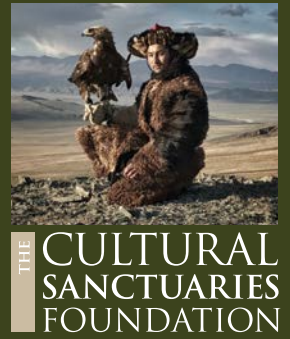


MADANG LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CENTER PAPUA NEW GUINEA



VOICES OF THE RAINFOREST
Project Report



PROJECT SUMMARY

This project involves the creation of a language and cultural center for the indigenous tribes of Baitabag village and neighbouring tribes within Madang Province in Papua New Guinea (the Center).

The Center will be a gathering place for the local tribes and will help to protect and promote their culture, languages and wisdom in an area which is not only home to some of the planet's richest biodiversity but is also the most concentrated area for cultural and language diversity in the world. Some 850 languages, all endangered, are spoken in PNG, with around 280 of those in Madang province alone.

The Center will be the first of its kind and will complement the science, education and conservation work being done by the New Guinea Binatang Research Centre (BRC), PNG's leading biological research and conservation organization.

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PROJECT HISTORY



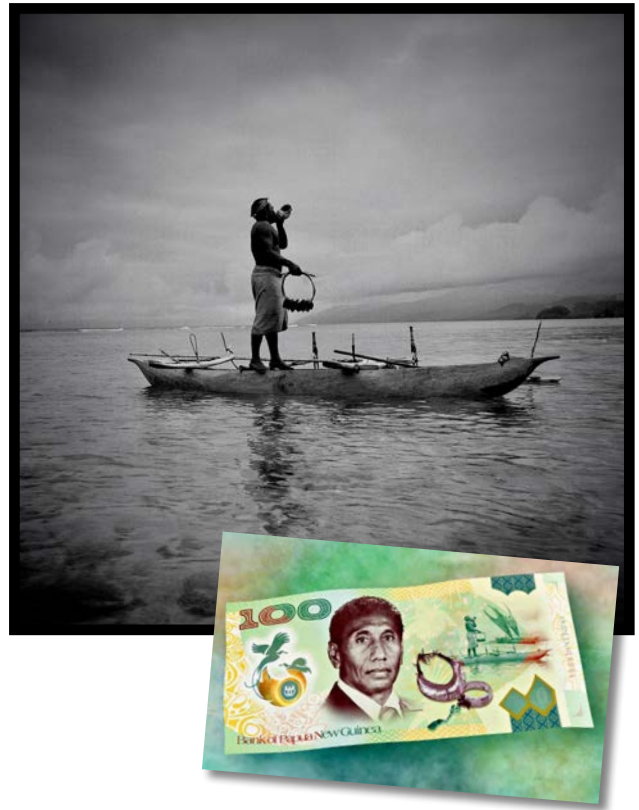
CSF's connection with PNG goes back decades.

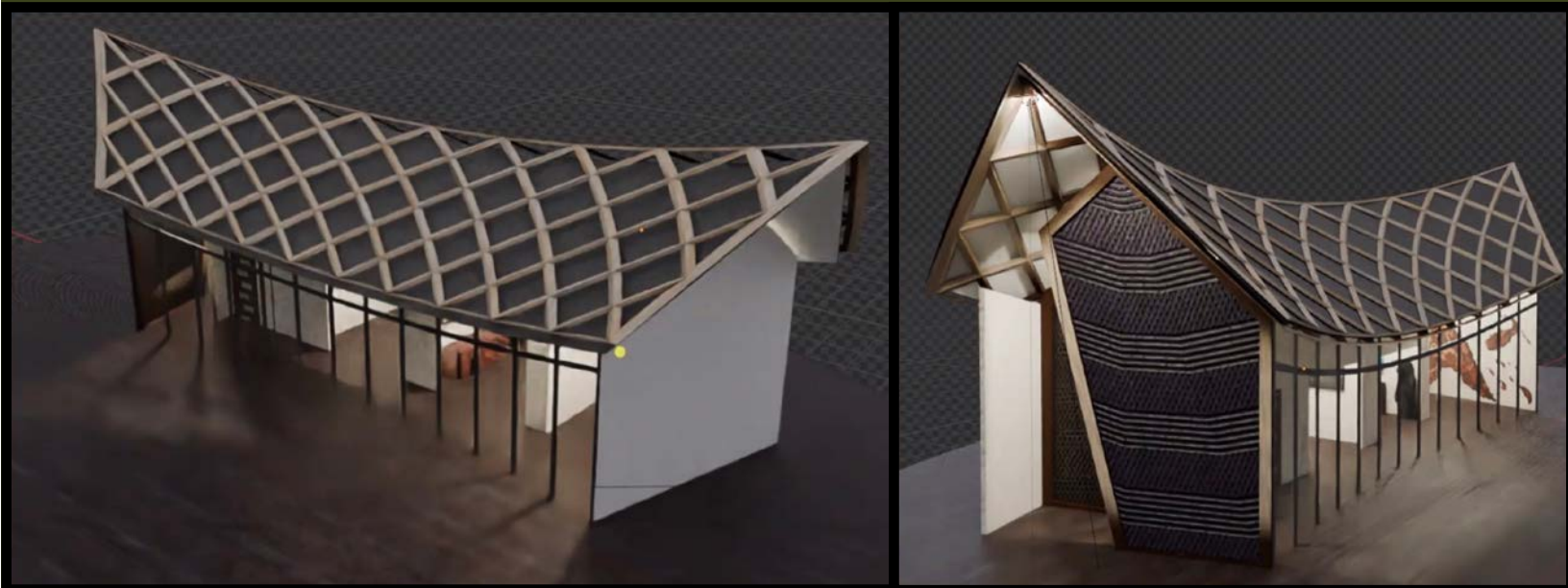
Growing up as a young boy in Australia after his parents moved there from his native Canada, CSF co-founder Chris heard stories of an exotic island to the North. He listened to tales and whispers about its tribes and its traditions and yearned to see it for himself. Some twenty years later, when he left his work as the last photographic assistant to Ansel Adams and set out on his own photographic journey, Chris headed straight to New Guinea. Falling in love with its mystery and remoteness, he committed to spend six months in each of the next ten years visiting every part of the PNG and West Papua archipelago to document the traditions, masks and

costumes of the tribes living hidden under the forest canopy, one foot still in the garden of Eden. He did just that and the photographic fruits of that decade are housed not only in his book *Where Masks Still Dance* but also in the National Archives of Papua New Guinea. In 2010, with linguistic experts and colleagues from National Geographic as part of their Enduring Voices Language Revitalization program (its mission to protect endangered languages), he spent a further extended period in PNG, including in Madang province, recording some of its endangered languages and producing several documentaries for National Geographic.

Roll forward to 2017...when we founded The Cultural Sanctuaries Foundation, it was inevitable from the start that we would one day do a CSF project in PNG. It has been calling to us ever since but it was when we started to get to know the team at BRC in 2020 that the vision started to take form. Five years on and now the timing is right, the funding is largely in place and the project plans have been refined and agreed.

Just a few months before our recent meetings with the local communities and BRC in Madang and the writing of this report, Chris was asked if one of his photographs (taken of a tribal shark caller all those years ago on the coast of New Guinea) could feature on one of the new PNG banknotes being released in conjunction with the celebration of the country's 50th year of independence. What an extraordinary honor.





Proposed design of the Center – see page 17 for more detail

“A CENTER IN THE CENTER OF THE CENTER”

PNG is the most culturally, linguistically and biologically diverse country on Earth. It is home to more than 750 distinct tribal groups, speaking more than 850 distinct languages – some 12% of the world’s total. It is also home to more than 5% of the world’s species.

Within PNG, the province of Madang on its Northeastern coast is the country’s epicenter of culture and languages. With reasons which are much debated and discussed but which can not be easily or fully explained, at 280, the number of distinct languages in this one province (of PNG’s 22 provinces in total) is staggering.

Hence, a Center in the center of the center!

CHOSEN LOCATION

The Center will be built near Baitabag village in the Kau Wildlife Management Area, a site of extraordinary natural beauty. A 30 minute drive from the town of Madang and its airport, a 15 minute drive from BRC’s headquarters and just a few minutes’ walk from the Kokoba Canopy Crane (about which see more later), the location is perfect for a project that integrates natural and cultural conservation.

Topographically, it is ideal too. Unusually for this area, the land on which we will build the Center is flat and the construction will not require the cutting down of any first-growth or otherwise ‘important’ or mature trees.

An added bonus is that it is on high land surrounded by pristine rainforest with beautiful views of the coastline and the Bismarck Sea in the distance.

A FIRST FOR US

This project is unique for CSF in being designed to benefit multiple tribes and communities.

In all of our other cultural projects, we have focused on, and/or built a cultural center for, one culture and language group, one unified community with a common language and set of traditions.

The Center in PNG will be rather different as it is going to serve and be for a large number of cultural and linguistic groups. Just in our latest meetings in Madang to discuss the plans and budget for the Center, we met with leaders of 10 tribes, each speaking a different language.

Think of the new Center as having a catchment area which will be as inclusive as possible. We want to ensure that all local tribes are and feel welcome.

Schools with 20,000 primary and 4,000 secondary students, a university with 5,000

tertiary students and an important teacher training college are all close by and, overall, we expect that the Center will be accessible – on foot or via short drives – to more than 60,000 people speaking over 50 languages.

PNG – SO OLD, YET SO YOUNG

The New Guinea archipelago has been inhabited by humans for at least 40,000 to 50,000 years, with the first settlers arriving during the last Ice Age from Southeast Asia. The landmass itself is much older. The country of PNG was not formed, though, until it gained its independence from Australia in 1975. It is 50 years old this year. Paradoxically, PNG is, therefore, both one of the oldest and one of the youngest countries in the world.





PNG – QUICK FACTS

- Population of around 11 million of which about 14% live in urban areas
- More than 750 tribes (possibly up to as many as 1,000) speaking more than 850 languages
- National commercial and administrative language and increasingly PNG's main lingua franca is Tok Pisin, which is a mash up of phonetical English, German and Malay
- Part of Melanesia
- Connected to its West to the Indonesian territories of Papua and West Papua
- At its closest point, just 3.75 kilometers from Australian territory – Saibai island in the Torres Strait – although mainland coast to the mainland coast the shortest distance is nearer 150 kilometers
- Attached to Australian landmass until separated by rising sea levels around 10,000 years ago
- Shells were abolished as a currency in 1933 and replaced by the kina

PNG – DATES OF COLONISATION AND INDEPENDENCE

- **15th century:** first European arrivals
- **1848:** annexed by the Netherlands (in the West) and the UK and Germany (in the East)
- **1888:** annexed by UK
- **1902:** transferred by UK to the British colony of Australia
- **1942:** unsuccessful invasion attempt by Japan
- **1949:** Papuans became Australian citizens
- **1975:** Independence
- Still part of the British Commonwealth

THE PNG RAINFORESTS AND OCEANSCAPE AND THE IMPACTS OF POPULATION, INDUSTRY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Occupying the eastern part of the world's second largest island, PNG has a diverse geography of volcanos, rugged mountains, deep valleys, rolling foothills, swamps, rivers and rainforests, a long (10,000 km) coastline and hundreds of islands. It is humid and hot on the coasts but cool in the mountains and it can snow on the highest peak of Mount Wilhelm.

It is home to the planet's third largest rainforest (which covers 80% of the country) and despite covering less than 1% of the world's land area, the country is home to 5% of the world's species, many of which are endemic. Its 15,000-20,000 plant species (including 3,000 orchid species), 150,000 insect species, 740 bird species, 276 mammal species and 800 coral species make it one of the most extraordinary places for flora and fauna on earth.

Threats, however, abound. Compacting the country's unsustainable use of resources, pervasive illegal logging and mining and history of poor environmental governance, the impact of climate change marches ever closer. Rising sea levels, erosion, saltwater intrusion, droughts, flooding and other extreme weather events and reduced soil fertility have a disproportionate impact on the land and on an economy and population heavily reliant on agriculture and aquaculture. Food insecurity and nutritional and health issues abound. The good news is that the PNG Government is taking this seriously, establishing protected areas and working to align its national biodiversity targets with global frameworks to promote sustainable environment management and conservation. Corruption remains a big problem but things are improving.





BIRDS OF PARADISE

The magnificent Bird of Paradise is the national bird of PNG. Having become symbolic of the country's culture and beauty as well as its soaring identity since independence, it features on the country's national flag. Of the 43 known Birds of Paradise species in the world, some 38 are found in PNG and nowhere else. Tribes use Bird of Paradise plumes in their dress and rituals.



THE PNG ECONOMY

One of the world's poorest countries, PNG's economy relies heavily on agriculture and natural resources (natural gas, oil and minerals). 85% of the working population are farmers with about 40% subsistence farmers. Its main crops and exports include copra, copra oil, rubber, tea, coffee, palm oil, taro, sago and betel nut. Within the cash economy, unemployment is extremely high and in the capital of Port Moresby reaches a staggering 70% of 16 to 35 year olds. 40% of the population are below the poverty line, 30% have little or no formal education (down from 99% in 1975) and 20% have no access to electricity. About 15% of kids attend secondary school.



TOURISM IN PNG

We will work hard at promoting the Center to visitors and tourists from near and far.

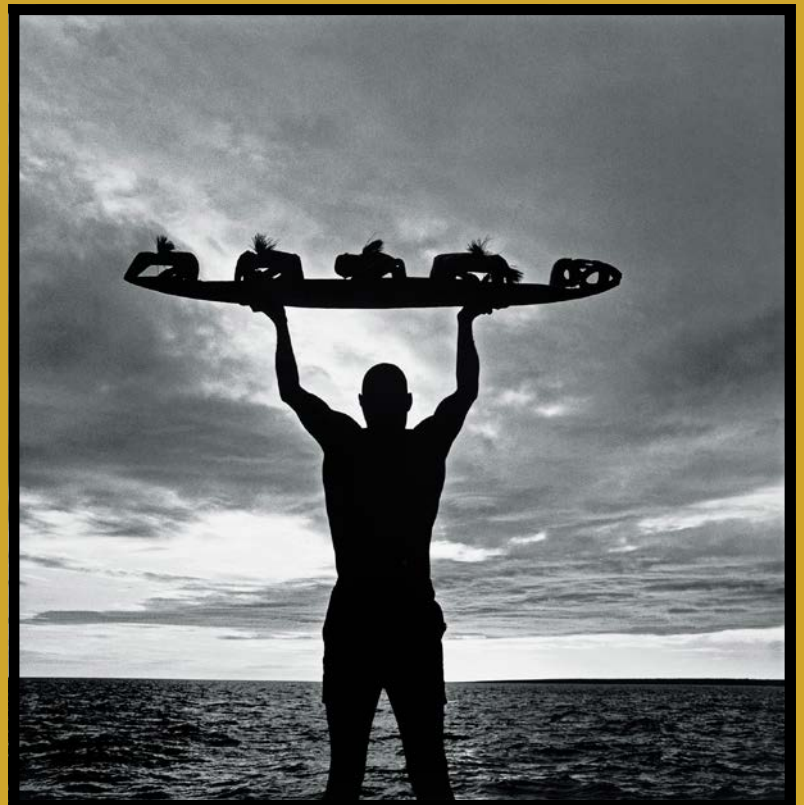
However, it was clear to us on our most recent visit to PNG that the country's tourism industry is far from flourishing. In fact, tourism levels have declined significantly over the last few years and, in particular, have not bounced back since the Covid pandemic.

It is a real shame to see such a stunning country so infrequently visited. Its eco- and cultural tourism potential is enormous, not to mention the attractions of its stunning rainforests, volcanos, rivers and coastlines (and so few tourists!) but its remoteness and an exaggerated reputation of tribal violence seem to have put people

off coming to this extraordinary and fascinating land.

We hope that that changes and we are pleased that the PNG Government and its Tourism Authority are committed to trying to change the country's international reputation as well as the efficiency of its domestic air travel and other infrastructure.

One thing is for sure – for any scientist, scholar or researcher out there who is interested in the most culturally, linguistically and biologically diverse country in the world, PNG really is a promised land. We hope that the new Center, working in partnership with the facilities at BRC, will be a huge draw for them to come to visit and study in Madang.



OUR PROJECT PARTNER, BRC



BRC has been working in Madang and other areas of PNG for almost 30 years. The legacy of the Christensen Research Institute set up in Madang in the 1980s by Diana Christensen, BRC was re-branded and re-launched by Vojtech Novotny (now a globally renowned and respected professor but then a young scientist newly arrived in PNG) with a small team in 1997.

The organisation's full name – the New Guinea Binatang Research Center – echoes its early beginnings, with its then focus on entomology reflected in the inclusion of 'binatang', the local tribal word for insect.

Since then, it has grown and broadened its scope now to cover the study of birds,

animals, trees and plants and to employ 70 people. Its latest expansion is into ethno-botany and, with talented New Guinean linguist Roger Maikei coming on board, local endangered languages so it is the perfect time for CSF and BRC to join forces and for the Center to be created.

BRC is the leading research and conservation group in PNG. A biological research, conservation and education NGO, it specialises in training Papua New Guineans on all levels from field technicians through para-ecologists to post graduate students, advancing biodiversity research in PNG and developing educational and nature conservation programs and targeting grassroots audiences.

THE KAKOBA CANOPY CRANE

One of the greatest challenges for scientists and researchers studying the biodiversity of any rainforest is how to access the heights and depths and the canopy of its trees in order to observe all the life that is there and to evaluate the impact of climate change and other variables on that life.

Twelve universities and science groups in the world have come up with an inspired solution – a canopy crane – and one of those twelve is BRC.

Its Kakoba Crane, funded by the European Research Council and jointly managed by them and BRC, was erected a few years

ago in Baitabag and researchers can now gamely strap themselves in to its gondola to be lifted into the treetops and above. (Having been up in the crane ourselves, we know how incredible the access is – you can simply reach out and catch an ant in the very top of a tree with your bare hand – and how spectacular the vertiginous views!)

A portion of the proceeds from the rental of the Crane will, thanks to the generosity of the leadership team at BRC, go towards the running costs of the Center until if and when it can become financially self-sustaining.



COMMUNITY LAND DONATION AND ROAD ACCESS

We are honoured that the community of Baitabag has agreed to donate a piece of their land to the project in perpetuity.

INFRASTRUCTURE, ACCESS AND HELP FROM THE PNG GOVERNMENT

We are also honoured that the PNG Government and, in particular, the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority are open to the idea of pitching in to help with infrastructure and access. The dirt road to

the land on which the Center will be built is uneven and really only suitable, in terms of vehicles, for trucks, motorbikes and four-wheel drives.

Together with BRC and the team at the Tourism Authority, we are applying for the PNG Government's support to improve and pave the road. Even if it were not a great advantage for the Center, this will also bring a huge benefit to the local community and to the accessibility of BRC's Kokoba Crane.



PURPOSES, AND MANAGEMENT, OF THE CENTER

The Center's purpose will be tailored to the needs and wishes of the local communities and tribes. It will act as a:

- gathering place for all of the local communities
- a magnet for inter-tribal relationships and friendships
- language and cultural center
- a language recording studio documenting the local endangered languages and traditional knowledge, stories and songs and a state of the art language lab for linguists around

the world to use, supervised by local language experts to document many of the 280 languages spoken in Madang

- market for local crafts, textiles and weaving
- technology center, with WiFi, computers, cameras and video cameras for the community to check out and use to document their culture
- photographic gallery featuring portraits of community members
- showcase for the research, education and conservation work of BRC
- draw and inspiration for economic opportunity, entrepreneurship and ambition
- place for tourists to learn about local traditions, and
- coffee shop (coffee is a big thing in PNG!).

Nestled in the rainforest, the Center will be surrounded by nature. We will create walking and nature trails to connect it to the Kokoba Crane and for guided nature walks and science tours in the forest. (During our visit to the site, we were treated to an exhilarating nocturnal bat hunt (PNG is home to an incredible 91 species of bat) as well as a demonstration of insect and moth capture by lightbox and a trip to the forest canopy in the Kokoba Crane.)

In terms of management, BRC will be responsible for the operation and running of the Center as well as for its construction.





THE IDEA FOR A “TALK TALK”

One of the biggest events for any tribe in PNG is a local Sing Sing. People come together to display their cultures, costumes, headdresses, dances and music and as many as 100 tribes can gather for one enormous celebration. (We were lucky enough to attend the 2025 Annual Sing Sing in Mount Hagan this year and it really is a sight almost incapable of description. Thousands of tribal groups all singing, drumming and dancing separately but together – a dazzling display of colour, sound and energy.)

When we create the new language hub at the Center, we envisage creating an annual Talk Talk – a Sing Sing but for language. Tribes coming together from across PNG to celebrate and showcase their languages and stories in one joyous gathering of language. Wouldn't that be something!?



DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

The Center (and everything in it) will be built, as much as is possible, by local people using local materials. It will be authentic, welcoming, accessible, useful, inspiring, popular and busy.

We are incredibly grateful to have the talented Darran Ward on board for the project. His design (as shown on page 5) of the main and ancillary buildings, inspired by the look and feel of a traditional New Guinea spirit house and based on natural colours and shapes, is absolutely beautiful. Darran will oversee the construction of the Center alongside the team at BRC.

SUSTAINABILITY – SOLAR AND WATER

The Center will be fully environmentally sustainable once built – with solar panels to provide all necessary electricity and a fresh water collection system. The proposed solar and water system will not be just functional, though. It will also be fantastically exciting and inspiring. Designed by Darran, it will be a real feature of the project and a powerful visual tool for telling the all-important story of conservation and environmental sustainability.

PROJECT TIMETABLE

We hope to start construction in the winter of 2025 and to have the Center operational by the end of 2026.

BUDGET AND RUNNING COSTS

Build: we expect the construction to cost the equivalent of between US\$180,000 and US\$200,000. We have already raised US\$145,000 and are incredibly grateful to the donor who has committed that. We are now seeking a further US\$55,000 to get us over the finishing line.

Running costs: we expect the annual running costs of the Center, once built, and including salaries and insurance to be approximately US\$12,000.

Financial sustainability: we will work towards the Center being financially independent but if tourism levels remain low, realistically the only income potential is from visiting scientists, scholars and researchers. CSF and BRC will work together to find ways to generate income and to fundraise for the Center and in the meantime, BRC has generously offered a portion of the income it receives for use of the Crane to underwrite the annual cost. If tourism levels increase, we would hope to replace all other support with revenue from tourists in the form of an entrance ticket fee, the sale of coffee and snacks and a modest commission for the sale of arts and crafts.

OTHER PROJECT PARTNERS AND ADVISERS

Alongside the local communities, the team at BRC and designer Darra Ward, we are also working on this project with:

- The Tourism Promotion Authority of Papua New Guinea,
- PNG National Museum and Art Gallery and its acting chief curator (and former BRC student) Bulisa Iova, and
- Dr Jane Mogina, PNG biodiversity specialist and UNEP adviser.

OUR THANKS

Our thanks go to all those donors to The Cultural Sanctuaries Foundation who have so generously donated to and pledged support for our work and, in particular, for this project. We are incredibly grateful.

Our thanks also go to all the community members in Madang who have given their time to discuss and support the project and, in particular, to the Baitabag tribe who have so generously donated the land on which the Center will be built. We hope that it proves to be all that they wish for it.

Finally, we thank the team at BRC, in particular Dr. Conor Redmond. We were first introduced to Conor back in 2020 and discussed the seed of the idea for

the Center. Working with him and his colleagues Professor Vojtech Novotny, Dr. Pagi Togo and Clant Alok Jnr, the vision has taken shape and, with Conor bringing designer Darran Ward on board and with a benefactor wonderfully pledging the majority of the funds that we need for the Center's construction, we are now in the final stretch. We are looking forward to working with Conor and the BRC team in the months and years ahead. We could not do this project without them.

In the national PNG language of Tok Pisin, to all of them from us at Cultural Sanctuaries...

Tenk yu Tru.





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