Papua New Guinea’s National Forestry and Conservation Action Programme

The forestry sector of Papua New Guinea is changing with the help of New Zealand foresters. Alan Hamilton, Bruce Jefferies and Keith Dolman are leading a major restructuring of the forest service, a strengthening of the conservation department and a whole series of initiatives that will improve the way forests are planned, managed and monitored. The end result will be sustainable development and conservation programmes and a better return to the resource owners (the landowners).

The need for change was highlighted publicly in a major Commission of Inquiry into the forest industry completed in 1989, which exposed an industry that was riddled with corrupt practices, bribery of leaders and rampant transfer pricing. The forestry sector was said to be out of control.

An interdisciplinary review mission in 1989 recommended formation of new policy and legislation and a programme of technical and financial support for implementing these. The World Bank was asked to serve as “lead agency” and donors were quick to offer support under the auspices of the National Forestry and Conservation Action Programme (NFCAP) which developed from the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP). It has evolved to incorporate a more balanced coverage of economic development and conservation than the original TFAP, and with greater NGO participation.

NFCAP also provides for a Technical Support Project to help the World Bank and Government of Papua New Guinea to manage what is in any language a complex and demanding programme. The New Zealand team are that project and enjoy centre stage in this internationally visible reformation.

Extensive Resources

So it is that from the ashes of condemnation, the forestry sector is fast emerging with a fresh show of respectability. Papua New Guinea still has extensive and ecologically rich forest resources. With the support of the various participating government and non-government agencies and the donor community, they have the opportunity of becoming a model for sustainable forestry and forest conservation. This is the ultimate objective of NFCAP.

The more immediate goals of NFCAP are to help to:
- reduce the destruction of tropical forests and to promote their sustainable use;
- restructure the forestry administration;
- design better planning, management and monitoring systems for the forestry sector;
- evaluate and manage the conservation of large tracts of forest area;
- strengthen the human resources of the government and NGO agencies participating in forest management and conservation;
- increase public awareness in forest and conservation management.

The NFCAP has enjoyed very substantial achievements since its inception in 1991 and is widely regarded as a model for collaboration in forestry sector development. Through NFCAP, Papua New Guinea has earned international accolades for the speedy accomplishment of new forest policy and legislation, and the firm commitment to a more effective and efficient Forest Authority which will comprise a Board, 19 Provincial Management Committees and a unified National Forest Service. There has been progress in identifying biodiversity values and in designing programmes to help safeguard these and other environmental interests.

The NFCAP faces some constraints too. It requires the coordination of many and varied inputs to achieve the goal of sustainable forest resource management. This goal has many competing claims and differing interpretations from the landowners, government departments, NGOs, industry and international environmental and conservation organisations. As with any major reorganisation there is resistance to change, just as there are those who would wish to see NFCAP go much further.

The reality though, is that for the first time in many years we find all of the major interest groups working together toward a more just and sustainable future of forest resource use and conservation. With that sense of goodwill, tolerance and mutual understanding and the continued support from the New Zealand team, a successful outcome for NFCAP seems assured.

Keith Dolman