

ACTION LEARNING FOR RESERVE PLANNING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Co-ordinating a system of national and regional reserves is a challenge in anyone's language. Papua New Guinea (PNG) has over 800 distinct languages, spanning a country of immense natural and cultural diversity, most of which is under traditional customary ownership.

The PNG Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) is the government agency responsible for implementing the national policy on establishing and managing protected areas. The challenge it faces is to facilitate management plans for a system of reserves that protect PNG's unique natural and cultural values, whilst enabling customary landowners to use their own land sustainably.

CEPA recently used action learning to address this challenge. In a first ever for CEPA, approximately 20 managers and staff from the terrestrial and marine protected area branches participated in a series of video conference action learning sessions over four days. The sessions were coached by Ross Rowe from Australia. The problem at hand (apart from Covid-19 and internet connections) was 'what are the challenges to implementing the protected area management plans'?



CEPA plenary session prior to using action learning in Zoom break-out rooms

Participants explored each other's questions and identified a series of actions that they can take collectively and individually to progress the management planning work in context of a diverse natural and cultural setting. These actions are now the building blocks for further project planning which will be undertaken by CEPA into the future. The benefit of action learning is that it brings to light assumed, but never explicitly stated information. This helped participants come up with innovative solutions, see things from another perspective, and appreciate the benefits of working together, including to develop relevant leadership and communication skills.



As a participant, Kay said “as a Director, action learning gave me an opportunity to understand myself better and try to master one or more capability skills in leadership, team function and communication.”

The application of action learning in CEPA shows that it is an effective tool in various cultural and organisational contexts. The importance of listening and understanding one another is relevant in any language.

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