



## Empowering communities for more equitable and sustainable forest governance

insights from the Asia-Pacific forest governance project in Papua New Guinea

**This policy brief draws on key insights and lessons from the implementation of the [Asia-Pacific forest governance project](#)\* in Papua New Guinea, highlighting *why* and *how* empowering indigenous peoples and local communities and strengthening their capacity for forest conservation, management and monitoring is important for achieving the twin goals of equity and sustainability.<sup>1</sup>**

### Challenges and opportunities

Papua New Guinea's forests are inhabited by more than 191 endemic species of mammals and 750 species of birds. These forests also provide subsistence food and building materials for tribal communities and local people, and most are under customary ownership (with 97% of forests privately owned – mostly by local communities or tribes). According to the FAO (2015), Papua New Guinea has 78% of total land cover under forests, of which 52.4% is primary forest. Major drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are commercial logging, agricultural plantations (particularly oil palm), mining and subsistence agriculture. While the legal framework is strong in many respects, it is undermined by weak enforcement, a lack of transparency and poor implementation. In this context, there is a unique opportunity for strengthening the role and capacity of local communities in taking the lead in forest conservation and management.

### Activities and outcomes

As part of the project, [BirdLife](#)'s two in-country partners, [Tenkile Conservation Alliance](#) (TCA) and the [University of Papua New Guinea](#) (UPNG) have undertaken capacity building activities. TCA has been engaging on the ground with local communities in 50 villages in Torricelli Mountain Range Conservation Area (TMRCA), enhancing capacity in forest management and monitoring, including of endemic and threatened indicator species such as the Tenkile Tree Kangaroo and Victoria Crowned Pigeon. UPNG has monitored forest cover remotely and provided maps to assist landowners in land use planning. This has increased local capacity to monitor forest resource use, forest condition and forest carbon stocks, and increased transparency, access to information and accountability in forest management.

A key approach to TCA's work has been to link with local livelihoods and provide sustainable alternatives to hunting (e.g., raising fish and providing training in rice and vanilla farming). TCA has produced a draft management plan for the Torricelli landscape, based on co-produced land use plans of 42 villages. Through land boundary demarcation and mapping, customary landowners have been able to appreciate the extent of their land and forest resources and identify areas for key purposes.

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## Key insights and learnings

- Capacity building and empowerment of local communities and indigenous peoples is important for their involvement in and influence on local and sub-national forest decision-making processes. This adds legitimacy to the decision-making processes, leading to more effective and sustainable forest management. More needs to be done to improve participation of youth and women whose access and voice in decision-making is currently limited.
- Engaging local communities and strengthening their capacities and skills in forest conservation, management and monitoring has not only been beneficial for biodiversity conservation but also in terms of enhancing livelihoods and equity impacts.
- Community-based forest monitoring (e.g. through use of apps) has also been helpful in complementing government law enforcement efforts, particularly at the provincial level. There are opportunities to upscale and link local forest monitoring and management efforts with multi-level forest governance mechanisms (e.g. through provincial and national structures).
- Capacity building efforts for communities is a continuous process that requires a long-term investment, both in terms of time and funds. A capacity needs assessment is essential.
- Insights and learnings from the project experience in Papua New Guinea can also be useful in a variety of contexts elsewhere, particularly in terms of highlighting the importance of investing time and resources in community capacity building.



Tenkile Tree Kangaroo © TCA



Local households and forest land in Sandaun Province in Papua New Guinea © TCA

\*This brief was developed under the project **Strengthening non-state actor involvement in forest governance in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Papua New Guinea, 2017-2022**. For more information see [www.birdlife.org/forest-governance](http://www.birdlife.org/forest-governance) or contact [poshendra.satyal@birdlife.org](mailto:poshendra.satyal@birdlife.org).

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