



Health workers, village health volunteers and the KI team gear up for the patrols.

Track partners focused on maintenance

The Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) have renewed their commitment to ensure the 96-kilometre Kokoda Track is accessible and safe for both villagers and tourists when trekking season reopens.

Part of an extended memorandum of understanding between the Government of Papua New Guinea and Queensland Government, the agreement aims to increase cooperation on tourism, the environment and conservation.

Acting KTA CEO Julius Wargirai said the partnership was initiated in 2017 to transfer skills and experience between Queensland National Parks and KTA rangers.

"PNG and Australia share many common challenges in conserving and managing protected areas and forests, while also balancing the needs of tourism and local people," Mr Wargirai said.

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Patrols bring COVID-19 awareness to communities

Communities in the Kokoda Track region are better informed about COVID-19 and preventative measures following awareness activities conducted as part of health patrols.

Nearly 50 villages in the Sogeri and Mt Koiari catchments were visited from 6-10 April as part of maternal and child health patrols supported by the PNG-Australia Partnership's Kokoda Initiative (KI).

Prior to the patrols, program officers, Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) and health workers were trained in COVID-19 prevention, management and awareness at the Central Provincial Health Authority (CPHA) in Port Moresby.

A total of 45 health workers from Hiri and Goilala districts attended the training, which was conducted by representatives from the CPHA and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Acting CPHA Director Marcel Burua facilitated the training and emphasised that people must know the facts and

basic actions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"How we communicate information about COVID-19 is critical to taking effective action to help combat the disease and also avoid false rumours which may fuel fear and stigma," he said.

The patrol team also distributed WHO information materials to aid posts and clinics, which included prevention messages in English and Tok Pisin.

Health workers and VHVs demonstrated proper hygiene and sanitation practices, especially regular handwashing with soap and clean water and the importance of physical distancing.

Hiri District Family Health and Services Coordinator Thomas Piaro said the training put them in a better position to assist communities during uncertain times.

"We are better informed about the facts of coronavirus and can confidently tell our communities how to prevent it from spreading," he said.



Acting KTA CEO Julius Wargirai with David Fuller from the QPWS.

Disclaimer: Images that do not feature social distancing and mask wearing were taken prior to the current COVID-19 situation. Please be assured that the latest COVID-19 guidance and protective measures are being taken to keep our communities safe.



Health patrols on Kokoda Track



Routine health patrols include immunisations.

Communities in the Kokoda Track region continued to receive access to health care as part of the maternal and child health patrols to remote villages during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

In April, KI supported patrols reached 45 villages in Sogeri and Mt Koiari catchments of Central Province.

The integrated health patrols brought essential maternal and child health services to nearly 1,500 women and their families.

Villagers had the opportunity to receive antenatal checks, family planning services and outpatient care.

More than 300 children under the age of five and pregnant mothers received immunisations.

Officer-in-charge of the Sogeri Health Centre Cecilia Valamb was part of the team that visited villages in the Sogeri catchment.

She observed that track communities are generally performing well in terms of health and education outcomes.

“With continuous support that comes from the Australian Government through the work that KI does, the people along the track are receiving better health services on a regular basis,” she said.

“We see that there is actual change in the communities, babies are fully immunised, we have good facilities here. The supply of drugs and capacity building of health workers and VHV’s has really lifted the health standard in this area.”

As part of the patrol, the team also conducted awareness on COVID-19 and demonstrated proper hygiene and sanitation practices.

Water security for track villages



Australian Government’s Nikki Wright, Central Province Governor Robert Agarobe and Kokoda Track Authority Acting CEO Julius Wargirai officially launched the Water Security Project in Sogeri, Central Province.

The Central and Oro provincial governments are working in partnership with KTA and KI to promote the health and sanitation conditions for Kokoda Track region communities.

This water security projects will improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for more than 10,000 people in nearly 40 villages.

The Central and Oro each committed K250,000 to the water project which

is being implemented through the PNG-Australia Partnership under KI.

The Australian Government will provide logistical expertise for the project.

Governor Agarobe said the Central Water Project is a true partnership – a model that promotes sustainability and positive impact for communities.

Villages will receive 9,000 litre water tanks and a new community meeting shelter.

PM watches ETOA premiere

Prime Minister Hon. James Marape MP was present at APEC Haus in Port Moresby on 22 January for the premiere of the new documentary film that explores the history of Etoa – the site of a significant battle during World War II.

The 45-minute documentary – *ETOA: A Kokoda Track Story* – depicts the relationships between Papua New Guineans and soldiers from Australia and Japan.

It recasts the way war paved the road towards the country’s greater growth and encourages a need for Papua New Guineans to learn about their past.

The film’s director David Lloyd-Lewis said *ETOA* represents a new chapter in the Kokoda legend about the lost battlefield of Etoa – covering its transformation into a warzone, the subsequent recovery efforts and the aspirations of Papua New Guinean, Australian and Japanese stakeholders

“Largely unknown in mainstream circles, the Etoa battlefield and its recovery signify an unclosed chapter of history for all involved,” he said.

“This story has a unique opportunity to showcase the reconciliation of once-warring nations through a shared commitment to honouring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.”

The film’s development saw improvements to the site which will mean access to future visitors and assisted the Japanese Association of Recovery and Repatriation of War Casualties (JARRWC) to identify their dead.

It also promoted the work of the National Museum and Art Gallery (NMAG) and its management and preservation of military and cultural heritage sites along the Kokoda Track.

“Partnership is an important value promoted by this documentary project,” NMAG Director Dr Andrew Moutu said.

The film was produced in partnership with the local track community, KI and JARRWC.



ETOA premieres at APEC Haus in Port Moresby.



FODE students sit their entry tests at the Kokoda College in Northern Province.

Flexible learning boost for health workers and teachers

More elementary school teachers and health workers have been given the chance to upgrade their education at Kokoda College.

The success of the 20 recipients of the inaugural Kokoda College flexible, open and distance education (FODE) program has built a pathway for more health workers and teachers to continue their education.

The FODE program is supported by the PNG-Australia Partnership and delivered by the Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF).

Thirty-three elementary teachers and seven health workers within the Kokoda region catchment areas now have senior high school educations formally recognised within the national education and health systems.

Theresa Sara was one student who successfully completed her grade ten courses and is continuing to study for year 11 at the Kokoda College, along with 39 other students.

“Being given this scholarship was my golden opportunity to upgrade my marks and achieve my lifelong dream of becoming a midwife,” she said.

The FODE curriculum is developed and delivered by the Department of Education and registered training providers like the KTF. Innovative approaches have been taken to deliver learning to people in hard to reach communities.

Students have made use of tablet computers distributed by KTF to complete lessons electronically and submit assignments from home after two weeks of lessons at the Kokoda College.

Kokoda College principal Enosh Ben said the partnership between KTF and KI is a real opportunity for locals along the Track to further their education and open doors to new possibilities.

“The FODE Centre enables Grade 10 school leavers to upgrade their qualifications to Grade 12 – the new minimum entry requirement for all teachers and health workers across the country.”

VHVs benefit from refresher

In March, more than 30 VHVs from the Sogeri and Mt Koiari catchments attended a refresher course on safe motherhood and family planning to improve service delivery in remote locations.

The two-week training was held in Sogeri, Central Province, and included theoretical and practical sessions on the women’s health and safety, antenatal mothers, birthing and labour, referrals and reporting processes.

Awareness presentations from subnational counterparts from the National Department of Health, Central Provincial Health Authority and Marie Stopes were part of the theory sessions in the first week followed by a week of practical sessions and awareness in the community.

Daiva Koeari, one of 91 KI-trained VHVs, said they bridge the gap between remote villages and health care centres.

“We see ourselves as the first contact point to any patient,” he said.

“We must know our roles as VHVs to assist and this training is very helpful to us.”

The VHVs conducted awareness on family planning and assisted mothers who came for antenatal check-ups and immunisation at the Sogeri Health Centre.



Marie Stopes’ Cathy Tukne conducts training on family planning methods

KTA, QLD rangers strengthen partnership

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Two experienced QPWS staff have worked with the KTA in February. One focused on KTA systems and processes to strengthen tourism management and redesign the ranger structure, while the other assessed field operations and determine ranger training requirements.

A key priority will be Track maintenance and repair.

Mr Wargirai said “each year the wet season causes damage to the Track, with trees down, grass over-grown and footbridges washed away. KTA rangers will work with Queensland National Park rangers along the track.

Earlier in the year, sections of the Kokoda Track were inspected by Julius Wargirai, QPWS’s David Fuller and KI staff.

The trip was the first of several inspections carried out to prepare the track for both

the local communities and trekkers to use when tourism resumes.

The work included assessing the condition of footbridges, which are critical for local communities and trekkers.

Mr Fuller said the QPWS is excited to continue its partnership with the KTA to strengthen tourism and trekking, and to protect the natural and cultural values of the Kokoda Track region.



CEPA and Australian counterparts map the development of the Kokoda Interim Protection Zone.

Master plan development underway for Protection Zone

The Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) has started development of the Environmentally Sustainable Development Master Plan for the Kokoda Interim Protection Zone (IPZ).

CEPA began drafting environmental aspects of the plan following a week-long workshop in February held in Tufi, Oro Province.

When completed, the master plan will provide a roadmap for how the IPZ will sustain the livelihoods and cultures of customary landowners and local communities, and guide environmentally sustainable development for the area.

This will assist with IPZ management and ensure the National Capital District's water and energy requirements are balanced with the need to conserve the Kokoda Track region's rich natural, cultural and military heritage for local communities and visitors.

The process was supported by the PNG-Australia Partnership, which included technical expertise from a management plan specialist from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The CEPA working group has built on years of studies in identifying significant environmental values, the threats to them and potential management strategies.

Bridge repair improves access

The Vesulogo Bridge – a key access point for the Kokoda Track – has been repaired, improving travel safety for local communities and tourists.

The bridge is located on Ower's Corner Road and underwent major repairs supported by KI, including a heavy gauge steel surface that will last for years.

For the past 10 years the bridge had a timber surface that had suffered wood rot, broken planks, stolen pieces and a recent arson attack. The new steel panels ensure even heavy vehicles will travel safely across.

Locals were engaged to support construction, including traffic controllers

to manage minor road delays and six workers who learned new steel working techniques.



The construction team completes the bridgeworks.

ON THE TRACK

Thomas Piaro
Hiri District Family Health
Services Coordinator



Kokoda Initiative spoke to 40-year-old Thomas Piaro, who hails from Hirane village in Lake Kapiago District, Hela Province. For the last ten years Thomas has worked with the Port Moresby-based Hiri District Family Health Services. He was previously the officer-in-charge (OIC) at Sogeri Health Centre.

Reflections on working as a health worker and with KI?

Working with KI has helped me reach places in the most remote parts of Central Province especially in Mt Koiari where I can visit mothers and children. KI's support has been very consistent that we work on a routine basis to access these sites especially flying in on a helicopter.

Most rewarding experience on Track?

When I was the OIC in Sogeri I worked alongside a health worker and VHV in Efogi Health Centre to assist a mother who gave birth to a baby but had a retained placenta.

I assisted with manual withdrawal of the placenta and then gave the necessary drugs needed to keep her free from infection.

This was a proud moment for me having to save both lives.

Future plans?

I want to manage rural health services and to see myself engaged more in rural health activities.