



**CONSERVATION
MELANESIA**
Papua New Guinea



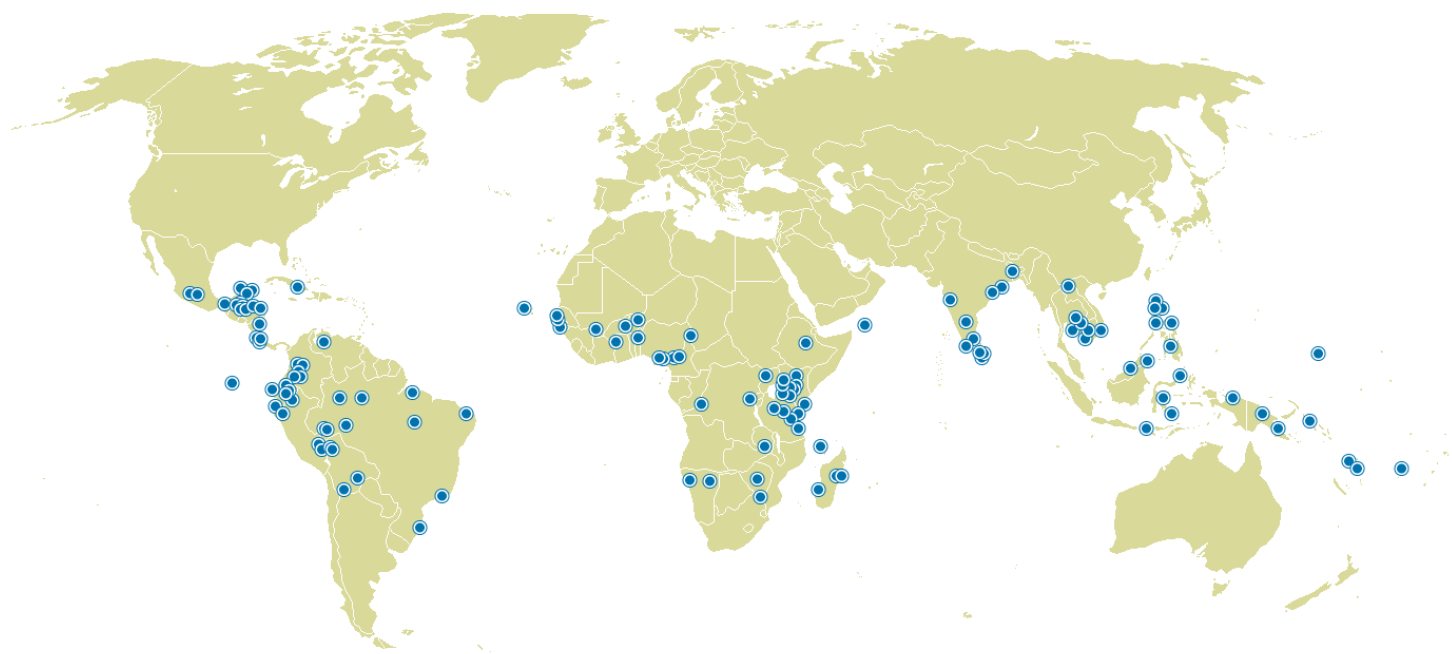
Equator Initiative Case Studies

Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, the Equator Initiative aims to fill this gap. The following case study is one in a growing series that details the work of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community-based environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. These cases are intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to take local success to scale, to improve the global knowledge base on local environment and development solutions, and to serve as models for replication. Case studies are best viewed and understood with reference to *'The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize'*, a compendium of lessons learned and policy guidance that draws from the case material.



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CONSERVATION MELANESIA

Papua New Guinea

PROJECT SUMMARY

Since 1995, the biologically diverse Collingwood Bay area on the coast of Oro Province, north-eastern Papua New Guinea, has been the setting for a conflict between the province's 3,000 indigenous Maisin people and proposed commercial logging and palm oil development within the community's 262,000 hectares of ancestral lands. In 1998, 38,000 hectares of tropical forest were fraudulently signed over to a foreign investor; since then, Conservation Melanesia, a local environmental NGO, has been a critical ally in publicizing the community's plight and building capacity to resist the proposed development.

In 2002, after a three-year battle, the Papua New Guinea National Court ruled in the Maisin's favour, returning the title of their land back to them. Since then, Conservation Melanesia has worked to develop a sustainable, long-term resource management strategy that effectively conserves the Maisin's traditional forest land and supplies the community with a means of supporting themselves.

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KEY FACTS

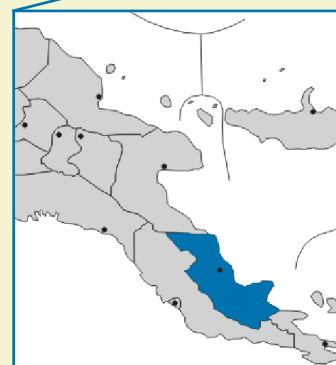
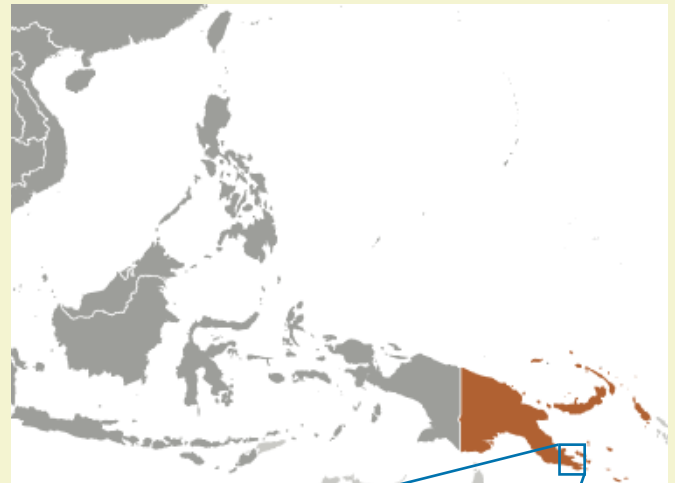
EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2004

FOUNDED: 1995

LOCATION: Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

BENEFICIARIES: 3,000 community members

BIODIVERSITY: tropical forest, coastal mangroves



Background and Context



Nestled on the coast of Oro Province, north-eastern Papua New Guinea, is Collingwood Bay, a rich haven of marine life and coral reefs of national conservation significance. The coastal habitat includes seagrass meadows, mangroves, sandy beaches and coral reefs and shoals. The terrestrial environment is similarly abundant in biological diversity, comprising rainforest stretching from one of the country's highest mountains to the coast. This forest of Oro Province also provides a habitat for the world's largest butterfly species, the Queen Alexander Birdwing butterfly, which is endemic to Papua New Guinea.

Since 1995, Collingwood Bay has been the setting for a conflict between the province's indigenous Maisin people and proposed commercial logging and palm oil development of the region's forests. The Maisin community numbers around 3,000 members living in nine coastal villages spread across the bay. Their ancestral lands cover around 262,000 hectares of tropical forest, forming the watershed of five major rivers.

The region has long been a target for logging companies. Aware of the destructive environmental and social impacts of large-scale logging in other areas of Papua New Guinea, the Maisin people drew up the Maisin Declaration in 1994.

"We firmly and unanimously stand opposed to destructive large-scale industrial logging, and to agricultural activity that entails the clearing of large areas of forest, in any part of the lands traditionally held by the Maisin people." The Maisin Declaration, 1994

The declaration states the importance of the Maisin people's natural resources to their livelihoods, culture and future, and outlines their intention to continue to develop sustainable sources of income based on non-timber forest products.

Threats to the Maisin customary lands

In 1998, however, 38,000 hectares (94,000 acres) of the Maisin cus-

tomary lands were fraudulently signed over to a Malaysian investor in the capital city of Port Moresby. The land was purchased from individuals claiming to represent the Maisin people, but was carried out without the knowledge of the community. The investor planned to clear the forest for palm oil development; the first the Maisin knew of the land lease was when barges arrived in Collingwood Bay in June 1999 carrying bulldozers and other logging equipment.

Conservation Melanesia, a local environmental NGO, was a critical ally in combating this attempted logging operation. The organisation works in partnership with local communities to conserve the environment of Papua New Guinea through sustainably utilizing its terrestrial, marine, and cultural heritage for the benefit of current and future generations. To achieve this goal, Conservation Melanesia has sought to research, develop, demonstrate, and promote strategies for conservation and sustainable development that are environmentally sound, economically viable, culturally appropriate, and socially equitable. The organisation's five programme areas focus on supporting and training community organizations in environmental conversation; researching alternative eco-enterprise options; enhancing environmental awareness through educational materials and campaigns; influencing environmental legislation and governing practices; and promoting marine conservation and sustainable resource utilization.

The organisation's executive director, a member of the Maisin community, led a campaign against the foreign investor, beginning with an information-gathering exercise to determine the details of the sale of the land. Conservation Melanesia also sought legal assistance from an environmental law firm while working closely with Maisin tribal chiefs and elders to develop a comprehensive strategy to halt the land deal and logging plans. Based in Port Moresby as a focal point for liaising with national and international supporters and media, Conservation Melanesia was able to draw substantial attention to the plight of the Maisin.

Key Activities and Innovations



In close consultation with village representatives, Conservation Melanesia has coordinated a multi-pronged approach to protecting the natural resources found in the Maisin ancestral lands. The initiative has collaborated with research institutes in conducting surveys of flora and fauna in the bay's marine and forest environments, and has compiled inventories of natural resources identified and used by villagers. To raise local awareness of environmental conservation and landowners' rights, Conservation Melanesia organized a number of workshops in the community's villages. The central aim of this work has been to establish the groundwork for the Maisin to declare their lands a conservation area, which would make it more difficult for the government to approve development projects there.

Partner environmental organisations have also played key roles in defending the Maisin's rights over the future of their lands through supplying technical and financial assistance. They have also sponsored a number of initiatives to publicize the Maisin's struggle to preserve the rainforest. Since 1995, small delegations of Maisin have travelled to the United States, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand to attend museum exhibitions featuring Maisin traditional handicrafts, to speak before audiences of conservationists, and to seek out financial support for small-scale economic projects in the villages. As knowledge of the Maisin has spread, a steady stream of visitors has made the journey to Collingwood Bay. In 1999, both CNN and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation covered the story of the Maisin's fight against commercial logging.

From forest protection to sustainable development

After a three-year battle, in May 2002 the Papua New Guinea National Court ruled in the Maisin's favour, returning the title of their land back to them. The challenge for the community and for Conservation Melanesia since this ruling has been developing a sustainable, long-term resource management strategy that effectively conserves the Maisin's traditional forest land and supplies the community with a means of supporting themselves. The initiative has sought

to promote livelihood schemes through integrated conservation and development activities as an alternative to the destruction of the forest, and to meet pressing social challenges, such as the need for better health care and education services, resource management strategies, and micro-enterprise development. This has also resulted from the need for sources of cash income in a society that was previously based on a cashless economy.

To this end, Conservation Melanesia supported the Maisin in forming a local community-based organisation, the Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development (MICAD) association. MICAD includes community-appointed board members from each Maisin village as well as women and youth representatives. Conservation Melanesia has assisted these community members to explore alternative, sustainable development options for income generation. Workshops have guided MICAD leaders through project identification, prioritisation, development, and evaluation.

Preserving a traditional livelihood

The chief means of generating income from forest sources as a viable alternative to large-scale cultivation or timber harvesting has proved to be making tapa cloth, a traditional occupation of the Maisin community, which has been used in traditional handicrafts that have been successfully marketed to urban and international consumers. Tapa cloth is pounded from the bark of mulberry trees, grown by the Maisin in family gardens. The damp bark is beaten flat, and then painted with natural dyes collected from the forest. Traditionally a women's art in Collingwood Bay, each cloth is painted with a different design, depending on the clan of the artist. Tapa has been used for generations for trade, as clothing, and for ceremonies.

The Maisin people have a particularly strong culture of tapa production, and have identified it as a key source of income for their communities. Together with Conservation Melanesia, the Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace, the Maisin have established

a community based micro-enterprise based on the production and marketing of tapa cloths. Assistance from partner organisations has focussed on ensuring the equitable distribution of profits from the enterprise, and on the role of women community members in decision-making.

Ongoing threats...

Many challenges remain for the community in its defence of its cultural and natural heritage, most notably in the shape of persistent threats from commercial palm oil exploitation of the forest. The land has been the subject of logging claims as recently as 2010, with fresh attempts to clear land for palm oil plantations. The continued support of Conservation Melanesia and its international partners is critical in resisting these efforts. Identifying long-term markets for the Maisin's traditional handicrafts represents one potential strategy for ensuring that the community has the resources to defend its land; demonstrating its capacity to manage the forest resources sustainably is another strategy that would add weight to the community's bid to have their ancestral lands declared a community conservation area.



FURTHER REFERENCE

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- Whimp, K. 2000. *Protection of Intellectual, Biological and Cultural Property in Papua New Guinea*. Asia Pacific Press.

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