**PROTECT mangrove forests and SAVE our island homes!**

Did you know that Fiji has the third largest mangrove area (380 square kilometres) in the Pacific Islands? And did you also know that mangrove forests in Fiji, made up of eight true species and one hybrid, are one of the most threatened ecosystems in Fiji?

The major pressures on mangroves include coastal development, clearance and reclamation for urbanisation, tourism, sand mining, conversion to aquaculture and agriculture, climate change, timber extraction and pollution.

According to *State of Conservation in Fiji* (2013), there was a 4% reduction in mangrove cover in Fiji over the ten-year period 1991–2001, with some localities recording a loss of cover of 60–70% due to unmanaged conversion of mangroves.

For generations, mangrove forests have provided breeding, spawning and nursery habitat for fish species and delivered coastal defense services by reducing risk from coastal hazards such as , storm surges and king tides. Mangrove forests therefore have multiple benefits for coastal communities and are important in maintaining community resilience.

The protection of mangrove forests is a great example of nature-based adaptations to climate threats. Located at the border of the land and sea, mangroves will slowly migrate inland in relation to increasing sea levels, thereby maintaining the health of our coastlines. Mangroves also absorb carbon from the atmosphere, directly contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gases, the main driver of climate change.In a changing climate, mangroves and other natural solutions provide hope for successful adaptation. A big gain from mangroves is they are self-regulating (within limits!) and, in the context of climate change, naturally increase in value over time through the continued provision of ecosystem services such as coastal protection and carbon sequestration.

As reported by Alongi et al in *Carbon cycling and storage in mangrove forests* (2014), carbon emissions from mangrove deforestation form up to 10% of global deforestation emissions, while healthy mangroves absorb 2 – 4 times the carbon per ha than the equivalent area of tropical forest.

In terms of coastline defense, a World Bank Group study on ‘Managing Coasts with Natural Solutions’ (2016) confirmed that mangroves significantly reduce wave energy.

“Mangrove vegetation reduces wind speeds over the water surface, lessening the likelihood of waves increasing in height within mangrove areas. Wave height can be reduced by 13 to 66 percent over a 100-meter-wide mangrove belt, while wave height can be reduced by 50 to 100 percent over a 500-meter-wide mangrove belt. Wave height reduction within a mangrove forest depends on the width of the forest, mangrove tree morphology, water depth, topography, and wave height.

The trends in habitat loss and the concomitant loss of coastal protection services will continue unless the values of these habitats (mangroves) are accounted for in policy and management decisions.”

The sad reality is that the value of mangroves as ‘green or living infrastructure’ is not fully recognized and the forests continue to be lost and degraded around the world.

The consequences of further mangrove degradation will be painful for many coastal communities in developing countries, especially those whose daily subsistence and livelihoods are dependent on mangrove goods and services.

However, the future of mangroves does not have to be bleak. Increasing recognition of the importance of mangrove ecosystems for both biodiversity and human well-being is driving efforts around the world to conserve, better manage and restore these ecosystems.

In Fiji and the Pacific, we must recognize mangroves as a valuable ecological component of community resilience to climate change and ensure that they are conserved and managed sustainably.

Governments, and communities, need to make commitments through management decisions and application of existing protection measures to curb the widespread losses from human activities.

Today as we celebrate International Forest Day, take a first step to better manage our mangrove forests in Fiji and say No to destruction of mangrove forests!

Let’s Stop destroying, and Start working with nature today!

For further information on natural solutions or Ecosystem based Adaptation (EbA), visit the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme’s website: [www.sprep.org/pebacc](http://www.sprep.org/pebacc)

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