

Participatory planning for eco-trekking on a potential World Heritage site: the communities of the Kokoda Track

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Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is an approach to data collection in participatory research. In this approach, the researcher is required to acknowledge and appreciate that research participants have the necessary knowledge and skills to be partners in the research process. PRA techniques were used to collect data on the Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea, illuminating the communities' perceptions of eco-trekking and how they could better benefit from it. This case study is an example of the implementation of community-based eco-tourism development and of understanding the multiplicity of forces that support or undermine it

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The Kokoda Track is a trail that runs through the Owen Stanley Range in Papua New Guinea. The 96km track extends north from Owers Corner, about 50km east of the capital, Port Moresby, across rugged terrain to the village of Kokoda in Oro Province. The Kokoda Track was the site of a major World War II battle that was pivotal in repelling invading Japanese troops in 1942 and, as a result, it has become an iconic part of Australia's military history. The track also symbolises the links between Australia and Papua New Guinea, as villagers along the

track provided vital support for Australian soldiers. Walking the Kokoda Track is for many a chance to acknowledge the bravery and character of the soldiers who fought along the track in extremely arduous conditions. Today, the track represents Papua New Guinea's premier land-based tourist attraction, with tour companies organising seven to 10-day treks for tourists—mostly Australians.

In October 2007, the Australian government pledged A\$15.9 million to conserve the Kokoda Track and pursue World Heritage



listing ('Kokoda Trail "to be re-routed"', *The Age*, 1 November 2007) after recommendations by the Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF) and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The push for World Heritage listing is a part of continuing efforts to ensure the sustainability of eco-trekking along the Kokoda. A tentative listing prepared by the Government of Papua New Guinea with WWF was confirmed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in March 2007; however, the outcome is still pending (TRIP Consultants 2007).

In a graphic demonstration of competing resource uses in the region, in November 2007, Australian mining company Frontier Resources Limited announced that it had secured agreements from local resource owners to build a major copper mine within the proposed World Heritage area. The development would require parts of the track to be re-routed around the mine. The Australian government and opposition parties were united in opposing the mine so near to the track and threatened to withdraw the promised conservation funds. In response, a small group purporting to represent the local Koiari landowners threatened to close the track—along with the booming trekking industry it supported—if any government threatened to interfere with its plans to develop the mine ('Kokoda landowners hit out at Aussies', *The Age*, 2 October 2006; Kruger 2007; Pearlman 2007). It subsequently became clear that the mine's management had written many of the public statements of this group and Papua New Guinea elected not to renew Frontier Resources' exploration licence. The company has begun legal action (Nichols 2008).

Exploring participation in community-based eco-tourism

This article builds on previous work that examined the role of tourism intermediaries¹ in remote and isolated areas of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia and suggested participatory planning methodologies as a potential means to more satisfactory outcomes for local tourism stakeholders (Ponting, McDonald and Wearing 2005; Wearing and McDonald 2002). The Kokoda case exposes the need for an eco-tourism development process that facilitates a two-way exchange of information and gives parity to divergent cultural perspectives. This analysis presents use of such a participatory process in reconciling the wants and needs of Australian trekking companies and 14 individual and independent village communities, regulatory authorities, non-governmental organisations and churches along the Kokoda Track.

The objective of the article is to demonstrate that given facilitated opportunities, communities can coordinate mechanisms to develop industries that work for them. Unless communities are given this opportunity, there is likely to be failure early in the process. The specific circumstances of this case offered the opportunity to use a combination of approaches taken from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques and a range of innovative communication tools, such as an 'awareness patrol'.² The community-based eco-tourism model being pursued along the Kokoda suggests a symbiotic relationship in which the tourist is not given central priority but becomes an equal part of the system. It looks at the training and education necessary to create a workable environment for the communities and tourism, with a focus on the sustainability of eco-trekking for the future of the Kokoda communities. When combined with par-



ticipatory approaches, it provides practice that can engage and empower stakeholders. Particularly for community-based actors, it can offer a voice in the process and the chance of defining goals and ways of operating that align with local perspectives and cultures.

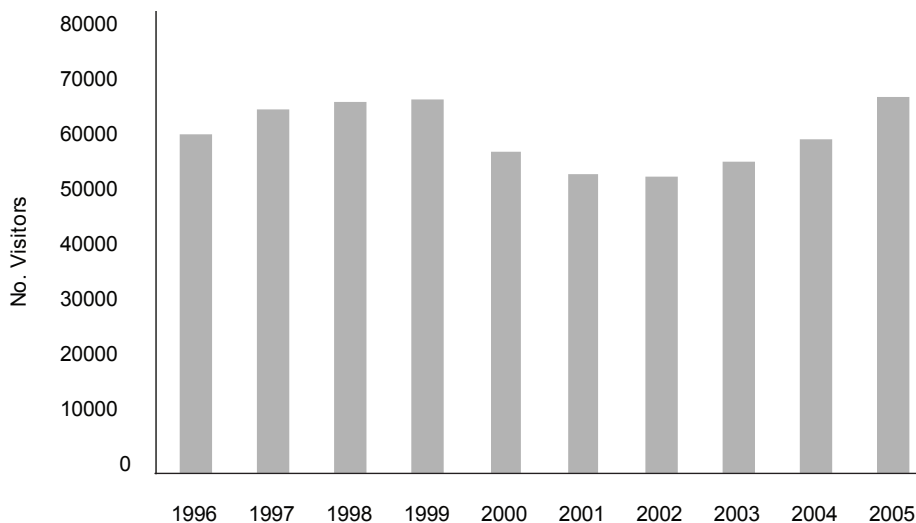
This article looks at the development of an eco-trekking industry on the Kokoda Track and demonstrates how the use of participatory methods in community-based tourism can align two different 'regimes of truth' (that of the community and of the tourism industry) to establish some compatibility. Here, trekking operators have entered into the world of local communities, bringing with them new Western concepts such as the business of international tourism. This article explores how the decision-making capacity of these communities can be enhanced using tools that reinforce the social organisation of the community.

Tourism and Papua New Guinea

Tourism in Papua New Guinea remains at reduced levels after a rapid decline from a peak of 80,000 international arrivals in 1999 (Figure 1).

The decline in 2000 was triggered by political unrest, perceptions of safety issues for visitors and the costs of travelling to remote destinations. While visitor numbers have increased, it is noteworthy that the number of leisure and recreation tourists (as opposed to business travellers) has yet to recover to 1999 levels (Figure 2). Further, levels of leisure travel to Papua New Guinea are unusually low in the Pacific region—leisure travel in Papua New Guinea's neighbouring Pacific states generally accounts for 80 per cent of international arrivals, while in Papua New Guinea, 2005 figures were 26 per cent (TRIP Consultants and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu 2007).

Figure 1 International visitor arrivals to Papua New Guinea, 1996–2005



Source: National Statistics Office of Papua New Guinea, <http://www.spc.int/prism/country/pg/Stats/Tourism/tourism.htm>



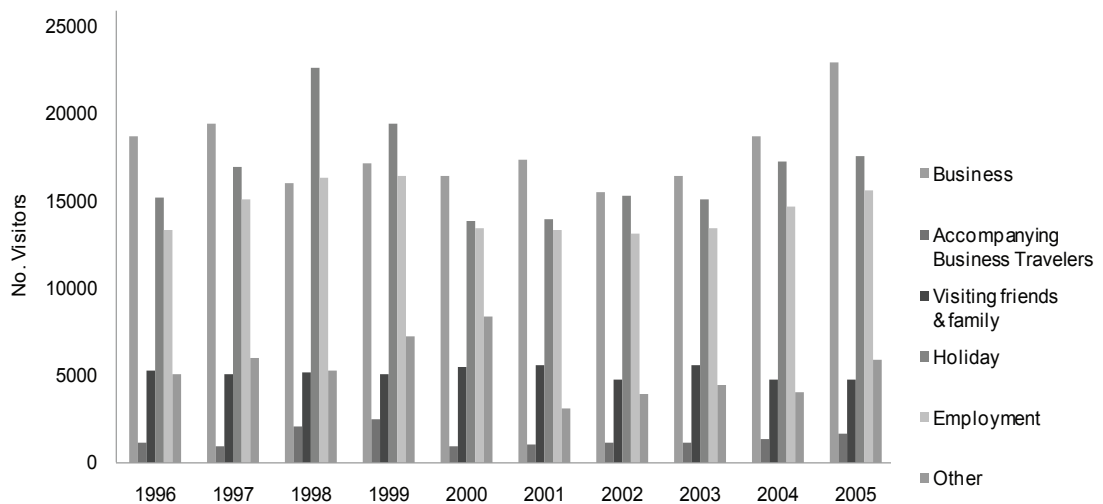
In the past five years, Papua New Guinea's niche markets, such as eco-trekking, have led growth in the leisure-tourism market.

Eco-trekking on the Kokoda Track

Eco-trekking on the Kokoda Track has enjoyed particularly high growth in recent years. The number of trekking permits issued grew from 76 in 2001 to 5,621 in 2008 (Figure 3). So far, 2009 figures are down compared with 2008 figures. This decline could be due to a number of factors including the global financial crisis, a late wet season, the deaths of three young Australian trekkers and a plane crash over Kokoda, which killed 13 people. The Kokoda 'brand' is well established and sets the track apart from other tourism destinations in Papua New

Guinea. The Kokoda Track is a significant tourist attraction, particularly for Papua New Guinea's major leisure source market of Australia. Two recent studies produced the first statistics on trekkers' responses to the Kokoda Track experience (Grabowski 2005, 2007). The reasons given for visiting the Kokoda Track can be summarised (Table 1). The results reveal that most visitors to the Kokoda Track regard themselves as adventurers, keen to take on one of the world's greatest treks for a physical and mental challenge. The fact that Australian and Japanese soldiers fought along the track under such horrifying conditions serves to amplify their sense of achievement. Most trekkers—regardless of the initial reason for the visit—emerge deeply moved by the experience of having walked 'in the footsteps of the brave'.

Figure 2 Papua New Guinea visitor arrivals by purpose of visit, 1996–2005



Source: National Statistics Office of Papua New Guinea, <http://www.spc.int/prism/country/pg/Stats/Tourism/tourism.htm>



World Heritage listing for Kokoda?

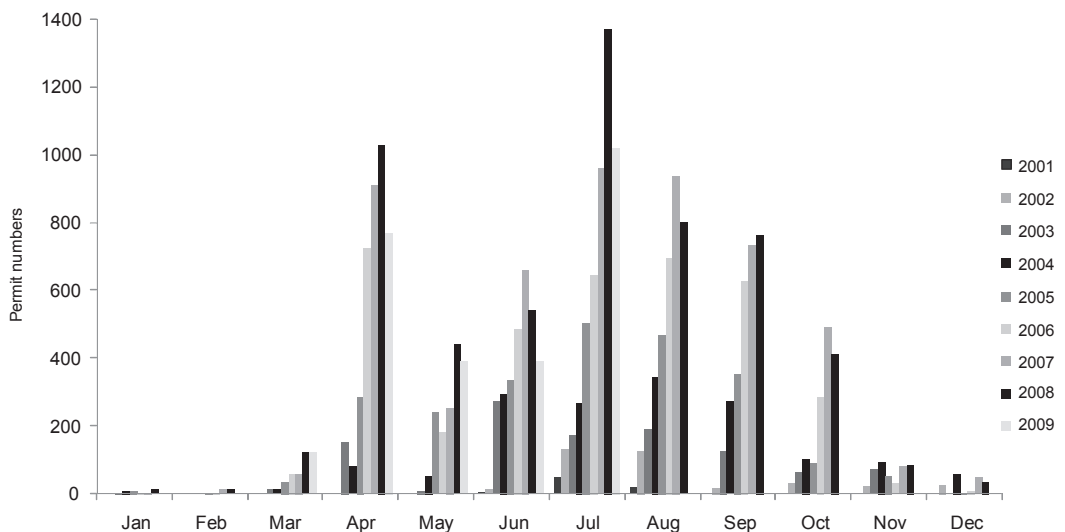
The existing Kokoda Track reserve extends only 10 metres either side of the track. The surrounding environment is under threat from unsustainable logging practices and mining, so groups concerned with natural and cultural heritage conservation are pressing for the protection of a much wider area. The UNESCO World Heritage list is an increasingly sought-after accolade for the world's most valuable natural and cultural assets. It can serve to raise awareness and leverage funding to ensure the conservation of these assets in perpetuity (UNESCO 2007). The Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF),³ the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and WWF are leading the push for the track and 1.5 million hectares of the surrounding Owen

Stanley Ranges to be inscribed on the World Heritage list. Documentation prepared for the nomination of the Kokoda Track for World Heritage status places the outstanding value to all humanity of the track and the surrounding Owen Stanley Ranges in five of the 10 World Heritage selection criteria highlighted in bold font in Table 2.

The bid for World Heritage listing will be based on the following cultural heritage features of the track⁴, the landowning communities who reside along the track and the surrounding natural environment.

- The physical environment contains high levels of biodiversity and unique ecosystems. (The Owen Stanley Ranges alone have the same number of plant species as the entire World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics rainforests of Australia.)

Figure 3 Kokoda trekking permits issued, 2001–09



Sources: Kokoda Track Authority (KTA), 2006. Request for ex-gratia funding for Kokoda Track Authority to the Minister for Inter-Governmental Relations, Kokoda Track Authority, Boroko; Kokoda Track Authority (KTA), 2009. *Newsletter*, (4)(August), Kokoda Track Authority, Boroko.



- The Kokoda Track has cultural military significance as the site of the first battle lost by crack Japanese jungle troops in World War II.
- The area is home to three language groups with cultures and traditions that are unlike any others in the world.
- The ranges are a significant element of the globally outstanding South East Papua Rainforest Eco-Region (WWF 2008).
- Almost two-thirds (510) of New Guinea's birds are found in the region, including 40 endemic or near-endemic species and a range of bird-of-paradise species.

Before the application for World Heritage listing, much work was undertaken with landholding communities to empower them to participate in decisions concerning the management of their resources. The next section outlines a key planning methodology in this process.

Participatory planning for ecotrekking development

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) encourages local communities to engage their own knowledge and ideas in the management of their resources. The philosophy of PRA requires the researcher to acknowledge and appreciate that communities have the necessary knowledge and skills to be partners in the research process (Chambers 1983; Rifkin 1996). In this case, the researchers' aim was for the local communities to achieve a state of intersubjectivity: a common and shared understanding of social reality in each community. Reaching intersubjectivity requires a reflexive approach on the part of the researcher(s). It involves challenging one's own (the researcher's) beliefs and perceptions, which stem from a world so different to that of the rural communities'. In other words, participatory research is

Table 1 **Reasons given for visit**

Reason for visit	% of sample
For a physical challenge	78.5
To learn about Australian history	66.6
For your own personal development	44.4
To discover a different culture/environment	25.9
To retrace personal family history	21.5
To learn about PNG culture	15.6
To take a holiday	12.6
To be surrounded by nature	5.9
Other	7.4

Notes: N=136. Respondents could choose up to three of the options.

Source: Grabowski, S., 2007. Ecotrekking: a viable development alternative for the Kokoda Track?, Honours thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.



Table 2 **World Heritage selection criteria (with Kokoda criteria highlighted)**

- A World Heritage site must be deemed
- i. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
 - ii. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design
 - iii. to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation that is living or has disappeared**
 - iv. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape that illustrates a significant stage(s) in human history
 - v. to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use or sea use that is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change**
 - vi. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)**
 - vii. to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance**
 - viii. to be outstanding examples representing major stages of the Earth's history, including the record of life, significant continuing geological processes in the development of landforms or significant geomorphic or physiographic features
 - ix. to be outstanding examples representing significant continuing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals
 - x. to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.**

Sources: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2007. *World Heritage Selection Criteria*, UNESCO, Paris. Available from <http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=146> (accessed 10 November 2007); White, N., 2007. Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges nomination for World Heritage status, Unpublished ms., University of Technology, Sydney.



participatory not only in the sense that the host communities take part in shaping the research (defining standards, symbols and ways of representation and interpretation). It is also participatory in the sense that the researcher himself/herself is very much a part of the studied field. Hence, ways of inquiry and interaction become crucial to the outcome of the study, the key concern of which is establishing mutual trust.

The PRA approach was used to facilitate an understanding of the lifestyles and activities of communities on the Kokoda Track, their expectations of eco-trekking and what changes could be made to enable them to benefit more fully from eco-trekking. This process involved the research participants collecting data with facilitated assistance from the researcher. This approach enables participants to take responsibility and assume accountability for their own knowledge and contributions with a view to enhancing self-confidence, independence and an awareness of each individual's full potential (Bhandari 2003; Campbell 2001; IBRD 1996; IISD 1999; Kent 2005; Maalim 2006; Pretty 1997; Walt and Rifkin 1990). More significantly, it allows the cultural perspectives of the participant to be expressed through the choice of topics, language and symbols.

PRA techniques give participants a set of visual tools to structure their knowledge and experience across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In this case, PRA was used to explore current land uses on the Kokoda Track, to define local visions for how tourism could interact with community activities and landholdings and to investigate future actions that could be taken by the various stakeholders. The tools themselves (such as land-use mapping) highlighted conflicting uses and allowed discussions on these between communities and tourism operators. This in turn helped address fundamental differences in a way

likely to reduce the possibility of conflict in the future.

Any form of community-based ecotourism depends on the support of the local community and access to local accommodation, transport infrastructure, medical services and human resources. PRA was employed to help local communities (via various representatives) make decisions about providing access to such resources for tourist use. It also provided a forum for the development of cooperative and coordinated planning between all the landowning clans along the track. It is essential that villagers take control of this process, as has been noted by West (2008) in a conservation-as-development program at Crater Mountain, Papua New Guinea. The decision-making process about the development of tourism and mining was so complex 'that most outsiders really did not understand the village issues when it came to development' (West 2008:605).

The use of PRA in this case was inclusive of the voices of all Kokoda Track landowners who were incorporated in the process. It is believed that this involvement has overcome some of the problems of working with Papua New Guinea communities identified by van Helden (2001). He finds that social fragmentation can result if it is not recognised that clans or communities are heterogeneous and do not necessarily share commonalities. Stemming from this, individuals will try to capitalise on projects without any concern for the 'common good' and so enhance the possibility of failure of the project.

A regional/track-wide approach to the development of the Kokoda Track is essential given that trekkers traverse the entirety of the track and pass through the tribal lands of 14 different landowning villages. The combination of village awareness patrols and workshops with representatives from a number of villages allowed villagers



to understand each other's needs and to negotiate common approaches to tourism concerns. They also allowed the outsiders to discuss the relative placement of tourism facilities and to comprehend tensions developing between villages—for example, among villages that were on the original Kokoda Track but were subsequently left off the contemporary trekking route. In this process, issues can arise from different levels of resistance, commitment and economic benefit between the participating communities. Despite these challenges, regional coordination is vital to the sustainability of the trekking industry, as it can lead to greater cooperation between stakeholders, it can create economies of scale for marketing and training exercises, ensure the most appropriate sites are selected in terms of minimising impacts from trekking, mobilise more people to become involved in eco-trekking activities and can allow a critical mass of attractions to develop—allowing the region to capture a larger share of the eco-tourism market.

In order to operationalise PRA, the first task was to bring the villagers of the Kokoda Track together. This was achieved via workshops held in the villages of Efogi (28–29 April 2004) and Kokoda (15–16 April 2005). These were part of a series of five workshops that informed the development of an eco-trekking strategy (KTF 2006). The communities were also represented at the other three stakeholder workshops (in Sydney, 8 December 2003; in Port Moresby, 15 June 2004 and 18 July 2006).

The community workshops were of primary importance in engaging communities collectively in the planning process. They brought together clan leaders and other representatives from all track villages. It also provided them with the incentive to develop small businesses as a spin-off from tourism. The main technique used was “social mapping” [also referred to as participatory

resource mapping] to facilitate communication across clans, cultures, languages and education levels’ (KTF 2006:24). Mapping allows participants to record villages and social amenities visually such as roads, schools and health facilities and to draw into this planned activities such as new guesthouses or rural electrification schemes (for example, Maalim 2006). Participants were separated into groups by village and a separate women-only workshop was held at the request of the Efogi women to ensure that their voices were heard. Each group was asked to draw maps of their village showing what they thought was relevant for tourists in their communities and what services the village could provide. Finally, all villages were also asked to prepare one and five-year development plans outlining some of the changes they wished to see in their communities as a result of hosting eco-trekking activities (an example is depicted in Figure 4). The maps created by each village were collated and the researchers drew out key themes.

The lead author was the facilitator of each workshop, relying on a translator to assist with communication. The translator also documented each of the workshops and the outcomes that arose from them. Languages spoken at the workshops included English, Tok Pisin (pigeon English) and Hiri Motu. The participatory resource maps were analysed with the participants and themes established. The stakeholders at the other three workshops used these documents and an analysis of some of the events that took place before and after the eco-trekking strategy was developed to provide the basis for further development.

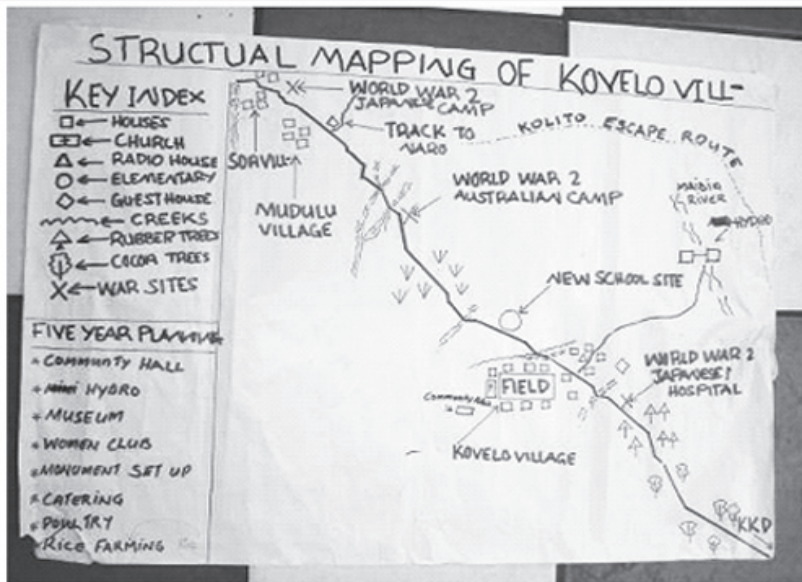


Discussion and theoretical implications

Communities along the Kokoda Track recognise the importance of 'good' (that is, sustainable) tourism for their future prosperity and the need for cooperation to achieve this. These two community workshops and awareness patrols represent the first occasions that all the villages along the track have gathered together to address issues of mutual interest. In fact, this is the first time since World War II that these 14 villages have met formally with outside support. As a result of the PRA process with the communities, nine key needs were identified, which indicated that immediate development of rudimentary services was essential for communities along the Kokoda Track

- Safe drinking water supply
- Power supply using mini-hydro systems
- Healthcare 'aid posts' staffed by a full-time 'aid post orderly' and maintaining an adequate supply of medicines
- Local schools
- Comfortable, dry guesthouses as an alternative to camping
- Community meeting places as sites for training, handicraft manufacturing and food preparation
- Gazetted protected areas to enable trekkers to see wildlife
- New crops and cultivars and new food preparation techniques to better suit the palates of trekkers, and
- Security to ensure trekkers' safety at all times

Figure 4 Map of Koveilo Village's five-year plan



Source: Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF), 2006. *Eco-Trekking Kokoda: a plan for sustainable tourism*, Kokoda Track Foundation, Sydney, in collaboration with Kokoda Track Authority, University of Technology, Sydney, Worldwide Fund for Nature.



These needs were analysed with information from the stakeholder workshops and further consultation and were then consolidated. Three main themes emerged: 1) village–tour operator relations; 2) land ownership; and 3) gender relations. These themes have been used to develop action plans with the communities and with other stakeholder groups. For example, under the first theme (village–tour operator relations), one concern of the communities was the weight that each village porter might have to carry for a trekker. As a result of this and other concerns, ‘A Voluntary Code of Practice for Tour Operators’ was developed in conjunction with the communities and tour operators and facilitated by the KTF, UTS and the Kokoda Unit in the Department of Environment and Conservation in the Australian Government.

An example under theme three, gender relations, which was reinforced as a part of a subsequent study and workshops in May 2009,⁵ was cooking classes. In their workshop, the women in Efogi village emphasised this as a key need for them so that they could learn new recipes that used a combination of locally grown food and a few staple ingredients (such as flour, sugar and yeast). In July 2009, the KTF conducted eight classes with women’s groups of between 20 and 40 women in the villages of Naoro 1, Manari, Efogi, Naduri, Alola, Isurava, Hoi/Kovello and Kokoda. The women’s groups at the conclusion of each workshop sold the food to passing trekkers and all villages made a small profit. The knowledge gained from the cooking classes can now be used by these women to develop micro-businesses via the sale of food to trekkers.

Eco-tourism offers a way to balance the schism between the conservation of nature and development of resources to improve community livelihoods. The sustainability of any eco-tourism product, however, depends on sustained community com-

mitment and a process to resolve concerns and disputes between communities and trekking companies. Participatory planning methods—while far from perfect—provide the chance to reach common ground in the agreement of goals and outcomes that few other planning tools can deliver. Equally, if these tools are used in a continuing process, they can facilitate an understanding of the reasons for concerns, conflicts and disagreements and can be used to address major issues before they threaten tourism assets and operations.

For example, tourism planning exists in a complex set of networks across different societies (for example, Urry 2002). As the costs and time involved in moving people have drastically declined in the past two decades, tourism has been liberated from former spatial constraints, allowing it to become a global phenomenon (Harvey 2000). As more and more remote and rural communities in developing countries such as Papua New Guinea are conscripted into global tourism systems, many researchers have exposed a need to explore the relationship between ‘host’ and ‘guests’ in a way that goes beyond the earlier approaches, in which attention was focused primarily on host–guest interactions (Smith 1989; Smith and Eadington 1992). More recent research has insisted on a tripartite system of tourists, locals and brokers (Cheong and Miller 2000; Wearing and McDonald 2002) and has focused on the conditions required to shape beneficial outcomes. For example, Milne and Ateljevic (2001) have argued that community-based approaches are central to many tourism development plans around the world and that there is a growing realisation that localised cooperation, trust and networking are essential ingredients in providing the right conditions for successful tourism development outcomes. Indeed, tourism is often seen as a key element in enabling communities devastated by economic



restructuring to regain and enhance their economic foothold in regional and national economies. Mowforth and Munt—although rather cynical about sustainable tourism development in developing countries—are hopeful that communities will be able to take control of tourism development utilising their resources.

Notwithstanding imperfections, there are successes, and the obstacles to change are not insurmountable. Then possibilities for change, however, are unlikely to come from the top or from the middle, where the power of vested interest is too great; it is more likely to come from below, where the need for change is the greatest. At this level, the resources of nature, power and finance and the control over them are small in dimension and change is unlikely to be significant on anything but a local scale (2003:302).

In the development of the Kokoda eco-trekking strategy (KTF 2006), questions were asked about how and which intermediaries could contribute to the production of new knowledge, which in turn could facilitate communication between two different socio-political spheres, each characterised by different world views (Australian tour operators and Papua New Guinea communities on the Kokoda) and thereby empower the bottom-up changes advocated by Mowforth and Munt (2003). It was also crucial to develop an understanding of what interactions needed to occur at the local level to develop this broader, community-based product in a sustainable way. It appears that the approach to working with local communities developed on the Kokoda Track has facilitated a shift in power—in the Foucauldian sense—towards local communities. According to Foucault (for example, Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991; Flyvbjerg 1991; Hollinshead 1999;

Kraft and Raben 1995; Smart 1985), power is exercised and not possessed and thus can never take the form of an institution. Nor is power a structure or a certain force, with which some chosen few are endowed. Rather power is the name with which we describe a complex strategic process. As defined by Foucault in his later work, it is 'actions on other actions' (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991:5). When applied to Kokoda, this rather fluid notion of power can aid understanding of the complex nature of the interactions that are occurring between the various stakeholders and allow a more balanced planning and development process to occur.

A range of authors (for example, Wearing and McDonald 2002) has suggested that conventional tourism development in developing countries often brings with it many of the same problems we have found in the exploitation of natural and cultural resources in the past. It is often driven, owned and controlled by outside companies and owners with a high leakage outside rural and isolated communities. Packaged tours are frequently offered and the only involvement of local people is through the use of their natural resources at minimum or no cost to the operator. Where rural and isolated people are used as guides, they are paid minimal salaries—in contrast with the profits made by the investors and owners. This inequality often proceeds on the pretext that if these operators did not come there would be no money injected into the community. Tourism is therefore put forward as a way of solving some of the problems that have arisen in rural and isolated communities, but it brings with it inappropriate economic growth. The communities on the Kokoda Track—having experienced low-level tourism for some decades—are aware of these issues. The workshops described in this article helped to give communities a voice and the ability to



respond to the issues and to influence planning and management of their resources. In Papua New Guinea, many communities are now aware that logging companies exploit local community resources with very little recompense or attention to sustainability. In this case, sustainable tourism has been used as a counterpoint to ensure that logging leases are not offered on the lands of the Kokoda. Alternatively, communities sign off on an agreement that their lands will not be leased to logging companies.

One impact of eco-tourism and eco-trekking on the Kokoda Track is the introduction of new world views to local communities. The establishment of a more prevalent cash economy, for example, not only introduces material goods to communities, it introduces different ways of thinking and interacting and creates new expectations and aspirations. These shifting world views challenge traditional ways of making and implementing decisions. For example, a cash economy can be seen as based on quantitative valuation (or measurement) of resources and expected returns. This stands in contrast with established ways of reaching decisions, which rest on more qualitative or cultural assessments of the worth and value of resources. Having said that, conservation and development are not about choosing between two mutually exclusive modes of practice—traditional or modern—rather they are concerned with finding a new balance in changing times and enabling people to communicate their priorities to outside influences. They fundamentally recognise that landholding communities can be active agents in determining their own forms of development rather than being passive recipients of development conceived by distant others.

Eco-trekking can benefit from the application of community-based tourism planning. This involves not only the introduction of new management tools, but a

new 'language of management' and new attitudes to host communities in tourism planning. This might enable communities to communicate with other stakeholders more effectively and ensure their opinions and priorities are implemented. There is, however, also potential to disrupt the relations of power within a community, bringing about changes in the social organisation too quickly for supporting institutions to arise (Wearing and McDonald 2002). The fundamental value of participatory techniques, then, is their use in creating a forum for debate among and between stakeholders and that they can impose or spark awareness about prejudice and knowledge within the development agents themselves.

Conclusion

This article builds on a foundation of previous work that has argued along theoretical lines for a participatory approach in the development of eco-tourism in remote and rural areas of developing countries. It looks to bridge the gulf of understanding that exists between indigenous tourism resource owners and foreign tourism developers (Ponting, McDonald and Wearing 2005; Wearing and McDonald 2002; Wearing, McDonald and Ponting 2005; Wearing, Wearing and McDonald forthcoming). This article presents an empirical application of this argument in the context of eco-trekking on the Kokoda Track and explores what can be learned from this process.

In the course of two workshops involving all 14 communities concerned with eco-trekking along the Kokoda Track, PRA techniques such as social mapping were used to develop an understanding of what issues were important to Kokoda Track communities and how eco-trekking could better serve the needs of these communities. These techniques enabled communities to identify



their priorities for eco-trekking development and to design one and five-year development plans for eco-trekking in their villages as a starting point for negotiation with tourism operators. The use of participatory planning techniques facilitates a shift of power in tourism development, as formerly marginalised groups are empowered to make decisions about their own destiny and their place in the tourism economy. The benefits for the tourism industry in this region are yet to be proven but already this process has led to a range of activities that adds value to the tourism product. These include the baking of new local foods—such as pumpkin scones—for tourists, the revised siting of guesthouses, development of community projects and better maintenance of infrastructure such as airstrips. Perhaps most importantly for the tourism industry, a long-term participatory process can lead to unprecedented levels of stability in relationships between operators and communities, which can serve only to improve business performance.

While much progress has been made through participatory planning for the continuing development of eco-trekking along the Kokoda Track, the natural and cultural heritage of the wider eco-region remains under threat. Despite the demonstrated global significance of the Owen Stanley Ranges for ecological, cultural and historical reasons, extractive resource exploitation—specifically, logging and mining—threaten the area with environmental devastation. Even though the Papua New Guinea government has made its stance clear by denying Frontier Resources the right to pursue copper-mining operations close to the southern part of the track (Nichols 2008), until World Heritage listing is secured, the future of the track remains uncertain. The continuing development of eco-trekking on the Kokoda Track provides an example of the complex processes in the implementation of community-based tourism and the value of PRA in this process.

Notes

- ¹ Intermediaries are representative of specific 'development agents' such as commercial tourism operators.
- ² 'Patrolling' is a standard PNG government method originated under the Australian colonial regime that involves periodic visits to villages. An awareness patrol is a variation developed by Papua New Guinea non-governmental organisations to provide information on a specific topic to villages (in this case, on the tourism planning effort) and to ensure a regular flow of information within and between villages.
- ³ The Kokoda Track Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation comprising several stakeholders including trek operators, non-governmental organisations and academics concerned with conserving the heritage and natural values of the Kokoda Track region and the wellbeing of its landowning communities.
- ⁴ These features were explored in an undergraduate study completed by Nancy White (2007).
- ⁵ In May 2009, the same core group of researchers from UTS and the KTF won a tender from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to identify micro-business opportunities for the communities of the Kokoda—primarily from the existing trekking industry.



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