



Bamboo is a “critical material” for Small Island Developing States

In brief - Government representatives and members from international organisations shared the various uses of bamboos in Fiji, Grenada and Indonesia. They put up a strong case for the imperative need for greater utilisation of bamboos and innovation to address some pressing challenges including climate change action and livelihoods support.

The keynote speaker, Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Fiji's Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation pointed at the devastating impacts of climate change on Small Island Developing States.

“We were the first country to ratify the Paris Agreement in February 2016, and we are honoured to be President of the 23rd Climate Change Conference here in Bonn. Under our national climate action plan, I am proud to say that Fiji has pledged to generate 100% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2030” said Minister Vuniwaqa. She further stated, ***“I am very happy, on behalf of the Government of Fiji, to be sharing this stage with the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation, who for twenty years have been showing how bamboo can reduce poverty and create new income opportunities.”***

Participants of the event highlighted the role of bamboo for climate change action and value chain creation through collaboration and innovation. Hon. Dessima M Williams and Francois Martel championed the need for more island states in the Pacific to join INBAR and benefit from bamboo.

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November 11, Cologne: Bamboo could be a critical plant for helping Small Island Developing States fight climate change, the UN [international climate conference](#) heard today. The side event held at the Fiji Pavilion saw senior representatives and technical experts from island developing states and international organisations share successful case studies of bamboo for climate change adaptation and mitigation in island developing states, with a special emphasis on assisting small island developing states (SIDS). Participants discussed the use of bamboo for typhoon proof construction, soil/water conservation and coastal protection, small and medium enterprise (SME) development, bioenergy, and carbon sequestration. They noted the important role bamboo can play in addressing many of the most serious challenges faced by SIDS, while, also supporting their National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and realising their sustainable green development goals.

“Bamboo is already among the world’s most valuable non-timber forest products, and grows across many of the Small Island Developing States, including INBAR Member State Tonga. I believe bamboo can be a very important tool for the empowerment of women, children and the rural poor, and for adaptation and mitigation to climate change” said Mereseini Vuniwaqa.

Stressing that bamboo can be used to raise incomes, and create diversified income streams for communities whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change; one of the key issues Minister Vuniwaqa touched upon was for the need to create resilient, earthquake-and typhoon-proof housing, which in turn creates jobs and helps the vulnerable coastal populations adapt to climate change impact. This fast-growing grass plant could prove to be extremely useful for the SIDS since it is used across the world for typhoon-resilient construction, soil conservation and coastal protection, bioenergy and carbon sequestration.

With low-lying islands, fragile environments, and a propensity to natural disasters, SIDS are among the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts. According to the IPCC's [most recent assessment](#), rising sea levels and temperature increases are already affecting SIDS' growth and development. For this reason, SIDS are among the most committed to combatting climate change. Currently reliant on expensive fossil fuel imports, Fiji [along with other SIDS](#) has recently committed itself to generating 100% of its electricity from renewable energy and sustainable biofuels by 2030.

Concluding her keynote speech Minister Vuniwaqa said, **“The government of Fiji stands ready to embrace bamboo for sustainable development and climate change, and I look forward to further meetings between the Government of Fiji and INBAR, which will be happening in December.”**

The second panelist Hon. Dessima M. Williams former Special Adviser, Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Office of the President of the General Assembly, and former Ambassador of Grenada to the UN stated the importance of bamboo in Grenada and in particular highlighted the increased usage domestically while also supporting its optimal utilisation for meeting Grenada's NDCs. She said, **“Bamboo has many uses in Grenada from being used as scaffolding to making jewellery and even as crab traps. It plays an important role in the daily lives of people in Grenada.”** She went on to discuss the possible next steps for improving the utilisation of bamboo which could be done through INBAR membership and greater collaborative projects.

Francois Martel, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Development Forum, the final panelist at the event championed the optimal utilisation of bamboo and said, **“Bamboo has many uses and can be used to make climate resilient buildings. I will continue to advocate for greater uses of bamboo and push for more Pacific states to join INBAR.”**

Following this technical presentations from Dean Solofa, Policy and Planning Adviser, Land Resources Division, Pacific Community made a technical presentation on the potential for bamboo to offer Pacific countries a fast growing short rotation crop with a variety of end uses and services such as the rehabilitation of degraded lands. He added that bamboo already grows in most of the Pacific and is highly suited for these countries' traditional agroforestry systems. The Pacific Community will work with its member countries to build capacity to better manage and utilise bamboo in the future, according to Solofa. Later a compelling video and talk by Arief Rabik; Director, Environmental Bamboo Foundation; and Desy Ekawati, Project Coordinator, International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) showcased the massive opportunities that can be created including diversified income streams and sustainable value chains through the “Thousand Bamboo Villages” project in Indonesia

According to Dr. Hans Friederich, Director-General of INBAR, **“Countries across the world's tropical belt are using bamboo to build climate change-resilient houses, make charcoal, and store carbon. It's a critical material in the climate change struggle, but people are still surprised to hear about it. INBAR has over the last two decades shown that bamboo is a viable solution for addressing a number of climate change issues and supporting the SDGs. We need to spread the word.”**

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More about the event

Bamboo, a fast growing, highly renewable resource found all across the Global South in the tropics and sub-tropics, can play a major role in helping many developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, while also promoting green economic development. Bamboo is a climate-smart approach that adds value to forestry and agriculture strategies via mitigation, adaptation, landscape restoration, and rural income and livelihoods. However, while there are an estimated 30 million+ hectares of bamboo distributed across the world, due to a lack of awareness, technical capacity and supportive policy and finance environments, most countries have yet to realise the full potential of their resources, in particular small island developing states.

This event presented the experiences of the Government of Fiji, INBAR member states, and the INBAR Secretariat on the potential for bamboo in the following areas:

- **Bamboo for Typhoon Proof Construction**

Bamboo is a strong, affordable material that bends rather than breaks, allowing local people to deal with the effects of increased typhoons and rising sea levels related to climate change in SIDS.

- **Bamboo for Soil/Water Conservation and Coastal Protection**

Bamboo's sturdy rhizomes and roots regulate water flows and prevent erosion very effectively. They thrive on problem soils and steep slopes that are unsuitable for other crops and can serve as an effective windbreak. They can serve as effective barriers to strong tidal waves, allowing for large accumulations of sediment and protecting other species such as mangrove forests. They thus help with soil and water conservation, which is a major issue for SIDS.

- **Bamboo Furniture and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development**

Bamboo is a versatile and rapidly renewable resource that can be used to make thousands of products, targeting high youth and female unemployment in SIDS.

- **Bamboo for Bioenergy**

Bamboo can provide a sustainable source of raw material for bioenergy that does not cause deforestation. It can be particularly effective for off-grid electricity generation in island states. It could assist in addressing SIDS' expensive energy imports and national energy policies on biofuels and rural electrification.

- **Bamboo for Carbon Sequestration**

Bamboo is an excellent carbon sink with research showing greater absorption of carbon dioxide than Chinese fir.