

Social assessment – indigenous peoples

Empowering the people of Pobuma to design conservation actions on Manus Island Papua New Guinea

Indigenous Peoples in the project area

Manus Province

Manus is the smallest province in Papua New Guinea in terms of both the population size and land mass. During the 2000 National Census, Manus had a total population of 43,387 people (National Census 2000). Of the total population of 43,387 the majority of people, 83 percent live in the rural areas. The average annual population growth in Papua New Guinea is 2.8%, which places a projected population of Manus Province at about 62,000 people. Manus Province has a land area of 2,149.1 square kilometres with the main island of Manus covered with tropical rainforests and a vast sea area of 274,243.6 square kilometres.

The island of Manus is situated about 2.9 degrees south of equator and 147 degrees east. Manus is located ideally within the Coral Triangle countries and has diverse biodiversity hotspots which are included amongst those found in the East Melanesia Islands region. The proposed rubber estate is owned by the Powai people and will be about 100 hectares in size. This will be right next to the mountain ranges within Central Manus where Mt Dremsel is located. Mt Dremsel is the highest peak in Manus and is home to high biodiversity. This rubber estate development is expected to take place before end of 2016.

The rubber estate project will be a joint venture between the Powai people from Jekal, Pelipowai, Peli-Patu, and Kupano communities and a Malaysian logging company called Maxland. The company is expected to build access roads to Jekal village and roads that link existing roads to the local town Lorengau. In recent meetings with the Powai people, the Maxland company owner gave his assurance by investing more than PGK10 million towards the rubber plantation project.

No communities are situated along the boundary of the proposed rubber estate site. Most of the communities are located on the coast while the rubber estate development will be taking place uphill. Except for the people of Jekal village, most of the people who live along the coastal villages and islands (Kupano, Timoenai, Pelipowai, Peli Island, Tawi Island, Peli-Patu and Mbuke Island) will be affected by sedimentation and pollutants due to forest clearance for road construction that can potentially seep into freshwater sources and marine resources.

Some members of the community remember too well similar agricultural project years ago involving road construction and the development of cocoa and rubber nurseries from the nearby Patu area to Jekal village failed to address environmental pollutions. The mangroves were destroyed to create marine port, road works and forest clearance caused soil erosions, and logging ships spilt oils on the surrounding sea area, with ships running aground on reefs which wilfully damaged some reefs. These incidents were reported to authorities but no actions were taken.

Potential positive and negative impacts

Positive Impacts

Through this project, conservation leaders from impacted communities will have the opportunity to meet, discuss and design relevant conservation plans to help mitigate potential impacts of the proposed rubber estate on the environment and people's livelihoods. Knowledge and experience gained through this project will help conservation leaders to train and involve their own communities in implementing any similar management plans of this nature in future.

Negative Impacts

The people of Pelipowai, Jekal, Peli-Patu and Kupano will benefit from any economic spinoffs of the rubber estate development. Some of the Powai people may not want to participate in the workshop because they will view this as some kind of hindrance to their economic opportunities. However, we believe that because most of the people in the rubber estate project area live on the coast, many invited leaders from coastal communities are likely to attend the workshop having experienced some negative environmental impacts from the Patu agricultural project.

The Patu project was carried out with a similar arrangement where road construction was traded for logs. The company which originated from Malaysia has since left and the roads are left incomplete leaving mud and silts almost everywhere on the road construction site. It will be in the best interest of the Powai leaders to attend the workshop so that they can contribute to some mitigation efforts having had the Patu experience a few years ago. For those communities who use the marine resources and freshwater from the river systems, we believe they will attend the workshop as pollutants from forest clearance, road works and oil spillage from the marine port will affect their fresh drinking water and the marine ecosystems.

Consultation with affected communities

There is an on-going dialogue about the involvement of our people in economic spinoffs from the rubber project. However, many lament over the Patu project that failed to deliver tangible benefit to affected communities. The Patu project intended to establish an agriculture nursery for cocoa and rubber seedlings in return for a logging company to harvest logs from road and nursery clearance. Rather, the project has left our environment damaged in terms of oil spillage from logging ships, sedimentations from log clearance and water and sea pollutions. The same group of inland people from Jekal, Pelipowai, Peli-Patu and Kupano were involved in the project. Those consulted are sceptical about the success of this new rubber estate project.

Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits

TARM is a network established by the tribal council of chiefs of Tawi Asi including Timoenai, Tawi and Peli. A representative of the Tawi Asi tribal council of chiefs is already on the board of directors of the landowner group of the rubber estate project area. Mbuke Asi and Tawi Asi tribal councils are united by their membership on Mwanus Endras tribal council network and therefore share a lot in common in terms of similar way of life, culture and language. The coastal communities of Timoenai, Mbuke, Peli, and Tawi depend mainly on water and marine resources for their livelihoods. The people of Pelipowai, Jekal, Peli-Patu and Kupano co-exist with our coastal people for about seventy years now. We have been trading goods using barter system with them as inland communities for almost a century and since then there have been inter-marriages across all our communities.

Because this project provides the opportunity for affected communities to come together and develop a management plan that can address the possible threats imposed by the proposed rubber estate, we do not anticipate any adverse impacts on communities involved.

Monitoring

We will use our representative on the landowner board of directors to update the inland people on progress of the workshop, and in particular the formulation of the management plan. A report of the outcomes of the workshop citing recommendations will be presented to the landowner board. The draft management plan will also be submitted to the board for their inputs before finalising it.

Grievance mechanisms

Any grievances by the communities with regard to our project shall be channelled through the board of the land-owner company. Our representative on the board of the land-owner company can respond appropriately or if required, we can be asked to respond. Our council of chiefs will also be available to respond if the inland chiefs are going to be involved in solving any grievances. Depending on the nature of grievances, there is always the formal government system where four LLG ward councillors can be used to resolve issues relevant to our project.

Any grievances raised with the project leads or third-party contact will be communicated to the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at IUCN within 15 days, together with a plan for remedial action (if any is required). The Regional Implementation Team can be contacted via phone on +679-331-9084 or email on cepfeastmelanesia@iucn.org and zsangga@gmail.com or via post on c/- CEPF Regional Implementation Team, PMB 5 Ma'afu St, Suva, Fiji.

Map of the area of work

Below is a map of Manus Island showing the proposed rubber estate and the surrounding communities of Jekal, Pelipowai, Peli-Patu, Kupano, Timoenai, Mbuke, Peli and Tawi communities in the POBUMA LLG area that will be involved in the management planning.

