



# Redefining Conservation

How communities in Raja Ampat are shaping their world, and what their experience teaches us about empowerment.

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## Summary

This article tells the story of the Raja Ampat Homestay Association - a community organisation located in the Dampier Strait off the western tip of New Guinea, in Indonesia. In four years, the Association's members have built an ecotourism sector consisting of over sixty, family-run homestay businesses, with an annual turnover of USD 1.5 million. In doing so, they have recast the conservation agenda as a means to control, sustain, and make a better living from the places that they have inherited through custom. In this article, we explore the impact that this has had on Raja Ampat's people and environment. We describe how we worked with the Homestay Association to support this transformation, including the methods we used. Finally, we reflect on what it takes - as facilitators - to empower people as agents of their own development.

## Lessons learnt

- i) **Local people take control of conservation if it empowers them to tackle the things that they feel strongest about.** In grabbing the opportunities presented by ecotourism, and setting up homestays, people in Raja Ampat found a way to prevent their land from being swallowed up by the resort industry; to be fully self-reliant business people, not mere dependent labourers; and to put their children through higher education. People felt more emotional about these issues than any other.
- ii) **Where top-down development has created division and mistrust, people need time to rekindle community.** Homestay owners in Raja Ampat know that the survival of the natural places on which their businesses are built depends on their relationship with relatives who also own and use those places. They have spent four years cementing the bonds between families and villages, through dialogue, job creation and helping others to set up businesses.
- iii) **It takes real businesses, formed, owned and managed by local people to create sufficient economic incentive for conservation.** To people in Raja Ampat, economic incentive is not just about money. It is also the ability to self-actualise as an entrepreneur, and to inspire others in your community. Working for someone else, or waiting for government assistance, is no longer enough.
- iv) **Real community organisations start with how people wish to organise themselves, not with how outsiders think people should be organised.** In Raja Ampat, people started by setting up family businesses and later set up an Association when they saw the need to discuss common problems. The idea of a collective business, to provide services such as transport and online bookings to Association members, has only now emerged four years after the Association was founded.
- v) **There are no shortcuts to empowerment.** As facilitators working in Raja Ampat, we learnt how important it is to: (a) **let people name and act on their own solutions** to their own problems, and not to put answers in their mouths; (b) **work in ways, and at a pace, that the people we facilitate choose to**, and not to impose our own logic or timetable; (c) **create motivated change agents** with the skills to influence others, and not to advocate or broker on their behalf; and, (c) **limit our presence** to just a few strategic interventions in a year, such as skills training and quarterly reflection, so that people have the space to make and learn from their own mistakes.



## Setting the stage

*"I was an illegal logger. I brought all [these] investors here to log the forest. Then I discovered this homestay business and my life changed completely. I now stand on the front line trying to defend our environment."*

This is the testimony of a homestay owner in Sawinggrai, Gam Island, in December 2013. Many more people have stories like that to tell: people who previously had no choice other than to make their living from bomb fishing, and from the illegal timber and wildlife trade, in order to survive and to send their children to school.

People in Raja Ampat - a group of islands off the western tip of the Indonesian province of West Papua - have grabbed the possibilities offered by ecotourism to take control of their own lives and of the places they have lived in for generations. They have created a new politics in which conservation is not only about marine protected area (MPA) management, but also about their struggle to secure their ancestral land and to liberate themselves from poverty.

People achieved this through a process which enabled them to build viable businesses that fulfil their life needs; to regenerate the ties between families and villages that give life to any rural community; and to safeguard the environmental assets that sustain them.

In this article, we describe how we worked with people to support this process; the impact that they have had on their environment and their communities; and the lessons we learnt, as development practitioners and facilitators, about what it takes to empower people as agents of their own development.

Throughout this article, we talk in terms of the 'people', and by this we mean Raja Ampat's customary communities, but specifically we are dealing with local homestay owners, women's groups, village heads and councils, church and youth now represented by the Raja Ampat Local Homestay Association.

Seventythree is a partner of the Walton Family Foundation<sup>1</sup>. We have worked in Raja Ampat as part of the Bird's Head Seascape Initiative since 2013, alongside Starling Resources. With a mandate to support

economic empowerment, our work aims to create the social and political infrastructure for locally controlled Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to work, and to improve the lives of Raja Ampat's people.



The Raja Ampat Homestay Association was founded in 2012 by the community.

*"I was an illegal logger...I now stand on the front line trying to defend our environment."*



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org>

## Redefining conservation

*"What do you want to build that homestay for? White people like to stay in hotels."*

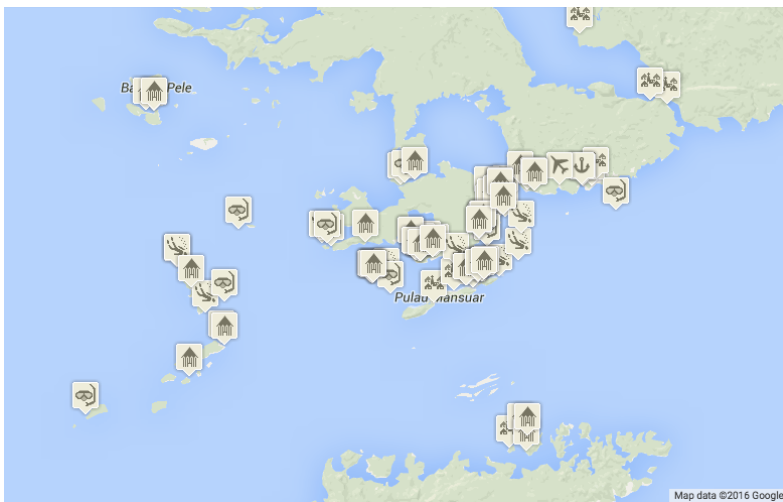
After years of economic neglect, people in the Dampier Strait have carved out an entirely new market for ecotourism, which they own.

When the first homestays went up, nobody believed that they would succeed. One woman described how she was ridiculed by other people in her village: "White people like to stay in hotels. Not in a house like you've built. The only things that will want to stay there are mosquitoes".

Yet, in just three years, local people have built a sector that generates gross revenues of around **US\$ 1.5 million per annum** and that has created at least 600 new local jobs in homestays, fishing and agriculture.

The Raja Ampat Local Homestay Association currently represents just **over sixty family-owned businesses**. These are not private individual businesses, but family entities, similar to a traditional joint stock company, that support and employ an extended network of relations.

*"Who would dare bomb the reef around Mansuar now?"*



Map of homestays from [www.stavrajaampat.com](http://www.stavrajaampat.com)

The Association is now the largest community-owned business grouping in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua. First concentrated around the islands of Mansuar and Gam in the Dampier Strait, the Association's membership is spreading to include communities from other parts of Raja Ampat such as the Fam islands, western Waigeo and the island of Batanta.

The Association's members understand that their businesses depend on the integrity of their environment. They believe that they and others in their communities are best positioned to protect that environment, and that their businesses give them the means to do so:

*"It's obvious isn't it? As more homestays start up in places under greatest threat from bomb fishing - such as Batanta and western Waigeo - less of it will happen. There will be more of us around to keep watch as we go about our business, and we will not need to be paid to patrol. Who would dare bomb the reef around Mansuar now?"*

*"Homestays are our way to defend our land... we do not want to be bystanders or someone else's workers"*

The Association mobilises **technical assistance and funding** for business skills training and mentoring for its members. The Association also provides certain **business services** to its members such as online promotion and bookings, and it manages government relations on issues such as the management of MPA entrance fees.

The Association is **setting standards** on diving, transport and hospitality to govern the conduct of its members' businesses. It is currently working to adapt and apply the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) to the homestay sector.





The Raja Ampat Homestay Association is a social movement

*"If we create tourism such as in Bali, then this place will be destroyed"*

The Association is also a **social movement** motivated by the desire to **prevent family land being sold to resorts** and to stand on their own feet as economic actors. *"Homestays are our way to defend our land... we do not want to be bystanders or someone else's workers"*. The pain that people feel when they have lost land remains the single most important factor in motivating people to set up the Homestay Association (see 'What does it mean to lose land?' below).

The Association is a **community organization** that, for the first time, gives people from multiple communities their own, shared space to discuss their lives and businesses; and also to find solutions to the problems that most concern them, such as waste management, illegal fishing, illegal logging, and the loss of culture and identity.

As such, the Association **fills an institutional vacuum**. With the possible exception of the church there is, at present, no other structure at community level that regularly convenes people from different villages in order to discuss matters that are too big for each village to address on its own.

The Association is **inspiring youth**. Over half its management team are in their twenties and thirties and represent a new generation of community leaders that could serve Raja Ampat for the next forty years. The opportunity to work for the family business means that youth now want to come home after completing their studies. Much of the money that their families' homestays generate now pays for their younger sisters and brothers to also go to college.

The words of one young homestay owner reflects how others of his generation now think: *"I hope other people in the community can build a business like this one. I hope that outsiders do not take over this small place. The future I wish for is that my community will always stay here and make its living from this place."*

The Association is **empowering women**. The Association understands that it will fail if men and women cannot work together.

## What does it mean to lose land?

Communities in Raja Ampat have a relationship to land, shore and coastline that runs deeper than modern constructs of land title or leases. Thus when land is used for infrastructure, housing complexes or resort development, the process of releasing the land from community ownership is highly contested. It is rare that all parties to the transaction share a common understanding of the terms of the deal, and this often leads to problems later on. Even where families have surrendered rights to land - usually for quite small compensation - they frequently regret the decision later. Some comments at a recent workshop discussion bring this to life:

*"We can't even drop by to collect coconuts - imagine, even dropping by is forbidden!"*

*"We all cried when we realised what we had lost"*

*"We do not want to sell our rights and then become servants; we feel so sorry seeing our relatives in that position"*



The Association is inspiring women, and inspired by women.

The Association's most energetic managers are now women. They are the glue that binds the Association's membership, and are organising other women in their villages to set up kiosks and a market for local organic produce to keep homestays supplied. Their example has transformed the outlook of women in the community. One said: *"All my life I have looked at this kitchen, I never knew life could be more than this".*

The homestay sector is therefore serving, not only to protect the marine environment, but also to **regenerate community**. Where this serves to build a **supporting system of extended family and other social relations** then it reinforces the likelihood that conservation will succeed.

This is what we call a **new politics of conservation** in Raja Ampat. Among homestay owners, conservation is no longer somebody else's agenda for which they need 'livelihood alternatives' and 'compensation'. People have redefined conservation as a factor that enables their own efforts to control, sustain, and make a better living from the places that they have inherited through custom - inside and outside MPAs.

*"The future I wish for is that my community will always stay here and make its living from this place."*

## A Vision for Life in Raja Ampat

"Fifty years into the future, we the people of Raja Ampat will have achieved the highest possible quality of life. **We will have become wise.** The homestay businesses that we are pioneering will have given us enough to live on. We will have passed the responsibility of leadership to our children, as our heirs, and we will have created opportunities for others in our villages.

Our people will be healthy and intelligent, with schools and hospitals in our villages. Our people will be able to meet all their needs for food, grown naturally and in our own gardens; for healthy homes built with local materials; for clothing; and for sufficient energy that we will produce ourselves and from renewable sources. Our people will continue to cultivate our gardens with care and only with organic fertilisers. Our children, our families and other community members will live in support and care of each other, in peace, order and unity.

We and other community members are aware that we can achieve a high quality of life because of the very rich, intact and beautiful environment in which we live. Our forests will be protected so that there is no uncontrolled logging or poaching of wildlife. Our forests will continue to provide us with enough wood, clean water and other goods to meet our needs for free, so that we will not have to buy these things. So it shall be with our marine resources. We will only catch fish sustainably and with environmentally friendly technology. There will be no environmental destruction and our environment will be free from waste. **Our environment is our identity** as the people of Raja Ampat and we are proud to be from Raja Ampat.

We, and all our people, will use our environment only to meet our needs and not wastefully. We will build with local and natural materials. Our settlements will be laid out according to our traditions. **Our lives will be sustainable.** Our environment will be secure, guaranteeing that all our future generations will enjoy a high quality of life, forever."

*Translation of the text written by the Homestay Association*

## How Seventythree and the Homestay Association work together

Seventy Three's mandate under the Bird's Head Seascape Initiative tasks us to build economic constituencies for MPAs in Raja Ampat. In delivering that mandate, Seventythree chose to focus our efforts on the Homestay Association because it is the most dynamic agent of change in what is otherwise a highly fragmented society. The businesses that the Association represents have created new purpose in people's lives: a means to fulfil long-held hopes and aspirations.

There are two main threads to Seventythree's work with the Homestay Association: (i) dialogue and collective problem solving; and, (ii) supporting skills training so that people can act on the solutions they identify.

### THEMES

- ✦ Sustainable economy
- ✦ Ecological integrity
- ✦ Culture and identity
- ✦ Social cohesion
- ✦ Decision-making structures
- ✦ Personal leadership

### Dialogue and collective problem solving

The Homestay Association's perspective on conservation emerges out of a deep dialogue about life and the future among the traditional owners and custodians of islands in the Dampier Strait.

In practice, this takes the form of a week-long meeting of the Homestay Association's members and other community representatives, two or three times a year. In the process of facilitating this "big conversation" over the past four years, Seventythree has worked with people to name and reflect on six, interconnected themes (see sidebar).

These are the elements that people feel determine their ability to function as a society and to meet their fundamental needs. They also reflect the issues that people feel most threaten their future.

It is a journey that has helped people to first recall the things that they have lost as a society, such as land, identity and the traditional values of reciprocity. Those memories fuelled the desire to re-vision how they want to live as a sustainable society. That vision now gives

### "The things that make us fear for the future"

Participants in this dialogue named six major threats to their way of life:

- i. Overwhelming volumes of plastic waste from Sorong, on the mainland of West Papua Province, and Waisai, the district capital of Raja Ampat
- ii. Damage to reefs from illegal fishing and unregulated tourism.
- iii. Illegal logging and land clearing that accompanies road construction.
- iv. The possibility that more land licenses will be granted for mining and plantations.
- v. New resort licenses, granted without proper consent: communities are losing access to land, including the areas they use to grow food, and some cases are cause for serious conflict.
- vi. Loss of culture and traditional arts, which has led to a loss of identity.

them the clarity of purpose to reclaim those things that they are losing, and to take control of their own lives and places. It shifts the debate beyond MPA management to address a much larger question: what kind of development does society in Raja Ampat wish to pursue?

The 'rubric of regeneration':  
recall, re-vision, reclaim.

Seventy Three drew direct inspiration for this work from the Scottish Hebrides where people living on small islands such as Eigg, Harris and Lewis have also journeyed through this three-step '**rubric of regeneration**' in order to buy out land under Scotland's land reform legislation, and to manage it as a collective asset.<sup>2</sup> They have set up businesses, generate clean energy and provide affordable homes. They have rebuilt themselves as thriving, sustainable communities and shown that it is possible even in the remotest spots. We are grateful to the Centre for Human Ecology<sup>3</sup> for the opportunity to witness the work of these Hebridean places.

Our focus on dialogue is designed to empower people to be self-reliant, question their realities and lead their own journey of learning and discovery. The process trains people to:

- ✦ To discover their own potential as people capable of shaping their own destinies, without having to wait for and depend on others (*self discovery*).
- ✦ Investigate the structures that have degraded the life systems on which they have depended for generations, and created poverty (*critical conscientisation*).
- ✦ Formulate and act on their own solutions to transform these structures, e.g. by organising themselves into businesses and advocacy campaigns.
- ✦ Reflect on their actions, as a way to learn from successes and failures, and to define next steps (*the learning cycle*).

#### The objectives of the Raja Ampat Homestay Association:

1. Protect assets such as the sea and the land from the accumulation of rubbish, from the use of fish bombs and poisons, and from illegal logging.
2. Protect and support local homestay business owners.
3. Convene members around a common vision and mission.
4. Sustain Raja Ampat's culture.
5. Strengthen the local economy.
6. Improve education and skills.

Our approach is also rooted in adult learning. We use methods first developed by the Brazilian popular educator Paulo Friere. These methods were further elaborated by the development education network Training for Transformation (TFT), for work with poor and vulnerable communities in southern Africa. Our work in Raja Ampat constitutes one of the first times that the TFT syllabus has been applied to community empowerment in Indonesia, and we are grateful for the skills and experience that TFT has shared with us.

The method empowers people to **name their own learning needs** instead of relying on outsiders to tell them what they are. It empowers people to **find their own solutions** to the problems they face, without waiting for outsiders to give them the answers.

The Homestay Association has since evolved into an organisation with its own **management team and a secretary**. It is working to translate its fifty-year vision into practical action such as community business development, environmental monitoring, and advocacy. It

<sup>2</sup> Alastair McIntosh, Rekindling Community, Connecting People, Environment and Spirituality, Schumacher Briefings Number 15

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.che.ac.uk/>



has formulated its **annual work plan** for 2016, based on a comprehensive review of its work over the previous two years.

We can say with confidence that the idea of setting up a Homestay Association, its vision and its work, are things that people in Raja Ampat have discovered and achieved for themselves. Our contribution as facilitators has only been to ask the right questions, to help them through their learning cycle.

## Supporting skills training

As this dialogue has unfolded, and people have found solutions to their own problems, so Seventythree has equipped people with some of the skills that they have requested in order to act on those solutions. Where this training has helped people set up businesses, it has created jobs and improved lives in ways that **validate and legitimise** the Association's Vision for Life.

Together with service providers such as the British Council and the IDEP Foundation, Seventythree is currently delivering practical skills training in:

- ✦ **Business development and administration**, with a focus on what it takes to run a collective family enterprise such as a homestay.
- ✦ **Organisational development**, with a focus on the structures and management processes needed to run the Association effectively.
- ✦ **Standards and promotion**, including the development of codes of conduct for diving and English language training.
- ✦ **Organic agriculture**, focusing on women's groups supplying homestays with agricultural produce.
- ✦ **Photovoltaic energy systems**, for individual homestays and mini grids.
- ✦ **Participatory research techniques**, to gather more systematic evidence of problems such as land conflict and environmental degradation.
- ✦ **Advocacy skills**, to better package and present issues to local government.



## What impact do we expect to have?

Seventythree measures the impact of our work against the six themes that people in Raja Ampat have named and elaborated over the past three years. The following table presents a number of broad progress indicators. Taken together, the different elements of this table propose a framework for sustainability that we have defined with local people in order to act on their Vision for Life.

What impact do we hope to have?	How do we know we are getting there?
A <b>sustainable economy</b> that generates incentives to protect and manage marine ecosystems	<p><i>Local people are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have secure access to their means of production including land and other natural capital;</li> <li>Engage markets to supply sustainable goods and services;</li> <li>Meet their fundamental needs (nutrition, housing, education etc);</li> <li>Manage and widely share the benefits of common pool resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Ecological integrity</b> of both marine and terrestrial environments	<p><i>Local people understand:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The links between the health of terrestrial and marine ecosystems;</li> <li>Ecological limits: how much is and is not sustainable.</li> </ul> <p><i>They are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent and mitigate damage;</li> <li>Demonstrate that marine and terrestrial ecosystems are recovering.</li> </ul>
<b>Culture and identity</b> that makes people proud of who they are, where they live and the environment that sustains them.	<p><i>People are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconnect with their traditional belief systems and values, as a means to mediate the effects of rapid modernisation;</li> <li>Assert a collective vision of themselves as a society;</li> <li>Define sustainable development in their own terms.</li> </ul>
<b>Social cohesion</b> that reinforces marine conservation and sustainable management	<p><i>Men and women</i> are able to work together, and to share the workload.</p> <p>People are able to mobilise support and act together to solve common problems; to pre-empt and resolve conflict.</p>
<b>Decision-making structures</b> that support the management of common pool resources	<p>People feel properly represented in decision-making; leaders are proactive and accountable.</p> <p><i>People are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach a consensus that binds them together as a community;</li> <li>Influence government decision-making processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Personal leadership</b> that enables people to realise their own potential to work collaboratively.	<p><i>Local People:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have the self-confidence to participate and contribute their ideas, and to act.</li> <li>Are able to listen to and communicate effectively with others, and to give and receive feedback.</li> </ul>

## What has been achieved so far?

### Sustainable Economy

Over the past four years, we have witnessed the emergence and rapid growth of a **new, community-owned ecotourism sector** in Raja Ampat, with gross revenues of around USD 1.5 million per annum. This has created at least 600 new local jobs (in homestays, fishing and agriculture). The homestay sector has also created new business opportunities for others: women are developing home gardens, and have set up a market to supply vegetables.

So the homestay sector is now the most dynamic part of Raja Ampat's local economy. Apart from a handful of private resorts, most of the rest of the economy is fuelled by central-government fiscal transfers to district and village government. Much of that money is, in turn, spent on construction, services and administration.

#### Connecting homestays to global tourism markets

In partnership with the Homestay Association, Seventythree has managed a number of interventions that are designed to ensure locally-owned tourism reaches a global audience, and is able to efficiently manage bookings and promotions. For instance, the website [www.stayrajaampat.com](http://www.stayrajaampat.com) was set up by our team member Doug Meikle after he visited Raja Ampat as a tourist, and was encouraged by some homestay owners to help them with their on-line strategy.

Since becoming part of our programme, the site has been greatly expanded, and is now the number one website for Raja Ampat, with over 15,000 unique visits per month and an Alexa ranking placing it in the top 0.1% of most popular websites in world. This is an extraordinary achievement for a website specialising in community businesses. The Homestay Association is responsible for keeping the website team updated on new places, businesses, prices and other relevant travel information.

Homestay owners explained to us how they have very limited internet access and face language barriers dealing with booking requests. We therefore worked with them to set up the on-line booking system that allows guests to fill in an on-line form which automatically gets parsed into an SMS system. Therefore the guests can make bookings in English online, while homestay owners can receive the request by SMS in Bahasa Indonesia. The app handles the translation, database and communications. Although this site was only launched in a low-key way in March 2015, within a year it had already processed over US\$ 250,000 worth of bookings. The feedback from guests and homestay owners has been very positive.

Most recently, Seventy Three and the Association responded to both the community's and guest's concerns about environmental degradation by launching the Raja Ampat Environment Watch website and application. This is a crowd-sourcing solution to the problem of how verifiable and reliable data about environmental conditions (both good and bad) can be elevated above the anecdotal. The app is not solely concerned with the garbage problem that so many guests mention, but can be used to report any environmental concern - marine or terrestrial. All reports are sent to the local government unit that manages the MPA, which is an example of how the homestay sector is working in partnership with other agencies to improve monitoring of the Raja Ampat area.

More information on the RA Watch App: <https://www.stayrajaampat.com/rawatch/page/index/1>

At least a third, and perhaps as much as half of tourists in Raja Ampat are attracted by what the community-owned tourism sector has to offer in terms of authenticity and value for money. Without this new sector to serve them, most of these guests would not have visited the area. Local people are rightly proud of the achievements of the sector and feel the homestay sector is a product of their own hard work, not the result of government projects or corporate social responsibility programmes.

## Ecological integrity

*"If we create opportunities for tourism such as in Bali, then this place will be destroyed. Several tourists have said to me the homestays are expensive... The way I see it, if you can pay, great. If you can't, that's also fine. So we limit the number of tourists who do not appreciate the environment"*

*"Imagine how polluted the water would be if every single one of us had a speed boat. We need to set up an Association transport business so that we all do not need one."*

At the request of members of the Homestay Association, concerned by the loss of bird of paradise habitats, local community forest patrol units have been trained by local government, and are operating around Saporkren on Waigeo island. Homestay owners say that this has already **reduced the incidence of illegal logging**.

Informal deterrence by homestay owners has **eliminated almost all spearfishing and other uncontrolled fishing** inside MPA no-take zones in areas that homestays are close to. Some homestays (notably in Saporkren and Mansuar) report **rapid recovery** of coral gardens and fish populations in areas where local monitoring is strongest.

Some homestays have set up regular '**clean up days**', involving schoolchildren from local villages, to remove rubbish from beaches. Others have started separating recyclable plastics and composting their organic waste. Nearly all have stopped providing bottled water, and have instead installed water dispensers for free refills.

The Association has also helped local people to organise a **collective response to the threat of careless development**. Association members say that they were recently able to intervene and place limits on plans by a resort business to build a helipad.

Association members are also increasingly aware that there are risks associated with tourism, and that there are **limits to which the sector can continue to expand**.

The **limits to further growth** will be a major topic of discussion in Association meetings over the next six months. This will elaborate on a number of **basic principles for environmental management** that Association members have recently identified:

### Land (forest) management :

1. For every tree cut, replant.
2. Limit timber harvesting.
3. Involve the community and customary leaders in forest protection.
4. Limit development activity, for example large-scale infrastructure development.

### Waste management:

1. Sort rubbish (separate organic from non-organic).
2. Limit the consumption of goods that produce non-organic waste.
3. Educate people not to throw rubbish indiscriminately and prevent the accumulation of rubbish.
4. Re-use rubbish for new income-generating opportunities.

### Marine management:

1. Regulations to protect coral.
2. Regulations to prevent rubbish from being thrown in the sea.
3. Limit the number of boats.
4. Limit/stop excessive harvesting of fish and other marine produce.
5. Restore coral.
6. Involve the community in marine monitoring.



## Setting Standards

In customer feedback collected from the website and in on-line surveys, most guests have a great stay in Raja Ampat, and really enjoy the homestay experience. However, there are some areas of concern, such as: Health and safety, waste management, hygiene, reliability of bookings and transport arrangements. There are specific concerns regarding diving and snorkelling. Local regulation (*Perbup 4/2011*) already sets out standards for dive operators, and some basic standards for tourist accommodation (defined as hotels or resorts, not homestays) and requires them to attain the Green Globe standard for sustainability.

In response to these concerns, the Association is setting standards on diving, transport and hospitality to govern the conduct of its members' businesses. The aim is to adapt and apply the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) to the homestay sector. Although the local government may see homestays as exempt from the standards that would be applied to hotels or guesthouses, the Association members feel that they wish to be deemed as professional hospitality businesses.

The diving code of practice has already been implemented, and all guests that dive with homestays will in future be required to confirm they have read and understood it. An Association member has recently qualified as an accredited dive instructor and all Association dive centres are required to have certified dive masters.

The hospitality standards (based on a selection of the GSTC criteria and indicators) are being rolled out in the second half of 2016. These standards not only provide a means whereby homestay owners can start moving towards compliance with globally recognised standards, they also provide a roadmap for how to manage a successful homestay business. Indeed, that latter benefit is likely to be of more immediate relevance to association members, rather than the possibility of a global certificate.

Homestays that manage to comply with these hospitality standards will see more satisfied guests, better feedback on the website and other sources, thus more bookings. They should be able to differentiate themselves from the competition and perhaps charge a slightly higher price. The standards naturally place emphasis on resource efficiency, yet are not very expensive to implement. So the homestay's cost structure should benefit. With falling costs and rising revenues, the homestays will be in a much better position to be financially sustainable.

## Culture and identity

Of any region in the Indonesian half of New Guinea, Raja Ampat has had some of the longest historical contact with the outside world. Its people are well informed and entrepreneurial. But they can also see how their relative exposure has led to the rapid loss of culture and identity. School children no longer use their indigenous languages, and traditional festivals and ceremonies are rarely celebrated.

Members of the Homestay Association are working to **document and reenact traditions** such as '*gelar senat*' (customary meetings) as a way to reinforce peoples' connection with their land and community. They feel that these traditions "give life" and support everything else the Association is doing to prevent the loss of customary land, to protect the environment and build strong family businesses.

Culture and identity is now strongly reflected in the Association's fifty – year Vision for Life in Raja Ampat. This talks about how people see themselves as folk from Raja Ampat, and how important their land and seascapes are to that identity. It equips people with a frame of reference to determine the types of development they want, and the types they do not.

## Decision-making structures

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The Association is now a **registered entity**, with its own governing statutes and management team. Within its management team, different people are responsible for environmental advocacy, business development, women's empowerment, cultural revival and spirituality. Based on an annual work plan, the Association runs its own cycle of regular meetings and training events.

Members now pay a **membership fee**. This enables the Association to pay for a secretary and run its day-to-day affairs. They have also agreed rules governing membership of the Association: for instance some individuals have been suspended for failing to participate in meetings.

Concerned to protect the reputation of the homestay sector, members have agreed a **diving code of conduct and service standards that are more detailed than the guidance set by government**. Seventy Three is now working with Association members to align these with existing best-practice guidelines, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC).

The Homestay Association has gained the **recognition of other community institutions** such as the church, and is involved in community decision-making. Churches are helping to relay messages about marine conservation on behalf of the Association. The church's endorsement of the Homestay Association appears to have carried most weight in influencing local stakeholders.

**Local government** also recognises the Association as an important economic actor. Among others, government and the Association are discussing ways to better collect and manage the entrance fee ('PIN') that tourists pay to visit Raja Ampat.

## Social cohesion

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One woman described what the Association has meant to her:

*"Before, we did not know people from other villages. But now with the Association, we know each other and support each other. We also help each other".*

Social cohesion matters a great deal to people. In addition to their businesses, members of the Homestay Association are most concerned about their ability to work with their **extended families** with whom they share rights in land, and to create jobs and business opportunities for them and others in their communities.

Homestay owners know from bitter experience that it is virtually impossible to run a viable business, or to protect the environment on which that business depends, without the support of family and the wider community. A homestay business is a **collective affair** in which individuals are entrusted with the responsibility of running it on behalf of family.

The Homestay Association has also invested considerable time and effort in strengthening **ties within and between villages**, and across multiple interest groups at that level (church, government, village councils, women's groups). Its members make regular contributions to village and church funds and events, and are working with school children to raise their awareness about litter and proper waste disposal.

## Personal leadership

*"It feels so good. This business has made it possible for me to send four of my children to college as far as Java."*

Like many rural communities in Papua, people in Raja Ampat suffer the **psychological scars of poverty** acquired in their struggle to keep pace with the modern, cash economy. As a result, many people suffer a debilitating lack of self worth, a belief that they are a nobody. They tend to look to outsiders to solve their problems: *"Just tell us what to do."*

Yet with support to appreciate their own talents and potential, and to find their own solutions to the problems they face, people who had no faith in their own abilities are doing things they never thought possible - be it running a homestay, or serving as a director of the Association. **People have taken leadership of their own lives.**

As the owner of a homestay in Kapisawar village put it, *"It feels so good. This business has made it possible for me to send four of my children to college as far as Java."* He was someone who suffered extreme poverty and his business changed his life. The success of people like him are working to inspire a **culture of self-reliance**, that Association members feel proud of.

As people have taken leadership of themselves, so they are also learning about what it takes to be a **leader in their community**. Here, the managers of the Association are grappling with the skills to listen better, to communicate more effectively, to give and receive feedback and to motivate others.



# What lessons have we learnt about what it takes to empower people?

The Homestay Association has changed the rules of game, positioning local people as agents of their own development rather than as the passive beneficiaries of other people's plans and projects. It has given local people a direct, controlling stake in marine conservation. They are now a step ahead of change, rather than a step behind.

The transformation has been as much of a learning journey for us, as facilitators, as it has been for the members of the Association. We learnt hard lessons on the importance of **method**. We learnt that, without a clear understanding of the techniques and parameters that define **how** we work with communities, we are more likely to disenfranchise than we are to empower.

Based on our four years of work with the Homestay Association and our growing understanding of adult education, we have learnt six things about what it takes to facilitate genuine empowerment:

## 1. Start with the issues that people feel most strongly about, not with what we outsiders think is important

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We started our work in Raja Ampat by listening. Notwithstanding our mandate to build an economic constituency for MPAs, we came with a blank page. We did not table a problem, present an agenda, or promise anything. We just asked questions and we listened to identify **where people's emotions lay**: where there was celebration, sadness or anger. Such feelings tell us more about how people experience their lives than any other source of information. Among practitioners of the Training for Transformation (TFT) method, **'feelings are facts'** and, indeed, they showed us our entry point.

We did not come to Raja Ampat with any intention of focusing on the homestay sector. We ended up doing so because it was the one thing that people most wanted to talk about, as a way to secure land and to pay for their children's education. People felt bitter about losing land to outsiders, and that outsiders dominated the tourism industry. They wanted to be more than other peoples' workers or mere "onlookers". The apparent success of the first few homestays in Raja Ampat offered them hope. Legislators and senior officials in Raja Ampat, keen to find ways in which conservation might support the village economy, enthusiastically supported this focus.

In selecting homestays as our entry point, we then supported people through their own journey of enquiry, discovery, trial and error as they set up businesses, and built the Homestay Association. In the end, these are the people that built an economic constituency for MPAs, not Seventy Three.

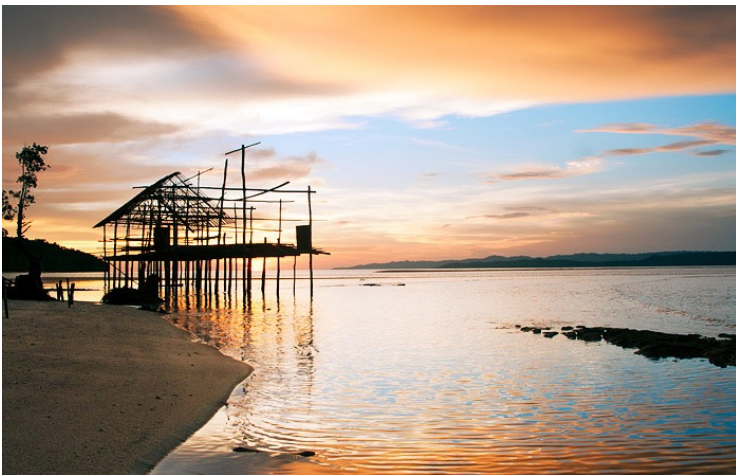


## 2. Resist the temptation to put answers in people's mouths

As facilitators, we are frequently tempted to suggest solutions in response to the problems that people present, especially among people who are psychologically conditioned to expect outsiders to give them the answers.

We learnt that, by simply presenting solutions, people do not take total ownership of them. It leaves us, as facilitators, with the burden of responsibility for delivering those solutions. We risk disappointing people if we do not.

So we learnt the ropes of knowing what to ask, and when, to help people **name their own problems** - as they experience them - and to **discover their own answers** to those problems. Training for Transformation (TFT) practitioners call this basic skill, '**the art of questioning**'.



For people who have not been encouraged to think for themselves - at school, in church or by the government officials - our method came as a profound shock. In those first months in Raja Ampat, people would often say, *"You people make us so tired. You just come and ask questions and you expect us to do all the thinking!"*

Yet it then dawned on them that it was they themselves that they had been waiting for, not any kind of "saviour" from outside. They began to appreciate their own ability to analyse the problems they named, and their causes.

They saw that the solutions they (and not we) came up with, however modest, were able to make a real difference in their own lives.

As solutions surfaced, so Seventy Three matched peoples' ideas with technical assistance if they did not already have the necessary skills. Examples include technical training in permaculture, business management and English language, and support with the StayRajaAmpat.com website and the SMS booking system.

In other cases, Association members were able to pool their own knowledge, for example in the development of a Divers' Code of Conduct as well as of their own standards governing homestay businesses.

As people have acquired knowledge skills, so we will now be investing in a network of **community coaches and study circles** to support independent, community-led learning in a range of areas such as language and hospitality that can sustain itself after Seventy Three exits.

Discovering the capacity to 'know' things and grasp abstract concepts, liberates people who had been convinced by their upbringing that they were ignorant or "bodoh". One woman

described what this revelation meant to her, *“Physical wealth can be stolen by other people. Knowledge, however, is [different]. Once we get it, however many times we share it, it will never finish. We will never lose it until the day we die.”*

“Knowledge” - as she named it - is not just information, it is also the ability to **reason**. In that context, an approach that simply puts answers in people’s mouths is not just disempowering. It is also deeply disrespectful of the cognitive abilities of the people we are trying to work with.

### 3. Respect the choices of the people we facilitate, however modest

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As outsiders, we are regularly tempted to intervene where we see a problem, before the people that we are facilitating have either named it or suggested a solution.

In Raja Ampat, we assumed that the Homestay Association’s best course of action would be to pursue a meeting with district (Kabupaten) government on issues such as resort licensing, destructive road construction, rubbish and deforestation:



First, we assumed that only a discussion with district government could address these problems. Second, we assumed that the Association is well positioned to initiate such a discussion. In representing a sector with an annual turnover of USD1.5 million a year, it enjoys direct access to legislators and senior officials.

To date, however, the Association has not acted on this suggestion. Association members are fully aware of, and regularly complain about, problems such as deforestation. But they had this to say: *“We understand the role of district government, but they are not our priority. We prefer to first work with the village.”*

In the eyes of Association members, village administrators and council members are the most proximate level of government and representation. They are directly elected. The decisions they take in areas such as infrastructure development, housing or waste disposal, have the most immediate impact on adjacent homestay businesses. In the context of the 2014 Village Law, which grants village government significant authority and spending power, this perspective makes sense.

There are other occasions, too, where community members have named solutions that challenged our assumptions.

Faced by the loss of land to property developers, we might have suggested that communities in Raja Ampat start mapping their customary lands. Yet that is not the answer that people came up with.

Women in one village named the simplest of solutions to protect their agricultural plots from beachfront speculators: “*plant, plant and plant.*” People build homestays businesses with the same objective of securing their ancestral places through a form of ‘adverse possession’. It is their solution, they are able to act on it immediately and it has the desired effect of keeping ancestral land in their control.

So we have had to temper our desire to engineer multi-stakeholder dialogue or colour the agenda with our own obsessions, and to respect the choices of the people we facilitate - however modest these might appear to be. They are, after all, agents of their own change. They will only do what makes most sense to them. They will have better insights into local politics, and a more sophisticated appreciation of the spaces available to them, than we may ever do as occasional visitors.

### It takes time to nurture dialogue between stakeholders

People in Raja Ampat – like many parts of rural in Indonesia – are experiencing massive change in their lives, over which they have had little had control. Society is fracturing as pre-existing indigenous institutions give way to new and imposed governing structures, and an economy fuelled by huge injections of cash.

Nurturing dialogue takes a great deal of time in such a setting. That community members are reluctant to launch into an advocacy campaign at district level should come as no surprise:

Many people remain scarred by their experience of poverty and have a deep fear of authority. It has taken years for certain members of the Association to liberate themselves from the mindset of a nobody, and to have sufficient confidence to hold their own in public.

As people have become more dependent on cash and on government assistance, so they also trust and rely on each other far less than they used to. It has taken the Homestay Association four years to bridge divisions and build consensus within their own families and communities, through dialogue and job creation. Their desire to now engage village government and councils is simply the next step in that process.

In a fractured place such as Raja Ampat, we have been careful as facilitators not to get in between the actors. **As outsiders, we do not have the legitimacy to play broker.** Instead we have invested in two things:

First we took Association members through a process of **self discovery**: a method by which participants are facilitated to unmask and appreciate their own potential. Where people were able to then direct their energy into setting up businesses, we saw quiet, but sometimes also angry, individuals turn into confident and positive examples to their rest of their community.

Second we equipped the Association’s most articulate members (its management team) with the **skills to listen** more than talk, to **give and receive feedback**, and to **communicate in ways that are less violent**. In that way, just a small group of people have been able to reach out to a steadily wider set of people, but at a pace they - not us - choose to set.

#### 4. Give people the space to act on their own and to learn from their mistakes.

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As external facilitators, with milestones to reach, we are often tempted to position ourselves as agents of the change we would like to see, and to then get in front of the communities we are working with in order to make change happen within our project timeframe.

Had Seventy Three adopted a more conventional approach, we would have hired a full-time field officer or a 'community organiser'. We realised, however, that this was only likely to reinforce a culture of dependency on outsiders.

So we decided to work in a different way. We restricted our contribution as external facilitators to a cycle of just three, week-long meetings a year for existing Association members; and a parallel cycle for new members. These meetings give Association members the opportunity to reflect on their actions, analyse what did and did not work, and plan for the months ahead.



Inputs to those meetings include guest comments from StayRajaAmpat across a range of areas including bookings, hospitality, waste management and the environment. In the months in between, Seventy Three's restricts its inputs to technical skills training to support solutions that Associations members have themselves identified.

So, for the most part, we are not present. This leaves community members with complete authority to take the initiative, and to make and learn from their mistakes, as they set up and run businesses, organise women's groups or administer the Association.

Given that space, individuals within the organisation have since grown in their ability to lead, shoulder responsibility and to inspire others, as entrepreneurs and as directors of the Association. So we have not had to salary anyone as a 'community organiser'. People have learnt to organise themselves without waiting for us to tell them what to do.

Such an approach ebbs and flows, as people struggle to reconcile new responsibilities with their existing commitments, and the demands of a professional organisation with the way they normally deal with each other as family. For a project manager, constant delays make the process difficult to manage and monitor.

Yet our experience shows that such an approach is better suited to the dynamic, complex world of a rural society in transition, compared to more rigid project management style. It encourages and embraces 'emergence': the continual surfacing of new energy, ideas and leaders that occurs when people gather courage for their own learning journey.

*"These organisations all come to our village and tell us stories and make us do things, but they never help us to ask why and to analyse the root causes of things. The 'sitting allowances' they pay us [for turning up to workshops] make us too lazy to use our brains."*



## 5. Agree clear terms of engagement, from the outset

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From the outset Seventy Three and the Homestay Association agreed that there would be no cash allowances for attending meetings, no material assistance of any kind; that people participate only out of their own desire to learn; that the only thing people would get out of this partnership is knowledge and skills, to better organise themselves, and to better marshal their existing resources.

We later learnt that we needed to agree the principles of a **learning partnership** in writing and to professionalise our interaction. Inspired by partners within the Training for Transformation network in southern Africa, Seventy Three and the Association have since developed an agreement that establishes our respective roles and responsibilities, including our respective financial and in-kind contributions to the process.

### Establishing the parameters of a learning partnership

Under the terms of our agreement, Seventy Three's partnership with the Homestay Association aims to:

- ✦ Increase the capacity of the Association to learn and to think critically.
- ✦ Avoid creating dependency between members of the Association and Seventy Three.
- ✦ Build the capacity of Association members as development actors, capable of meeting their own needs.
- ✦ Develop the village economy within environmental limits.
- ✦ Uphold the principle of equality: to be open to, learn from and enrich each other.

In fulfilling those principles, Seventy Three is responsible for delivering:

- ✦ Learning methods for adults and village study circles.
- ✦ Organisational and programme management skills.
- ✦ Business training and mentoring for homestays and other community enterprise.
- ✦ Training to manage the StayRajaAmpat website and SMS booking system.
- ✦ Other technical training such as English language.
- ✦ Documentation and other study materials.
- ✦ Funding for training, where costs cannot be met by the Association.

The Homestay Association is, in turn, responsible for:

- ✦ Liaison with village and district government.
- ✦ Organising learning events, including timetabling, public announcements and invites.
- ✦ Logistics including meeting rooms, stationary, transport, accommodation and subsistence for participants.
- ✦ Funding to meet the cost of activities, to the extent that membership fees permit.
- ✦ Other in-kind (non-cash) contributions.

## 6. Support the development of real businesses

Building a business not only provides a decent and growing income to families in Raja Ampat, it also builds assets, thus ensuring resilience in future. Yet the most profound consequence of becoming an entrepreneur is that it lights a pathway to self-improvement that emerges from within the community itself, instead of being handed to people by government or NGOs.

Our work in various different settings leads us to believe that the preconditions to becoming an independent business owner are **curiosity, bravery and tenacity**. These same qualities lead many local entrepreneurs to apply themselves to many different problems faced by the community, emboldened by their experience that their own efforts can have a material impact on the world around them.

Enabling this process of self actualisation requires us, as outsiders, to change the way we see and facilitate the community-based economy.

In Raja Ampat we learnt that local people already had a keen sense for market opportunities (homestays). By respecting their choices, we made more headway in strengthening the local constituency for MPAs than if we imposed livelihood options that we deemed conservation-compatible but with less developed markets.



Photo : R. Sauyai

We learnt to treat people's family enterprises as real businesses from the start. The training we have given assumes that most people are capable of becoming entrepreneurs. We honed their **attitude and skills as business people** but we also strictly avoided gifting money and materials. Such gifts inhibit business development. They undermine people's ability to learn from their own mistakes and to use their own local knowledge to find the best pathway to building a successful enterprise.

We also learnt that there are **no short cuts**. In a rural setting, families often have various different livelihoods, that overlap and sometimes contradict. A family business creates new complexity as the business needs to find space among the other commitments that the family has. Over time, as the business grows, the family begins to drop less rewarding activities and concentrate on the business, which enhances its success. Thus business achievement is self-reinforcing. But it is hard for outsiders, and the family themselves, to detect this tipping point, where the business stopped being just another income stream, and became the family's core livelihood.

This whole approach departs from conventional attitudes to the community-based economy, which may treat small family businesses as nascent, weak and inferior to the real 'private sector'. Yet not only are the homestays in Raja Ampat the **real private sector**, with the fastest growth rate of any business sector in the district, they also have legitimacy. They have emerged from the community and are embedded in the islands' social, financial and cultural networks.

*"Let others have all these village funds [dana desa] from the government. We'd rather work to find the things that we don't yet have"*



## Conclusion - “It’s like peeling the layers off an onion”

We like to use the metaphor of peeling an onion in our work with the Homestay Association. The Association’s evolution over the past four years reflects its members’ evolving understanding - layer by layer - of what it means to be an entrepreneur and also to be a community organisation.

Right at the outset of this process, we learnt that people’s primary locus for action is the extended family, rather than their village. It is through the family that people secure customary rights to the land they build their businesses on. But this also meant that the families who had established the first few homestays as early as 2010 were working in isolation from each other.

It is only in 2012, when they began to see a need to act together to defend land, acquire skills and promote their businesses, that families mooted the idea of an association. But, in establishing the Homestay Association, families had to then **define their collective purpose and to learn how to work with each other.**

So it took another two years of dialogue for the Association to shape its Vision for Life, agree its articles of incorporation, appoint a management team and develop an annual work plan. It took three years to establish a system of membership fees, hire and salary a secretary, and start to set standards governing its members.



Each of these stages of development reflects a **cycle of action and reflection**, in which people have had to grapple with the **skills needed to run a business**; with why it is important to **collaborate with others**; with their **rights and responsibilities** as members of a community organisation association; and, for the managers of that organisation, with **what it means to be accountable** to its members.

Now in its fourth year, the Association will begin work to understand - and even quantify - the limits to further growth of the homestay sector, and to advocate its vision of a sustainable society to village government and councils across the Dampier Strait.

That, in turn, demands a **new level of understanding about village governance, what it consists of, and how the Association might help to make it more effective**. Herein lies our next challenge, as process facilitators, in the final phase of our work with the organisation.

A lot of what we describe above might not sound like conservation. But in a place like Raja Ampat, this slow, patient work that adult educators call **conscientisation** is what it takes to create the leadership, the institutions, the economics - the politics - on which the continued integrity of the islands' ecosystems depend.





## About Seventythree

Seventythree is a firm of analysts, business developers and development educators. We create economies and business models that are productive, fair and sustainable. We shape the paradigms, the institutions and the leadership that make these things possible.

Seventythree works in the energy, marine, land use and industrial sectors. We deliver a unique blend of advisory and training services to business clients, governments, community-based organisations and philanthropists. We work at macro policy, factory and farm level. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. is based in Singapore, with the capacity to execute projects globally.

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