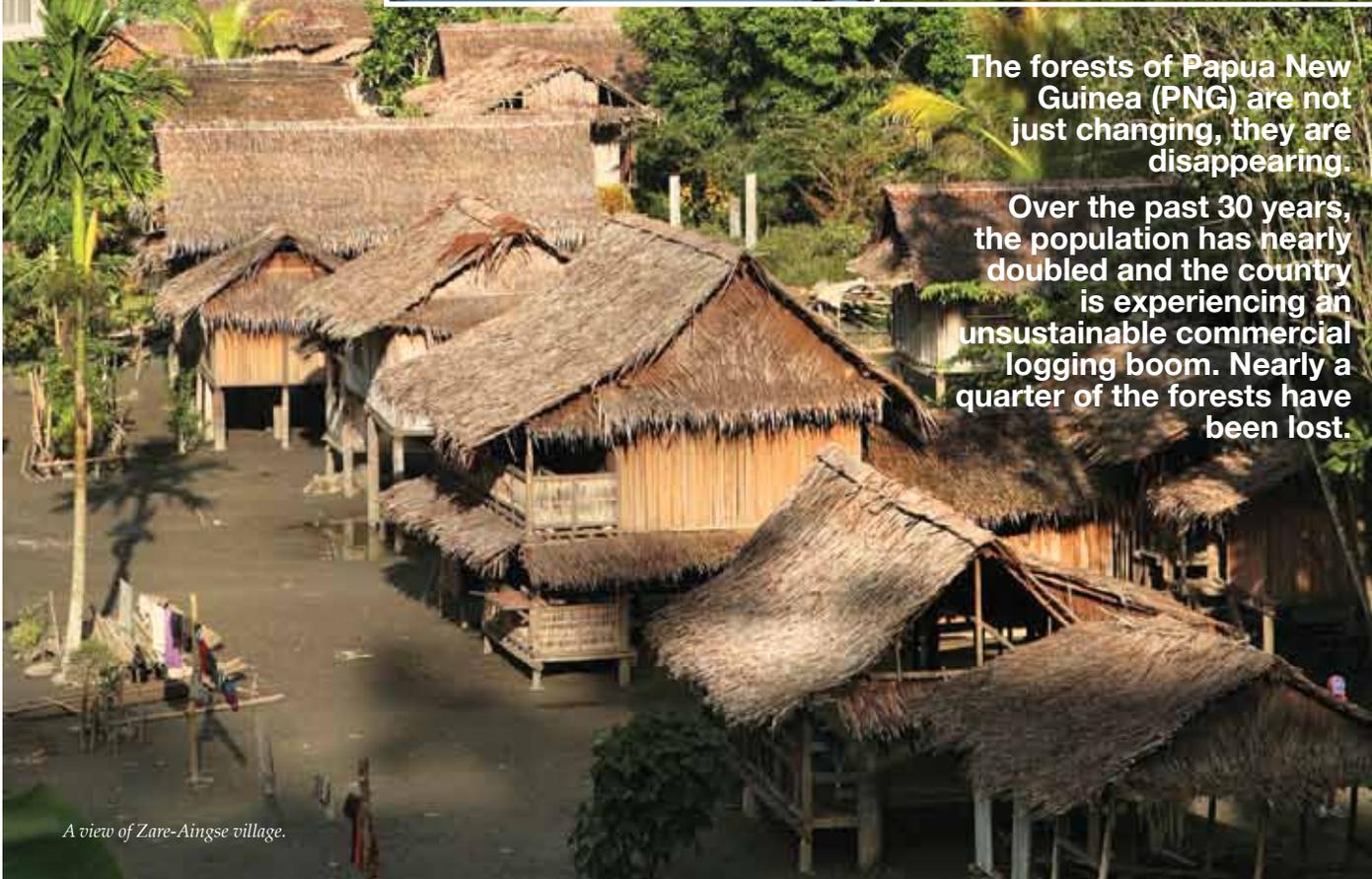


THE WARIA WAY

Loggers OUT,
alternative
development IN

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The forests of Papua New Guinea (PNG) are not just changing, they are disappearing.

Over the past 30 years, the population has nearly doubled and the country is experiencing an unsustainable commercial logging boom. Nearly a quarter of the forests have been lost.

A view of Zare-Aingse village.



Undisturbed ridge-top forest.

Yet despite this doom and gloom, communities in one forested valley are rejecting the loggers for an alternative means of development. The rainforests of PNG are one of the last remaining wilderness areas on the planet, covering over 60% of the country, from the coast to the mountains.

With West Papua, they form the third largest intact forest wilderness on the planet. Not only do they support 6% of the world's biodiversity, they are also extremely important to the people of PNG.

These forests are vital to the livelihoods of the mostly rural population, providing them with their food, shelter, medicine and their spiritual and cultural identity.

However, a country-wide proliferation of unsustainable commercial logging (and mining) activity is undermining the environmental fabric on which the cultural, social and economic well-being of the country's rural population depends.

Glimmer of hope

Yet there is a glimmer of hope. In the Waria Valley, located on the north coast of the southeast peninsular in Morobe Province, communities responded to and learnt from recent history.

Ensuring that through their strong attachment to the land and as customary land tenure system dictates, they do indeed have the final say regarding the fate of their forests and biodiversity.

The people of the lower Waria Valley have received little benefits where large-scale conventional logging has taken place. The communities voiced their concerns - and while they were keen to retain control over their resources, they also wanted benefits that these resources could bring.

Local man Cossey Yosi took on the gauntlet of making this aspiration a reality. While studying in the United Kingdom, he approached a British NGO (Coral Cay Conservation) with a

project concept. After much effort and with support from the Darwin Initiative, the Waria Valley people joined forces with a number of partners both from PNG and UK. They included development-oriented groups such as Bris Kanda, as well as the University of Technology and the PNG Forest Research Institute in Lae.

This multi-partner collaboration wanted to follow a less conventional route to development via community-driven forest conservation and alternative livelihood generation.

The first step was to assess the forest biodiversity. Despite the wealth of local knowledge regarding local plant and animal species, virtually nothing had been documented.

The project team undertook the first biodiversity assessments for the area, documenting bats, mammals, birds, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians - within different habitats.



Banana rafting to survey site.

The habitat maps generated meant local communities could for the first time visualise the spatial value of their forests and see the results of their own impacts at a broad scale.

At the same time, vegetation inventories within various forest and non-forest habitats were completed.

While vast areas of primary forest still exist, large areas on floodplains have been lost to 'gardens'.

Patches of forest are cleared for gardens and crops cultivated for a few cycles before being abandoned.

Understanding the impact of land use change on the forest was a priority. Community mapping to document the extent of agricultural conversions was combined with satellite derived data (with the support of the University of PNG).

Forests true value

The habitat maps generated meant local communities could for the first time visualise the spatial value of their forests and see the results of their own impacts at a broader scale.

In addition to better understanding the forests (and local impacts), communities were keen to improve environmental awareness so that younger generations would not only appreciate the true value of the forests but also have the skills necessary to manage and



benefit from them sustainably in the future. To this end, a school's education programme was initiated with additional environmental education materials and teaching aids developed in consultation with local teachers and in conjunction with the existing curricula.

Biodiversity survey training was also undertaken, aimed at developing the skills and ecological knowledge of national students, enhancing their capacity for future research work and employment within the conservation and environmental management sector in PNG.

Groups of national undergraduate and graduate students received field training in biodiversity assessment techniques. In addition, the biodiversity research programme served to build the capacity of local stakeholders through guiding and survey training.

Whilst preserving the forest areas is important, a key driving force behind the willingness of local communities to participate in the project was the opportunity for alternative livelihoods.

In conjunction with Bris Kanda, a number of successful sustainable livelihood initiatives were started, including inland aquaculture, poultry and piggery schemes.



Some of the findings at Waria Valley.



Village scene under a rainforest.



The over-arching goal of the project is to empower stakeholders to sustainably benefit from their forest environment. To this end, the communities and partners are in the process of creating a local NGO group.

These should provide a more regular supply of protein for people and an income for those participating, whilst also lowering the pressure on forest resources (e.g. via reduced hunting).

Another major livelihood component of the project was eco-forestry - serving both the ecological and economic goals.

The small-scale use of portable sawmills is seen by many as a way of helping prevent rural communities from turning to commercial logging operations for income from the forest.

The establishment of a small-scale saw milling operation was hugely supported by the local communities and seen by many within it as a good source of income.

The project approached Forcert, a PNG-based not for profit forest management and certification group, to assist in its establishment.

Forcert is engaging the communities to make small-scale eco-forestry an economic and ecological reality. All timber would be certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) and International Fair Trade Association, ensuring the forests are sustainably managed.

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The NGO will create a body to oversee and assist with the community development aspects of the project, maintain links with the various project partners and be able to seek funding from within PNG and internationally.

It is hoped the project will strengthen the capacity of local managers, researchers, stewards and other stakeholders in the Waria Valley to protect the forest ecosystem and those who benefit from it.

Whilst the project has achieved successes on many fronts, in research, education, training and livelihoods, the challenge remains - to build on this foundation and ultimately achieve local sustainable development based on benefits derived for local landowners from local forest biodiversity.



Forest cleared for local gardens in the Waria Valley.

