

From Planning to Action: Forest Conservation and Management in Papua New Guinea

PAPUA New Guinea (PNG) occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and still boasts 33 million hectares of closed natural forest (77% of the country), home to numerous endemic species. Overall PNG is sparsely populated with some 700 distinct cultural/language groups. Economic growth over the past two decades has been spurred by large-scale mining, petroleum and logging operations though the majority of the population continues to rely upon subsistence agriculture (swidden) and collection and utilization of forest products. Some 15 million hectares of forests are accessible for logging, of which 1.5 million hectares have already been logged, generally in an unsustainable manner. Of the over 6 million ha of approved timber blocks more than 1.5 million hectares have been located in areas of high biological value. Forest loss and degradation is now becoming a serious problem.

Papua New Guinea is an important wilderness area but has very few protected areas under government management, just 0.2% of the total land area. Opportunities to expand the conservation estate will depend on encouraging local landowners to adopt land use practices that are consistent with conservation objectives. The World Bank has been assisting the Government of Papua New Guinea to assess the trade-offs and conflicts between conservation and development and to find ways to feed these decisions into land use planning. Funded by the Bank, a consortium of Australian scientists has been field testing tools to identify priority areas for biodiversity conservation in PNG; the results of that exercise are summarized in this volume. The BioRap methodologies are based on biodiversity values but can be used to determine a range of options to "capture" maximum biodiversity, each with different benefits and costs in terms of biodiversity gain and agricultural and forestry opportunities forgone.

The BioRap methodology deals only with the planning stage and does not attempt to address how priority areas should be managed. Conservation management in Papua New Guinea is particularly challenging because of the social, cultural and political context. The World Bank has been actively engaged with the government in preparing and implementing new forestry policies and ensuring that greater benefits accrue to local landowners. Although the Department of Forestry identifies and allocates logging concessions, concessionaires

must then enter into timber rights agreements with local clan groups and royalties must be paid to landowner groups. A new World Bank project will work with the Government of PNG to improve current forestry practice and strengthen forest management to promote harvesting that is both ecologically and socially sustainable. The project will support capacity building to strengthen the planning and monitoring roles of the Forestry Authority and support independent audits of all logging operations. PNG's Forest Inventory Management System (FIMS) will be expanded to access other sources of data and information on appropriate land uses, including BioRap to better identify areas appropriate for sustainable forest management and/or conservation.

In addition there will be a comprehensive effort to improve landowner access to information and technical advice to empower them to make better informed decisions re land use, including designation of clan conservation areas as well as other realistic and viable alternative options to commercial logging. A Conservation Trust Fund will support projects with conservation of biodiversity as a primary goal in areas of global significance, based upon priority areas identified under the BioRap exercise. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) will contribute \$10 m to capitalize the fund, provided that the Bank and other donors can mobilize equal amounts of matching capital. Thus the BioRap exercise will provide the scientific underpinning for an exciting new initiative that offers an opportunity to move from planning to action to protect PNG's unique biodiversity and forests.

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