



# TREE KANGAROO CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Papua New Guinea



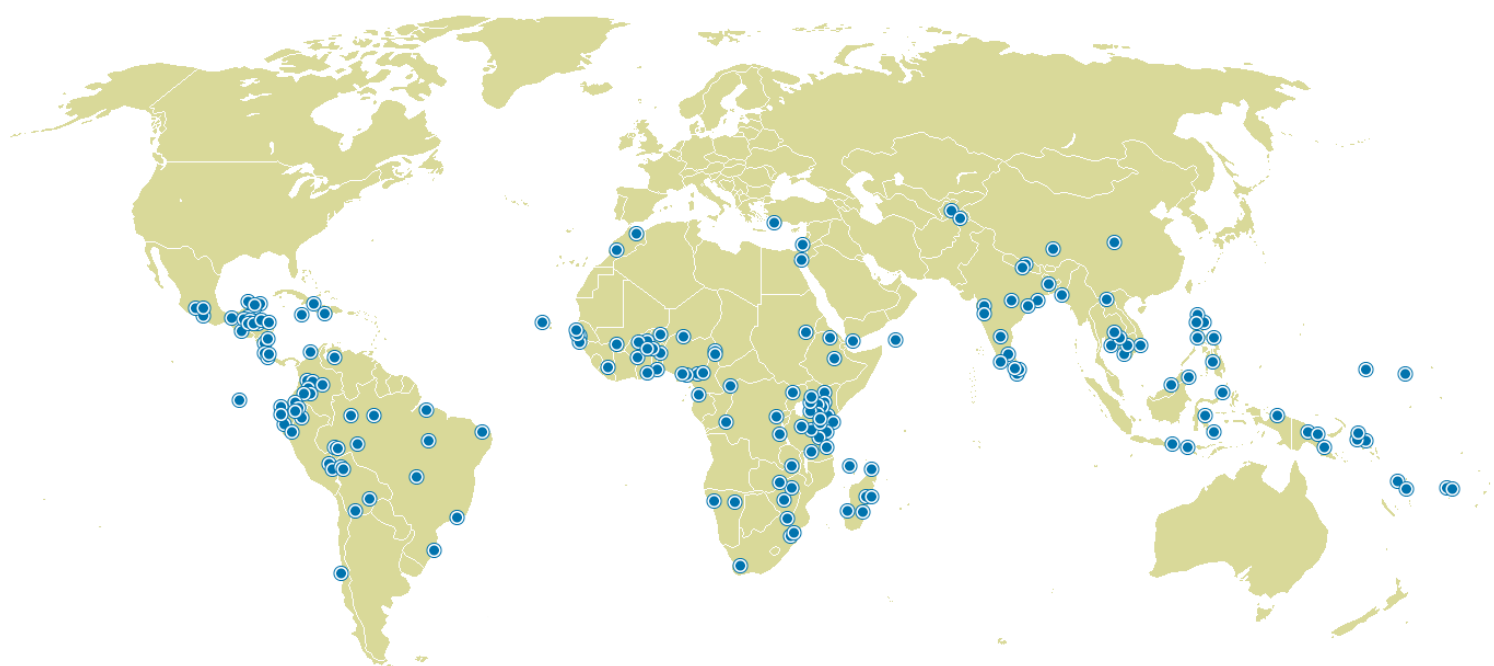
## Equator Initiative Case Studies

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Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative. The Equator Initiative aims to fill that gap.

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program manages a community conservation area and locally-owned forest, the first of its kind in Papua New Guinea. The locally-driven initiative undertakes a range of activities to protect the watershed and provide the local population with sustainable livelihoods. The conservation area covers 78,729 hectares of habitat, protecting endemic and endangered wildlife species, including the Huon tree kangaroo. The organization has partnered with the private sector and the government on a conservation livelihoods program and a coffee harvesting project, which has brought in more than US\$75,000 for local farmers and their families. Farmers use this additional income to pay for their children's school fees, family health expenses, and basic household necessities. The initiative represents a unique model of community mobilization and leadership, and is the first time that the diverse indigenous communities involved in the initiative have come together to advance a shared conservation and sustainable livelihoods agenda.

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## KEY FACTS

EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2014

FOUNDED: 1996

LOCATION: Huon Peninsula, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea

BENEFICIARIES: 12,000 people

AREA OF FOCUS: Community-based conservation and livelihoods development





# Background and Context



## *A cultural and biodiversity hotspot*

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a cultural and biodiversity hotspot. It has nearly 1,000 indigenous tribal groups who speak more than 850 different languages, accounting for nearly 12 percent of all existing languages on earth. Despite its relatively small land area, Papua New Guinea is estimated to contain between five and ten percent of all floral and faunal diversity in the world. The country's ecosystems include rich coral reef systems, mangroves, tropical littoral forests, lowland rainforests, swamp forests, lowland montane forests, grassy savannas, cloud forests, and heath lands. Altitudinally, its terrain rises from sea level to more than 4,000 metres, with its highest peaks representing some of the few equatorial mountains to receive snow. The country harbors between 15,000 and 25,000 species of plants, many endemic to the island nation. Papua New Guinea's flora includes diverse tropical species, including remnants of Antarctic flora from the supercontinent Gondwana. The country is particularly notable as an orchid biodiversity hotspot. PNG has exceptional bird, insect, amphibian, and reptile

diversity. Charismatic flagship species include birds-of-paradise (Paradisaeidae) and Huon tree kangaroos (*Dendrolagus matschiei*). The country's rugged, mountainous, poorly-explored interior is thought to harbor uncontacted tribal groups as well as flora and fauna undocumented by science.

PNG is rich in natural resources, most notably timber, minerals, and natural gas. However, much of the country's wealth is unevenly distributed. With nearly 85 percent of the population living in remote, rural areas, the government struggles to provide its citizens with basic services. PNG ranks 156th out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, with nearly 40 percent of its population living in poverty. Access to education and health care is limited. 25 percent of children do not attend school, adult literacy is 50 percent, infant mortality is high, and childhood malnutrition is rampant.

## *The Huon Peninsula and the YUS landscape*

The Huon Peninsula in northeastern Papua New Guinea is a rugged piece of land that juts into the Bismarck Sea. It lies 350 kilometres north of PNG's capital, Port Moresby, and its interior is only accessible by foot or airplane. The peninsula's land cover types include grasslands, lowland rainforest, montane rainforest, and alpine grasslands. The area spans PNG's most extreme elevations, from sea level to mountains of 4,000 metres.

The YUS landscape – named for the Yopno, Uruwa, and Som rivers originating in the Saruwaged Mountains – is located in the northeastern section of the Huon Peninsula and covers 158,271 hectares. The YUS landscape is home to at least 13 endangered or threatened terrestrial animals, including the endemic, near-threatened emperor bird-of-paradise (*Paradisaea guilielmi*), the endemic, endangered Huon tree kangaroo (*Dendrolagus matschiei*), and the critically endangered eastern long-beaked echidna (*Zaglossus bartoni*). Threatened and endangered marine species include four species of turtle and the vulnerable dugong (*Dugong dugon*).





The YUS landscape has a low population density – about 6.2 people per square kilometre – and its 50 villages occupy only about six percent of the total land area. Nearly 70 percent of the landscape is covered by an unbroken tract of rainforest. Residents of the YUS landscape speak seven local languages and dialects, in addition to Tok Pisin and English. More than 95 percent of land in PNG is owned by indigenous people, and the YUS is no exception – nearly all land in the YUS landscape is customarily owned by local clans. The main economic activity in the YUS region is farming. The most important crops are coffee (*Coffea* spp.), cacao (*Theobroma cacao*), betel nut (*Areca catechu*), and copra (*Cocos nucifera*). Livestock and food crops are grown on a subsistence basis and are supplemented by fishing and hunting.

### *Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program: Origins and organizational structure*

In 1996, researchers from the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, USA, traveled to the YUS landscape to study the biology and ecology of the Huon tree kangaroo. Recognizing the critical role of local communities in conserving tree kangaroo populations and the habitats they rely upon, researchers began to develop partnerships with local landowners. Over the years, researcher efforts and landowner pledges of land to form a community conservation area created three initiatives – the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program (TKCP), the YUS Conservation Organisation, and the YUS Conservation Area Management Committee. These three groups work in concert to promote conservation and livelihoods development across the YUS Conservation Area.

The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program is a partnership between the Woodland Park Zoo TKCP and TKCP-PNG, a local nongovernmental organization in Papua New Guinea. Today, the Tree Kangaroo

Conservation Program has 26 staff, 20 of whom are local landowners. Staff positions include a program manager, a conservation strategies manager, a community services and livelihoods manager, a leadership training and outreach senior coordinator, a research and monitoring coordinator, a healthy community coordinator, an administrative coordinator, four conservation officers, two mapping officers, and 13 YUS rangers. Overseen by a board of directors, TKCP-PNG manages all day-to-day activities relating to research, community outreach, mapping, land-use planning, livelihoods, health, education, and leadership.

The YUS Conservation Organisation (YUS CO), comprised of 21 landowner representatives, serves as an advisory board to ensure community voices are represented in TKCP. YUS CO provides communities with opportunities to advise on and participate in programs across the YUS landscape, as well as to leverage technical and financial support for development and conservation within local communities.

A third body, the YUS Conservation Area Management Committee (YUS CAMC), was established upon gazettal of the YUS Conservation Area in accordance with the requirements of the PNG Conservation Areas Act. Voting members of this body include three members from the YUS Conservation Organisation, a representative from TKCP, and government representatives from the national, district, provincial, and local levels. YUS CAMC provides long-term strategic planning and overall management for the YUS Conservation Area.

Together TKCP, YUS CO, and YUS CAMC provide integrated services to ensure that conservation and development needs of communities are addressed with the full inclusion of local stakeholders in the Huon Peninsula.





# Key Activities and Innovations



## *Establishment of the YUS Conservation Area*

The Huon tree kangaroo is the flagship species for the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program. In addition to other mammals and birds, the animal is locally hunted as bushmeat. Rather than approach this issue by attempting to ban the hunting of the Huon tree kangaroo and other animals within the YUS landscape – which would be culturally insensitive and doomed to failure – TKCP has worked with local clans to form a community-based conservation area to protect tree kangaroo habitat. TKCP has adopted a holistic approach to conservation, offering local communities access to coffee and cacao markets as well as better health care and education to incentivize support for the conservation area. Clans that pledged parcels of land to the conservation area agreed to designate certain areas as off-limits to hunting (*tumbu*). These no-hunting areas quickly became ‘wildlife banks’ where species found refuge to reproduce and thrive, eventually repopulating areas where hunting is allowed. After more than a decade and a half of work with local communities in the YUS landscape and local and national authorities, TKCP’s efforts led to the formal gazettement of the YUS Conservation Area, totaling 78,729 hectares, in 2009. Two years later, TKCP was able to collect baseline ecological and socioeconomic information in order to formalize a data-based management plan for the YUS Conservation Area.

The YUS Conservation Area is the only community conserved area in Papua New Guinea gazetted under the 1978 Conservation Areas Act. This designation allows customary landowners to retain ownership and control of the area, while also providing national-level recognition and protection. Because almost all lands in PNG are owned by local communities, the significance of the YUS Conservation Area to the future of biodiversity conservation efforts in Papua New Guinea cannot be overstated. TKCP is currently involved in a five-year plan to strengthen management effectiveness in the YUS landscape. This pilot project will distill lessons learned and best practices for community protected areas, acting as a model for replication of community-based conservation in PNG. The eventual goal of the

project is to gazette the YUS Conservation Area at a landscape level and effectively double its size to 160,000 hectares.

## *Mapping and land-use planning*

Mapping and land-use planning are critical to the success of the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program. Mapping has given YUS residents a better understanding of clan land claims and conservation area boundaries, thereby reinforcing the value of clan land pledges to the conservation area. Mapping has furthermore enabled communities to identify agricultural areas, riparian areas, and sites slated for restoration. It has also provided clans with a way to come together to agree upon which forests should be used for hunting and which forests should be declared off limits to hunting. The land-use planning exercises give communities the tools to balance





development with environment protection. YUS communities are now using maps to develop monitoring plans to measure program progress and conservation impact.

### *Ecological research and community ranger program*

The main thrust of ecological research in the YUS Conservation Area is directed towards the Huon tree kangaroo – specifically efforts to better understand the animal's biology and ecology. Researchers have established transects to study the Huon tree kangaroo populations at various altitudinal gradients across its range. Recently, two adult tree kangaroos were fitted with National Geographic 'crittercam' video collars to help researchers better understand feeding behavior and daytime activities. Samples of plants shown to be favored foods are currently being examined for nutritional content. TKCP also partners with other research institutions and encourages them to use the YUS Conservation Area as a living laboratory. Recent projects include documentation of the songs of birds throughout the YUS Conservation Area

TKCP involves local communities in ecological research through a ranger program that currently employs 13 local community rangers. Each ranger is a local landowner nominated to the post by their communities. By engaging local communities in selecting rangers, the project is able to reinforce community support for the conservation area. Rangers receive training in species identification, tracking, and research methods. The rangers spend one week per month patrolling and monitoring the landscape, recording the presence or absence of key species previously selected for research by the communities themselves. This data is consistently maintained in the YUS Conservation Area record book. Rangers also educate residents about the conservation area boundaries and its rules and check for violations. The ranger program serves as an innovative approach to long-term sustainability in the region by integrating traditional ecological knowledge and modern scientific methods to assess ecosystem health.



*“I have seen evidence of tree kangaroos, cassowaries, and lots of possums, and I am happy that my Sapun Clan made the right decision to pledge land to the YUS Conservation Area.”*

*Fifu Kuyo, Saburong Village resident*



# Impacts



## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

### *Species conservation*

The YUS Conservation Area serves as an important site to protect the endangered, endemic Huon tree kangaroo. Additional species protected by the conservation area include the vulnerable New Guinea pademelon (*Thylogale browni*), the near-threatened small dorcopsis (*Dorcopsulus vanheurni*), the dwarf cassowary (*Casuarius bennetti*), and five endemic bird species. Ongoing research and monitoring in the YUS Conservation Area is yielding important information that will advance efforts to conserve and manage PNG flora and fauna. Surveys within the YUS landscape continue to find unrecorded species, indicating the need for further research within the YUS landscape and in other regions of the country. YUS residents report seeing greater numbers of tree kangaroos and other birds and mammals since the establishment of the conservation area. The increase in populations of local fauna is a cause of local pride and has increased support for the conservation area.

### *Carbon sequestration and maintenance of ecosystem services*

TKCP has created one of the largest forest carbon datasets in the region. Transect data suggest that the YUS Conservation Area stores 44.6 million tons of carbon, the equivalent of 163.6 million tons of carbon dioxide. In addition to sequestering and storing carbon, forest ecosystems in the YUS Conservation Area maintain a number of ecosystem services that are vital to the well-being of local communities. These services include the provisioning of wild game, fresh water, and non-timber forest products including food, construction materials, medicinal plants, and ornaments. The intact forests of the YUS landscape also play important roles in mitigating flood events and improving connectivity to other ecosystems, thereby bolstering ecological resilience.

### *Protecting marine ecosystems*

TKCP is attempting to replicate its terrestrial conservation programs in order to protect marine ecosystems in the Huon Peninsula. The organization is currently undertaking a marine biodiversity survey of the coastal areas in the YUS landscape. Discussions with local communities have identified turtles and dugongs as priority species for conservation and plans for implementing a community-based monitoring program are underway. As a first step, local communities have pledged to discontinue destructive fishing practices and have placed signage to identify sensitive reefs and turtle nesting sites.

## SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

### *TKCP's livelihoods initiative*

The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program's livelihoods initiative provides income for local farmers and builds support for the YUS Conservation Area. The livelihoods initiative focuses on linking local coffee and cacao farmers with export markets. In 2011, TKCP helped farmers in the Uruwa Zone export their coffee beans to Caffé Vita, a United States-based coffee roaster committed to sourcing socially and environmentally responsible coffee. The Coffee Industry Corporation of Papua New Guinea provided technical training to local farmers in coffee husbandry and post-production management, greatly improving coffee quality and yields.

Coffee is shade-grown in existing family gardens together with native trees and other food crops, thereby mitigating pressures to clear existing forests. Pilot coffee farms have since expanded to the Yopno and Som zones. This is particularly significant because the livelihoods initiative participants must pledge to support the YUS Conservation Area and abide by its bylaws. The coffee project enhances habitat and wildlife protection while simultaneously providing local farmers a source of income that can be invested in education, health care, and community development.



The 2015 coffee harvest totaled six tons, more than doubling the 2014 harvest. Since its inception, the coffee initiative has helped farmers export nearly 14 tons of coffee, worth more than 190,000 kina (US\$75,000). The connection to Caffé Vita provides farmers with a premium price. This integrated approach to optimizing supply and building connections to international markets provides a powerful model for increasing local income. The project has enabled participating farmers to earn 80,000 kina (US\$30,000) more than they would have made selling their beans in local markets.

TKCP is attempting to replicate the success of the coffee project among cacao farmers in the coastal areas of the Huon Peninsula. In 2014, TKCP helped farmers sell 375 kilograms of cacao to a chocolate company based in the capital, Port Moresby. TKCP is working with the Papua New Guinea Cocoa Board and chocolatiers to improve the quality and flavor of the cacao and to identify new markets. TKCP is facilitating the establishment of the YUS Conservation Coffee and Cocoa Cooperative, an organization dedicated to strengthening the management and marketing of the two crops.

### *Improving local education*

There are 34 elementary schools and 13 primary schools in the YUS area. After grade eight, students must move to urban areas to finish high school. Since 2003, TKCP has directed a scholarship program to send local students to teacher's colleges in order to fill teacher vacancies in the YUS area. To date, 24 YUS students have qualified as teachers and returned to the area to build local capacity and educate the next generation of YUS leaders. In 2015, TKCP transferred management of the scholarship program to the YUS Conservation Organisation. In addition to training local teachers, TKCP has also implemented a 'Junior Rangers' program to promote engagement of youth in local conservation efforts. The program's aims are to increase environmental knowledge and awareness, preserve traditional ecological knowledge, and create future environmental leaders.

### *Improving community health*

Over the past three years, TKCP has implemented a project entitled 'Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development' (BALANCED) to provide communities with greater access to health information and services. This work includes training of youth and adults on 'Population, Health, and Environment' (PHE), an approach which emphasizes how healthy environments are integral to healthy communities. Trainings have been given in 40 villages, producing more than 200 youth and peer educators who are able to educate their communities on environmental stewardship, safe sex, STIs, gender issues, and pre- and post-natal care, among other issues. These peer educators have created culturally appropriate PHE messages and materials to distribute in their communities and have established networks to sustain mutual learning. Peer educators are also working with 'mama groups' to provide women with information about reproductive health, family planning, and child care. In addition to creating peer educators and education materials, the health initiative has distributed four solar refrigerators to insure that communities have access to vaccines to immunize infants and mothers. The program also supports village birth attendants and has distributed more than 60 solar lights that can be used during medical emergencies.

Heri Yawa, a trained peer educator and midwife, has seen great demand for health education in her community. Says Yawa, "I've built a little house that I can use to attend to clients. I have more clients and I need a more appropriate place to discuss private issues. I need basic items for the house like a bed, PHE pamphlets, and other midwife supplies. The house is situated next to a pathway crossing, just where I want it so that when people are walking to their villages, they will see the house and come in for a chat."

## GENDER IMPACTS

Human Rights Watch describes Papua New Guinea as 'one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman'. It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of women in Papua New Guinea experience rape or assault in their lifetime. Given the pervasive gender-based violence in the country, efforts to promote gender equality in Papua New Guinea are extremely challenging.

The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program believes that women's participation in all aspects of the initiative is vital for the long-term sustainability of the YUS Conservation Area. TKCP is continuously sensitizing men to the concept of gender equality at local community meetings. Women are encouraged to participate in TKCP activities and to express their needs and opinions through 'mama groups'. Each zone in the YUS Conservation Area has elected at least one 'mama representative', and the YUS Executive Team and the YUS Conservation Area Management Committee each reserve one seat for a 'mama representative'.

The BALANCED program has improved women's lives by providing women with information about family planning, contraception, birth spacing, sanitation, malaria prevention, and child care. Most significantly, the health and family planning services program has trained women to become peer educators for health and environmental issues. This training is laying the foundation for younger women to play a more active leadership role in the YUS Conservation Area in the future.

## POLICY IMPACTS

Over the next five years, the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program will collaborate with the Government of Papua New Guinea and the United Nations Development Programme to implement the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project, 'Strengthening Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas'. The aim of this project is to contribute to Papua New Guinea's new Protected Areas Policy. TKCP will strengthen local capacity to manage the YUS Conservation Area as well as develop best practices which can be shared with other protected areas across the country. The project will make the YUS Conservation Area a model for future community-based conservation areas in the country. In addition to the organization's contributions to national Protected Areas Policy, TKCP also participates in stakeholder meetings for PNG's national Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) policy.

# Sustainability and Replication



## SUSTAINABILITY

In 2011 the Woodland Park Zoo, with the help of Conservation International's Global Conservation Fund and other donors, established a two million dollar endowment for the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program and the YUS Conservation Area. The endowment supports basic conservation work in the area indefinitely. The four percent capital per annum devoted from the endowment to the initiative generally covers approximately 15 percent of annual operating costs. TKCP continually pursues funding from international organizations, foundations, and private donors.

As the coffee and cacao operations expand, revenue from those operations will continue to go directly to local farmers, providing them with critical resources to enhance their quality of life and develop local enterprises. The livelihoods initiative has fostered community buy-in for conservation programs, which is further bolstered by environmental education efforts, ensuring the social and cultural sustainability of TKCP. Capacity-building to develop local leadership skills is still a high priority to ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

## REPLICATION

The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program has yet to be replicated in Papua New Guinea. However, as the first community-based conservation area in the country the program will serve as a laboratory for testing replicable programmatic elements and policies. The government of Papua New Guinea has recognized TKCP's land-use planning process as a model for engaging communities in conservation efforts and is supportive of having the process replicated in other areas of the country. Based on TKCP activities to date, it is evident that community participation and landowner buy-in for community-based conservation areas is essential for successful replication in Papua New Guinea. TKCP's livelihoods initiative may be replicable in other PNG communities. However, because much

of the country is mountainous and infrastructure is poor, forging connections to export markets will be challenging in other regions of the country. Other aspects of the TKCP project which could be replicated throughout PNG include the BALANCED program and the teacher education scholarship program. Wider promotion and adoption of the BALANCED program could help PNG communities begin to address longstanding issues of gender inequality.

## PARTNERS

The success of the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program and the YUS Conservation Area is made possible by a wide range of national and international partnerships. The initiative's primary partner is the Woodland Park Zoological Society. The Woodland Park Zoological Society provides financial, technical, and infrastructural support, managing grants, sustainability strategies, and long-term fundraising. KfW Entwicklungsbank and the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building, and Nuclear Safety have both provided





critical funds for the establishment of the YUS Conservation Area. Other international partners include:

- **Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme:** Financing for the five-year 'Strengthening Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas' project.
- **UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme:** Financial support for the livelihoods program, development of a marine biodiversity monitoring program, reforestation, and youth awareness programs.
- **Conservation International:** Financial and technical support.
- **Rainforest Trust:** Financial support for the landscape level expansion of the YUS Conservation Area.
- **The Global Conservation Fund:** Financial support for the YUS Conservation Area endowment.
- **IUCN:** Financial support for land-use planning and conservation area management.
- **Zoos Victoria:** Financial support for the livelihoods program and professional development.
- **The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund:** Financial support for local rangers.
- **Vibrant Village Foundation:** Financial support for community health and livelihoods program.
- **Seattle, USA Rotary:** Support for the community health program.
- **James Cook University, Cairns, Australia:** Technical support for ecological monitoring.
- **USAID:** Financial support for community-based health and family planning services programs through the BALANCED project.
- **PATH Philippines:** Support for peer education and community healthcare.
- **Caffé Vita Coffee Roasting Company, USA:** Trade partner for the YUS coffee initiative.

#### Local partners include:

- **The Papua New Guinea Conservation and Environment Protection Authority:** Legal and policy support.
- **Morobe Provincial Government and the YUS and Wasu local governments:** Local services, logistical support, and policy and planning advice.
- **Coffee Industry Corporation of Papua New Guinea:** Technical training to the coffee project.
- **Queen Emma Chocolate Company:** Trade partner for the cacao project.



*“We have always sold 60-kilogram bags of parchment coffee on the local market for a price of 38 to 50 kina. We had to sell many bags in order to earn enough funds for school fees. Some parents had given up. But now with TKCP’s livelihoods project, we are able to receive over 300 kina per 60-kilogram bag of parchment coffee for direct export. We are now able to send our kids to high school and college.”*

*Dono Ogate, Yawan Village Coffee Farmer*

## FURTHER REFERENCE

- Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program Website. Available online [here](#).
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