

'Challenging 'Integrated Conservation and Development' in Papua New Guinea: the Bismarck Ramu Group' ¹

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Abstract

This paper examines Bismarck Ramu Group's distinct model of community development. After looking at a brief history of the group, its internal workings and its modified approach to conservation, the paper tries to identify possible lessons for other groups. Four broad lessons are suggested: the self-reliant model, indigenous community empowerment, the challenge to 'desocialised' conservation and certain elements of the group's process.

The BRG 'model' could be summed up as: firstly, developing indigenous partnerships with villager-landowners; secondly, assisting villager-landowners to develop self-reliant strategies based on customary land tenure; and, finally, assisting villager-landowners in community planning, including resource management and conservation options. It is suggested that this model is contingent on a region where there is secure title to productive land, and is subject to some competitive pressures. On the other hand, the model both counter poses and addresses the wide gap left by liberal policies, which demand intensified investment and commodification, and most often contribute to landlessness and poverty. A 'Melanesian synthesis' can be seen in the group's internal processes, and in its approach to indigenous community empowerment - organised facilitation, and helping communities make their own substantial decisions over development and conservation. Finally the BRG, with some authority through its own experience and practice, rejects 'desocialised' conservation projects and plans. It maintains that the leadership of traditional custodians must be reasserted, in future partnerships, for successful nature conservation in Melanesian society. Conservation must be seen as an enduring custodianship issue, and not as a desocialised process.

1. Introduction

"People in Papua New Guinea are very much connected to their land - it's their guarantee of survival - it is like money in western society"

John Chitua, BRG Coordinator

Conservation and development agencies, from development banks through UN agencies to various NGOs, are now thoroughly immersed in notions of 'community development', 'community participation', and sometimes even 'community ownership' and 'community empowerment'. In general, though, these are concepts designed to ornament and legitimise projects in developing countries - projects which are overwhelmingly determined, administered and assessed by funding consortia in the wealthy countries. Where development has been linked to conservation, there has been huge controversy, over the setting of priorities, the authorship of projects and the nature and meaning of both the conservation and the development. This has led some indigenous groups to reclaim the process, and to redefine conservation and development in their own terms.

The Bismarck Ramu Group (BRG) in the Madang Region of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is one such group, and it has created a model which is attracting national and international attention. In the late 1990s the group split from a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored project of 'integrated conservation and development' (ICAD) and focussed instead on programs of landowner (villager) mobilisation, led by indigenous workers, and with no

¹Thanks to Lisi Riedl for her work in transcribing a large number of interviews

material incentives. Some successes in conservation and a range of other village-level achievements, combined with a popular approach which makes links with traditional practices and local histories and so resonates well with local people, has led several other PNG and international groups to seek training and contact with the BRG, so as to learn and adopt some of their methods.

In this paper I want to overview and examine the origins of the BRG, and its distinct model of community development. Then, based on interviews with a range of BRG members, I will look at the internal workings of the group and the ways in which it has adapted various influences and continues to change. I will argue this adaptation is typical of indigenous or traditional technologies, and is at the root of indigenous survival over millennia. Finally I will try to identify the possible lessons for other groups, from the BRG experience.

2. Rejecting 'Integrated Conservation and Development' projects

Projects of integrated conservation and development (ICADs) began in Africa and India in the 1980s (after the failure of many simple exclusion nature reserves) and "aim at building linkages between the welfare objectives of local communities and biodiversity conservation goals by providing communities with development support" (McCallum and Sekhran 1997: 4). They generally involve some sort of material incentive for local communities to agree to protect natural areas. The incentive for some form of 'development', in orthodox economic terms, is seen as compensation for foregone exploitation of that part of the natural environment which is to be protected. These protected areas are usually linked to biodiversity 'hotspots' (identified by outside scientific experts) in poor, tropical countries. However the compensation model tends to assume that local poor people are likely to be driven to destroy the natural value of their locale, and have few of their own, indigenous resources for environmental management. In addition, the ICAD may position itself as a competitor with logging and other destructive resource industries, seeking to 'buy' the favour of local communities. The 'debt for nature' swaps which began in the late 1980s, after the first debt crisis, are similar in nature.

From their origins in Africa and India, ICAD projects spread to Papua New Guinea. By the late 1990s there were at least ten different types of ICAD in the country:

- The Hunstein range Project, supported by WWF International and the East Sepik Council of Women (East Sepik Province);
- The Kuper Range Project, run by The Wau Ecology Institute (Morobe Province);
- The Lakekamu-Kunimaipa Basin ICADP, run by the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, the Wau Ecology Institute and Conservation International (Central and Gulf province);
- The Maisin ICADP, run by Conservation Melanesia and Greenpeace, in Collingwood Bay (Oro Province);
- The Lasanga ICADP, run by the Village Development Trust, in Lasanga (Morobe Province);
- The Crater Mountain ICADP, sponsored by the Research and Conservation Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Society-USA (Eastern Highlands, Gulf and Simbu Provinces);
- The Oro Butterfly Project, backed by the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation and AUSAID (Oro Province);
- The Kikori Basin ICADP, run by WWF-USA (Gulf and Southern Highlands provinces);
- The Lak ICADP, backed by the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation and the UNDP (New Ireland Province); and

- The Bismarck-Ramu ICADP, backed by the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation, the Christensen Research Institute and the UNDP (Simbu and Madang Provinces) (McCallum and Sekhran 1997: 2).

The Bismarck Ramu Group sprang out of frustrations with the last two, the Lak and the Bismarck-Ramu ICAD projects.

However the Oro Butterfly Project also illustrates some typical problems with ICADs. This Australian aid project arose from concern around World Bank support for Oil Palm Extension, which was laying on roads and other infrastructure for the oil palm industry (which comprises a mill, a plantation, many small holders, roads and a port) on the Popondetta plains. In the course of this work it was discovered that land clearing had endangered the habitat of the world's largest butterfly, the Queen Alexandra Birdwing Butterfly (QABB). Australia's aid agency (which also finances the oil palm industry) then funded a small ICAD project to research the QABB, prepare education and conservation plans, and to offer economic and social incentives to local communities. These incentives were said to include support for an extraordinarily large range of measures, such as cash cropping (coffee and cocoa were already grown in the region), the development of rainforest products, ecoforestry, captive butterfly breeding, other microenterprise development and support for schools, water supplies and health services (AACM 1995: 5-6, 38-43). One year into the project, a quarterly progress report claimed only modest achievements. Research into the QABB continued, some rural marketing possibilities were being "investigated", and the local community had expressed concern over basic infrastructure, particularly roads and health. The project staff had installed some water tanks, assisted with some health contingencies, and were "lobbying" to improve the roads into the area (PNG DEC 1996: 2-4). When malnutrition problems were discovered in the plateau area, a rabbit breeding program was introduced - this was poorly conceived and ended up a failure. The final report to Ausaid suggests a successfully completed project (**REF??**), but independent investigators found disillusionment, poverty and failure in its wake (O'Connor 2003 - **DOES TIM HAVE A REPORT ON THIS NOW?**).

While the BRG grew directly out of the Bismarck-Ramu ICAD project, one of the members had also worked in the earlier ICAD project in Lak, New Ireland. John Chitoo, a confident, direct and articulate man from Bougainville, is now Coordinator ('The Boss') of the BRG. John says that the Lak ICAD project set about trying to compete with logging companies, offering an 'early reward scheme' to groups of people who were already receiving royalties from logging. The idea was to get villager-landowners to agree to leave certain coups of trees still standing, and still have access to royalty equivalents. The project began in 1992:

"But we found out later, towards the end of 1993/1994 ... the landowners thought that this was a new thing, they couldn't really understand what was the ICAD project ... basically people were confused, they thought that the integrated conservation and development idea was just like another developer coming, it was just like another New Guinea Lumber company." (Chitoo 2003b)

The project was run by the PNG Department of Conservation, along with the UNDP. Because there were hundreds of thousands of Kina in the project (one PNG Kina is about two Australian dollars), the villager-landowners thought that they might get more from the ICAD than from the loggers, so their expectations were very high. But the project came to Lak after the logging was well in play, and did not really have the resources to compete with the logging company - which had tactically slowed down its use of incentives, while the ICAD used up its own incentives. As the ICAD ran out of resources, the logging company then "steamed up".

"So that was the tactic they played and towards the end of 1993/1994 - people then swayed back again to the loggers, they voted to go with the loggers." (Chitoo 2003b)

The Lak Project (1993-95) was assessed by the UNDP as a failure, but valuable lessons were documented from the experience. Two books, *Race for the Rainforest* (McCallum and Sekhran 1997) and *Race for the Rainforest 2* (Ellis 1997) were produced, to set out these lessons. Lak was said to have failed because a large biodiversity conservation area was not created, and logging followed the delivery of a range of incentives to landowners, intended to help them stop the logging. The lessons included an awareness that ICADs and their material incentives could create dependency and passivity on the part of landowners, that cooperative endeavour, 'partnerships' and 'participation' are easily spoken of but may often be superficial, that landowner attitudes towards conservation are critical, and that logging companies had a comparative advantage (ie. facilitated access and no real regulation) in dealing with local communities in the PNG political climate (McCallum and Sekhran 1997: 51-77). The second UNDP report noted that there were "many problems" with the "material incentives to compensate communities for opportunity costs" approach in Lak, including the generation of unrealistic expectations of "cargo" [western goods and services] amongst local people, and the fact that "ICAD projects cannot compete with mining or logging companies ... in the provision of immediate material benefits to communities". Long term education and landowner awareness was required (Ellis 1997:6, 64-65, 68). John Chittoa says that one of the big lessons learned from Lak was that

"We should not play the same game as the loggers ... by basically paying off people and going in there heavy handed, with trucks [and other 'cargo'] .. that stuff was raising expectations in the field." (Chittoa 2003b)

The Bismarck-Ramu ICAD Project (1995-1999) began in an area more protected from the imminent threat of logging (and large scale cash cropping) but suffered from many of the same problems. Members of the Lak and Bismarck-Ramu projects were left dissatisfied with the design of the ICAD project, which began by separating 'conservation' from the 'development' needs of the communities (Ellis 1997). Such an approach, it was felt, could not be truly driven by the landowners themselves. As a result several of the project team departed from the UNDP method and eventually created the Bismarck-Ramu Group (BRG), breaking away from the PNG Government and the UNDP.

Flip Van Helden was one of several foreign members (in PNG, foreign workers are called 'expatriates') of the Bismarck Ramu ICAD team in 1996-98. He went on to publish a booklet with Jochem Scheemann (Van Helden and Scheemann 2000) and a PhD thesis (Van Helden 2001) on the Bismarck Ramu ICAD experience in the Madang region, including the emergence of the Bismarck Ramu Group. Van Helden says that a change in approach was driven by team members, during this project. John Chittoa believes many of the same mistakes were repeated in the early stages of the Bismarck Ramu ICAD project.

"We had this biological survey that took place and people were flying in and out, using choppers to get in and out of the area ... there was a bit of cash brought into the community by the project ... I mean people saw us using the choppers and expatriates went into the area as well, all this raised peoples expectations ... We stopped and then talked about how this seems to be the same approach we used in Lak; so we took time to think about that and we said: 'no we're not going to repeat the same mistake let's change the approach, let's go in there low profile – [and] expatriates are not allowed in the field.'" (Chittoa 2003b)

The ICAD project had begun with biological surveys, but discussions within the team in 1996 led to the recruitment of a community development specialist, and a shift to a more 'people centred approach', where the biologists were eventually "marginalised" by the social scientists (Van Helden 2001: 242). Yet a shift away from the use of material incentives and towards 'community entry', where the priorities of local communities were actually listened to, was said to be "fundamentally incompatible with the underlying economic premise of [the] ICAD idea" (Van Helden 2001: 245). The team believed that the active involvement of local

communities was essential for any lasting conservation outcome, and the community development trainer, US citizen Barry Lalley, maintained that active involvement would only come on issues about which people felt strongly and emotionally (BRG in Van Helden 2001: 251). Van Helden says that Lalley, in one sense, "hijacked the project, turning the ICAD philosophy on its head, denouncing the use of incentives and globalisation" (Van Helden 2001: 246). However this is probably an exaggeration. It seems more likely that he reinforced and encouraged the trend already in place amongst team members. One effect of this was that the ICAD, in the later days of UNDP funding, was no longer primarily a conservation project:

"It's difficult to preach conservation ... there were other things on peoples minds - health and education. We would help them look at their village - problems that they faced. As we built trust with them, as the relationship grew, we could possibly talk about looking at the environment." (Lalley 2003a)

Several big changes then took place, before the group finally broke from the UNDP - changes that were possible, at this early stage, because of the latitude allowed by UNDP managers (Chitoo 2003b). First, 'community entry' which involved listening (without prior fixed agendas) to villagers' problems and concerns was regarded as the first step in a community development process. This was not to say that the community organisers (COs) had no agenda; their social and conservation concerns were simply accorded a new, more deferential place.

"The Bismarck Ramu community entry strategy instead did not aim to push conservation, but rather through a gradual process of trust building, local problem analysis and an emphasis on self-reliance [aimed] to find out which communities in the area of interest could have a potential interest in resource management issues, and would therefore be suitable partners for further project work" (Van Helden 2001: 270)

Second, all material incentives were abandoned. No money or 'cargo' (eg. motor vehicles, but also things such as tinned food) were to be associated with their entry into a community.

"The Madang project staff sincerely came to believe in this new 'non cargo' approach, treating conservation as a self-help rather than a lack-of-economic-incentives problem." (Van Helden 2001: 247)

A third major change was that all international workers bar one (the CD trainer, Barry Lalley) were gone from the project, by 1999 (Lalley 2003c); and no international workers were involved in community entry. This was not because the group disliked or did not have good relations with foreigners. It simply was and is a product of PNG post-colonial history (including the 'aid' and resource industries) that foreigners are always associated with influence and the allocation of 'development' moneys, including bribes. BRG Finance Manager Tamana Tenehoe, a Bougainvillean woman and core BRG member, explains:

"You know if we have a foreigner in the team, the first picture that people in the village will get, they will expect something from outside ... Whereas when we have our own local people going into the communities I don't think it raises their expectations." (Tenehoe 2003)

This shift in approach and the split from the UNDP meant giving up large sums of money. The UNDP wanted the emerging BRG to work with a large international conservation group, The Nature Conservancy (TNC). However the TNC maintained an approach focussed on biological conservation, which was no longer acceptable to the community oriented BRG. John Chitoo says the UNDP tried to push the two groups together, and millions of Kina were on offer:

"But we decided not to take it and it was really kind of a unique thing, you know, no one really wants to disregard money from donors ... [but] we did not agree with the project that was proposed ... we have different agendas ... we said no, forget about it ... we'll go and search for money elsewhere. So we wanted to be independent as possible." (Chitoo 2003b)

BRG campaigner Yat Paol, a Madang man with a church background, says that the group could no longer accept this starting point of pre-determined 'biodiversity hotspots':

"We had a different objective to the UN funders, they were looking at conservation – our focus was the people. Because in Papua New Guinea, the land is owned by the people and how can we talk about conservation and do all that awareness [building] without due consideration for the people - making sure that they own the whole .. getting them to responsibly guard and take care of and wisely use the land and resources – that's what we are here for. (Paol 2003b)

3. Community development and landowner support

After the breaking from the UNDP, the BRG rapidly established its independent status, with offices just outside Madang township, eight full time staff and sixteen part time community organisers (Chitoo 2003a). Funding was secured from two European foundations, which get annual reports and took an interest in the evaluations of 2000 and 200 (see section seven below) but have generally taken a 'hands off' approach, knowing and trusting the group and its work. In this section I will try to identify the several influences on the BRG 'model' of community development, and then try to characterise the model itself, including the 'steps' of community entry.

BRG members generally stress the Melanesian nature of their approach; and indeed in their village work there is constant emphasis on the value of customary relationships, on building self-reliance and on an environmental management based on traditional principles. As one member stresses:

"BRG is basically a mobilisation of local people - to empower local people ... BRG wants to help people to decide what is important for their lives and future generations - and to see the relationship between the environment and how their ancestors have lived for centuries" (Guman 2003a)

However when looking at the Melanesian features, we should recognise that there are also some international influences, in their approach to conservation, to organisation and to community development. I suggest this is fairly typical of indigenous practice, which adopts new ideas and new technology within its own cultural context, rather than remaining static. This capacity for change must account for the resilience and longevity of indigenous practice and communities. The BRG's initial community development trainer, Barry Lalley, also had experience in Latin America a sound knowledge of community development literature. Although now a full member of the BRG and a PNG resident, he still sees himself as an outsider, and an observer of the developing BRG process:

"They wanted to try to make the organisation as Melanesian as possible ... that was interesting for me because as I said, I'm a western thinker - I'm an outsider. But it's been interesting to watch these influences because as they try to keep the organisation Melanesian, they also adopt outside thinking - they really can't help it in this globalised world. (Lalley 2003c)

One such outside influence on Barry Lalley and the BRG were the writings on 'participatory democracy' in development, of Ann Hope and Sally Timmel. Referring to some African cultural practice, they drew attention to the broad community-level consultation, the 'weaving together of a social fabric' and the importance of women's roles in a process of meaningful development. Even research in indigenous communities required community consent, developmental 'aid' that benefited only elites should be rejected, and the 'trickle down' effect of broad economic growth was worse than useless (Hope and Timmel 1984: 4-6). The PNG experience of the 1980s and 1990s seemed to prove their points: that economic growth would not help marginalised peoples, and that policy formation without community input was "a recipe for disaster" (Hope and Timmel 1999: 214). PNG has seen record export performance, coupled with appalling social indicators (see Anderson 2003: 15-16), and big mining developments that led to war and massive social disruption. In many respects the writings of Hope and Timmel reflected many of the existing Melanesian emphases: on buildings relationships and on community participation in decision making (much of this is now called 'social capital', in the west). In another sense they presented a more structured approach to these same issues, including the development of the BRG's 'steps' of community entry (**CHECK - is this right, re the steps?**). It may also be that the more structured approach of western conservationists also influenced the BRG's approach to ecological management. But the way in which these management options were presented was entirely different.

This emphasis on 'process' has its roots in indigenous practice, but also has a structured counterpart in western thinking, as Hope and Timmell demonstrate. From an outside point of view, the BRG is remarkable both for the time they take to build relationships with their 'partner' communities, but also amongst themselves. This writer observed and took part in a two day trip, with a BRG worker, the main purpose of which was to confirm that some village elders were coming to attend a meeting in Madang, in a few days time. The outcome was not really in doubt, anyway. The villagers had no telephone, but the amount of time involved for such a confirmation seems extraordinary, and inefficient, from a western point of view. Similarly, a lot of time is taken in internal BRG meetings, which last one whole week, every month. Barry Lalley says that the length of meetings is:

"strictly Melanesian; they talk things through ... ad nauseum ... because relationships matter, people matter ... and I think that part of the Melanesian character is not only carried out in the organisation but in the way they run things in the village. (Lalley 2003c)

The 'inefficiency' point is not lost on BRG members, many of whom are highly educated and have good cross-cultural understandings. But they say their practice represents a deliberate focus on relationship building, rather than the western quick cut to a desired outcome. Yanny Guman says:

"the BRG call themselves a process-oriented organisation though they may be specifically referring to the community development process. ... [but] we build relationships, we value people, we value people's time. We don't talk about all the tangible things that will happen after, the relationship building is the first part ... a lot of criticisms actually come up, saying that well "it's process driven – it's time consuming, a lot of resources – it's just wasting time" and of course to some extent it is; but in order for good community development to take place ... people [must] identify their own outcomes." (Guman 2003b)

Centrality of and respect for small landowners in PNG is a clear indigenous feature of BRG practice. The group places land custodianship at the heart of a strategy of self reliance and ecological management. Not all developing or indigenous communities have this advantage, but in PNG the land is both very fertile (the country is food rich) and 97% is held under customary title, by small groups. This is recognised in both the constitution and the land law - if not by developmental practice. Logging and mining companies constantly subvert community decision making processes, and there are regular battles with development agencies, such as the World Bank, to defend (and not commodify) customary land title. The corporate undermining of customary title has now become a central focus of BRG campaigns. Economic liberals are ideologically opposed to this collective and non-marketable institution of PNG society; but customary title has helped communities survive for thousands of years and remains the basis for food security and social security in the country (see Anderson 2003: 13-14, 36, 39, 41). PNG land expert Andrew Lakau points out that 'efficiency' arguments against customary title are often misconceived:

"customary land tenure can be unfairly denounced for not being responsive to increased productivity and economic utilisation of land ... For cash cropping and agricultural development to be boosted, support services and incentives like agricultural inputs, favourable price policies, market outlets and credit provisions, amongst others, will have to be readily available." (Lakau 1994: 79-82)

These concerns are supported by the better international analyses, in which the 'multifunctionality' of small farming has been stressed (eg. Rosset 1999, Mazoyer 2001). These analyses say that the contribution of small farmers cannot be measured simply by marketable produce - hence the inappropriateness of pitting the output of large monoculture plantations against market sales from small farmers. A proper accounting must include the full range of subsistence, social service, ecological management and social security contributions from small farmers.

Finally, the focus on self reliance is an indigenous feature, which builds on support for customary land title, which is in turn linked to kinship systems. Everyone in PNG has access to land, and a means of survival - until the kinships and land systems are broken. The BRG constantly stresses self-reliance, in part because of the disastrous consequences observed for those who have 'sold' their land (land cannot really be 'sold' in PNG, but it can be alienated through long term leases and resource agreements) and have therefore destituted their children and grandchildren. Life and unemployment in the many settlements around PNG's cities is precarious. Helping develop self-reliant strategies is seen as being at the core of the BRG approach to community development. Yat Paol explains it this way:

"Our version of community development ... is basically self-reliance of the people ...[we are] helping to organise the people so that they can do things on their own, without sitting down and waiting for outside assistance." (Paol 2003b)

Tamana Tenehoe says the BRG is clearly set against 'support' that encourages dependence:

"When they [the community organisers] go out to the communities they help the communities in the village with ideas on how to be more self reliant and not depend on outside handouts, and how they can take care of the environment ... we don't give out handouts like cash or anything to the villages. (Tenehoe 2003)

Yanny Guman points out the stark reality of lack of government services that also lies behind the strategy of supporting self-reliance:

"People out there – they're rural, they're isolated – they expect a government official or someone from the church to go in and provide all the things they need, but they will never get it ... so we believe the key and the most important part of any process of community development work is to get people to realise they have the answers within themselves ... all they require is a neutral person to be present with them and be able to provide that extra person, so that people feel that empowerment and move on. (Guman 2003b)

However the group recognises that communities often do need resources, and money, regardless of the BRG approach. John Chittoa says:

Basically we are not against money, we're not against cargo – we know that times are different now, we're not living in the old times now – new things are coming in. ... [but we are] trying to educate people to try and see, appreciate, what their environment is doing for them. But ... [many] need money for school fees, for health fees ... [some things are] really beyond the people's capacity, so we link them with other agencies that deal with that particular problem." (Chittoa 2003b)

All the elements of the BRG approach are spelt out in BRG internal documents, and these understandings have been shared with other groups, though the group does not publicise or promote itself. An early BRG community development guide, for community organisers, focusses on self-reliant, community-led planning. This method stresses listening, and a broadly supportive role for BRG organisers when dealing with villagers.

"The more you talk the less effective you are: stop the preaching! ... Participation means the community should be in control of the process and you should only guide the process." (BRG 1997: 1)

Engagement with a community was initially seen in seven stages: entry, education, assessment, analysis, planning, mobilisation and follow-up (see the table below). Entry to a community involved meeting with the elders, exchanging stories ('story-ing') with community people and the community development team meeting to assess the community. Education meant holding community meetings on PNG history and culture, and on the theme of self-reliance, exchanging stories with community people and arranging a time to return. Assessment involved community mapping (by the community), an exchange of stories which link to the previous visit, and a Community Development Team (CDT) facilitated community assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses. The analysis of step four began with negotiations over a further meeting in which solutions and a way forward (directed by the community and making use of their own skills and resources - that is, without outside help) might be planned. This would be followed by planning, which involved a CDT assessment of the community's plans, discussion of the community's vision, prioritisation of the problems to address and development of an action plan. The sixth stage of mobilisation involved the community putting into place their plan. This was up to the community, and so the role of the CDT followed over

into the seventh, follow-up phase, where there would be monitoring, encouragement and further facilitation. Each stage began with meetings with community leaders to ensure that it was all right to hold another meeting (BRG 1997: 4-15). These steps were discussed intensively at BRG meetings, and later simplified into a four step process (see table below). The Community Development Teams (CDTs) were also renamed as Community Organisers (COs), as it was felt greater recognition was needed for the fact that the village communities were really doing their own community development (Chitola 2003b; Paol 2003b).

A number of important concerns, linked to BRG philosophy, were associated with this organising process. Communities were asked to identify their problems, rather than their needs; as it was felt the latter "is actually feeding into the cargo/dependency mentality that we are trying to break" (BRG 1997: 22). The formation of committees was also avoided, as such organising decisions could be made in different ways by different communities (BRG 1997: 22). The importance of time taken to build relationships was constantly stressed, a point repeated by BRG workers (Guman 2003b; Paol 2003b; Tenenoe 2003). At the same time, the community organisers would make a point to leave so as to allow the community time to work independently and together.

Importantly, conservation was not introduced by the community organisers as an initial or central theme, a clear break from the ICAD approach. The BRG maintains that:

"any attempt at conservation must be done in a real partnership with the community ... We have chosen to begin from where the people are - not in terms of conservation or the environment, but in terms of their lives, their problems, their struggles and their dreams. From here we can eventually get to conservation" (BRG 1997: 26-27).

That is, the BRG themselves value environmental protection, but as a matter of community organising process they will not seek to set an agenda or lead with their values. In addition, the community organisers make it clear that they have not come to deliver any 'cargo' (outside goods), money or to impose a predetermined project. Their sole task is to help the community organise, and to empower itself, using its own resources (BRG 1997: 22-39).

The BRG is of course not a blank slate. They have 'an agenda', and their aims (see Appendix One) make it clear that they seek to promote self-reliant strategies including communities holding and properly managing their own land, 'good' cultural values including 'recognising the strength and value of women', and explaining 'the negative impacts of large scale development and the tricks used by companies'. BRG workers made it very clear (eg. Sinemile 2003; Paol 2003a; Caspar 2003) that they saw only losses, not gains, for local people who had alienated their land to loggers, miners, cash croppers and other big companies. There is a clear BRG view against corporate development. Grace says "The companies come and get whatever they want, so I don't see any betterment ... from the companies" (Sinemile 2003). Yat confirms:

"[In] our experience [and according to] the people that came to us - that companies are here for profits and no matter what they will wheel and deal and manipulate the people for their own end. So our bias has been against big development, if there is any kind of development it has to be from the people and planned by them and normally it would be small development at their own level - manageable by them. (Paol 2003b)

There were a few short term benefits from big corporate projects (cash, vehicles), then the hard reality of long term dispossession and environmental degradation bit hard. Companies in PNG want to get their hands on land and cheap resources - they are almost all natural resource plunderers. If villagers make it clear they want to do business with a big company, and do not want BRG, the community organisers will just leave.

The steps of the organising process were a guide for the community organisers, and not a structured process for the villagers to 'progress' through, or qualify in. Nevertheless as a method, they are taken seriously by the BRG. Trainer Grace Sinemile points out:

"we only guide them; [for example] if they want better water in the community, if the water source in the community is not good, we find some resources, but not from outside ... they themselves have to [make it happen]. (Sinemile 2003)

In 2002 these seven steps were reduced to four, with six different pathway options (Sinemile 2003; Lalley 2003b; see Table 1 below). The main difference in the first four steps was the distinction between PNG and local village story-ing, that is, learning the lessons of their own history. New features in the six options were, first, recognition that the community organisers may not have anything to offer the villagers (leading to their exit); second, that network connections might be immediately useful; third that planning might not always involve land use planning; and, finally, there is a selection of land conservation options - National Park, Fauna Sanctuary, Protected Area, (**ONE OPTION IS MISSING HERE?**), Conservation Area, and Wildlife Management Area (WMAs) - from which communities can choose. All options have some legal status, but each have different combinations of community or state control. Communities typically choose an option which reserves greater community control, and minimises the potential government threat to take over their land (Caspar 2003). The BRG conservation team now has the technical skills to help with developing a community's chosen conservation option.

Initial (7 step) model	Revised (4 step) model	... with options
Entry	Entry	
Education	PNG timeline	
Assessment	Village timeline	
Analysis	Community mapping	
Planning	* Choice of six options --->	EXIT
Mobilisation		Network
Follow-up		Planning
		Land use planning
		Problems
		Matrix (conservation) process
Sources: BRG 2000; Sinemile 2003; & Lalley 2003c		

The BRG 'model' of community development might therefore be summed up as: firstly, developing indigenous partnerships with villager-landowners (which involves a well thought out process of 'community entry', explained below); secondly, assisting villager-landowners to develop self-reliant strategies based on customary land tenure; and, finally, assisting villager-landowners in community planing, including resource management and conservation options.

4. Conservation by other means

Even though protected area options only come at the end of a long process, the BRG's indirect approach to conservation has nevertheless produced results; after the communities' needs have been worked through. John Chitoo describes the way in which in 1999 the BRG helped

communities in the Faroko and Sepu areas create two Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), of some 80,000 hectares:

"People ... have health problems which they need to attend, they have education problems – so we decided that we will do community development first ... [as] it turned out really - we achieved our [conservation] objective ... by salvaging two wildlife management areas with the people ... So by the processes that we use, people were able to conserve those areas without us using money or cargo. (Chitua 2003b).

The current BRG Chairman, Poin Caspar, was one of several BRG community organisers at Faroko and Sepu, during this time. He explains that, before conservation, the communities focussed on their education and health needs.

"the first two issues that they identified were education and health. So we took them through the [BRG] process ... they prioritised problems they were going to address with their own resources ... [and] decided to address the issue of education first. As a result of that, a person in their community developed an elementary school in the community ... [in addition] they have a hospital set up and [now] they have a health worker in the community too." (Caspar 2003)

A little later, a second large protected area was created by eleven clans from Wanang Village. After BRG community organisers had spent two years with the community, the BRG conservation team went in and took the communities through another process. Concerned that their area would be logged, like an adjoining area, these eleven landowner groups eventually signed an agreement to not allow any big extractive 'development' on their land. Now for any change, or for any form of small development, "every one" of the eleven groups has to agree to it (Paol 2003b). This Wanang Conservation Area covers 18 000 hectares of "primary forested land" of the Upper Sogeram region of the Madang". The Wanang agreement is a 'conservation deed', as distinct from a Wildlife Management Area; but both mechanisms are options presented by the BRG process (Paol 2003b). Both the Faroko-Sepu WMA and the Wanang Conservation Area are in the big river valley between the Adelbert Range and Bismarck Range.

The BRG conservation process begins with "the traditional concept of conservation", which people have been engaged in for very many years, and leads up to the choice of mechanisms, which will include community management and traditional penalty systems:

"in wildlife management you have to have loss and penalties, and so that is how we incorporated the traditional concept of conservation. So for instance, we had a law that if someone from another clan goes into my land ... if I catch him sneaking around, I can lay a penalty on him, a western type of penalty and also a traditional form of penalty ... you give me a certain amount of money and on top of that you need to give me maybe a pig ... they decided themselves – the landowners." (Caspar 2003)

The highest levels of protected areas (probably the equivalent of IUCN categories 1 and 2) were linked to traditional sacred sites, as Yat explains:

"Naturally there are taboo areas that are strictly sacred sites which is out of bounds for people to go in ... in the language of some conservation people who are here, they are like 'wildlife banks' ... But from the traditional times ... there have always been sacred sites. They serve as areas for wildlife to breed. And then when there are many of them, [wildlife] come out of the conserved areas and people can kill them outside; but not inside." (Paol 2003b)

The highly protected areas had spiritual as well as conservation significance, and were not just protected, but (in a hunter society) were exclusion areas:

"You were not supposed to go into my sacred area – that belongs to me, the spirits in that sacred site only know me ... and I know the stories that involve that sacred site. So it was strictly forbidden, very forbidden ... that was practiced from the past till even today, in most parts of Papua New Guinea ... Very sacred sites are forbidden to even [others] in the community, except for the immediate owners of the land. (Caspar 2003)

In the end, Poin believes that the Faroko and Sepu people were "very happy" with the outcome.

"Why I say this is because the way BRG facilitated those arrangements .. they totally owned, especially the wildlife management areas we assisted them to set up ... the people say now that "it's our WMA", they seem to own the WMA." (Caspar 2003)

Grace says that all communities the BRG work with have conservation as a priority. It is more of a priority because "big companies" are trying to get into their area, and the communities

want help to "protect their bush" (Sinemile 2003). Most have now seen the devastating effects of large scale logging, which was unimaginable just 20 years ago.

Whatever form of conservation plan might be chosen by a community, there will have to be some combination of agreements and deeds, access arrangements, boundary mapping, laws and penalties for transgressions and community surveillance and management of the area. The BRG conservation team is able to assist with setting up these arrangements.

The 'high profile' achievements - 80,000 hectares of WMA - attract attention, but the BRG remain focussed on community development goals - confidence building processes which may result in a wide range of outcomes. Barry Lalley says there is a "misconception" that the BRG is an environmental organisation:

"But we get excited with [other small village projects] They're not sexy; [but] we're into having people believe in themselves - saying you can do it, you can take action (Lalley 2003a)

5. Group processes

Two of the most remarkable features of the BRG's internal workings are the amount of time spent in group activities and the very low key approach to expected outcomes from their work. Both features reflect the emphasis on relationship building, as discussed above. The BRG also declares itself as a non-promotional organisation, having no pamphlets or visions of expansion. It sees its community organisers as hybrid part-time workers and volunteers - people who are regularly and necessarily taking their practices back into the communities in which they live. On gender, the group has developed policies which have a two-to-one mix of men to women community organiser teams, going into villages, and a women-only policy of managing finances.

The entire group meets every month for five days, to discuss group activities. One such meeting is associated with a 'briefing' before the sending out of community organiser field patrols, and another after the patrols return, associated with a 'debriefing' (see Table 2 below). Each patrol will last about three weeks, and after the debriefing the workers will go back to their villages, to practice at home what they practice in their work:

"they try to put into practice what they've learnt so far from BRG, so when they get back [home] ... they try to do it back in their own communities as well." (Tenehoe 2003)

This is considered an essential part of BRG work: that it is replicated in the workers' home villages. So in practice, community organisers spend almost half their time in their home villages - they have another life. Yet they are supposed to carry their BRG practices back to these lives. Yanny Guman sees a link here with other volunteer organisations.

"Volunteerism I see as quite predominant within BRG ... because about 75% of our workers are volunteers I guess because they come in and work part time. They spend half of the time back in the villages, they come in and they work part time. We call them community organisers, they're part time people and they're field workers .. I didn't see these community organisers as different from volunteers." (Guman 2003b)

2003 activities	2003 dates	2004 activities	2004 dates
		Yearly planning	26 Jan - 6 Feb
Brief	24 - 28 Feb	Brief	16-23 Feb
Patrol	28 Feb - 17 Mar	Patrol	23 Feb - 8 Mar
Debrief	17 - 21 Mar	Debrief	8-11 Mar
		PV training	22 March - 2 April
Brief	28 April - 2 May	Brief	19-26 April

Patrol Debrief	2 - 19 May 19 - 22 May	Patrol Debrief	26 April - 10 May 10-13 May
		PV training	24 May - 4 June
Brief Patrol Debrief	9 - 13 June 13 - 30 June 30 June - 3 July	Brief Patrol Debrief	21-28 June 28 June - 12 July 12-15 July
Brief Patrol Debrief	21 - 25 July 25 July - 11 Aug 11 - 14 Aug	Brief Patrol Debrief	2-9 August 9-23 August 23-26 August
Grassroots U training	1 - 11 Sept	Intro to business (BRG)	27 Sept - 8 Oct
Brief Patrol Debrief	22 - 26 Sept 26 Sept - 13 Oct 13 - 16 Oct	Brief Patrol Debrief	18-25 Oct 25 Oct - 8 Nov 8-11 Nov
Brief Patrol Debrief	17 - 21 Nov 21 Nov - 8 Dec 8 - 11 Dec	Brief Patrol Debrief	22-29 Nov 29 Nov - 13 Dec 13-16 Dec
Source: BRG (2003a) Schedule 2003 and Schedule 2004			

Barry Lalley says that the BRG's long meetings are a cultural and collective form of check and balance, in many respects substituting for the western view of oversight from a board. Labelling these meetings 'briefings' and 'debriefings' was probably a badge given to existing cultural practice:

"It's a constant reflection on one's work and it's also letting everyone participate in the process, but there's also a check in balance there cause if someone ... would come back and they would bullshit ... [others] saw what was going on that stuff stopped ... The idea to put it as a briefing and debriefing may have come as a collective thinking when we set up the ICAD." (Lalley 2003c)

The week long meetings involve many reports, but also trust exercises, group planning and role-playing, as Yat Paol explains:

"There's a continuity, we pick up from where each patrol team has left in its village. They go back to the village, and pick up from where they had left from the previous patrol. But planning of that next visit we do that together, up in the meeting room and it's really intensive planning together." (Paol 2003b)

As a result of this intensive group contact, good group understandings and a strong sense of trust is built up, between members of the group:

"I like the people that make up BRG, there's this trust between all of us – the staff and the community organisers. We work together, we work a certain way" (Tenehoe 2003)

Community organisers go out, so far as is possible, in teams of two men and one woman. This to some extent reflects the gender composition of the group, but is also a deliberate design to ensure the security of the group in remote areas, the logistical strength to carry out certain field work and cross big rivers, but also to ensure that there is a woman in each group to talk with the women of the village. The 2002 evaluators said that:

"BRG is honest about its work with women .. [they] continue to struggle with ways they can improve their work and its impact to 'help people recognize the strength and value of women' [BRG aims] and that they recognise this as an important central aim in their work in the communities" (Eagles and Jones 2002: 21)

While there are still efforts to increase the proportion of women in the BRG management group, a decision was taken some time ago that only women should manage the group's finances, both in patrol teams and at the group's offices. Finance Manager Tamana Tenehoe explains:

"I think our people trusted the women more than the men, and they trusted the women to take care of the money when they went out on patrol ... and not so much the men .. [this was] because I think the women are wise – wise spending the money and not the men. That's how we see it here. (Tenehoe 2003)

This policy recognises well established findings, in many countries, that women spend money more according to family needs, while men use money more for 'discretionary' spending.

6. Education, campaigning and training

In addition to its community organisers and the conservation team, the BRG has an education team, a campaigns team, and trainers. The BRG education team concentrates on land care and environmental education in primary schools. The campaigns team pursues issues that reach beyond just one community, while the trainers focus on developing the skills of the community organisers and of select groups that approach the BRG for training. A management group, now called the Coordination Team, performs most of the executive, coordination and financial functions.

The education team mainly goes into primary schools, talking about the environment and linking conservation practice to PNG history and culture. BRG Educator Nui Somp loves working with children, and teachers and children alike appreciate new faces in the classroom:

"We talk about the environment in general and then also – that's the main base line of our history in the PNG history culture – that we pretty much start with their affairs ... I mean the same messages the community organisers apply to the parents, we send to the students." (Somp 2003)

The BRG message is an encouraging one, and the team is often asked to return to the schools they visit. Children also often come out with their own stories of traditional environmental practice:

"When we talk about their history, some of them come out with their own little stories, the legends they've been told, and they're happy [to know] ... that if we can keep our legends going on, we can pass it on to our next generation. ... I think we just strengthened them." (Somp 2003)

Campaigning is a newer area for the BRG. They have become involved in several disputes over big development projects, largely because these issues were worrying local communities, who in turn approached the BRG for support. Concern over the proposed Ramu Nickel mine led to "facilitation, training, sharing information as well as networking" with a arrange of communities and NGOs, both PNG and international (Eagles and Jones 2002: 19). Campaigner Yat Paol says the BRG is now involved in many big disputes, and once again, their primary role has been to listen:

"For the people when they come in with problems, [we are] providing psychological support, moral support – listening to them that's very important, nobody listens to the people." (Paol 2003b)

After beginning in BRG as a church liaison person, Yat became BRG's initial campaigner in the Upper Ramu oil palm campaign and the RD Tuna campaign.

The Upper Ramu campaign has involved helping ten communities protect their land from a Regional Government plan to take over 35,000 hectares of land, and turn it over to a huge oil palm plantation (Paol 2003a).

"The Upper Ramu people ... came requesting us to work with them ... [these] people are totally against oil palm on their land – now – our work has been we work for them when they come in and, when not, we go in and touch base with the updates over there and when we come back we brief everybody about the updates ... my role as campaigner and my counterpart – our role is to be communication link between the people and friends, and a communication link from friends who have the know how and who know what's going on in the oil palm industry." (Paol 2003b)

At present, there are no large scale oil palm plantations in Madang Province; but communities have given over land for sugar, and many have seen the environmental damage caused by large monocultural oil palm plantations and mills in the Provinces of New Britain and Oro.

The RD Tuna campaign has involved support for a group of landowners, the Kananam people, who have a land dispute with, as well as environmental and social problems from, the operations of a big Filipino fish company (RD Tuna) and wharf facility. The dispute generated

so much national and international publicity in 2003 that the BRG began to receive threats, which culminated in RD Tuna deciding to sue some of the Kananam leaders and the BRG. In the course of this, the company gained the support of one of PNG's national papers, *The National*, which is owned by a big Malaysian logging company (Rimbunan Hijau). A Filipino reporter for *The National* ran a series of 'stories' attacking the BRG:

"This newspaper for nine days in a row ... put out big stories blasting the Bismarek Ramu Group. It didn't really surprise us of course but, the people were really mad because it is their fight and everybody came sympathising with us but we said oh that's all right, we are prepared for this (Paol 2003b)

RD Tuna's defamation case has now collapsed. Lawyer for the Kananams, Almah Tararia, says:

"There wasn't any evidence ... The claim was very general, and said the defendants put out materials on a web site or did brochures, sent a letter to the US embassy - but there wasn't anything saying which defendants did what and when our clients asked for particulars the plaintiffs couldn't provide anything. (Tararia 2003b)

The BRG's support certainly appreciated by Kananam leaders, who speak in the highest terms of the group, because they listen and help give voice to their concerns (Gem 2003; Deb 2003).

"We thought that BRG has plans for us, but when we came here we saw that BRG was really operating without plans ... when we work with BRG we feel like working with our own people... all the decisions that come out for the campaigns are usually made by us, I mean we make the decisions and they just go by our decisions. (Gem 2003b)

Lawyer for the Kananam leaders confirms that the BRG's role was important in listening to and helping empower that community:

"The biggest thing that the BRG did was empower these guys ... they were not going to be able to achieve that [defiance of the company] on their own and I think the BRG gave them that strength.. to talk about the issues they'd been facing. And nobody listened to the Kananams for a long while ... it was [BRG's] help that made the Kananams stand up and talk" (Tararia 2003b)

These campaigns have involved an increasing amount of BRG attention, and they are seen to have wider implications for many communities. But BRG involvement in these campaigns raises questions which parallel the community development process: to what extent does the group actively engage in the disputes, and to what extent do they simply support the affected communities. BRG is not a blank sheet, they have strong feelings about landowner-villagers rights, when they are being abused. But there are many such examples in PNG, and empowerment of communities is central to the BRG approach. So their own philosophy, and advice from their evaluations (Eagles and Jones 2002: 23-24) has kept them committed to a support and resourcing role, in their campaigns. Of course, that has not stopped big companies singling the group out for attack. Companies like RD Tuna have been surprised to see that poor villagers have friends, and resources.

The BRG has also played a lead role in organising other community groups to resist what are seen as inappropriate initiatives from NGOs, particularly some of the big international NGOs. For example, in 2003 five groups including the BRG wrote to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) to demand that that group withdraw its proposal for a 'forest summit' in 2004, and that WWF also cease its association with mining companies and the World Bank (BRG et al 2003). The WWF in a 'concept note' in 2002 had proposed a forest summit which would be privately backed by the World Bank. The WWF lamented that "the issue and the purpose of the project [earlier World Bank 'Land Mobilisation' projects] was misinformed to the general public and so the whole project was taken out of context". The forest summit - which would serve to draw attention to plans for protected areas, but also allow discussion of World Bank land registration proposals - had to be kept on a "tight lead .. so that it does not get out of context". To this end, although the organisers were a 'World Bank Alliance' and World Bank funding was needed, the World Bank logo or name was to be kept out of WWF summit publicity. (WWF 2002). The five groups argued that the World Bank had consistently attacked customary title, and for that

reason had attracted widespread hostility in PNG. People had fought and won this battle with the World Bank - they had successfully defended customary title. Citing a range of examples, the groups said that the WWF's "shameless corporatisation" was having the effect of "undermining local organisations and disempowering local people" (BRG et al 2003). The WWF withdrew its forest summit proposal.

As it has become better known in PNG, the BRG has had to deal with increased requests for training from other organisations, as well as their own workers and the communities they work with. The original community development trainer Barry Lalley, has taken a step back to an advisory role, and two experienced community organisers (PNG nationals Poin Caspar and Grace Sinemile) are now the BRG trainers. Poin says most training is still with the BRG's local (Madang Province) partner communities, but they are receiving more outside requests:

"And those requests we - BRG - as a whole decides and the training team only facilitates ... we also do trainings with outside organisations ... [for example] the Lutheran Development Service requested five trainings from us next year ... [this] is an organisation that we constantly network with." (Caspar 2003)

In late 2003 community activists from the Maisin community, who successfully resisted a logging operation on their land the year before, spent a month with BRG, observing their work and methods. Community worker Drida Sinapa was impressed with the BRG's procedures:

"looking at the procedures they have more than I have. And I have a lot of tools ... I've [also] learnt here about the deed - the conservation deed." (Sinapa 2003)

However the demand for training has created some pressure on BRG work time and became a prioritization issue, which the 2002 evaluation team was asked to consider. Training for communities has been in the areas of community development, organising, leadership, health and hygiene, gender, literacy, traditional medicine and conservation. (Eagles and Jones 2002: 20). With other specialist skills, such as legal advice in land disputes and in the RD Tuna campaign, BRG has made use of links with community legal centres and private firms. The message of training is the repeated theme of the BRG:

"I really want to ... help the people see the importance of their land. I don't want them to sell their land out. This is only our hope and our mother and everything - our life ... I really want Papua New Guinea to be self-reliant, to be really independent, to hold on to their land and not become slaves on their own land." (Sinemile 2003)

7. Evaluation and evolution

The BRG grew out of the context of an ICAD, reacting against that model and relinking with traditional land and environmental management practices through facilitating strategies of self reliance. However their major aims and their internal structures are still changing. Coordinator and founding member John Chitoo sees BRG history in three stages: the ICAD period, an interim phase and the present phase:

"BRG has basically gone through 3 changes. 1996 to 1999 was ... our colonial period ... we were colonised from somewhere which we didn't agree with, we wanted independence. ... Stage number 2 was from 2000 – 2002 that's when BRG became independent. ... 2002-2003 this year ... we've had an evaluation ... [and] are looking at how we can best do our work, we're going through a restructure." (Chitoo 2003b)

Evaluations have been a regular occurrence. Under the UN there were two evaluations. And despite the demand after the split to be more Melanesian, the independent BRG has called for two more outside evaluations. Most of the suggestions from these evaluations have been taken up, but a couple have been resisted. The main argument has been over the group's rejection of an external board.

"Some of our loyal funders question us on this constantly ... the BRG said look - we don't understand why you're pushing for us to have a board. And the funders said because you've got to be accountable ... and [the BRG] came back and said we're accountable to the people from the village that we work with, we're accountable to you and we're accountable to each other. ... [and] the other organisations that you have funded that all had boards, you lost a lot of money from corruption." (Lalley 2003c)

Nevertheless, the group did improve their financial system, after the first evaluation, and is still considering the second evaluation team's suggestion for an 'Advisory Board'. The evaluations themselves are seen as having some of the functions of a board:

"they know, not having an outside board becomes a little incestuous – so they take the outside influences very seriously – they listen and if they think it can help they adopt it and if they don't, they won't adopt it." (Lalley 2003c)

The first evaluation carried out on the BRG, after the split from the UNDP, was commissioned by the BRG and carried out by several NGO members. The second was asked for by the BRG's major European funders, the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and Bread for the World (BftW). Both reports were broadly supportive of BRG activities, but also showed up some of the different ways BRG had chosen to operate. Both were seen by BRG management as valuable contributions to an ongoing process of self-evaluation (Chitoo 2003b).

The 2000 review team comprised two expatriate and four national NGO workers, three men and three women. Their evaluation was set against the main stated aims of the BRG at that time, "to promote self-reliance by helping rural communities organise themselves", and "to promote conservation by helping rural communities conserve their land, including its forests, waters and wildlife". No particular evaluation method was followed. The team relied on its wide representation, wide discussions and it focussed on "practical" matters to help "bring about positive changes" in the BRG (Hershey 2000: 11-13). The review was broadly supportive of the BRG. The community development workers interviewed felt that they were a "strong part" of the decision making process, and BRG staff generally had higher levels of participation in group decision making than was the case in many other organisations. There was a functioning office which filed regular reports, including financial reports. BRG staff had high standards for their work, including team work and team spirit, high moral standards and respectful relationships between men and women. Community workers were also encouraged to carry on their work (of self-reliant and cooperative development) in their own communities. There was good quality, regular training, including gender training, and some good networking. The community development work was slow, careful, and flexible, drawing lessons from past mistakes. Patrols were book-ended by lengthy briefings and debriefings, which allowed for planning, preparation, reflection and collective learning. A number of valuable achievements had shown up in villages since the community development process began, namely: the setting up of preschools, mobilisation of village savings; preserving customs, use of traditional medicines, reduction in illnesses, villages paying teachers'; allowances, building of schools and an aid post, and keeping villages clean and the pigs fenced in. Some useful educational tools had been developed and two wildlife management areas comprising 82,000 hectares had been determined and were set to be dedicated (Hershey 2000: 35, 39, 45, 55, 63, 67, 83, 85, 91, 103).

Many of the recommendations were therefore to pursue and develop existing practices. There were two other categories of recommendations - those that were not adopted by the BRG, and those that were. On the contentious issues the review team called for a more clearly structured management, a full-time experienced finance officer, and full day discussions on finance matters (Hershey 2000: 19-25). BRG decided to more cautiously adapt its management structure, to train up its own finance officer and to keep finance discussions out of the wider group process (Chitoo 2003b). The group agreed to recommendations concerning clarifying policies, procedures and job descriptions, report writing training for its workers, discussions over workers privacy, greater gender equity in employment and in village participation, and joint briefings and debriefings (Hershey 2000: 21-31)

The June 2002 evaluation was to review BRG's "development since the 2000 evaluation", and in particular to look at the organisational structure, their system of checks and balances, and their new initiatives - mainly campaigns and training (Eagles and Jones 2002: 2). The reviewers, Julie Eagles and Gordon Jones, were both expatriate workers with experience in Melanesia. They were "impressed" with progress since 2000, in particular the development of a "well managed" finance system and the functioning of an "adequate" internal board. Their major suggestions were to do with the "prioritization" of goals and work areas as well as some more systematic internal procedures (Eagles and Jones 2002: 6). They proposed the revisiting of BRG's goal and vision, to help it deal with tensions between community development work and the emerging campaigns, and called for clarified and written guidelines for workers' roles, CPI indexed salaries, more attention to gender balance in management, and regular appraisals of positions (Eagles and Jones 2002: 10-16). On revising group aims and the new initiatives, they supported the campaigns (while saying that the group should "not take the lead .. but act as a resource and support"), argued for greater integration of the various component activities (eg. the education campaign), for limiting the breadth and increasing the depth of community work and reviewing the group's exit strategies from communities (Eagles and Jones 2002: 23-24). Most of these recommendations seem to have been taken very seriously. For example, individual worker appraisals, and in-depth discussions on community exit strategies were taking place in late 2003, when this writer made his second visit to the BRG.

On the regular suggestions for greater structure, the BRG has also responded, but in a typically slow and careful way. John Chitoo notes the implicit criticism of too much emphasis on process:

"We've had some new people come in basically to try and put in some structure into our work, because we have been very much a process oriented organisation, so we need some structure to basically help us, some structures and systems to hold things together." (Chitoo 2003b)

The most obvious sign of this change has been the hiring of Yanny Guman, a gentle and thoughtful Highlands man, with considerable experience in organised volunteer and community groups within PNG. Yanny was immediately made CO-coordinator, along with John. However it is probably fair to say that, after a year, there have been no management revolutions. Yanny acts rather as an involved but also reflective team member. He describes his background as "very structured and very systematic, kind of bureaucratic". However he has not pushed bureaucracy onto the group. Any organisational changes are certain to be discussed in depth before they are implemented.

"BRG is an indigenous organisation - it tries to build its own structures and platform on traditional values and systems and flexibility - our own systems - so we don't kind of want to override those roots ... BRG's also learning but it's become like a model for other indigenous organisations ... other local NGOs are coming in to learn ... some of the concepts so they can integrate [them] into their own activities." (Guman 2003b)

Yanny also points out, as a sign of BRG learning and change, that the steps for community entry (a highly structured model) have been modified and reduced in the past year or so.

8. Lessons from the BRG

I want to suggest that there are four broad lessons we can draw from the BRG and its approach to community development and conservation. The first two - the self-reliant model and indigenous community empowerment - have greatest direct relevance to indigenous communities and developing countries. The second two - the challenge to 'desocialised' conservation and certain elements of group process - have much wider relevance.

It would be possible to link aspects of several of these lessons to the concept of 'social capital', following de Renzio and Kavanamur, who applied this notion to the wantok system and the 'bigman' phenomenon in PNG (de Renzio and Kavanamur 1999). There is a great deal of trust, relationship and institution building in the processes I have been describing. However I don't find this a helpful exercise, as too much is lost by the conceptual aggregation of 'social capital'. The immediate task would then be to distinguish several types of relationship, trust and institution building, and to further distinguish the different social groups involved. In my view, if social capital has use as a concept in this context, it is after it has been disaggregated and linked to distinct social interests. I do not intend to use it here.

8.1 The self-reliant model

BRG's promotion of self-reliant strategies could have direct relevance to many indigenous communities, and developing countries. The approach appears quite successful, in some areas of Madang Province - and the BRG is committed to its work remaining in this region. But how widely applicable is the model? The BRG 'model' could be summed up as: firstly, developing indigenous partnerships with villager-landowners; secondly, assisting villager-landowners to develop self-reliant strategies based on customary land tenure; and, finally, assisting villager-landowners in community planing, including resource management and conservation options.

Plainly enough, this approach relies upon villagers having recognised title to their land, and land that is rich enough to support their communities in most of their basic needs, and certainly as regards food and housing. This is not the case in many indigenous communities and developing countries, in post-colonial areas, where dispossession and marginalisation are widespread. However in PNG almost all people have kinship access to some customary title, most land is highly productive and only in some areas (particularly in some crowded islands) are there serious resource constraints and overcrowding. Ninety-seven percent of the country's land is held under collective and inalienable customary title. This title is legally secure, so long as resistance is maintained against the big investors groups (led by the World Bank) that are relentless in their campaigns to register and then commodify land title.

However even in the Madang Region, Flip Van Helden has raised questions about possible partisanship in BRG activities. He argues that the organising successes in Faroku and Sepu were due to BRG organisers offering a voice to Upper Ramu clans against the encroaching Jimi migrant community, from the Highlands. He suggests the BRG may have discovered a "fragile middle ground" between the competing interests of two communities:

"These clans realised that a conservation arrangement could help them assert their rights as land owners in the face of Jimi migration and competing claims within the floodplains" (Van Helden 2001: 321, 368)

Barry Lalley says that the BRG "talked at length" about this possibility but, in the event, the Jimi settlers unexpectedly supported the Upper Ramu clans' conservation areas, as a hedge against further settlers in the area (Lalley 2003b). That still leaves open - as a matter for judgement in other particular situations - the question of whether the BRG approach would aid one group of landowners against another dispossessed, migrant or landless group.

The self-reliant model is therefore contingent on a region where there is secure title to productive land, and is subject to some competitive pressures. It addresses the other end of the spectrum to liberal "employment building" policies, which demand intensified investment, commodification, and which typically fail in regions with large informal and subsistence sectors - often mainly adding to landlessness and poverty (Mazoyer 2001). But the self-reliant approach is also a survival technique, which does not set itself up as universal model. Yanny

Guman says the BRG approach simply "fills a gap" between very limited government services, church charities and other community developments (Guman 2003b). John Chitoo is similarly modest in his claims for the model. He says BRG is working in its area of strength, which is "on the ground":

"Our strength is on the ground, to basically help organise local communities .. but we are [also] thrown into being a national NGO and ... into international issues as well. But basically we know that we cannot lose sight of where our strength is... on the ground, that's where the power is – with the people, and we think that's where we can do good work. (Chitoo 2003b)

8.2 Indigenous community empowerment

The BRG approach to indigenous community empowerment seems to be a broader theme, with broader relevance. It also links to traditional community practices, but is also a 'Melanesian synthesis' of international influences with those traditional practices. Structured facilitation processes seem to have been valuable, particularly in a context where a wide range of outside industries, including the aid industry, have been disempowering and failing local communities. International bodies such as the World Bank, while refusing to accept their own responsibilities, have blamed the failure of development models in PNG largely on local people and cultural practices such as parochial politics - ie. wantok based electoral systems and the bigman system (Rohland 2002). Such attacks, if taken seriously, serve to further disempower local people. They amount to an argument that there is no value in one's own culture and history, and cultural heritage (while it may be a nice decoration) is basically an obstacle. Real development involves abandoning traditions and adopting the profit maximising culture. Yet the failure of export oriented strategies to translate into broad community benefits has most to do with the failure of this profit-maximising, liberal model of development, in developing countries (Anderson 2003).

On the other hand, the BRG approach of disciplined facilitation, refusing to make ultimate decisions for communities and encouraging them with a 'you can do it' message, seems well appreciated. Poin Caspar says he notices the effect on communities during facilitation meetings:

"When we take them through the process they feel empowered, at the same time they feel motivated [over] the issues which they themselves identify ... people seem to realise that it's within [them] already ... So when BRG goes in to communities ... it rings a bell in the minds of the people and from that they just pick up and go... they do it themselves." (Caspar 2003)

Barry Lalley confirms this, observing that one community, being polite people and feeling inadequate, had just not realised that telling a big logging company to go away was an option:

"one of the communities asked us to save them from the logging company - they told them to get out - they [hadn't] realised that was an option - let people know they do have rights and they can say no - pretty exciting stuff." (Lalley 2003a)

This is an issue which goes well beyond Papua New Guinea, and even beyond indigenous communities and developing countries - though it has particular relevance to the imposed inferiority complexes of post-colonial societies. Powerful ideological forces lead people to believe that they have no voice and no real ability to oppose great and powerful interests. Community development thinking has challenged this, and the BRG synthesis offers some inspiration. Small communities can 'own' the processes and outcomes in their own communities. This is real self-determination, and political and economic democracy.

Outside groups, such as aid organisations, should take notice. 'Giving' to communities has its dangers, as it is very easy to engender dependence:

"I'm not saying leave that little child hungry, but ... if we begin to give them food and give them food they become dependent and that's what happened here – there's a colonisation of the mind that Bismarck Ramu is

trying to break down. They're saying you can do it, you can do this stuff – doesn't mean we're trying to cut ourselves off from the outsiders – start believing in yourself and when you start believing in yourself you can engage that outside world on a much more equal basis." (Lalley 2003c)

The BRG approach to indigenous community empowerment been one of organised facilitation, and helping communities make their own ultimate decisions over the form of community organisation, development and conservation. Even when this is at odds with the corporate development model - and perhaps because of that fact - their own committed decisions may well prove successful.

8.3 Challenging 'desocialised' conservation

It is the logical other side to 'ownership' of a development or conservation project that imposed projects are highly vulnerable. While this may be recognised in theory (and local 'ownership' or at least participation is sometimes made a required feature of newly imposed projects), the BRG have experienced and demonstrated both the failure of imposed conservation projects, and the success of those generated by traditional communities. This gives them a powerful position from which to criticise conservation projects and processes which are cut off from traditional communities. Such 'desocialised' conservation consumes enormous resources and is vulnerable in the face of competing corporate interests. The BRG critique began from their own experience with ICADs (integrated conservation and development projects), but now extends to a wide range of community as well as conservation projects. Simply put, 'outside projects' rarely work:

"Outside projects come in with a perceived agenda - when people are actually involved in the decision making there is a high probability of the projects becoming successful. But outside projects with little involvement, generally the projects fails. People believe that (outside delivery) will continue - if not, it's your problem ... Outside projects - will always disempower local people" (Guman 2003a)

There is a lesson here for western conservation groups. Traditional communities have a wealth of ecological management resources, and protected area proposals which attempt to bypass these communities and their stores of knowledge, and simply focus on 'biodiversity', do so at their peril. As well as failing in nature conservation, such projects may often offend and damage the interests of local communities. The most obvious example of these bypassing strategies is the 'engagement' of some international conservation groups with mining companies and banks, against the interests of indigenous communities. On the other hand, new possibilities for nature conservation could be looked for in partnerships with these communities. The lesson here is that conservation must be seen as an enduring custodianship issue, and not a desocialised process.

8.4 Group process

Finally, some features of the BRG's internal processes would be of interest to a wide range of other groups. Like the indigenous community empowerment, this is probably best understood as a 'Melanesian synthesis'. It introduces the value placed on relationship building, traditionally built up in kinship systems, into a structured social organisation. The result is a group which does not ignore goals, but stresses process; and a group which actively organises exhaustive opportunities for collective participation in group plans and evaluation. Very few groups anywhere, to my knowledge, meet for one week to evaluate the past three weeks work. Very few listen with such intense respect, and allow long silences so that no opportunity to engage is denied, and in case a new viewpoint may emerge. This approach challenges widespread notions of efficiency. Yet the BRG is quite a dynamic organisation, and its current problems have a lot to do with the proliferation of activities and additional demands on their time. Other

groups might consider reflecting on their own internal processes, with the BRG experience in mind.

Tim Anderson
April 2004

Appendix 1: Aims/objectives of BRG, Madang [2003, original version 1997]

1. Strengthen people's thinking about protecting and controlling their land
 2. Assist communities to organise themselves.
 3. Rid people of cargo thinking and assist them in being self reliant.
 4. Strengthen good cultural values
 5. Help people recognise the strength and value of women.
 6. Share thoughts, discuss and assist people in their thinking about development and development issues.
 7. Help people recognise two systems are in place (western and traditional) and these system are often not compatible.
 8. Explain the negative impacts of large scale development and the tricks used by companies.
 9. Work closely with schools and churches to strengthen their thinking about the importance of land.
 10. Establish a core group of community organisers and a core group of trainers who can train people working in communities.
- BRG (2003b)

Appendix 2: 'BRG guidelines', Madang [2003, original version 1999]

1. BRG must remain small and focussed in its work of assisting communities to protect and control their land.
 2. BRG does not seek to grow much beyond its present size. It seeks to minimise bureaucracy channeling most of the funds it receives to the field operations rather than the administration.
 3. BRG does not seek to build an institution.
 4. Most of BRG's work will be concentrated in the Madang Province.
 5. BRG must not overextend itself in its work. It must know its limits, be comfortable with them and say "no" when it has to be said.
 6. BRG provides training as part of its work. These trainings are conducted with communities as well as organisations, groups and individuals who work with communities throughout PNG.
 7. BRG will network with other people and organisations, however the networking must come about naturally - not done just for the sake of networking nor dictated by donor agencies.
 8. BRG does not seek to promote itself via media stories, brochures, pamphlets etc. BRG seeks to continue its work in a low profile manner.
 9. BRG will continue to invest much time and resources on personal and professional development of BERG personnel. BRG members are expected to maintain a high standard of professional performance and personal behaviour.
 10. The majority of BRG field workers are based in their villages. BRG respects the need for their workers to remain connected to their villages. As such none of the field workers are full time employees. Between patrols (and or other work) BRG field workers have breaks between two and five weeks.
 11. BRG cannot and will not compete with other organisations when it comes to salaries, allowances and benefits for BRG members. BRG will compensate its members fairly for work performed and take care of medical needs during BRG work time.
- BRG (2003b)

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