomes from forestry (SIG 2001). The strategies are to:

- Implement the Code of Logging Practice (COLP), using its provisions to prosecute offenders for non-compliance.
- Continue reforestation of logged sites. SIG is to establish an enabling environment to facilitate private sector investment in forestry plantations using land tenure security and appropriate taxation arrangements as instruments to foster development. Commercial industrial plantations are reaching maturity and will lift output from 120,000 m<sup>3</sup> currently to 200,000 m<sup>3</sup> by 2020.

While mandatory implementation of the COLP by logging companies may result in sound logging practices and a reduction in non-compliance, it does not directly address the issue of sustainable forest harvesting. Although SIG views forest certification as a complement to its strategy to reduce unsustainable forest harvesting, it has made no firm commitment to its implementation.

### **Landowners**

Landowners found the requirements of certification challenging when it was first introduced. They maintained that it was too complicated to follow the standards and too much work was required through certification. They viewed field operations like blocking, inventory, tree marking and positioning, reporting, and detailed record keeping as involving too much work. Timber milling also involved a lot of manual work. Lessons learned here forced SIDT to develop less complex and stringent standard under SIEF. Another reason why SIDT did not adopt FSC's certification directly was its high cost. The SIDT-EFU team assisted landowners in these activities

under the SIEF eco-timber label in a step-wise process to build their capacity and skills towards FSC certification.

Landowners were already carrying out timber milling before forest certification emerged but their actions were unsustainable because they were not following any forest management plan. In the case of SWIFT, the number of participating landowners declined from 200 to 10 in the first year of certification. At the end of year 2000, SWIFT had 62 certified landowners (Wilko 2004). They were pleased about the higher prices for certified timber they received but disliked all the extra work involved in trying to comply with the standards. At the start of the eco-forestry programs by Soltrust, SWIFT, and SIEF, landowners' needs were not adequately assessed. Landowners argued that timber production involved a lot work and required more labor and thus interfered with their social lifestyle. For example, men spent more time in timber production and less time helping women with garden work. While it is true that landowners want higher monetary returns from their forest than they currently receive in royalties from logging companies, no assessment was made of the workload commitments they are willing to make to earn additional money. The quantity, quality and regularity of timber supply demanded by the certified market do not fit well with the needs of landowners. For example, some landowners said they only need extra cash two to three times a year for social events during Christmas and Easter and to pay for their children's school fees (Olivier and Siwatibau 1999). Some landowners refuse both commercial logging and sustainable (certified) forest harvesting and opt instead to do their own timber milling, which they see as generating a higher income than logging royalties while allowing them to operate on as-needs basis.

A major reaction to certification is anticipated if the current market for Solomon logs (mainly China) starts to demand certified timber. At the moment this is not happening and consequently there is little pressure on logging companies to adopt forest certification. Even SIG's Forestry Department, the authority in charge of forest policy and regulation, has very little knowledge about forest certification. Foreign logging companies have not reacted to certification because certification is as yet a non-issue.

### **Current Status of Forestland Certification**

Soltrust and SWIFT stopped operating in 2000 and 2001 respectively and thus have no records to show the actual area of forestland certified. KFPL has 40,000 ha of plantation forest certified and SIDT gave an estimate of 16,000 ha. Details are shown in Table 4. Landowners simply cannot meet the cost of certification. It is very expensive to be certified and thus NGOs work as group managers to certify group projects in order to share the cost. Even with that, certification would not be possible without funding support from donors. With the closure of the Soltrust and SWIFT programs, it is highly unlikely that the timber producers they supported for certification will recertify in the future. SIDT uses the SIEF standard and is moving landowners towards FSC standards. KFPL has benefited from certification and will likely seek recertification. Some people from SWIFT have reformed under the Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF), which is now using SIEF eco-certification. NRDF is made up of SWIFT former employees and is funded by ICCO.

**Table 4 Number of timber producers and amount of forestland certified**

Program	Number of land owners & timber producers certified	Area (ha)	Type of forestland	Forest operation
Soltrust [FSC-certified but revoked]	6	n/a	Primary Forest	Chainsaw-driven mill
SWIFT	62	n/a	Primary Forest	Portable saw milling
SIEF-Community Ecoforestry	24	16,000 Approx.	Primary Forest	Portable saw milling
KFPL	1	16,000 in production – 40,000 total	Plantation	Logging

Source: Personal Communication, Soltrust, SIDT and Wilko 2004

### Current Status of the Certified Marketplace

Currently only KFPL products carry the FSC logo while SIEF has its own Eco-Certification logo. The ITTG of New Zealand and buyers in Australia desire at least 40 m<sup>3</sup> per month from VETE but timber producers are not able to meet this demand due to inconsistent production. The market outlet is available but supply from certified landowners is low. This is a major concern for VETE, which aims to increase both the volume and consistency of production as well as to become FSC-certified. Current VETE production averages about 30 m<sup>3</sup> per month.

Logging companies are aware of certification but view it as an unnecessary business cost. Only if buyers/markets demand certified products or SIG makes it mandatory (which is most unlikely) will they change their position.

### EFFECTS OF FOREST CERTIFICATION

While the effects of forest certification have been minimal in the Solomon Islands on mainstream industry and the government, there are some positive effects. For example, KFPL was kept afloat during the period of ethnic tension because it continued to sell its timber to the certified market while other logging operations were not able to.

#### Power

Certification has had very little effect on the provincial and national governments and within the forestry sector at large since it emerged in 1995. This is because only a small number of the stakeholders concerned were involved (three NGOs – Soltrust, SIDT,

SWIFT – ninety landowner groups and KFPL). They have very little influence on policy. The major and influential players in the forestry industry in Solomon Islands are the logging companies and SIG and neither of them was involved. It is commercial logging that is having significant negative effects on Brundtland’s three-legged stool – the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability – at the different scales of individual, community and national levels. Most commercial logging agreements have not worked in favor of the landowners.

### **Social**

There have been some benefits at the individual and community levels especially among interested landowners who participated in the eco-forestry programs through the certification standard-setting process. These include capacity- and skill-building through certification assessor training, awareness, consultation and participation. Some communities managed to halt commercial logging in their forest areas through awareness training in certification standards. The structure of the tenure system and the subsistence economic environment are also important factors. Tribal members support each other through distribution of their resources or from what they earn from the sale of their resources; in this case, they share the earnings from the export of certified timber. This brings forth a sense of togetherness, equality and fairness between tribal members. Furthermore, this social network remains an important principle to ensure that while chiefs themselves assemble most of the resources, they must also redistribute those resources back to the people.

The only social concern among women in the communities was that men spent more time milling timber and less time in the garden to produce food. Food production at the household level is the most important occupation in the village.

### **Economic**

Landowners are apparently able to get a much higher price from selling certified wood than from selling uncertified wood in the domestic market (three times as much). For example, they get US\$100 per m<sup>3</sup> in the domestic market while they receive US\$297 from VETE through SIEF for eco-timber. Marketing entities for all programs (SWIFT, UTH and VETE) experienced an increase in access to export markets when they started selling certified timber. Market demand, however, requires higher volume production and good quality timber, which few communities’ production output can meet on a consistent basis.

The price premium is not always a sufficient incentive to encourage landowners to “invest” in eco-forestry management and in certification (i.e. to pay the costs today so that they will earn a greater return in the future). Only a portion of the certified wood that is produced on site is actually exported. Some timber is used for community projects like churches, school buildings, bridges, boats and residential homes while some is rejected from export and only sold on the domestic market. With all the hard work, only a portion of the total timber volume produced can fetch the premium price. This reduces the incentive to producers.

## **Environmental**

Solomon Islands' forest resource situation now is at one extreme, unsustainable and subject to overexploitation. It will be exhausted by 2015 if there is no drastic change in policy and strategy to ensure environmentally sound and sustainable practices. The forest is under severe threat and at present forest certification in the country is far from having any significant effect. One of the environmental concerns over the certification of plantation forestry is that it may increase incentives for the deforestation of primary forests, which, in turn, would decrease biodiversity.

## **CONCLUSION**

NGOs adopted forest certification as an additional tool to promote Sustainable Forest Management. The benefits from practicing SFM would stop landowners from granting further timber rights to companies to engage in large-scale, unsustainable logging. Some landowners succeeded in halting commercial logging and in getting direct monetary benefits. They rely heavily on NGO support through external funding support, however. When funding stopped and NGO programs were discontinued, landowners also stopped production. From the three NGOs that initially promoted certification two have halted certification activities. Large forestlands are still under large-scale, unsustainable commercial logging by companies exporting timber to environmentally insensitive markets in China, South Korea, and Japan. Unless these major market outlets for Solomon Islands timber start demanding certified timber, certification will continue to have little impact.

Forest certification themes relevant to Solomon Islands include (1) markets (strong international market demand for uncertified Solomon Islands round logs and timber products reduces pressure on domestic industry to become certified); (2) lack of government support; (3) strong role of NGOs and international donors in promoting certification; (4) value of certification during internal conflict; and (5) the requirement for a stepwise approach to meet the needs of small-scale producers (individual and community).

## **Roadblocks and Challenges**

Major barriers to certification are: (1) markets (current international markets for Solomon Islands round logs or timber does not absolutely require certified wood, so one can still sell uncertified timber to current market outlets); (2) little government support for certification; (3) heavy reliance on external funding for NGOs or other stakeholders to aggressively promote sustainable forest harvesting; and (4) lack of landowner initiative to take up certification on their own. With 90 percent of forestland in the hands of landowners with 70 percent illiteracy, it will take a long time for certification to be widely accepted and practiced. There is limited awareness of forest certification among responsible authorities or decision makers and thus policy change towards forest certification at the national level and government support for its implementation at the community level will take a long time.

Funding assistance or donor support for certification is important. Without that, those promoting certification in the country would not be able to run certification programs. The high cost of certification (cost of meeting certifier's fees) is well beyond the capacity of the NGOs, let alone communities and tribal groups. The FSC standards are too technical and complicated for landowners and thus need to be translated into simple terms for ordinary people (tribal groups, communities and producers) to understand.

Commercial logging is depleting the natural forest at a very fast rate – 700,000 m<sup>3</sup> per year – while progress in forest certification is progressing at a slow pace. By the time a full-fledged program to set up certification is in place, most of the virgin forest will all be gone. Because logging is the major revenue earner for the country, the economic consequences of taking action to move in the direction of SFM could prove unpopular.

### **Future Developments/Scenarios**

Three critical factors that are likely to be important for the development of certification in the short-to-medium term include: (1) enforcement of COLP; (2) increased importance of certification in Chinese market; and (3) increased pressure from multilateral and bilateral donor community and support for NGO programs on certification.

Effective enforcement and monitoring of COLP is important. The forestry department needs to be strengthened to carry out monitoring and enactment of the forest law (SIG 2004). The option to promote logging company certification on forest concessions depends on the market and revised government. Commitment from international and local NGOs, governmental agencies, donor funding and international markets for certified products are necessary requirements for certification. Most NGOs' work depends very much on external funding and now traditional aid donors are committed to economic recovery and development in the country. This came about as a result of the intervention by the Regional Assistance Mission and the subsequent restoration of order. This may help bring about improvements in forest management and certification arrangements. For example, the Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF), a local NGO, was recently formed and is now assisting a few communities to produce eco-timber under SIEF's eco-timber label for export to the ITTG market.

### **Future Research**

Initially, NGO eco-forestry programs were targeted at halting un-controlled commercial logging, and when certification emerged they saw certification as a win-win situation whereby landowners could harvest their forests at a sustainable level while deriving maximum benefit from them. There is a need to conduct research on landowners' perceptions of traditional resource use and management. On the other hand, there is also a need to conduct market research on the end products that are and could be made from Solomon Islands timber and on consumer attitudes to illegal

and unsustainable logging in Solomon Islands. Through such research, and the application of the results, the market may eventually come to exert pressure for certified timber increasing the prospects for sustainable forest management in Solomon Islands.

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### LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

Organization	Date	Location
Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT)	14 January 2004	Honiara, Solomon Islands
Soltrust (former employees and directors)	14 January 2004	Honiara, Solomon Islands
Forestry Division, Department of Forest, Environment and Conservation	18 January 2004	Honiara, Solomon Islands
Environment and Conservation Division, Department of Forest, Environment and Conservation	18 January 2004	Honiara, Solomon Islands
Kolombangara Forest Products Limited	4 March 2004	Ringi Cove, Western Province, Solomon Islands
Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF)	4 February 2004	Munda, Western Province, Solomon Islands
Loupou Tribal Project	8 January 2004	Afio, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands
Kasera Community Project	22 January 2004	Nagolau Village, Isabel Province, Solomon Islands
Kolomola Village Project	11 January 2004	Kolomola Village, Isabel Province, Solomon Islands

**ACRONYMS**

CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CDC	Commonwealth Development Corporation
COLP	Code of Logging Practice
CSN	Civil Society Network
FAMP	Forest Area Management Plan
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICCO	International Organization for Development Co-operation
IFM	Isatabu Freedom Movement
ITTG	Imported Tropical Timber Group
KFPL	Kolombangara Forest Products Limited
MEF	Malaita Eagle Force
MTDS	Medium Term Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRDF	Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF)
RSIP	Royal Solomon Islands Police
PCDT	Pacific Conservation Development Trust
SI	Solomon Islands
SIAC	Solomon Islands Alliance for Change
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SIDT	Solomon Islands Development Trust
SIDT-EFU	Solomon Islands Development Trust-Eco-Forestry Unit
SIEF	Solomon Islands Eco-forestry
SIFIA	Solomon Islands Forest Industries Association
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SOLCERT	Solomon Certification
SOLFRIS	Solomon Forest Inventory System
SOTPA	Sawmill Owners Timber Producers Association
SWIFT	Solomon Western Island Fair Trade
UTH	Umi Togeta Holding
VETE	Village Ecoforestry Timber Enterprises
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

