

Salome Zongesi

“40 years of service to her local province.”



Served her local government for 40 years

For the last forty years of her life, Salome Zongesia has served her local government of Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea, as a Food Crop officer. She currently lives in Markham at Mutzing Station, training farmers about different types of grains, crops, and spices, while working to provide them with training opportunities that allow them to keep up with the demands of the field.

Co-founding the Markham District Women in Agriculture Association

With farmers in the Markham district scattered between different [Local-Level Governments](#) (LLGs), there is always lots to do for Salome and her colleagues. Something Salome is very proud of, is her role in founding of the Markham District Women in Agriculture Association in 2019.

Salome received a lot of interest in the early stages of the group's formation, with women arriving at her office to ask for information on how to get involved, and especially how their participation in the group would help amplify their voices so that government officials at the provincial level would hear their concerns.

To raise the profile of the group shortly after its conception, Salome worked with Markham District Commerce Officer, [Mrs. Hedwig Tally](#) to host meetings and information sessions so that women felt well informed before deciding to become a member.

She also set up a management committee, deciding on the various roles and responsibilities of its members so that the group ran smoothly.

As of today, the Markham District Women in Agriculture are registered with the [PNG Investment Promotion Authority](#) and are officially licensed for trade.

Mobilizing farmer groups, especially women's groups is not an easy task. Officers on the ground have to gather women through their representatives and in meetings, getting them to understand their objectives as a group, and matching them to different partner organizations like the [National Agriculture Institute \(NARI\)](#), Fresh Produce Development Agency (FPDA) and ROC Taiwan Mission.

What type of training is provided for the farmers in your group?

Before any training is conducted, a 'training needs analysis' is carried out. We visit the farmers for their views on what type of training or awareness they could benefit from, and then we think of where we would need to direct them. For example, if women want training in fresh produce, we link them up with the FPDA. Most classroom-based training have been abolished, so our officers are now conducting practical demonstrations or hands-on training with the women – you could say that the field is our classroom!

What are some challenges you face in your work?

Sourcing the funds to continue with our work is always a challenge. There are certainly times where we've needed to hit pause on our training sessions because there was not enough cash flow to support us. However, the little funding we do receive is used to buy seeds and gardening tools to supply to women farmers in continuing their farming activities.

We get very little financial support, if any, from our elected representatives too. So, I've resorted to using registration fees to collect money for our training sessions. Partners like FPDA are brilliant, providing a lot of the sessions. I want to recognize them for their work in capacity building for our farmers. FPDA operates with a model farm concept, and many of our women farmers have benefitted from this.



Sabome doing a field demonstration with a farmer.

Can the government do more for women farmers and other farmers?

I believe that if the government is serious in assisting us, there would need to be a lot of change implemented. This isn't realistic due to a lot of political issues, and I feel what they actually want to see is farmers find their niche, while being more consistent in their farming duties. The struggles of farmers in Morobe and many other provinces will still be there, but the farmers need to remain focused on their dreams and aspirations to continue. DAL Officers can only assist where they can.

How is land being utilized?

In [Markham District](#), more than 60% of arable land is currently being disputed in courts, leaving less than half of the land for residents to farm. We do work to raise awareness of the land available to use within our communities, but it is up to the communities to organise and discuss a plan of action. There needs to be more awareness around the issues of registering land and working with development partners to develop.

What are your views about Women Farmers?

I have noticed that women these days are very willing to work on their land, but there is no support for them. Women are marginalized in many aspects, no matter their strength. But we can work together with the various agencies to enact change. I am a strong believer that if we can equally share our land between men and women, we will create a very big difference.



Organized training by the Fresh Produce Development Agency



A photo taken by Saborne during a field visit