



## **Toolkit to facilitate the collaborative documentation and revaluation of bio-cultural knowledge in PNG.**

In 2012, The Christensen Fund supported the "Saem Majnep Memorial Symposium on Traditional Environmental Knowledge", held at the University of Goroka, Papua New Guinea. The symposium drew together people with experience of, and interest in, the collaborative documentation of traditional ecological knowledge in PNG, and more widely in Melanesia. The symposium was judged a success for the collation of disparate efforts it enabled, for the knowledge sharing and networking it afforded, and in stimulating greater interest in wider engagement with documentation practices in education and community renewal contexts. Participants demonstrated genuine interest in the collaborative documentation of TEK, drawing on partnerships between scientific and local experts, and emphasised the on-going relevance of these initiatives. In light of this, we (James Leach, Giles Lane and Porer Nombo) began activities towards the development of a simple, cheap and accessible toolkit to stimulate new collaborative documentation initiatives.

In this project, we propose to co-design, alongside TEK holders, modes of engagement and recording that do not divorce environmental knowledge from cultural, that encourage local revaluation, and that work with local sensitivities over ownership, routes of transmission, and secrecy. These aspects emerged clearly from the Symposium as central to successful partnerships and documentation efforts.

Travelling from Goroka to Madang after the Symposium we began testing simple hybrid digital and paper technologies in the Rai Coast village of Reite. This was undertaken in collaboration with Symposium participant and expert Porer Nombo, with whom James has already published a dual language documentation of Rai Coast plant knowledge. ([http://press.anu.edu.au/titles/asia-pacific-environment-monographs/reite\\_plants\\_citation/](http://press.anu.edu.au/titles/asia-pacific-environment-monographs/reite_plants_citation/)).

With the enthusiastic participation of Reite villagers, including a high proportion of women and girls, old and young, we began to develop a toolkit with which they can document their knowledge in an adaptable and locally appropriate manner. We used simple folded booklets that utilize readily available materials, and distributed these to informed volunteer participants for them to use as they thought appropriate for recording an aspect of their practice or knowledge. (This booklet design has been developed, since 1999, to specifically allow for digital capture and sharing, with outputs that are both physical and digital). In doing so, we began to iteratively develop a process including tools, method and protocols that aims at practicality, and that produces documentation that can be easily transferred subsequently into digital files for preservation and circulation. This digital/paper hybrid approach is part of the project's promise and novelty.

A central part of this pilot study was to work with village people of both genders and at different ages to explore informed consent statements, prompts, and modes of acknowledgement that they consider appropriate to the knowledge they hold about

their environment and culture. The results, and a more detailed explanation of the process, technology, and the ethical procedure, can be seen here:

<http://bookleteer.com/book.html?id=2882#page/1/mode/2up>

and here:

<http://bookleteer.com/collection.html?id=20>

And a narrative of the short experiment by Giles Lane can be accessed here:

<http://proboscis.org.uk/5309/indigenous-public-authoring-in-papua-new-guinea/>

In this project, we will return to work alongside Reite people to further develop what was only a proof of concept activity in 2012. We will take more materials, and spend longer with a wider selection of collaborators and assistants to refine and develop a toolkit and process.

A captivating moment at the Symposium was when Andrew Pawley reported on Ralph Bulmer and Saem Majnep's desire to see village people in PNG becoming researchers and recorders of their cultural and ecological heritage. Our co-design process aims to develop a toolkit will help facilitate rural people and their children's own research into local bio-cultural knowledge, with the additional possibility of supporting the current inclusion of 'Indigenous Science' as a component of the PNG national curriculum for secondary education.