



Case Study

A VISION RECOVERED PAPUA NEW GUINEA, MELANESIA

How nurturing and mentoring a small, local nonprofit and charitable trust resulted in an inspiring collaboration that now benefits the Greater Melanesia and Pacific Region.

Today, the Mama Graun Conservation Trust Fund, along with its sister organization the Micronesia Conservation Trust, is considered one of the most effective young conservation non-profits in the Melanesia Region and the Pacific. It services six Melanesian countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia, Timor L'Este) and mobilizes funding from a variety of local and high-level international sources.

A surprising turn of events, considering the way it all started.

The concept for the Conservation Trust Fund (meaning “Mother Earth Trust” in the local language) began in Papua New Guinea in the mid-1990’s as a way to bring together many of the largest and most established conservation interests together on behalf of this world-renowned biologically diverse hotspot and home to the third largest rain forest in existence. The United Nations and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) initiated the consultation process and surveyed more than 500 individuals and organizations about the feasibility and the usefulness of such an organization. The result was overwhelmingly favorable, and so the process of creating the Trust was started.

In 1998, the Global Environment Facility, working through the World Bank, pledged \$15 million to the Trust to both create a special fund as a component of a forestry project with the Government of Papua New Guinea and to act as the fiduciary agent as well. The plan was to create an endowment of \$30 million that would fund an approximately \$1.5 to \$2 million annual dispersal to forest landowners in compensation for the lost logging revenue of property that would be put into conservation management.

Unfortunately, strains related to a logging statute between the World Bank and the Papua New Guinea Government over the Forestry Conservation Project caused the initial project to collapse in 2005. After the fall, a small, now unfunded entity had been created – the Mama Graun Conservation Trust – that remained committed to the original mission of “protecting the Melanesian environment through long term sustainable funding.”

Mama Graun, after the cancellation of the World Bank project, was considered “clinically dead,” in the words of an advisor. While Mama Graun had no capital, it did have a structure, a board, and an international group of supporters who recognized its potential. The Nature

Conservancy was convinced that a strong, operationally sustainable organization was still possible, but the genesis would now be to start from the bottom up without any major capital.

Because of the significant financial, reputational and legal risks involved in starting a Trust without major capital, this was a courageous move on the part of Mama Graun. However, the gamble paid off because of the talented staff, dedication, ethics and clear vision of all involved.

The Trust began with small donations to initiate a demonstration program to showcase its ability to create financial mechanisms that support communities in selected priority “Protected Areas.”

In 2006 with the Conservancy’s backing, the Trust attracted a modest first grant of \$150,000 for a two-year demonstration program from an American funder, The David and Lucille Packard Foundation. TNC supported the Trust with its experience in organizational financial management, assisting setting up systems to make sure that donor funds were being used as the donor intended.

All transactions where money changed hands were tracked carefully through all the proper local and international protocols. This level of financial tracking was an especially important consideration if the Trust hoped to receive international and national funding as well as donations from private foundations and individuals.

Three-and-a-half years later, the Mama Graun Conservation Trust had built upon the seed money and proven that they were extraordinarily capable of competent financial management. They also showed that they were serious about building a non-profit organization in a disciplined way using established best practices. In 2008, the Mama Graun Board decided to expand services to all Melanesian Countries, and changed the name to “Mama Graun Conservation Trust Fund.” Independent, operational audits were conducted in 2009, revealing high achievement of the Trust at all levels.

Helping the Mama Graun Conservation Trust Fund become an established local non-profit turned out to have big conservation pay-offs for TNC. The Trust provides grants and hands-on training to ensure long-term success in management of local conservation areas with high biodiversity values. Furthermore, the Trust helps the government, international donors and non-governmental organizations work together to identify and fund conservation projects that could not be undertaken otherwise.

Today the Trust’s funding and concrete, practical approaches are used in other countries in Melanesia, and provides an example of a model partnership to conservation groups everywhere.

For more information about the Mama Graun Conservation Trust Fund, visit <http://www.nature.org/wherework/asiapacific/papuanewguinea/strategies/>