Fiji’s forest resources can be grouped into two main classes: natural forests and plantations. Fiji also has the third largest mangrove area in the Pacific (behind Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands) covering an area of 49,600 ha (IUCN n.d.) Fiji is including mangrove forests under its National REDD+ Programme. The FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment (2010) estimates Fiji’s forest cover to be 1,014,0800 ha (56% of total land area), which includes a number of forest classes such as Closed Forest, Plantations (pine and hardwood) and 70% of Open Forest. Another FAO study breaks it down to approximately 47% (857,508 hectares ) of Fiji’s land cover covered by natural forests, softwood plantations (mainly pine: *Pinus caribaea*) representing 2.5% of land area (49,000
hectares), and hardwood plantations (mainly mahogany: *Swietania macrophylla*) representing 2.9% of the land area (50,000 hectares) (Leslie & Tuinivanua, 2010 p. 12).

The Fiji National REDD+ Programme has identified three main drivers of deforestation in Fiji, namely, land clearance for: (i) agricultural development, (ii) infrastructure development, and (iii) the establishment of settlements. The main drivers of forest degradation are: (i) poor logging practices, (ii) fuel wood collection, and (iii) the burning of forests.

While harvesting of natural forest is slowly declining, there is an expected increase in production from plantation forests. Pine woodchips are the main low value processed commodity and have dominated Fiji’s exports of wood products since the early 1990s, mainly being exported to Japan for the paper and pulp industry. Fiji does not export logs. Wood is an important fuel source in Fiji, particularly for the 54% of its population who live in rural areas (Ogle, 2013).

The forestry sector contributes approximately 2.5% of GDP and some US$ 50 million in foreign exchange annually, and forest products are the fifth most important export commodity (Leslie & Tuinivanua, 2010).

Fiji has a population of approximately 847,793, divided into two main ethnic groups: Indigenous Fijians, known officially since 2010 as “iTaukei” (57.3%), and Indo-Fijians (37.6%) (UNOHCHR, 2012). Approximately half of Fiji’s people live in rural areas, depending heavily on forests for food and medicines, and building and weaving materials (Lagataki 2010 p. 19).

Of the 1.78 million hectares of land in Fiji, approximately 87.9% (or 1.57 million hectares) is communally owned as “iTaukei land” through traditional Fijian clan level landowning units called *mataqali*, whilst the remainder is privately owned as freehold land (141,872 hectares, being 7.94%) or state-owned land (69,934 hectares, being 3.91%) (Trenorden, 2012 p. 27).

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