

General

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# Papua delegates visit Eigg and Skye to learn about community development

A 12-strong delegation of officials from the Indonesian province of Papua visited Eigg and Skye recently.

The delegates, led by Alex Rumaseb, head of Papua's provincial planning office, were taken to Eigg and Camuscross in Sleat by Alastair McIntosh and colleagues of the Centre for Human Ecology to look at the way bottom-up development can empower communities.

Papua, on the Indonesian side of New Guinea island, is one of the last great frontier wildernesses. Its vast rainforests and coral-rich waters are home to more than 250 indigenous tribes, the most linguistically diverse population on Earth. Yet standards of health and education for indigenous Papuans are often below the national average. Rampant logging, both legal and illegal, has decimated swathes of primary forest. And now palm oil companies owned by powerful corporations are coercing communities into selling their land, sometimes for less than \$1 a hectare, whilst promises to build schools and homes go unfulfilled and villagers are left bereft of the ecosystems.

Papuan provincial government planners are concerned about the implications of people losing their connection to the land and their culture through the development of the cash economy, and they wanted to understand how people in the Scottish Highlands are keeping or reclaiming that connection. "We like the idea of 'soil, soul and society' working together," said Alex Rumaseb. "We want this to inform

our 100-year plan for a healthy, happy Papua province."

The province faces a situation where two-thirds of the population are made up of incomers, many of whom were sent over when Indonesia was a military dictatorship. Professor Alastair McIntosh said: "This delegation was made up of both incomers and indigenous Papuans. They especially valued seeing on both Eigg and Camuscross on Skye how different communities can come to respect each other and make a common future. The Scots also learned a lot from their experience as they strive to develop a more democratic system than the one they have had."

As much of Papua's rainforest is actually owned by the indigenous population in a system based on ancient systems of ancestral tenure, the Papuan delegation also wanted to know the mechanism which enabled crofting and community trusts to benefit the local community. They met with Maggie Fyffe, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust secretary; Neil Robertson, Eigg grazing clerk, and Camille Dressler, local historian and social enterprise tutor, whilst on Skye they met with Susan Walker from the Crofting Commission. They also watched a communal potato-planting at Camuscross, and could not get over the fact that the tractor was driven by Gavin Parsons who is a lecturer at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

The Papua delegation reported that they were seeing growing signs of climate change in Indonesia, and they therefore wanted to understand

more about climate change. They were very impressed by Eigg's award-winning green electrical grid, and were particularly interested in the solar and hydro components of the system.

The visit to Eigg culminated in a ceilidh in the community hall where islanders and Papuan delegates

shared food, dances and songs. As piper Donna MacCulloch piped the group away, they sang a traditional Papuan farewell song.

Camille Dressler said: "As we prepare to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Eigg community buy-out, it is very moving to find out that our efforts have been an

inspiration for a people on the other side of the world. We wish them the best in their endeavours."

The Papuans' visit to Scotland ended in Govan, where they studied urban poverty and the work of the GalGael Trust which was started by the late Colin Macleod whose father is from Gravir on Lewis.



Delegates and community members pictured outside Glebe Barn Field Centre on Eigg