

PNG's changing paradigm

An ITTO project has helped develop a new SFM model in Papua New Guinea

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Protected: Forest in the Adelbert Ranges under a community-based land-use management plan/conservation agreement. Photo: D. Gilmour

For the past 30 years, forest management in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been dominated by an industrial model under which:

- a forest management agreement is negotiated between the state, landowners and industry (providing a mechanism whereby landowners transfer forest management rights to the state, which is supposed to manage forests sustainably on behalf of the landowners); and
- landowners receive a guaranteed portion of royalty payments.

Widespread dissatisfaction with this model has emerged over the years, due primarily to unacceptable levels of destruction and degradation of large areas of forest, which landowners value for a wide range of goods and services and the inequitable sharing of benefits from commercial exploitation of forests.

Industrial forestry has now come to an end in several provinces in PNG and is declining rapidly in several others. By and large, the easily accessible forests have been harvested. Data from the PNG Forest Authority indicate that 75% of concessions under forest management agreements have concluded their operations. Clearly, an alternative model for forest management is urgently needed to address the deficiencies of past approaches and to commence planning for the future.

A new model for PNG forests

An ITTO project¹ that operated between 2006 and 2010 has developed an alternative approach that could point

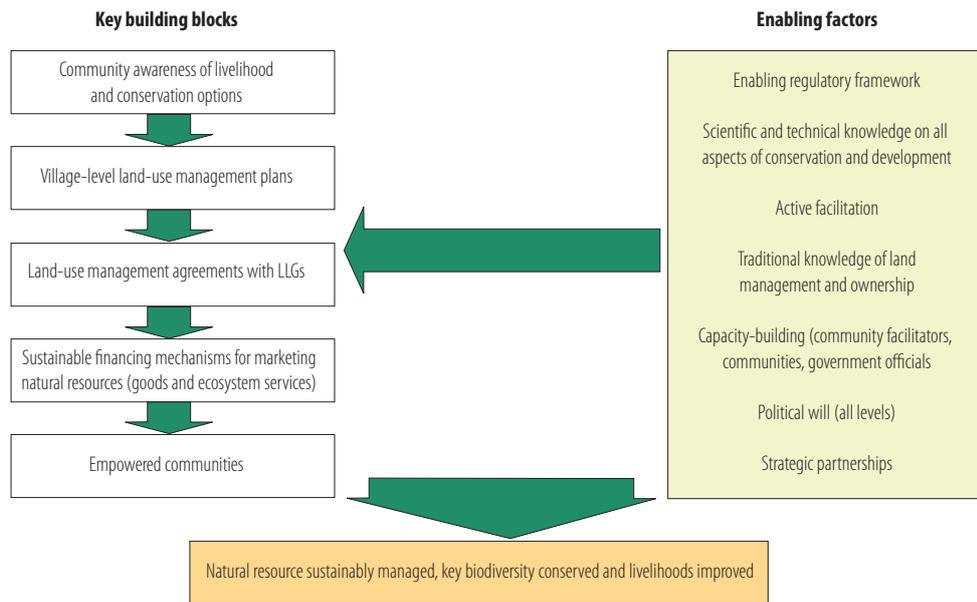
the way for the future of sustainable forest management in the country. The project was executed by the PNG Forest Authority and implemented by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). It operated in the Adelbert Ranges in the Almami Local Level Government (LLG) area of Madang Province on the north coast of PNG. The Nature Conservancy has been working with local government and communities in the Madang area to protect biodiversity since 1997, and the ITTO project built on that previous work. Partly as a result of the earlier collaboration, the Almami LLG enacted an Environment and Conservation Law, the first of its kind in PNG, in 2003. This law created an enabling regulatory framework for the development of community-based land-use management plans and conservation agreements to empower local landowners to manage their natural resources for their own benefit. Under the law, clans retain ownership of their land. Moreover, the process does not involve or encourage either land registration or clan incorporation, which many clans fear because they can be precursors to losing control of their land.

The ITTO project was designed, in effect, to operationalize the 2003 Almami LLG Environment and Conservation Law. However, there was also a broader consideration, because the problems of forest degradation and inequity associated with the prevailing forest management paradigm applied not just to the project site in the Adelbert Ranges but also to much of the rest of the country. Hence, the project was perceived to have national application, and its stated aim was "...to create a conservation and development model that can be applied widely throughout the country".

The results of the project greatly exceeded expectations. Nine of the 22 villages in the Almami LLG completed

1 PD 324/04 Rev.3 (F)

A generic model of community-based natural resource management for use by communities in PNG



Source: developed during a project team brainstorming session on 16 May 2012.

land-use management plans and signed conservation agreements covering 18 000 hectares, including 4360 hectares of core conservation areas.² The approach is now being replicated in the provinces of West New Britain and Manus.

The approach trialled by the project placed high prominence on conservation objectives and was referred to as a ‘conservation–development’ model. The model was designed to encourage the community-based sustainable management of all natural resources, with a conservation underpinning. In an ex-post evaluation of the project in mid-2012, the approach developed by the project was analyzed and represented in a modular format so that the model’s key building blocks could be readily visualized and communicated. The model was also reformulated slightly to be more generic so that it could be applied to a wide range of situations encountered in natural resource management in PNG, including sustainable forest management and sustainable fisheries management. Conservation agreements are replaced by land-use management agreements, which encompass a broader range of objectives, although the conservation underpinnings of the original approach can still be integrated readily into the revised model. The flowchart above shows the key building blocks of the model.

Conclusion

The experiences of Almami communities since 1996 and the outcomes of the focused support provided by the ITTO project between 2006 and 2010 could be the first chapter in a book to be written on a new paradigm for

managing natural resources in PNG by empowering local communities. This vision for the future is one in which local communities are empowered to develop their own land-use plans and manage their own natural resources - including forests - for their own benefit, with support and facilitation by government and other organizations. However, there are several major challenges to be faced in mainstreaming such an approach. The two most critical of these are:

- building capacity for the community facilitation that is essential for empowering communities to carry out participatory land-use planning and negotiate land-use management agreements with LLGs; and
- ensuring that communities can obtain sufficient financial benefits from the sustainable use of their natural resources (goods and ecosystem services) to make their involvement in the process worthwhile.

While future prospects for adopting and mainstreaming a new approach to the management of natural resources in PNG are bright, there is a danger of stagnation and even reversal unless pressure is maintained by government and others to continue developing and implementing the process. In this regard, political will and the role of champions, many of whom have emerged in PNG in the last few years, will be critical for maintaining the momentum for change.

² Three of the conservation agreements were signed before the commencement of the project.