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 review of literature 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% of the total forestland area in the country through 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 firm commitment from the government to promote sustainable forest harvesting.

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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
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
SOLCERT	Solomon Certification
SOLFRIS	Solomon Forest Inventory System
SOPTA	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

I. INTRODUCTION

Forest certification in Solomon Islands is currently being championed by a few non-government organizations (NGOs) working with a small number of land-owning groups. Although forest certification is market driven, NGOs have adopted it because they see it as an additional tool to promote sustainable forest harvesting. These NGOs were already promoting community forestry and assisting landowners in sustainable forest harvesting before the emergence of a market for certified timber. Forest certification has some impact at the community level by reducing or even stopping commercial logging in certain areas, but it has had little impact at the national level. The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) is not directly involved in certification, but *is* involved in commercial logging. Forest resources are being exploited at an unsustainable level through commercial logging. To reduce the logging companies' current unsustainable cut rate of around 700,000 m^3 per annum to a sustainable level of around 200,000 m^3 per annum (SIG 2003c), SIG is enforcing the Code of Logging Practice (COLP) approved in 2002. In doing so, SIG is drafting a new act (the Forestry Act 2004) to ensure mandatory COLP implementation by logging companies (SIG 2003b). Any company that does not comply with the requirements of the COLP will have its license suspended or terminated under the new act.

The forest sector is currently dominated by foreign logging companies in partnership with local landowner companies and contractors, mostly Malaysian companies selling raw logs to the Chinese, South Korean, Japanese, and other Asian markets. Except for the Japanese, these markets are relatively insensitive to sustainable forest harvesting and forest certification issues. Logging companies are aware of forest certification but are not prepared to adopt it because of the additional work and cost involved; they want only to extract the timber and move on. Commercial logging is the major economic activity in Solomon Islands; log exports earn 80% of foreign exchange (CBSI 2003) and have been going on for the past four decades. However, commercial logging 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.

Small scale forest milling and certification are viable options but landowners are not ready for certification as evidenced by the amount of time, money and expertise NGOs must invest in training them to be certified; landowners do not take the initiative on their own to go for certification but wait for NGOs' assistance. At this early stage, certification has no impact on forest exploitation and on policy at the national level, and little impact at the community level. Progress in forest certification is slow due to a lack of understanding of the certification processes, the extra workload involved and NGOs' limited capacity, skills and funding assistance from donors. Work on forest certification started in the early 1990s, and two small family operations in Maliata 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. The only reforestation company that was certified in 1998 was Kolombangara Forest Products Limited (KFPL), which remains the only current FSC-certified operation in the country. Other forest certification initiatives had problems during the ethnic tensions between 1999 and 2001, with Soltrust and SWIFT ceasing operations.

II. BACKGROUND FACTORS

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 or coral islands covering a total land area of about 27,000 km^2. About 350 of the islands are currently inhabited. The islands were first inhabited about 6,000 years ago by a Neolithic Southeast Asian population—the first proto-Melanesians (Smit 2002)—which settled in tribes under chiefly rule. 86% 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 comprised of 94.2% Melanesian, 4% Polynesian, 1.4% Micronesian, 0.4% European and 0.1% 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 national government is comprised of three branches: (1) Legislature, (2) Executive and (3) Judiciary. The Legislature consists of the single chamber National Parliament, which has 50 elected Members of Parliament (MP) representing 50 constituencies or political boundaries. General elections to elect the 50 MP's take place every 4 years. The Executive comprises the Head of State (Governor General) and the Cabinet, made of the Prime Minister and 20 Cabinet Ministers responsible for the management of the State. Each of the 20 Cabinet Ministers heads departments which comprise public servants. The Executive formulates policies and action strategies for implementation by the public servants, some of whom are seconded to provincial governments. The Judiciary comprises the Attorney General, the High Court and the Public Prosecutor. The national government is based in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands.

At the provincial level, provincial elections operate under the same set of rules and procedures as 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 electoral process of both national and provincial representatives has contributed to a culture whereby politicians divert resources to a select minority of citizens/communities as a reward for their support during elections. The Multi-donor Economic Governance Mission (MEGM) report stated that it is evident that a number of politicians have become "rent seekers" 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 participation in decision-making processes are major governance issues. Some of these issues have existed since colonial times: "modern" governance (Westminster model) has long been considered a threat to the traditional governance structures and authority practiced by 86% of the population. There is much dissatisfaction by landowners (who own most of the resources) over "modern" governance alienation, and heavy-handed, top-down approaches.

Ownership and Tenure

About 90% of the forested 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 8% of customary land, some of which has subsequently passed to forestry or agricultural companies. About 2% of the land area is held by the forest industry and mostly 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). Most landowning groups or tribal members live in rural villages, which comprised 86% (354,310) of the total population of 410,000 (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 report 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 negotiation 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% of the total log value, or less since many companies deduct the cost of road-building from the landowner royalty. Meanwhile, the government receives 35% of the total log value through export duties and levies, and logging companies receive about 30% in the form of excess profits after production costs (this varies with log price, which is generally low so that margins and profits are lower). Production costs and service charges incurred by the logging company account for the remaining 20% (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. Commercial logging started on government-held forestland in the 1960s and since then, has shifted onto customary forestland.

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 of 1970, or as is more often the case, illegally due to the government's failure to implement the legislation effectively. (About 90% of logging concessions or timber rights are granted illegally.) 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 applied to the high court of Solomon Islands for a court injunction to halt logging by two companies, Bulo and Metro, on Billy Island. Bulo, a logging company owned by a few landowners from Marovo, holds the timber rights and Metro is a Malaysian logging company subcontracted by Bulo to carry out the logging operations. The landowners argued that timber rights granted to Bulo by the SIG Forestry Department breached the Forest Resources and Timber Utilization Act of 1970. The Forestry Department did not consult all of the landowners during the timber rights hearing, and the majority of them want Billy Island to be a conservation area rather than a logging area. They were surprised when logging started on the Island and took up the case in court. There are many cases similar to this in the country but many do not go to court because of the lack of financial resources by landowners, allowing logging operations to continue unabated.

The forest industry is comprised of the SIG Forestry Department headed by a Minister who is a political representative, the provincial government, contractors or logging companies, 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 most cases no proper participatory process or consultation is made; 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 tribal members.

In the last 15 years, a number of tribes, family units and communities have taken the initiative in small-scale saw milling operations to directly involve all tribal members and attain maximum benefit from their forest. Although the milling operations do not cause much environmental damage compared to logging, timber extraction is conducted through unsustainable practices. Most landowners are in favor of this option compared to industrial logging. They see the monetary benefits, since they earn three times more for sawn timber per equivalent round log volume (m^3), and 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 28,000ha. These plantations were established by the government on alienated land. Recently, landowners have begun to establish significant areas of plantations on their customary land. These plantations, in spite of 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, the Solomon Islands Forestry Management Project (SIFMP) had compiled a database of 1,600 individually owned stands which are thought to represent around 60% of those planted (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^3 (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.

The COLP 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. It focused on twelve key standards. These include: (1) Protected and exclusion areas, (2) Roads and landings, (3) Road line clearing, (4) Road drainage, (5) Landing size and number (6) No felling and skidding within buffers, (7) Temporary crossings, (8) Skid track width, (9) Log value maximization, (10) Weather restriction, (11) Decommissioning skid tracks, and (12) Decommissioning landings and log ponds (SIG 2003a). The COLP focuses more on the controlled use of machines in logging operations rather than a comprehensive forest management plan as with FSC and SIEF approaches.

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. Logs were the highest among all commodities exported from Solomon Islands, which shows the importance of the forest industry to the economy. Although commercial logging is unsustainable, any sudden change to 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	Log Value	Sawn Timber Volume	Sawn Timber Value
	('000 m^3)	US$('000)	('000 m^3)	US$('000)
1990	399.0	7536.8	8.2	571.3
1991	291.8	6594.0	6.1	546.9
1992	543.1	13869.1	8.5	858.7
1993	591.1	29563.2	11.0	1332.1
1994	659.3	35609.6	12.4	1304.5
1995	748.5	35948.9	12.4	1778.1
1996	833.0	44861.7	12.0	1720.0
1997	690.3	37094.1	9.5	1662.4
1998	513.0	20254.0	8.0	1731.6
1999	611.2	33421.1		
2000	536.06	29922.9		
2001	533.59	25394.3		
2002	550.4	33886.5		
2003	740.51	48094.1		
Total	**8240.9**	**402050.3**	**88.1**	**11505.8**

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 for churches, aid posts, school and petrol shed construction within their communities. Producing good quality timber is a major problem among timber producers, despite a series of trainings in timber production and grading. Most of the exported certified timber is used in joinery or furniture work and all kinds of wood products for houses.

Table 3. Entities producing certified timber for export

Management Organization	Marketing Arm	Period of Export	Volume of Export (m^3)	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[1] NZ, Australia
United Church (SWIFT)	SWIFT	1996-2001	1,140		Holland
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)

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 detail records to show the actual value of the timber.

Wood products account for 30% of GDP and the forestry sector employs 3,600 people—one-third of the total labor force in the formal employment sector.

III. 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 among landowners, including land disputes, conflict among landowners, land degradation, and sedimentation and pollution of river systems, catchments areas, 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 see them as having no regard for the environmental, social and cultural settings. Landowners and NGOs are demanding that the government develop adequate environmental regulations and codes of conduct to regulate logging activities and put in place an adequate and effective monitoring system.

NGOs like Soltrust and SIDT were established in the early 1980s and help landowners gain information and make decisions regarding destructive logging practices and other major industrial land developments like oil palm plantations. More NGOs came

[1] New Zealand Imported Tropical Timber Group

in the 1990s, including international NGOs like Greenpeace Pacific, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). They joined in the concerted effort to inform citizens about the negative impacts of commercial logging and unsustainable resource development. They initiated a number of conservation and sustainable resource management programs among some communities. Despite that, 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 social service provision through schools, clinics, roads and water supply convinced a number of landowners to put their forest resources at the mercy of 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 perception of resource use. People did not put the NGOs' ideas and information into practice. The NGOs then realized that just providing information alone is not sufficient although information is undisputedly important. The need is to actually show landowners the best practices for using (or harvesting) their own resources, in this case how to harvest their forest and get maximum benefit from it. With external funding, they set up eco-forestry divisions/units within their organizations and taught landowners how to harvest their forest and sell them to get more income than they do with logging companies.

At the time when NGOs were promoting sustainable timber milling with landowners, export markets for certified timber emerged and exerted pressure for certified timber from those milling operations. Soltrust, SIDT and SWIFT therefore adopted and promoted forest certification as an additional tool to implement sustainable forest harvesting. Isabel provincial government joined the program under SIDT through the European Union (EU)-funded Isabel Sustainable Forestry Management Project. Soltrust and SWIFT adopted FSC certification standards using the Group Certification process, which included all the 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. Dealing with individual tribes and communities was more complex and difficult. SWIFT eventually became FSC-certified in 1996.

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. However principles and criteria are similar to FSC's principles and criteria. The parties to eco-timber recognized that certification is very expensive under FSC and that it will take time for landowners or timber producers to adopt and fully implement FSC standards. This is a private arrangement between ITTG (the market), Greenpeace Pacific and SIDT. They are using 2nd party eco-timber verification as a start for landowners and plan to build them up for eventual FSC certification. The SIEF's eco-timber therefore complements rather than undermines FSC.

SWIFT expanded its eco-forestry program in response to demand from the market for certified timber. The market thus had a lot of influence on adoption and promotion of certification by NGOs in Solomon Islands. KFPL was also interested in certification because of the market demand and premium price for certified logs (it was largely an internal decision by CDC to do this). The eco-forestry programs implemented by NGOs could not have expand and been readily accepted by landowners if they had not secured reliable market outlets and high prices for their timber. The timber that was produced by SWIFT before 1996 was exported to Holland but SWIFT faced difficulties in finding markets with reasonable prices (Wilko 2004). Certification or guarantees of 'good' forest management were seen as the key to establishing market outlets and higher prices for the timber. NGOs capitalized on this to expand and increase sustainable timber production. However, being predominantly subsistence-based, communities did not produce consistently to maintain a regular supply to meet market demand. Landowners or timber producers only produced timber when they needed money. This is one of the major problems experienced by the certification program.

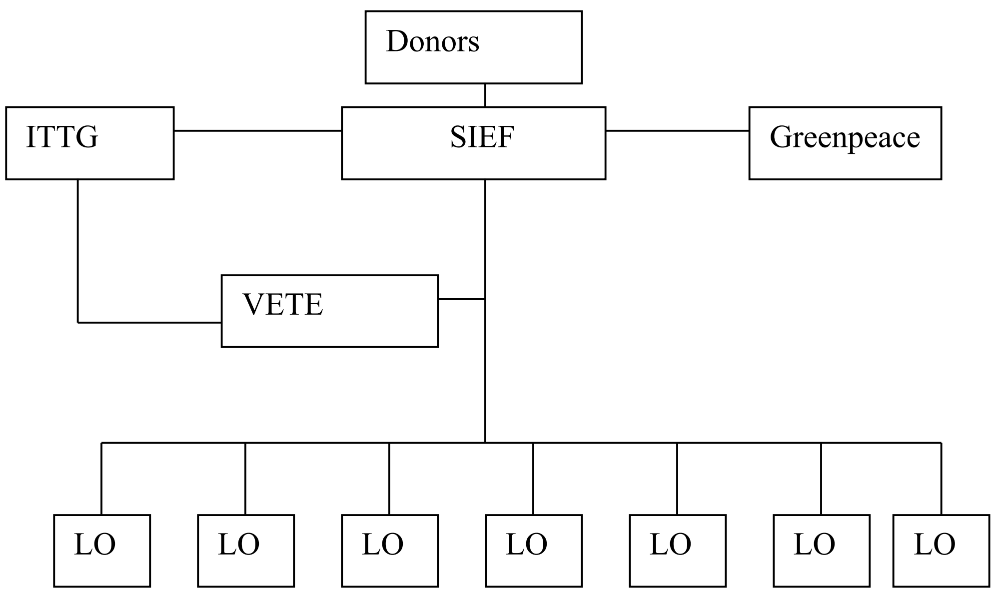

Figure 1. Diagram of the SI Ecoforestry Program operation showing links to donors, the market (ITTG), NGOs (Greenpeace, SIDT), Village Ecoforestry Timber Enterprises (VETE) and Landowners (LO)

The NGOs worked within their respective eco-certification programs to build capacity among landowners. The landowners are weak and have been marginalized under current forest exploitation practices, and moreover, there are no avenues for continuous dialogue between landowners and the government. The government seat is located in the capital of Honiara and is alienated from the landowners. Because of this, the landowners have very little influence on policy at the national level. Some of their influential members and political representatives are often bribed or resort to corruptive practices by logging companies to convince the rest of the tribe members to allow their forest to be commercially logged. They use their influential role in the system to meet their own needs rather than those of their tribes. Activities undertaken by Soltrust, SIEF and SWIFT include support and promotion of: (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. SWIFT was the pioneer in community-based certification.

All stakeholders were very enthusiastic about the new initiative and supported the process. They initiated and formed SOLCERT (Solomon Certification) in 1998 with membership from the government. SOLCERT was formed to coordinate all certification-related work among all stakeholders involved and to act as the certifier to be accredited with FSC. SOLCERT did not function as expected due to lack of coordination between NGOs and has remained ineffective since its formation in 1998. Although individual NGO's activities were conducted without much coordination they did have some effect among selected communities including capacity building, providing employment and increasing income. They however failed to make any impact on policy at the national level. Soltrust and SWIFT have so far ceased operations due to technical and financial problems and the impact of ethnic tensions. SIDT remains an active member of a new Civil Society Network (CSN) which is just becoming a force at influencing national policies especially after the ethnic tensions.

Ethnic tensions surfaced in late 1998. The state's inability to effectively deal 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 sympathizer group within the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) and forced the democratically-elected Ulufa'alu government out of office in a coup on June 5, 2000. The armed engagement of both IFM and MEF forces from 1999 to 2000 led to the killing of many, the destruction of infrastructure and the collapse of the national economy. Development initiatives came to a halt and investor confidence was completely eroded.

Support from the government for certification was nonexistent. Any aggressive strategy to promote sustainable forest harvesting and forest management by the government would have drastically affected 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 provincial governments are licensees and sub-contract to foreign logging companies. This close relationship makes it convenient for logging companies and SIFIA to influence policy. As an example, in 1997, SIFIA pressured the government to reduce the export duty from 35% of total log export value to 20%, which it did. Currently, the duty is being raised back to 35%.

Institutional Design

Forest certification is being championed by NGOs with the help of market demand for certified timber. Landowners participate in certification because they get more monetary benefit through milling their timber compared to the 15% royalty they get from logging companies. This is evidenced through the overwhelming request from communities to join the NGO's eco-forestry program. However not all communities are committed to maintaining the standards required under the certification process. For example, from 1992 to 1998, Soltrust trained and developed a Forest Area Management Plan (FAMP) in partnership with 48 landowning groups and communities, but only 6 were ready for certification in 1998. Some aspects of the FSC standards were well beyond the capacity of the landowners. They were not ready and prepared to follow detailed procedures, practices and standards as outlined in the FAMPs although the plans were developed with them through village consultation. Lessons learned here forced SIEF to develop less complex and stringent standards still in line with FSC's principles and criteria. One other reason why SIEF did not adopt FSC's certification directly was because of the high cost of certification. Soltrust was pre-assessed by SGS Qualifor, a certification company from Europe, and a main evaluation was carried out by Smartwood/Rainforest Alliance from America. However Soltrust was never certified due to failure to meet pre-conditions and lack of payment to the certifier.

Description of NGOs and stakeholders involved in forest certification

(1) Soltrust was registered as a national NGO in 1989 under the Charitable Act (Cap 55) of Solomon Islands. It replaced Foundation for the People of the South Pacific Solomon Islands (FSP-SI) and took over its functions and activities. One of these was timber-milling which started in 1986. Soltrust established an eco-forestry division in 1992 and assisted communities in training and development of forest area management plans with landowners. Six out of the 48 landowner groups or communities (timber producers) trained and assisted by Soltrust were assessed by Smartwood/Rainforest Alliance in 1998 and became FSC certified (lost the certification after that due to non compliance and non payment of certifiers fees). With external funding assistance, Soltrust provided continuous training, extension and support work, and monitoring of local timber producers. Soltrust later established a marketing arm called Umi Togeta Holding (UTH). It purchased milled timber from timber producers and exported them to European markets. Despite marketing initiative, Soltrust experienced technical and financial problems in its operations prior to the ethnic tension and ceased operation in 2000 during the height of the ethnic tension when its office was destroyed by militants.

(2) The Integrated Human Development program of the United Church of Solomon Islands set up SWIFT in 1994. SWIFT's FAMP and standards were developed by Dutch foresters who transferred and translated FSC requirements to Solomon Islands community forestry conditions. The first landowners or timber producers were certified in 1996. When they started in 1994 with sustainable timber milling they had problems marketing their timber. When they sold their first certified timber in 1996 the market

opened up for more timber. SWIFT's forest certification program was funded by the International Organization for Development Co-operation (ICCO) based in Holland. Due to incompatibility between church and business affairs, and other management problems, SWIFT's program stopped in year 2001 and no certified timber has been produced since.

(5) SIDT was founded by Dr. John Roughan (a naturalized citizen, originally from the USA) and Abraham Baeanisia, 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 joint eco-forestry program (SIEF) in May 1995. External funding for different phases of the program came from the EU (regional funding under its tropical forest budget line), USAID, the New Zealand High Commission in Solomon Islands, Pacific Conservation Development Trust (PDCT) in New Zealand, ITTG NZ, UK Foundation and Greenpeace International. SIEF established a set of principles, criteria and indicators for good tree harvesting. These were developed and agreed upon by all joint partners. In order 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 active projects (landowners) and supplies eco-certified timber to ITTG in New Zealand and some market outlets in Australia. This included 8 communities in Isabel Province supported under the EU-funded "Sustainable Forestry Management Project" from 1995 to 1998 (SNR Consultancy & Associates 1998). This project was an initiative by the Isabel Provincial Government in line with its 1993–97 development plan. It encourages alternative forestry activities from commercial logging. In mid-1997 SIEF set up a marketing body called Village Eco-timber Enterprises (VETE) within the program to address the increasing market demand in tropical hardwoods from their sustainably-managed forests. VETE's membership comprised of timber producers participating in the SIEF program and managed by a Manager who is stationed within the SIDT-EFU office. VETE exports the timber on behalf of the timber producers. It brings in the timber from the provinces to Honiara, sorts, grades, loads and treats them in containers for export. It does all paperwork and handling. VETE is not for profit and retains only 15% of the total export value to meet its operational and handling costs, which is not sustainable at current low volumes. VETE needs to operate as a full-fledged business entity but cannot until timber producers resume full operation, which depends on SIEF program revamp and funding status. According to the SIDT 1982–2002 - 20th anniversary report (2002), VETE exported 715 m^3 to overseas markets mainly to ITTG in New Zealand from August 1997 to April 2002. The volume of timber exported was worth US$220,000 and the money went directly to timber producers (landowners). If this volume was sold as logs it could fetch US$74,710 for logging companies and landowners would only get US$8,030 in royalty payment. During the same period (1997 – 2002), an additional volume equivalent to about half of the exported amount of eco-timbers was sold locally or used domestically for timber/petrol sheds, furniture and housing for project members. Building better houses for families is one way to raise their standard of living in the villages. The SIEF program depends on external funding to make it function and the last EU regional funding stopped in 2001. The SIEF program has been funded recently by Oxfam Australia but funding is only limited to training. A new funding proposal to the EU for VETE under its bilateral mechanism is pending.

(4) KFPL is a joint venture company between SIG and UK Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) and is managed by CDC. KFPL was first and only 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. They have greatly expanded their sawn timber production and output in recent years. Their certified logs and timber kept them afloat from 1998 to 2001 when Solomon Islands went through the ethnic tension and economic crisis. Apart from market benefit, 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^3 per annum at a value of around US$5million (SB$35million).

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

(6) SolCert (Solomon Islands National Certification Body) was established in 1998 with membership from (i) SIDT-EFU, (ii) Soltrust, (iii) SI Government Forestry Department, (iv) SI National Union of Workers and (v) SI Forest Industries Association. The functions of SolCert are to: 1) build awareness of forest certification; 2) set national standards for forest certification; and 3) be the contact office for certification in Solomon Islands or the umbrella body in forestry certification. It was planned that SolCert will complement and support SOPTA to promote and market certified timber from Solomon Islands. This plan did not succeed since both SOPTA and SolCert failed to function as expected. This was due to closure of the Soltrust and SWIFT programs.

Standards

Soltrust, SWIFT and KFPL were FSC-certified while SIEF uses the eco-timber standard. The eco-timber label also adopted some FSC principles and criteria like defining protected areas, forest use, forest management plans, needs and rights of customary owners, method of harvest, verification and monitoring. Landowners (timber producers) expressed that field operations like blocking, inventory, tree marking and positioning, reporting and detailed recordkeeping were some of the activities that involved too much work under FSC standards. Milling also involved a lot of manual work. For example, they normally carry the milled timber from the mill site to the point where transport is available. The SIEF team has assisted timber producers in these activities under the eco-timber label. They are building their skills towards FSC certification but the high cost of certification under FSC is a big obstacle. Timber producers don't pay for certification under the SIEF eco-timber label. Greenpeace does the verification of the standards and criteria on the ground. Greenpeace representatives in Solomon Islands are members of the SIEF team. They collaborate in carrying out trainings in developing forest area management plans with landowners, and carry out verification and monitoring.

In the standard-setting process, Soltrust developed its FAMP in partnership with landowners and incorporated the FSC standards in the plan to meet local needs. The FAMP was developed during three months of training in forest resource planning on site. This was to ensure that the community owns the plan because they take full responsibility for the plan's implementation. The plan contained all the standard practices, which were in line with FSC principles and criteria. Soltrust conducted monitoring of the plan's implementation every three months. Because landowners have to use FSC standards, they take a long time to get them to be certified. Landowners were assessed on the implementation of the FAMP. SWIFT's whole forest management system was set up by forestry experts from Holland but has also adopted the initial approach taken by Soltrust in identifying tribes, resource owners 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 (tribal groups, communities and producers) to understand. SIEF takes communities or producers step-by-step towards FSC standards; it's a first step towards FSC certification.

A national standard-setting process was initiated and three meetings were held in 1996 and 1997 with the aim of defining a national FSC standard for community forestry at the outset. The process was not completed since there was no central coordinating body in place to carry on the work. Even SOLCERT was not in a position to do so.

Forestry Problems

Unsustainable and illegal logging, deforestation and loss of biodiversity are 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. Although certification is seen as a tool for sustainable forest management, control of deforestation and loss of biodiversity, it is not effectively addressing these forest problems at the present time. At current extraction rates, the primary rainforest will be exhausted by the time forest certification has a strong foothold in the country. The current progress in certification is slow with little national support.

Marketing entities (SWIFT, UTH and VETE) for all programs experienced an increase in access to export markets when they started selling certified timber. Market demand, however, requires higher production and good quality timber, which few communities' production output can meet on a consistent basis.

Roadblocks and Challenges

Commercial logging (primary forest removal) is depleting the natural forest at a very fast rate—700,000 m^3 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.

There is very little or limited awareness or knowledge 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 limited, and without that those promoting certification in the country will not be able to run certification programs. SWIFT received substantial donor funding for certification and donors are still interested in certification subsidization for community forestry. This is evidenced in the SIEF and Soltrust certification programs. The high cost of certification (cost of meeting certifier's fees) is well beyond the capacity of the NGOs, let alone the communities or tribal groups.

Although attempts to set up national standards have been made in the past, there are currently no national standards for forest certification in Solomon Islands to ensure that FSC guidelines are translated into SI national Forest Certification standards that meet local conditions. The FSC principles and criteria 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. SIEF tries to solve this problem by taking landowners step-by-step towards FSC standards, first getting them used to certification under the eco-certification program and then moving toward the FSC.

Certification considers large areas of forestland and thus is not feasible for small tribes or family groups or individuals who have access to small forestlands unless they are part of a group certificate. It is difficult for small producers to quickly qualify for FSC certification. Solomon Islanders live in villages in tribal groups and have the right to use small pockets of forestland areas.

The amount of work and labor involved to ensure the required criteria for certification are met is very demanding. Village people do not engage full-time in a specific activity, which would be required to maintain the certificate and produce enough quantity for the market. This has led some communities to abandon the whole program and engage in other activities.

NGOs that are involved in certification seem to want to compete with each other when instead they should work together to avoid victimizing the resource owners. Two small family operations on Maliata Province were the first to be certified in 1995 followed by SWIFT in 1996. Soltrust never actually became FSC-certified.

IV. THE REACTION TO CERTIFICATION

Forest certification has been around for 8 years and there are many village operations that have been exposed to it as well as the company KFPL, 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 and communities and has not had any impact on the forest industry and landowners. Therefore, the reaction to certification has been very minimal or nonexistent.

Forest Policy Community and Stakeholders

SIG has no policy on forest certification but aims to restore the current logging rate to sustainable levels and strengthen sustainable 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:

- Implementation of the Code of Logging Practice (COLP) and punitive powers given to implementers to prosecute for non-compliance. This will become mandatory with the passage of the new Forest Act (approved in parliament in November 2003).
- Continued reforestation of logged sites. SIG would provide an enabling environment to facilitate private sector investment in forestry plantations with respect to secured land tenure instruments and appropriate taxation provisions to enhance development and the legal framework to back it up. Commercial industrial plantations are reaching maturity and will lift output from 120,000 m^3 currently to 200,000 m^3 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 as would have been rewarded through certification. Whilst SIG appreciates and sees forest certification as a complement to its strategy to reduce unsustainable forest harvesting, it has made no firm commitment to its implementation. SIG is too wedded to patently un-certifiable destructive and illegal logging.

Landowners

Landowners (timber producers), 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. It must be noted here that a number of landowners were already milling timber on their own before forest certification was introduced. Their milling activities were, however, unsustainable because they were not following any forest management plan. In the case of SWIFT, the number of timber producers went down from 200 to 10 in the first year of certification. At the end of year 2000, SWIFT had 62 certified landowners (timber producers - tribes, family unit, communities) (Wilko 2004). In general, timber producers did not support certification. They enjoyed the higher prices for certified timber but not 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, landowner (forest owners or timber producers) needs were not adequately assessed. They argued that timber production involved a lot work and required more labor and thus interfered with their social lifestyle. For example, men spent most 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 what they are currently receiving in royalties from logging companies, no assessment was made on their desired increase in income and the commitments they are willing to make to earn the money. The timber quantity, quality and regular supply demanded by the certified market does not fit 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 & Siwatibau 1999). Some landowners refused both commercial logging and sustainable (certified) forest harvesting and opted for their own timber milling, which they saw as generating higher income than logging royalties and allowed them to operate on a needs-only basis.

Foreign logging companies are well aware of certification but see it as an unnecessary business cost. Not until buyers/markets demand certified products, or if SIG makes it mandatory (which is most unlikely) will they change this position. Nobody is pressing 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 simply not there on the table. Only a few NGOs are promoting it and its impact is very minimal and not felt at the national level amongst government policymakers and the logging industry.

Current Status of Forestland Certification

Soltrust and SWIFT stopped operating in 2000 and 2001 respectively and thus have no records to show actual 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.

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

Program	# of Land owners /timber producers Certified	Area (ha)	Type of forestland	Forest Operation
Soltrust [FSC-certified but revoked]	6		Primary forest	Chainsaw-driven mill
SWIFT	62		Primary forest	Portable saw milling
SIEF-Community Ecoforestry	24	16,000 Approx.	Primary Forest	Portable saw milling
KFPL		16,000 production – 40,000 total	Plantation	Logging

(Source: Personal Communication, Soltrust, SIDT and Wilko, 2004)

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 Soltrust and SWIFT's programs, it is highly unlikely that the timber producers they supported for certification will re-certify in the future. SIDT-EFU has its own standards based on environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability and is moving landowners towards FSC standards. KFPL has benefited from certification and will likely seek re-certification. Some people from SWIFT have reformed under the Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF), which is now using SIEF eco–certification.

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 prefer at least 40 m^3 per month from VETE but timber producers are not able to meet this demand because they are not being consistent with production. The market outlet is available but supply from certified producers is low. This is a major concern for VETE and its main aim is to increase both volume and consistency of production as well as becoming FSC-certified. Current VETE production is averaging about 30 m^3 per month.

V. EFFECTS OF FOREST CERTIFICATION

Certification has had very little effect on the provincial and national governments and within the forestry sector at large since its entry into Solomon Islands in 1995. This is because only a small number of the stakeholders concerned were involved (three NGOs—Soltrust, SIEF, SWIFT—ninety landowner groups and KFPL). The major 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 Bruntdland's three-legged stool—the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability—at the different scales of individual, community and national levels. Solomon Islands' forest resource situation now is at one extreme, unsustainable and subject to overexploitation. Its exhaustion will be imminent 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. There have been, however, some benefits at the individual and community levels especially among selected communities that have 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.

Major barriers to certification are: 1) lack of government support for certification; 2) lack of funding for NGOs or other stakeholders to aggressively promote sustainable forest harvesting; and 3) lack of landowner initiative to take up certification on their own. With 90% of forestland in the hands of landowners with 70% illiteracy, it will take a long time for certification to be widely accepted and practiced. 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^3 at domestic market while they get US$297 from VETE though SIEF for eco-timber. Yet the price premium is not always a sufficient incentive to encourage them 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 does not give much incentive to producers. 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 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.

Because of the limited scope and minimal impact of certification, it is not possible to discuss the aspects of power or social, economic and environmental factors that may be relevant for certification in Solomon Islands at great length. Landowners or tribal groups involved in certification were restricted to their own tract of forestland and thus the potential level of conflict within or between indigenous communities, forestdependent communities, government, local or international conservation organizations, and small private forest owners was not an issue.

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.

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.

VI. CONCLUSION

Forest certification is a market-driven tool that NGOs adopted as an additional tool for achieving sustainable forest harvesting. Initially, NGOs' 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. Although timber producers get direct monetary benefits from certification, the cultural and subsistence lifestyle, extra workload involved, and requirement of consistent production prevented full adoption of certification. These groups instead relied heavily on the NGOs that initially introduced and promoted certification. When funding stopped and programs were discontinued, timber producers also stopped production and thus progress made by NGOs has declined. From the original four organizations that were promoting certified timber, both NGOs have halted certification activities, and only KFPL is still exporting certified wood.

Commitment from international and local NGOs, governmental agencies, donor funding and international markets for certified products are necessary requirements for certification. To increase interest in forest certification, government must firmly commit to promoting sustainable forest harvesting. There is also a need to conduct research on landowners' perceptions of traditional resource use and management.

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, 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. The big question is how long NGOs will continue to assist landowners before they can do it on their own. The other option is to promote logging company certification on forest concession areas but this will require a major policy change from the government.

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APPENDIX I: LIST OF PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT)

Dr John Rouhan – Adviser
Felix Narasia – Coordinator, Eco-forestry Unit

Soltrust

Mathias Marau – Training Manager Eco-forestry Division
Moses Rouhana - Monitoring Eco-forestry Division
Joseph Hasiau - Board Member 1994-1996

Note: These are all former employees and board members of Soltrust. Soltrust closed in year 2000.

Loupou Tribal Project

Mathew Hite – Coordinator

Kasera Community Project

Robert Kesti – Coordinator

Kolomola Village Project

Gilbert Leamana - Coordinator

Forestry Division, Department of Forest, Environment and Conservation

George Kao – Under Secretary
Kennedy Hoda – Acting Commissioner of Forest

Environment and Conservation Division, Department of Forest, Environment and Conservation

Nathaniel Dawhya – Conservation Officer

Kolombangara Forest Products Limited

Mr Wayne Wooff (Former General Manager)

Natural Resources Development Foundation (NRDF)

Wilko Bosman (Former Coordinator- SWIFT)

Mahlon Kuve (Former Forest Officer – SWIFT)