



## Learning from capacity building experiences: reflections on the project “Technical Assistance on Protected Area Planning and Management”



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Thanks to all the CEPA staff, UNDP staff and many members of the PNG community, from whom we have been learning over the last five years.

**Cover photo:** Ann Peterson

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## Executive summary

In this document, we reflect on our experiences from nearly two years of working with PNG protected area managers in the project “Technical Assistance on Protected Area Planning and Management” as part of a project funded by the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and implemented by UNDP: “Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas (PIMS 5261)”. Our learnings included the following observations:

### **Learnings about outside consultants as capacity builders**

- Capacity building is just as much about our ability as facilitators and consultants to learn and adapt as it is for the ‘recipients’ to learn and adapt.
- The consultant’s attitude and professionalism are critical success factors.

### **General learnings**

- It was beneficial to use the Protected Area Competence Framework as a common basis for developing capacity building planning products.
- PNG’s National Qualifications Framework (NQF) can also be linked to the Protected Area Competence Framework so that people have opportunities to gain nationally recognised certification for workplace learning.

### **Working with the Conservation and Environment Protection Agency**

- We saw that it would be helpful if staff had more useful and personalised capacity development plans and training profiles.
- A SEP-specific mentoring program would have helped to drive capacity strengthening
- We saw that learning activities will be much more effective if they are embedded in a workplace training context, with appropriate mentoring and support to cement in the new skills and raise competence.
- A key learning from this project is that mentoring in SEP requires the development of a SEP-specific program, that incorporates mentor training and a more structured and diverse approach.
- Many training or learning opportunities could be tied into the action plan
- Staff would benefit from more time for reflection, team building and communication in the workplace
- The established Capacity Building Technical Working Group needs formal recognition, agreement on roles and responsibilities and support to help direct future initiatives.
- It might be helpful for SEP workers to be supported by an agreed minimum number of training days per year.
- The lack of organisational policies and facilities and equipment constrain the ability of individuals to do their work.
- We found staff were very receptive to activities rather than lectures.
- The most effective capacity building takes place through onsite learning.

### **Building capacity in the field: management committees, provincial officers, communities and rangers**

- We realised that in many cases, field capacity needs to be built for both ‘rangers’ and other members of the community, and that these groups are not always easily separated.
- It also emerged that ‘technical’ training for management committees may be a lower priority than training in financial, administration and communication fields.
- It is very beneficial for people at the community and provincial levels to be provided with facilitated opportunities to express their opinions about protected areas.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why capacity building

Historically, from the mid-1990s, there was a decline in the ability of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) national government to manage protected areas as government was decentralised. Staff were withdrawn from protected areas, including national parks, and from regional centres. Since about 2009 “most responsibility for conservation on the ground seems to have been passed to provincial and local-level governments, who have neither the capacity nor funds to do very much”<sup>1</sup>. However, the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) now has in place a Protected Area Policy<sup>2</sup>, which establishes five pillars for conservation and a range of strategies to improve protected area planning and management. CEPA is currently finalising new protected area legislation.

PNG's protected area network is faced with many threats, including those from diverse alternative land use options. The effects of rapid economic development, increasing resource use and climate change require increased ability to effectively manage the protected area network and improve the livelihoods of resident customary landowning communities. However, the management effectiveness assessment of PNG's protected areas<sup>3</sup> indicated that the overall network has limited effectiveness, little engagement, low capacity and low levels of training. Many of the issues affecting PNG's protected area network are the result of limited national, regional and local capacity for conservation, planning and management.

During 2018 and 2019, we assisted CEPA through a consultancy called “Technical Assistance on Protected Area Planning and Management” as part of a project funded by the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and implemented by UNDP: “Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas (PIMS 5261)”. This project had a significant focus on building capacity to manage the protected area network. While the tasks relating to capacity building were broad, the primary emphasis was on the capacity of the Sustainable Environment Programs (SEP) Wing within CEPA, which has high-level responsibility for protected area management in the country<sup>4</sup>.

In this report, we review the lessons we learned from the capacity building initiatives. We are not writing ‘how to do capacity building’ – this is a compilation and summary of what we as a team learned during the project. We hope that it will be of use to other people undertaking this work in PNG.

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<sup>1</sup> Mowbray, D. and Duguman, J. (2009) Chapter 10: Environment and Conservation Policy and Implementation. In: *Policy making and implementation: studies from Papua New Guinea* (ed May, R. J.). Australian National University ePress, Canberra. , p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Independent State of Papua New Guinea. (2014) Papua New Guinea Policy on Protected Areas. (ed Conservation and Environment Protection Authority), Waigani, National Capital District, Papua New Guinea.

<sup>3</sup> Leverington, F., et al. (2017) Papua New Guinea Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Protected Areas. SPREP/ CEPA/UNDP, Samoa.

<sup>4</sup> Note that much of the on-ground management is and will be undertaken by customary landowners assisted by other stakeholders and institutions including provincial governments.

## 1.2 Our capacity building approach

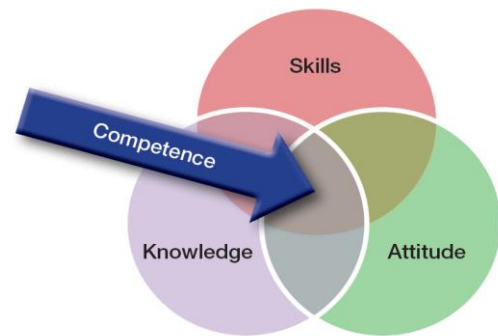
Capacity development can be defined as *'the process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organizations and societies for making effective use of resources to achieve their goals on a sustainable basis'*<sup>5</sup>.

To increase the capacity within PNG to manage protected areas, we needed to consider both

- *organisational capacity* of SEP, provincial governments, management committees and rangers and other stakeholders; and
- *individual competence of protected area managers*, particularly of SEP staff to perform their roles<sup>6</sup>.

Competence (Figure 1) is the 'proven ability to perform a task or do a job'<sup>7</sup>(Appleton 2016:2) and is often defined in terms of the required combination of:

- *skills* – these ensure the ability to perform a task reliably and consistently
- *knowledge* – provides a technical and theoretical background to the task, and
- *attitude* – helps an individual to complete a task positively, professionally, ethically and conscientiously and includes personal attributes such as leadership, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration<sup>8</sup>.



**Figure 1: The skills-knowledge-attitude model for competence (Appleton 2016:2)**

People increase their competency in many ways, including: life experience; formal education; understanding traditional or customary ways; apprenticeships; on-the-job experience; self-help programs; mentoring; and training and development programs. All of these together contribute to job competence in an employee. Ultimately, supervisors and employees working together and assessing the consistency of job performance (behaviours) over time determine overall 'employee competence'<sup>9</sup>.

This project included both formal and informal components related specifically to capacity building.

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<sup>5</sup> GTZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit. (2003) Policy Paper No. 1: Capacity development for sustainable development. GTZ, Eschborn.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say other managers are not important, but capacity building of the SEP wing was the main focus of capacity building in the project Terms of Reference.

<sup>7</sup> Appleton, M. R. (2016) A Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Appleton, M., et al. (2017) Pathways to professionalisation: developing individual and organisational capacities for protected area management. Lessons from Eastern Europe. BfN, Bonn. ; Appleton, M. R. (2016) A Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

<sup>9</sup> World Conservation Congress (WCC). (2016) Establishment, recognition and regulation of the career of park rangers. WCC-2016- Rec-103-EN. . Available at [https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC\\_2016\\_REC\\_103\\_EN.pdf](https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_REC_103_EN.pdf).

The **informal component** was part of the entire project, where we used other opportunities to build capacity, including capacity within SEP<sup>10</sup> to more effectively carry out their work. For example, we tried to ensure that all technical products were developed with full input from and ownership by SEP staff and where possible with input from other partners.

The **formal components** were included in Task Two of the project and focussed on developing strategies and action plans for increasing capacity to manage protected areas. Details of these components are included in a series of reports (Figure 2)<sup>11</sup>. We designed the formal component of this project to adapt and apply the Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners (Competence Register)<sup>12</sup> to PNG. The resulting document, the PNG Competence Register<sup>13</sup> incorporated competences relevant to SEP staff, protected area committees and rangers. In collaboration with SEP staff and others we developed the priority actions for SEP staff, protected area committee members and rangers to strengthen their competence and capacity in protected area planning and management.

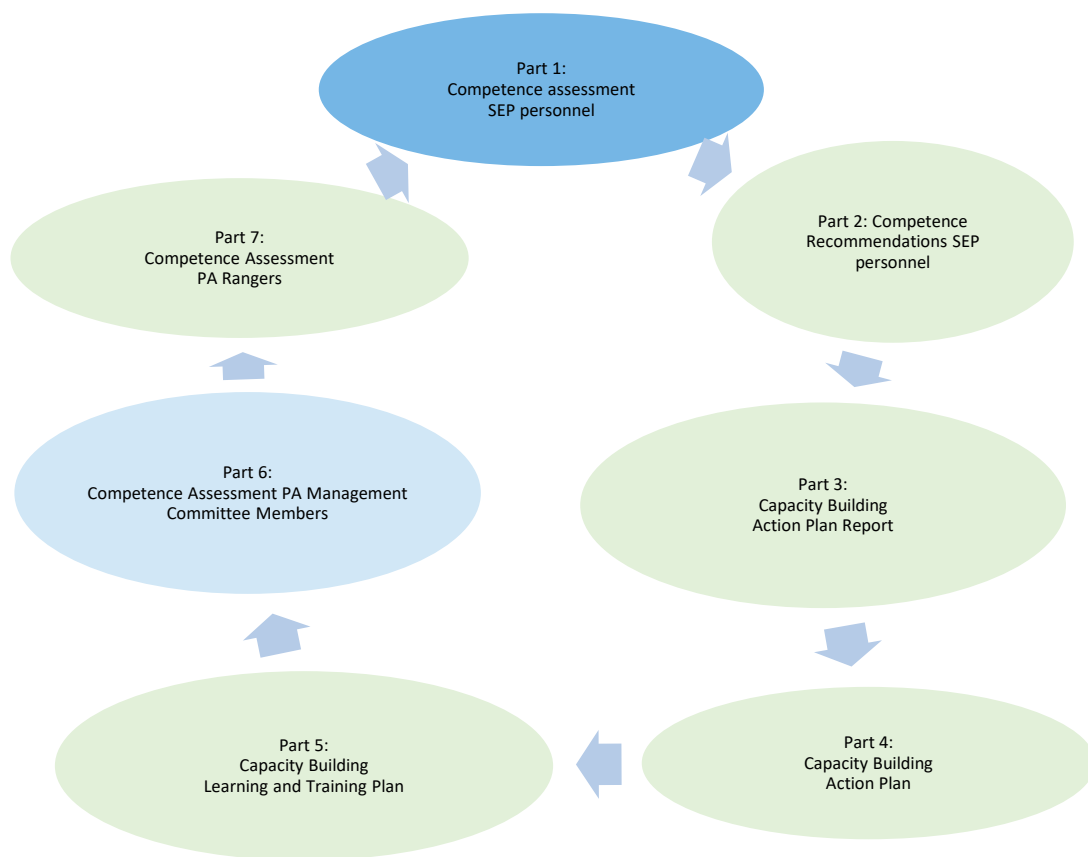


Figure 2: Capacity building outputs

<sup>10</sup> Please note: The term SEP (Sustainable Environment Programs Wing) is used through this report and includes personnel from CEPA (Conservation and Environment Protection Authority) who undertake work in relation to protected areas in PNG.

<sup>11</sup> All latest reports will be cited here in final version – being finalised now

<sup>12</sup> Appleton, M. R. (2016) A Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

<sup>13</sup> Summary report is Peterson, A., et al. (2019) Capacity Building for Protected Area Management in Papua New Guinea: overall summary PNG Protected Area Management Guideline No.CB9 version1. Papua New Guinea Conservation and Environment Protection Authority, Port Moresby.

## 2. What we learned and key points

### 2.1 Learnings about outside consultants as capacity builders

In some cases, the learnings confirmed what we already thought from decades of experience in protected area management and education. However, in other cases our preconceptions have been challenged and we have changed our ideas completely – this is where real learning happens! Humility and an open mind are critical, as we learn as much as we can teach.

***This reflects the fact that capacity building is just as much about our ability as facilitators and consultants to learn and adapt as it is for the ‘recipients’ to learn and adapt.***

*“We found that the term ‘capacity building’ has been extensively used in PNG, to the extent that it has become a common phrase. But capacity building is very much an art. It requires time, patience and creativity and is not necessarily done during formal training. It’s not like we all come into a room and say ‘today we will build our capacity to communicate effectively, lead a team and manage our time’. In the instances where this type of formal training has taken place, its impact has been negligible.*

*We’re familiar with the fact that most learning happens on a day to day basis, at the workplace or at home. So, our mindset and approach is important when we show other people how to do things. We came upon instances in the office where people were asked to do a job but for some reason didn’t or couldn’t do it. There were probably various reasons for this, either the internet or the printer wasn’t working, or someone was sick, or something happened at home, or someone somewhere else didn’t turn up on time, or the individual tasked with the job couldn’t use Excel. All these things can be categorised as some type of capacity constraint, but, for most people they’re just one of numerous events that happen on a day-to-day basis, often beyond their immediate control. In this instance, courses, workshops and new office equipment might assist, but are probably not the solution. Even if we fix the printer and install a new internet router, something else will inevitably break. So it’s not about fixing things, but rather doing things within the existing structures with a different mindset.*

*Rather than focusing on the capacity constraints of the recipient, anybody coming into the organisation with the intention to ‘build capacity’ should do so with a willingness to observe and learn. We should be aware that as educators we come into a space with our own assumptions, world views and limited capacity to understand. There is something extremely valuable in taking time to listen, talk and understand because there is always a reason or another perspective underlying the constraint and it is rarely black and white.*

*Going back to the instance where the office job didn’t get done, all that we needed to do was to sit down with the officer at their desk where they felt comfortable and go through the task step-by-step. In doing so we could provide one-on-one guidance and support for an ‘integrated capacity building experience’ looking for and acting on potential solutions. Most importantly, we can model and encourage a ‘can-do’ attitude of problem-solving and moving forward, rather than being paralysed by indecision and anxiety about negative consequences. This change not only means more work gets done, it ends up with far more job satisfaction and better morale.”  
Mat Wolnicki*

#### **The consultant’s attitude and professionalism are critical success factors**

It can sometimes be easier to focus of the constraints than the opportunities, particularly when faced with systemic or intractable problems that appear too hard to resolve. Modelling positive



attitudes and behaviours, despite the challenges, helps reinforce a productive and optimistic workplace and can help encourage others. People can also easily pick up on body language and attitudes, so it's important that our nonverbal communication is also positive.

## 2.2 General learnings

***It was beneficial to use the Protected Area Competence Framework as a common basis for developing capacity building planning products.*** Though we could have developed capacity action plans without using the IUCN-WCPA competence framework<sup>14</sup> (and we may have recommended many of the same things), this approach had the advantage of being an internationally recognised and objective basis for our work. We built on the experiences of many other people throughout the world, including in the Asia-Pacific region, but tailored it to PNG needs and circumstances. This means we can compare PNG work with other protected area programs and can contribute to regional programs and products. One of the consultancy team attended an international conference about capacity building in London in August 2019, and was impressed at how widely the framework has been applied, and the general acceptance of this as the principle guideline for capacity development in protected areas.

The PNG Competence Register covers all of the huge range of skills, attitudes and knowledge needed for protected area management, from office administration and chainsaw operation to international planning and reporting. The assessment of competences of four personnel levels in SEP and of protected area committee members and rangers was a key strategy used in planning for capacity strengthening. Most SEP-wing staff completed a questionnaire and so have some understanding of the framework. However, it is unclear whether senior staff in CEPA and UNDP have a full understanding of the framework and would be able to reapply the framework and analyse the resulting data.

We hope that the PNG Competence Register is a 'legacy product' that should be able to guide CEPA's capacity building activities for years to come – provided it is understood, applied and updated.

***PNG's National Qualifications Framework (NQF)<sup>15</sup> can also be linked to the Protected Area Competence Framework*** so that people have opportunities to gain nationally recognised certification for workplace learning. NQF levels, competence levels and employment levels have been formally matched in the Ranger Discussion Paper<sup>16</sup> and this approach would have benefits more broadly, including for CEPA staff. Formal training experiences can be assessed and certified, and on-the-job learning and experience can also be counted towards qualifications through Recognition of Prior Learning. At the field level, this is particularly important and is a core approach in the Torres Strait Treaty Villages ranger training<sup>17</sup>. Even where people already

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<sup>14</sup> Appleton, M. R. (2016) A Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

<sup>15</sup> National Higher And Technical Education Board. (2017) Papua New Guinea National Qualifications Framework. Second edition. Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology

<sup>16</sup> Leverington, F., et al. (2019) Protected Area Rangers for PNG: a discussion paper. . In: *PNG Protected Area Management Guideline No. RA1 version 1*. Conservation and Environment Protection Authority, Port Moresby.

<sup>17</sup> David Rutherford pers. comm.

have diplomas or degrees, certified training qualifications (such as first aid or communication in the workforce) are transportable and help with gaining future employment.

***Capacity building is a long-term process but there is enthusiasm everywhere***

PNG's distributed model of protected area management means that there are capacity needs across the country, from customary landowners and local level government officials to senior members of the public service. There is unlikely to be a 'quick fix' to the long-standing capacity and learning constraints.

On the positive side, we have been impressed in the field with the hunger of village people and government officials to learn more, and with their understanding of what they need to know. For example, management committee members and stakeholders who participated in the management effectiveness workshops in 2016/17 nominated many areas in which they wanted training. By analysing these requests we were able to produce a capacity assessment for management committees and rangers.

***We confirmed the need to embed capacity building, learning and training in the workplace***

Learning and training activities need to have a long-term focus and be embedded with a structured plan. Training is much more likely to be effective where it addresses the current and near future needs of staff and the organisation. Thus, any training that is conducted should have relevance now.

There are very limited benefits to be gained from training that 'sits alone' and is not relevant to the learner now or in the immediate future. Much of what is learned during disconnected training events is lost and this represents a significant waste of good resources and money, as well as frustration for the learner. For example, a one-week training course on management planning may be good for people to understand the basics, but unless people are then supported to be involved in management plan development, they will not remember the steps and techniques. Also careful consideration needs to be given to who receives training.

***There are opportunities to communicate and collaborate with partners***

More money for capacity building is not necessarily the answer. Much can be achieved with existing resources. In addition to the strategies identified above, it could be very valuable to utilise SEP's many partners, including external consultants, NGOs, universities and other agencies. Once a strategic approach to capacity building (both formal and informal) is agreed upon, a diverse range of partners can be approached to assist in the delivery of the plan.

This would achieve specific SEP outcomes, build partnerships and communication, enhance synergies and avoid duplication. If the Capacity Building Action Plan is owned by a range of partners, this will enhance its long-term sustainability and avoid past problems where capacity improvements are identified but not effectively acted upon.

During the project period, we became aware of many other conservation projects in PNG, and exchange of information among these projects and participants would be beneficial. This could be through national and regional forums and seminars, communication by videos and social media or by exchanges and placements.

***Workshops often try to achieve too much in too short a time***

During this project, we were trying to cover a lot of material in a short time, and this sometimes resulted in ineffective workshop processes, where sessions were rushed and not effectively concluded. Especially where the group consisted of people with variable prior knowledge and

experience, it was more effective to take plenty of time to go through material more slowly and to ensure there was time and space to consolidate learning and reflect.

***It is important to understand the local context and the experiences and understanding of trainees when assisting with any learning activities.***

In some cases, we made incorrect assumptions about people's world views, their understanding or their abilities, and this meant that workshop processes were less effective. Relating training material to people's own lives and experiences was most valuable.

## **2.3 Working with CEPA**

***We saw that it would be helpful if staff had more useful and personalised capacity development plans and training profiles,*** using the competence framework as a basis. Certified training with incentives and a clear pathway towards achievement would also be a good motivator.

***A SEP-specific mentoring program would have helped to drive capacity strengthening***

We saw that learning activities will be much more effective if they are embedded in a workplace training context, with appropriate mentoring and support to cement in the new skills and raise competence.

A key learning from this project is that mentoring in SEP requires the development of a SEP-specific program, that incorporates mentor training and a more structured and diverse approach. In addition to traditional methods of mentoring such as one-on-one mentor/mentee relationships, alternative models could be investigated. A new mentoring approach could be group-based and incorporate the diverse array of external specialists that engage with SEP.

***Many training or learning opportunities could be tied into the action plan***

Learning and training opportunities that are tied to projects or particular funding sources could be more clearly tied into people's learning 'journeys' and reflect and support the SEP Capacity Building Action Plan and Learning and Training Plan. In this way learning opportunities can be 'scaffolded' to build on current competences and support previous learning and training activities. Training activities that are delivered in a one-off, ad hoc way are likely to fail to support long-term learning outcomes for SEP staff.

***Staff would benefit from more time for reflection, team building and communication in the workplace***

To consolidate any learning experiences, staff benefit from structured time to reflect on any formal or informal learning that takes place. Critical reflection can enable the learner to better integrate and adapt the learning that has been engaged in. It also encourages the learner to gain confidence, to share learnings and take more risks within the workplace.

Team meetings and formalised discussion process are limited within SEP, and this limits staff engagement and learning. Some teams may have only one or a few members, with staff often absent from the SEP office. However, creative strategies are needed to ensure that all staff feel part of a team and can ask questions, share experiences, reflect and develop critical skills.

***The established Capacity Building Technical Working Group needs formal recognition,*** agreement on roles and responsibilities and support to help direct future initiatives. Ideally, capacity building in SEP requires a dedicated leader to drive the process forward, to embed learning and support a range of training activities. While the TWG has been established, it will

need to 'step up' in the future to help deliver identified outcomes. This will require recognition of the TWG and perhaps some form of incentives.

***It might be helpful for SEP workers to be supported by an agreed minimum number of training days per year.*** A first step is to have a plan, but this could also incorporate dedicated learning/training days. Learning and training aspirations and outcomes should be reflected in each worker's performance report, with future activities scaffolded and supported by SEP.

***The lack of organisational policies and facilities and equipment constrain the ability of individuals to do their work.*** The SEP organisation needs to address a range of process to enhance overall capacity and the competence of individuals. Importantly this requires that capacity building is identified and resourced in a range of SEP documents, including the strategic plan, corporate plan, business plan, code of ethics etc. Lack of internet connectivity remains a limitation and is out of step with modern workplaces. However, staff seemed reluctant to show initiative to solve this problem.

***We found staff were very receptive to activities rather than lectures.*** This is not surprising, as most people find it much more interesting to be actively engaged, but the difference in responses between smaller and larger groups was striking. There was generally good engagement from SEP staff when workshops were focussed on small-group work and discussions rather than presentations. Many people were reluctant to speak out in a larger group and especially in front of managers.

***The most effective capacity building takes place through onsite learning***

Some of the most effective learning experiences in CEPA in recent time appear to be the opportunities to either lead or be involved in large public consultation exercises. An example has been the Kokoda initiative consultation process, where many CEPA staff spent time together in the field, engaging with customary landowners and stakeholders. Through active engagement and leadership by experienced people, everyone learned a lot and also bonded more strongly as a team. Staff gained experience in all aspects of the program, which included planning, liaison with other agencies, complex logistical organisation, and visiting communities to discuss the program and to learn from them.

In addition, CEPA staff have travelled extensively since 2013, as part of developing the Protected Area Policy and legislation, evaluating management effectiveness, working with the GEF 4 and 5 projects and engaging with the Coral Triangle Initiative. Much of this travel has been funded by GEF. This has given many CEPA staff opportunities to connect with landholders, government officials at all levels and other stakeholders as well as international officials and scientists. They have organised, led and facilitated numerous meetings and also had countless informal discussions. This has increased their confidence and competence, has connected them much more closely with people across the country, and has expanded their understanding of situations in the field and the enthusiasm of communities for conservation of their land and sea. This process has done more to increase their ability to manage the protected area network than any formal capacity building process could ever do.

In the past, there was also a reluctance from CEPA to engage at this level for the perceived risk of being swamped with requests or demands from the community. For the most part, the focus was on how to manage community expectations, rather than how they should be involved in the decision-making process. This was well justified given CEPA's previous experiences of requests for compensation, resources or decision-making powers, but CEPA has shifted from a defensive

stance to one of collaboration with the communities and provinces. The Kokoda Initiative's process of working is a good, though lengthy, example of such an approach.



Three SEP wing staff and consultant as a team in provincial workshops to trial an action learning approach to scoping provincial mechanisms for protected area management. This process was a positive learning process for all involved.

## 2.4 Building capacity in the field: management committees, provincial officers, communities and rangers

***We realised that in many cases, field capacity needs to be built for both 'rangers' and other members of the community, and that these groups are not always easily separated.*** For example, in the Torres Strait Treaty Villages, a number of people are offered training and paid an allowance to participate, but then the most capable and committed of these can progress to more formal employment as rangers. Raising basic capacity in these impoverished areas benefits everyone, but also can result in better environmental management.

We also realised that in this environment, we cannot separate capacity to manage protected areas from more general capacity. For example, management committees will function more effectively in their protected area management if they are better able to engage with modern technology.

***It also emerged that 'technical' training for management committees may be a lower priority than training in financial, administration and communication fields.*** This was evident from the management effectiveness study but was reinforced from learnings with Indigenous communities in Australia, where increased capacity in leadership, financial administration and company law has provided a foundation for the ability to apply for and oversee grants, employ staff, and engage with the wider world, and has thus been a strong basis on which further capacity can be built<sup>18</sup>. The IUCN Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund in parts of PNG also works with communities to strengthen this type of capacity so they can apply for grants to conduct ecological work<sup>19</sup>.

***It is very beneficial for people at the community and provincial levels to be provided with facilitated opportunities to express their opinions about protected areas.*** Our approach in working at the provincial level was to provide a facilitated process for sharing ideas, where people were given an opportunity to describe how they could contribute to the protected area

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Schneider pers.comm. talking about the leadership program of the Martu people in Western Australia.

<sup>19</sup> Zola Sangga pers. com.

network. The use of the Action Learning approach provided participants with the skills to explore, identify and get group agreement on the real (system level) problem before proposing solutions for the surface level symptoms. We provided a framework that respects and empowers every team member to contribute their knowledge, experience, insights and ideas. In doing this we were very clear on team members taking personal responsibility for both their own development and performance of the team while working to solve a problem and implement agreed actions. The approach was very well received.

Our collaboration with the provinces found that people are willing to share their views, provide feedback and become engaged in decision making processes.

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