

Do trees have feelings?

by Arnold Mundua

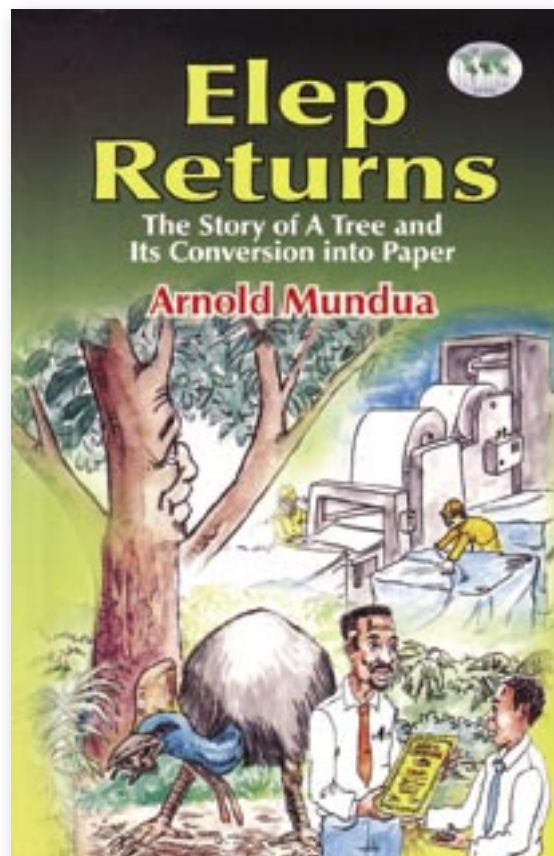
PNG Forest Authority
PO Box 267
Mt Hagen, WHP
Papua New Guinea

IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG), trees and forests remain integral parts of the cultural heritage. Globally, the great importance of trees and forests has led to the publication of many books and papers that record the science of trees and the roles they play in ecosystems and society. Indeed, the profession of forestry has existed in PNG for more than 30 years. Despite all this, the dissemination of basic forestry information to the general population, and particularly to children, remains overlooked.

I was awarded an ITTO fellowship to publish a science-fiction novel I wrote titled *Elep returns*. It gives an overview of forests, foresters and forestry, with particular emphasis on the log export industry in PNG, for children in PNG schools. In this article I describe the novel, its purpose and how it was written.

The story

Elep returns is the story of a tree, named Elep, which grew in Kandrian, a region on the south coast of the PNG island of New Britain. The novel relates Elep's adventurous story, from its germination and growth into a big tree, its conversion to a log, export to Japan and transformation there into paper, and its return, in paper form, to PNG, where it is used for the printing of school certificates. By coincidence, Elep has



Fellowships awarded

Twenty-nine fellowships worth a total of US\$151 900 were awarded at the 40th session of the International Tropical Timber Council in May/June 2006. Awardees were:

Komlan Mibia Adiku (Togo), to undertake a study on the quality of *Gmelina arborea* timber in Togo in view of best pricing; **Indranie Jean Bacchus** (Guyana), to undertake a masters program in business administration; **Belvi Margui Cáceres Rodríguez** (Peru), to get a masters in management and conservation of tropical forest and biodiversity; **Maheshwar Dhakal** (Nepal), to undertake PhD research on a forest products' pricing system in a community forestry program; **Kelechi Eleanya** (Nigeria), to do post-graduate research on forest-based livelihoods in Nigeria's Akassa mangrove forests; **Richard Gyimah** (Ghana) and **Christine Mambote Makananu** (Democratic Republic of Congo), to participate in an environmental leadership course; **Edward Kamara** (Liberia), to attend a training course on forest utilization technologies for sustainable development; **Lina Karlinasari** (Indonesia), to do PhD research on wood bending strength analysis based on non-destructive testing; **Migbégbloê Kumedjro Messankpon** (Togo), to undertake a post-graduate thesis that will develop a management plan for the Bayémé protected area; **Win Kyi-I** (Myanmar), to prepare a technical document on wood-drying technology; **Amy Alicia Lazo Ulloa** (Honduras), **María Meneses Lixmani Pitacuar** (Ecuador), **Tania Liliana Luna Arévalo**, **Yan Arley Ramos Palacios** and **Henny Gicela Maldonado Sevilla** (all from Colombia), and **Cecilia Victoria Vargas Mendiola** (Peru), to attend a training course on the diversified management of tropical natural forests; **Elisabeth Any Mba** (Cameroon) to obtain a diploma in reforestation and forest management; **Marcel Joachim Medzegue** (Gabon), to do PhD research on comparing okoume (*Aucoumea klaineana*) timber from plantations and natural forests; **Roberto Lecomte Mello** (Brazil), to attend the World Conference on Timber Engineering; **Joseph Mizingou** (Republic of Congo), to prepare technical sheets on the phenology calendar of ten commercial species in four national forest stations; **Lawrence Gradebo Ogunbare** (Nigeria), to work with the Ghana Forestry Commission to study its tropical timber data management system; **Abiodun Olusesi Oso** (Nigeria), to do masters research on the assessment of forest offences on exploitation in Ogun State Between 1996–2005; **Eli Nur Nirmala Sari** (Indonesia), to do a PhD on forest certification and its impact on rural forest community poverty alleviation; **Sajani Shrestha** (Nepal), to do PhD research on wild food products' use and nutrition in a buffer zone in Nepal; **George David Tchikou Tchuissou** (Cameroon), to use remote sensing and GIS in the study of deforestation and its affect on environmental equilibrium; **Lucie Felicite Temgoua** (Cameroon), to undertake a masters program in rural and tropical forestry; **Mahendra Singh Thapa** (Nepal), to complete a masters program in natural resource management and rural development; **Aung Ko Thet** (Myanmar), to undertake a masters program in natural resource management.

the proud privilege of displaying the academic excellence of a boy who once relished the fruits Elep produced when it grew near the boy's Kandrian village.

The tree Elep is personified in the story. In the local Arup (Arawe) dialect in Kandrian, 'Elep' refers to *Canarium indicum*, a tropical hardwood tree species belonging to the Burseraceae family. It occurs in most parts of PNG and is a dominant species in Kandrian. It is famous all over PNG for its tasty, crunchy nuts, known locally as *galip*. Elep narrates its journey from seed to tree and from wood to paper, highlighting the various phases of growth and processing and, in doing so, presenting an overview of forestry.

How and why Elep returns was written

About 70% of school children in PNG come from timber-resource-rich provinces. However, when the subject of forestry is raised in the classroom, children will tend to picture a tree, or a forest or forest plantation, or a log truck (jinker) loaded with logs and roaring at breakneck speed towards a log pond, or a seedling in a poly bag. Such images will not be linked in the child's mind, and he or she will not find it easy to see forestry as a process. In fact, children don't seem particularly interested in 'dry' discussions of the art and science of forestry. Hence the relevance of forestry to the lives of these children is often obscured. Even the teachers have insufficient knowledge of forestry to teach it in an interesting and informative way. And for these reasons and

others, the subjects of trees and forests are often overlooked in schools.

Literature on forestry is abundantly available in the bookshelves of libraries across the country, but readership is mostly restricted to forest experts alone—scientists and foresters. Most of it is in the form of textbooks and technical papers, which may be handy to a teacher at times but are rarely of any use to children. Hence, a good understanding of forestry at the junior level seems a long way away. In rare instances, foresters are called in to give lectures to students, but this is usually on an ad hoc basis.

In my 20 years as a forester—resource forester, forest surveyor, logging foreman, SGS log export inspector, and forest extension officer—I have answered many questions about forestry from the general public. Often, the nature of the questions illustrates an almost total lack of awareness of the forestry process. At times I used to think, “This is a very simple question, how come he or she can’t understand it?” It was at such times I started to see a need to write something for the kids, an overview of an entire forestry operation and, in particular, the log export industry, in a simple story that kids could read and understand. But it had to do more than present some information; it needed to be entertaining, a page-turner that would keep the child engrossed. How could I do this? Since children like most of all to read fiction, I concluded that the story of *Elep* should be a novel.

Elep returns is targeted at years 9, 10, 11 and 12 students in secondary schools throughout PNG, many of whom will one day take on some sort of responsibility for forest management

on clan land. It is intended as a class reading novel, where all aspects of forestry activities in PNG, particularly the log export industry, are brought into perspective. I have tried to cover all aspects of field forestry in the story: plant science, forest mensuration, botany, forest survey, logging and log export, wood science and many more.

Printed in paperback, the book has 20 chapters, 151 pages and a fact file towards the end of the book. Each chapter is illustrated with drawings and the book includes a map that shows *Elep*’s journey through foreign lands. Copies can be purchased from me at the above address.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks the ITTO Fellowship Program for making funds available for the publishing of the book.



ITTO fellowships offered

ITTO offers fellowships through the Freezailah Fellowship Fund to promote human resource development and to strengthen professional expertise in member countries in tropical forestry and related disciplines. The goal is to promote the sustainable management of tropical forests, the efficient use and processing of tropical timber, and better economic information about the international trade in tropical timber.

Eligible activities include:

- participation in short-term training courses, training internships, study tours, lecture/demonstration tours and international/regional conferences;
- technical document preparation, publication and dissemination, such as manuals and monographs; and
- post-graduate studies.

Priority areas: eligible activities aim to develop human resources and professional expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- improving transparency of the international tropical timber market;

- promoting tropical timber from sustainably managed sources;
- supporting activities to secure tropical timber resources;
- promoting sustainable management of tropical forest resources;
- promoting increased and further processing of tropical timber from sustainable sources; and
- improving industry’s efficiency in the processing and utilisation of tropical timber from sustainable sources.

In any of the above, the following are relevant:

- enhancing public relations, awareness and education;
- sharing information, knowledge and technology; and
- research and development.

Selection criteria: Fellowship applications will be assessed against the following selection criteria (in no priority order):

- consistency of the proposed activity with the Program’s objective and priority areas;

- qualifications of the applicant to undertake the proposed fellowship activity;
- the potential of the skills and knowledge acquired or advanced under the fellowship activity to lead to wider applications and benefits nationally and internationally; and
- reasonableness of costs in relation to the proposed fellowship activity.

The maximum amount for a fellowship grant is US\$10 000. Only nationals of ITTO member countries are eligible to apply. The next deadline for applications is **6 September 2006** for activities that will begin no sooner than 1 January 2007. Applications will be appraised in November 2006.

Further details and application forms (in English, French or Spanish) are available from Dr Chisato Aoki, Fellowship Program, ITTO; Fax 81-45-223 1111; fellowship@itto.or.jp (see page 2 for ITTO’s postal address) or go to www.itto.or.jp