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Papua New Guinea

Stories of Inspirational Women Agripreneurs

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Message from the Executive Director, Grow PNG



Tell Your Inspirational Stories, and so, many more will aspire.

Storytelling is a powerful medium to get your message across to your stakeholders. Inspirational stories are nuggets of gold, as they add more punch and impact to uplifting aspiring individuals.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), there are a few exceptional women who, despite the challenges of gender inequality in the country, stood out from the norm and made a difference in the agripreneurial space. These women can be found on farms, mobilizing smallholder farmers, at the market, raising the voice of women in agriculture, and building businesses in agriculture and within the food system.

In this series of storytelling, Grow PNG brings to light hidden gems of 10 outstanding inspirational women agripreneurs' stories. We believe these stories will inspire many more women to tell their stories, as well as inspire generations of new and talented women agripreneurs to rise and take their places within the agriculture value chains and food system in PNG.

This GrowHer inspirational stories of agripreneurial women leaders is supported by our earlier work done on gender case studies and gender training. Grow PNG's plans include a Gender Working Group and other gender initiatives to mainstream gender, thereby increasing income and improving the livelihoods of women, families, and smallholder households and those of their communities in the Markham Valley, Morobe Province, and PNG.

We thank the 10 Inspirational women agripreneurs for contributing their stories, and the [GrowHer](#) platform for amplifying their stories worldwide.

John Lloyd Simango, ML
Executive Director
Grow PNG



Introduction and Context



68% of Papua New Guinea's 8 million people are involved in agriculture. Of those involved in agriculture, 70% are women. Empowering women agripreneurs will mean increasing income levels and opportunities for a large number of the female population who are involved either as smallholders, MSME, business groups, cooperatives, or other forms of women enterprises and groups in the agriculture value chain and food system.

[Papua New Guinea's Gender Inequality Index \(GII\) of 2019 ranked the country 161 out of 162.](#) The agriculture value chain and food system in which most women are involved is better placed to reduce these gender inequality gaps if properly supported.

There are many inspirational women leaders who are advancing work within the value chain and food system, and with more support, they can do more. Their stories need to be told to inspire the next generation of women agripreneurs to also take these journeys. Collectively, this will encourage more women to participate in agriculture and earn an income to improve their family's livelihood and contribute to reducing these inequality gaps.

The increase in the number of women agripreneurs will potentially increase their collective voices to influence policy decisions, thereby, encouraging growth in this space. These include access to market, finance, technology, capacity building, education, health, and many others such as conservation, climate-smart practices and economic opportunities.

Research also shows that empowering millions of women business leaders and increasing their agency in value chains will drive equitable economic growth while injecting cash into rural economies and allowing the sector to benefit from increased investments in technology and financial services. COVID-19 has further highlighted the need to understand women's roles in the workplace, especially in agricultural value chains, and empower them as business decision-makers.

With DFAT's catalytic investment, Grow Asia has been able to demonstrate that amplifying the business case for women's economic empowerment can incentivize investment into gender mainstreaming actions, practices, and policies.

Grow PNG's involvement is to use its multi-stakeholder platform to increase the engagement of key stakeholders who may come together to discuss and find solutions to addressing these problems and advancing the work of women agripreneurs and women in general. Through an upcoming Gender Working Group, partners will articulate these challenges, seek support, and encourage to implement of gender-sensitive and inclusive practices to the benefit of women agripreneurs, women farmers, smallholders, and businesses in the agriculture value chain and food system across PNG, and the Grow Asia Network.



Meet the women changing the face of agriculture in PNG

These like-minded agripreneurs are pushing boundaries.



Edith Babul

'Mama Guava of Munum'



Margaret Kandilop

'a single mum who knew no limits'



Lala Kembai

'a single mum who knew no limits'



Gertrude Gurup

'Cocoa, the tree of benefits'



Salome Zongesia

'40 years of service to her local province'



Pamela Ben

'I turn to land for my future'



Noylene Levis

'Bringing women together to drive positive change'



Maria Linibi

'She found her purpose in farming, and founded PNG Women in Agriculture'



Malinda Marvin

'Degree or not, land is Life'



Kwina Ewande Ambang

'From the Garden to the Table'

Edith Babul

'Mama Guava of Munum'

20 years

Fieldwork under her belt

5 hectares

of land to care for

Edith Babul is no stranger to farming. On her fruit farm, Edith grows Hybrid Indian Guava, Abiu (Pouteria Caimito), Custard Apple, Chocolate Fruit (Black Sapote), Soursoop, and citrus fruit. She also rears chickens, ducks, and pigs, and has dreams of leaving her farm under her daughter's management as she takes up another adventure in farming overseas.



Dreams of guava farming

Edith's journey in farming began in 2001, the year she first tried her hand at harvesting. One day, she set up shop at Lae Market, with two boxes and one bilum full of Indian Guava. While she was hopeful to sell her fruit, she couldn't believe her luck after receiving K350 within a few minutes of being at the market. That same day she told her husband "Someday, I will resign from work and go into full time guava farming."

Seven years later, Edith received a call from the Morobe [Women in Agriculture](#) team, with an invitation to attend training at the prestigious [National Agriculture Research Institute \(NARI\)](#), hosted by members from Australian Women in Agriculture. Without this training, Edith may never have quit her day job and moved into agriculture full time. She quit her job the next year and hasn't looked back.

It was all uphill from there, after Edith was selected for a scholarship in Queensland, Australia, that changed the trajectory of her farming career.

"After resigning in 2008, I stayed in my village of Munum and tended to my farm. In 2009, NARI worked with Australian Women in Agriculture to send farmers from Papua New Guinea to Australia for training, and I was one of them. I trained in Australia from 2011 until 2013."

Hard work and a little bit of luck

Edith's hard work coupled with a little bit of luck meant she was selected to attend a workshop that taught her new farming methods and the confidence to apply what she had learned. "I was one of the lucky recipients of this scholarship that saw 10 of us selected to attend a three- and half-month course at TAFE Queensland. The training opened my eyes to different farming methods, and I got to learn about budding, grafting, marcotting, and pest management."



Mama Guava and a sweet Abiu fruit



Edith selling her fruit at the market

10,000 trees and counting

Edith has 10,000 fruit trees on her farm and is eager to expand, but she needs to raise more money to finance the expansion. Indian Guava trees are no longer rare to come by, as these trees have been planted by many other farmers in the years since her first trip to the market. This doesn't stop Edith from selling, but only motivates her to dream bigger!

Training the next generation of farmers

As part of her fundraising activities, Edith charges different fees for groups that want to visit her farm. "For every visit, and knowledge shared on the farm, I try my best to make money so I can pay for my staff."

Edith has two employees and often employs students who wish to earn some pocket money during their school holidays. She pays a small sum for them, just to make them happy, and built a small bungalow for the students to stay overnight.



Edith and a custard apple. Custard apples are creamy and sweet.

Other streams of income for Edith come from growing aibika (abelmoschus manihot), also known as spinach, taro, banana, pawpaw (Papaya), and yam, and the hosting of any Christmas parties or get-togethers for local companies who envision some quiet time away from the city. "They can come, pay their fees and we prepare the lawn and barbeque for them."



A bungalow that students use during school holidays

“
They can come, pay
their fees and we
prepare the lawn and
barbeque for them.”

- Edith Babul

“
For every visit, and
knowledge shared on
the farm, I try my best
to make money so I can
pay for my staff.”

- Edith Babul

Next time you're in Lae, and would like to visit Mama Guava, give her a call before you drive down to her block!

Gertrude Gurup

“Cocoa, the tree of benefits”

Over 1,000

**cocoa trees planted in place of
destroyed Betelnut trees**

Gertrude Gurup and her husband Timothy Gurup are cocoa farmers in Mutzing, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea, who used to farm Betelnut. In 2006, after their Betelnut trees were destroyed by pests, Gertrude decided to plant over 1,000 cocoa trees in their place, even though she knew it was a risk as the Betelnut business was making good money for the people in Markham Valley.



From primary school teacher to cocoa farmer

For 25 years, Gertrude had devoted her time to teaching primary school students, and she struggled to imagine life without the chaos of the classroom and the children who would grow into adults remembering her life lessons. Gertrude decided to retire in 2012, two years after she opened her fermentary in order to fully commit to her cocoa plot with her husband.

But her risk paid off, and soon she started to see [the benefits of the cocoa trade](#). In 2010, Gertrude built a small fermentary, the first of three in her village, that enabled her to dry the cocoa beans herself. Things were going so well that Gertrude was considering quitting her full-time job as a primary school teacher.



Ripe cocoa is yellow or white when the husk is scraped

Utilizing Papua New Guinea's land

Gertrude believes that the customary land of Papua New Guinea should be utilized by its people. "In PNG, we have untapped customary land banks. We have land that can generate income for farmers, and seeds are free from our land. We only have to have dreams to use our land." Together, Gertrude and Timothy branched out into other small businesses, opening a store, rearing chickens, and farming vegetables on their small plot of land in order to support their children.

Branching out with the cocoa proceeds

With the proceeds from the [cocoa](#) plot, they purchased two trucks and a small tractor on loan, to assist them in plowing their land for farming. Their cocoa plot has allowed them to repay their loans and provide for their six children, who have since purchased small pockets of land, owning trade stores and a small guest house. The fruits of their labor have been sweet, and they're proud of what their children have achieved with their support.

“

At Elliven, they are now selling a 63.5kg bag at K450.00. I can sell 5 bags during the peak period in a week from my plot, or even more when I set up the scale and buy wet beans from customers. During quieter weeks, I can sell 2 bags, and still see a lot of money from farming cocoa.

”

- Gertrude Gurup



Gertrude's cocoa fermentary scraped

Following in their mother's footsteps

Gertrude's daughters have followed in their mother's footsteps and are farmers who run poultry businesses. Both Gertrude and Timothy understand that Cocoa farming is hard work, especially after an illness that meant Timothy needed a leg amputation, providing quite a setback for their business. The pair struggled to make ends meet for eight years and were unable to renew their fragmentary license, meaning they were not legally allowed to sell their cocoa.

Now, it certainly helps that the cocoa price is good, says Gertrude. "At Elliven, they are now selling a 63.5kg bag at K450.00. I can sell 5 bags during the peak period in a week from my plot, or even more when I set up the scale and buy wet beans from customers. During quieter weeks, I can sell 2 bags, and still see a lot of money from farming cocoa."

Today, Gertrude and Timothy have one full-time employee and have since renewed their fermenter license so they can sell their cocoa once more. Gertrude is also thinking of running a fishery as a new business venture.

Kwina Ambang

“The Garden to Table Dream”



Agritourism

Agritourism is not new to Papua New Guinea (PNG), but this advocate of women in agriculture and a businesswoman in Morobe province tells her story with a different perspective altogether.



Starting out in agritourism

Kwina Ewande Ambang, is a quiet and ambitious woman, originally from Gembogl in the Simbu province bordering Mount Wilhelm, [the tallest mountain in PNG](#). Today, she is the owner of [Miles Lodge](#) located 12 miles out of Lae City, the second largest city in PNG. She got started in agritourism 15 years ago – comfortably ahead of the curb – by turning her 7-bedroom home into a [guest house](#). With support from her husband – a forester - the lodge was built using sawn timber from their sawmill. A bank loan also helped improve amenities for the lodge.

With support from the officers of [Morobe Provincial Tourism Bureau](#) who provided guidance and training, the guest house came into full operation in 2010. Miles Lodge has conference and training facilities, a bar and grill area, 32 air-conditioned rooms, bungalows, and dining facilities.



Miles lodge, above, was previously Kwina's home

Gender inequality in Papua New Guinea

Gender inequality is rife in Papua New Guinea. In 2019, it was ranked [second last](#) (161 out of 162) for gender inequality. The index is derived from three measures – health, empowerment and labor market participation. Such a low score across all three measures highlights the systematic disadvantages faced by all women in the country, not just those in the agricultural sector. (You can read more on the issue of gender inequality through the lens of agriculture in this Food and Agriculture Organization [report](#).)

Women in Agriculture

Kwina was keen to address this issue and became one of the founding members of Women in Agriculture (WIA), working alongside Founder and Director, Maria Linibi, to promote agriculture and related activities involving women. She was the first Treasurer of WIA and assisted in advocating for women rights and their opportunity to work and live on their land in Morobe and other provinces in PNG.

She believes that a lot of positive changes can be achieved for PNG women if they set aside their differences and work together. Kwina has travelled to many business conferences hosted by [PNG Tourism Promotion Authority](#) (PNGTPA) and attended many trainings by both PNGTPA and WIA.

Eating Garden to Table

Kwina's Garden to Table Dream pushes her to promote sustainable agriculture activities and she walks her dream to sustain women farmers by purchasing vegetables and other organic garden produce to prepare food for her guests at the lodge. Kwina buys from local farmers along the roadside markets from Markham all the way to Lae's main market. Her greatest ambition is to have a PNG Indigenous Food Menu on the dinner table in hotels and restaurants around PNG. In addition to the PNG menu, she wants to see the traditional food available in a seed-bank for women to plant in their gardens. She would like to see less processed food served in households, moving instead to more local, fresh, organic food.



Miles Lodge

Changing entrenched mindsets

When WIA introduced Floriculture to women, many thought that idea was impossible. "I had to get out in public, talk to women and educate them that, income diversification should be seen as an opportunity to sustain themselves, and floriculture was one way to do so," says Kwina.

Her influence and determination for women to tap into floriculture was quiet challenging at first. She had to break the existing mindset that flowers were meant only for decoration in churches or at funerals. Today, many women earn an income from potting flowers, cutting and decorations at special events within the country.

Women are sent off with pigs and a small bag of seeds

"Before she leaves, she is given small bags of seeds and a live pig to take with her. We prepare her to sustain herself on the land, should anything happen to her. We know that we won't be around to watch what she is doing, or what has been done to her, so we prepare her mentally, socially and economically before she leaves. Plant the seeds so you and your children won't go hungry and take care of the pig, so you won't look for pigs for your sons or when you want to attend to a customary obligation. These days, we have lost our good traditions and we should try to bring back some of our best traditional approaches in agriculture."

Cultural practices in Simbu

Kwina recalls the culture of [her homeland](#). "In Simbu, traditionally when women are chosen to be married into another clan or village, we prepare them well before sending them off to their groom."

The importance of domestic stability for women in agriculture

Kwina believes in family stability and would like the PNG government to review the laws on Family Protection. The [Adultery Enticement Act](#) is very shallow, relying on compensation to remedy cases of adultery (up to a maximum of PGK1,000 or USD\$280). This is not seen as sufficient deterrent, and many marriages break up as a result.

She believes it should be reviewed to maintain stability in homes and tougher penalties imposed. She notes that in agriculture, you need the husband, wife, children and families to work together to achieve their business goals. It is for this reason that she is now training her daughters to take on the management role of the business, passing her legacy onto the younger generations.

A message to other women in agriculture

Kwina's message to women is: "Believe in yourself. You own your land, touch the soil and God will work miracles for you."



Women are sent off with pigs and a small bag of seeds

Malinda Marvin

“Degree or not, land is Life”

Over 10 years

In the sale and aggregation of fresh produce

“Women should not limit themselves because of their educational background when it comes to agriculture. Degree or no degree, we have land to create many opportunities.” This is a bold statement by [Malinda Marvin](#), a rural water and sanitation engineer in Papua New Guinea. Malinda has been involved in the sale and aggregation of fresh produce for over a decade now.



Early career progress

From Anumba village in Okapa District of Eastern Highlands, this soft-spoken lady spent her childhood watching her grandmother tend to their land. Malinda’s grandmother taught her extensively about the land, covering topics such as seed and soil identification, weather prediction, as well as planting and weeding skills.

Malinda graduated from [Divine Word University](#) in 2006 and joined the Salvation Army Social Services as a community development trainer. She later joined mining company [Barrick Gold](#) as an Environment Officer. Between 2009 and 2014 she was contracted to [Live and Learn Environment Education](#) (LLEE), an international NGO, as their Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Engineer. She left and worked for Oxfam for a year. In between she provided consultancy services where fitting.

She also worked extra jobs on the side – freighting fresh vegetables and fruits to K-Mart (a local supermarket in Kimbe), Super Value Stores (SVS) in Lae, Vanimo and Port Moresby between 2010 and 2012.

Starting her own business

Malinda returned home to Goroka in 2018. She took a leap of faith and started her own company, Foya Fresh Produce, and started farming crops such as zucchini, french beans, capsicum and tomatoes. Excitingly, Malinda had the opportunity to begin supplying crops to two tertiary institutions. She also saw the opportunity to assist other subsistence farmers, so she worked as a middle-man – this time purchasing cauliflower, broccoli and capsicum from farmers in Mul-Baiyer in the Western Highlands and other vegetables like tomatoes, cabbages, carrot in Goroka to meet her buyers' demands.

As a farmer, Malinda wants the government to address the limitations many smallholder farmers and aggregators like herself face, especially in rural PNG. She also advocates for the government to secure international markets, subsidized freight costs, and converts the 97% of customary land in the country to semi-commercial and commercial farming land where farmers can scale up to make better use of specialized farming skills.

Diversifying into mushroom farming

With her core business established, Malinda enquired at Juncao Mushroom Centre, a mushroom tuber-producing center managed by the EASTERN Highlands Provincial Natural Resources Division in partnership with the Chinese Government in Goroka. She received in-depth training on planting, nurturing, handling, and storing mushrooms. Fresh from her training, she planted 600 tubers of mushrooms and has since started supplying locals and restaurants in Goroka.

Hopes and dreams for the future

Malinda's dream is to use her experience as a farmer and fresh produce supplier to set up a storage and supply hub that receives produce from farmers and delivers it to bigger markets.

"My other ambition is in specialized organic farming, working with farmers to grow and supply specific organic produce to the markets within PNG and export around the world. Providing consistent market opportunities for specialized farmed crops will keep every villager busy on their land. They will happily toil the land knowing the products have a market that is readily available. With my level of qualification and experience, I am adamant to make this work, so we don't lose the value of our land in front of our children. As our land is our life and this principle must be alive in our lives and passed on."



Malinda farms zucchini, capsicum, and tomatoes among other



Maria Linibi

“She found her purpose in farming, and founded PNG Women in Agriculture”

Now supports

10,000 Female Farmers

Maria Linibi, founder of PNG Women in Agriculture, forged a new path in farming, and now supports over 10,000 female farmers in PNG through her NGO.



Early career progress

At 38, Maria was at a career crossroads after being retrenched from a public relations role, but rediscovered her roots in farming and discovered her purpose helping other women in agriculture.

Today, she's a grandmother of six and the President and founder of PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation, an NGO with a mission to be the voice and support system for fellow female farmers in Papua New Guinea's agriculture sector.

Agriculture contributes to 85% of the population's livelihoods – Maria's own father was a coffee farmer and as a child, Maria would often help him. The experience on the farm as a child helped her to quickly gain the manual skills to work as a farmer when she made her career transition; however Maria soon realized that farming and selling were two very different skills, the latter of which she lacked.

As a result, Maria sought to educate and equip herself with the necessary knowledge to thrive in the business world. Committing to research and classes, her hard work led to success as a farmer.

An organization for the empowerment

On the other side of her breakthrough, Maria thought about the challenges she faced as a farmer and of all the other women farmers in PNG trying to overcome similar hurdles. It struck her that many – particularly rural women – may not be as fortunate as her to have access to the resources that aided her success. With the desire to empower her community, together with her husband, Maria founded PNG Women in Agriculture in 2006. Today, the organization provides women with the necessary skills, knowledge and community support to help them achieve their economic potential. The PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation establishes partnerships and conducts training sessions to facilitate community sharing and keep women in the network inspired and engaged.



Maria in one of the DAL farms in Erap, Markham

Hopes and dreams for the future

While her organization has achieved immense growth, success and recognition since being founded, this did not come easily for Maria. One of the biggest challenges she has dealt with is managing the language barrier. Papua New Guinea has over 800 different languages, which are spoken across the country's provinces and villages, making it the most linguistically diverse country in the world.

She faced vast communication and organizational constraints when establishing the organization's reach in the areas where it was needed most. Nevertheless, with time and experience, Maria was able to efficiently manage this factor unique to the country and PNG Women in Agriculture now engages over 10,000 local women farmers.

One ongoing challenge is the limitations of infrastructure in PNG – in a country of 600 islands with mountainous geography, means of transport are limited and often unavailable to many women in farming who need to find markets to sell their produce and manage the cost of freight. Despite the various challenges, Maria remains unfazed as she understands that change is an ongoing process that takes time and effort – and she remains focused on the women. Maria strongly believes that women are crucial to the development of the country, and continuously works to build their capacities as individuals.

Helping other women grow

When asked why she does what she does, her answer is simple: she enjoys being able to contribute to the development of her country and the growth of the women she helps. She gains true happiness when she sees them succeed. The years she has spent in the industry have also contributed to her personal growth: Maria has traveled around the world speaking at and attending global conferences on agriculture. She looks forward to these conferences as she sees them as effective platforms for dialogue, initiating sharing and learnings for women in agriculture all around the world. They provide her with different perspectives and act as motivation for her to continually grow her organization and make the changes within her communities for them to thrive independently.

Maria's message to other women in agriculture is this: "There is no end to agriculture; it is the bottom line for us. People can leave, things can change but you always have the land to fall back on. So don't be afraid, learn as much as you can and absorb it, utilize it and keep growing."

“

There is no end to agriculture; it is the bottom line for us. People can leave, things can change but you always have the land to fall back on. So don't be afraid, learn as much as you can and absorb it, utilize it and keep growing.

”

- Maria Linibi



Noylene Levis

“Bringing women together to drive positive change”

“

If you have arable land at your doorstep, please get your hands dirty. You don't have to sit down and wait for your husband or the government to come and tell you what to do. Find a spade or a digging stick and start planting so we can create our own change at home.

”

- Noylene Levis, full time farmer, baker and business owner



Introducing the Watung Sisters

In 2019, Noylene Levis formed a 12-member strong agriculture association called the Watung Sisters, a subgroup of the [Markham District Women in Agriculture](#). Based in Markham District of Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea, the women joined forces to make the most of what their land had to offer. On top of overseeing 12 full time farmers, Noylene is a full-time farmer herself and also a baker who enjoys making scones to sell at Mutzing and Umi markets.

Cultivating local fruits and vegetables

With Noylene at the helm, her team of female farmers cultivate cabbage, taro, pok choy, onion and banana, shipping some of their proceeds overseas. Taro is especially popular with purchasers in Port Moresby. Initially, the buyers based in Port Moresby were purchasing only five bags of taro but have increased their numbers gradually over the course of the last year. Noylene's Taro is sold in supermarkets too. "Normally, two bags are sold to supermarkets and the rest I sell at the market in Gordons and Waigani." She takes orders to [Pacific Adventist University](#) and [CPL Group](#). It usually takes Noylene four days to sell her bags of taro before she begins her journey back home to Lae, sharing the final numbers of her proceeds with the group treasurer and dividing her income from the day with the rest of her farmers.

Working closely with her local department of agriculture and livestock

Under Noylene's leadership, the farmers have seen first-hand the importance of farming on their own land, and understand that benefits from their sales, will one day return to them. Noylene and her team work closely with the Markham District Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAL), who supply the farm's vegetable seeds. The DAL also conduct training sessions with Noylene's farmers, in partnership with the office of Fresh Produce Development, on things like pest management.



Planting preparations

"We aspire to purchase our own tractor to plough our land and transport our vegetables to the market. And we also want to build homes for all our families. This is our five year plan."

She believes that if all women set aside their differences - much like she has done with her group - and work together in unity, positive change can be achieved within their communities.

"Women need to realize they have the potential to drive change. Change starts with us."



Noylene grows pok choy, cabbage, banana and taro to name a few

“
Women need to realize they have the potential to drive change. Change starts with us.
”

- Noylene Levis

Pamela Ben

"I turned to the land for my future."



Started Out Watermelon Planting

After completing Year 12 at Wawin High School in 2006, Pamela took up a stint as an Administration Officer. Following which, Pamela decided to start farming with the help of her husband, Ben Naboth, a customary landowner from Tararan village who is very supportive of her farming endeavors. They started planting watermelon on her husband's land.



The Markham Valley is known for its fertile land and farming activities by large Agricultural Industries. Identified as the food bowl of Papua New Guinea, the valley is famous for different types of agribusiness models, ranging from palm oil, cassava, and peanut to rice and watermelon. The valley even supports agroforestry, poultry, cattle farming, piggyery, and the popular local green gold called the Markham Meat 'Betelnut'.

Pamela's motivation in farming came about after having seen the sale of watermelons at the Lae Main Market. Looking at the income generated from watermelon sales, she increased her farming land to half a hectare and started planting other fresh produce such as Indian Hybrid Guava, Green Boy Chinese Cabbage, Cucumber, PT Kaukau, Taro, Lettuce, and Pakchoi Chinese Cabbage.

Her commitment to improving the business did not stop there. Pamela attended the Financial Literacy Training by Ginigoada in 2018 and was one of the farmers selected by Fresh Produce Development Agency (FPDA) in their Village Extension Worker (VEW) project. FPDA provides farmers with a Startup Kit containing seedlings, tools, fertilizers, and insecticides in addition to conducting nursery and quality checks, as well as soil preparation training for farmers. The toolkit helps to kickstart vegetable production and aims to address food security and financial security issues. As vegetable crops can be harvested any time of the year, growing vegetables allows people in rural villages to raise funds for school fees, uniforms, and other basic necessities for the family unit throughout the year.



Pamela Ben and her husband Ben Naboth

“

If women are unable to continue their education, they should return back to their land, and work on their land. Land is life, and we must go back to our land.

”

- Pamela Ben

Pamela aspires to do three things with her farm's proceeds – build a permanent family home; buy a vehicle to transport produce to the market; and purchase a tractor to plough their land for planting. The proceeds from her farm have also enabled her to operate a store and a liquor shop along the highway which will greatly help her in achieving her dreams.

Pamela strongly believes that self-sustaining opportunities on land must not be wasted.

In encouraging other women to do the same Pamela says, “If women are unable to continue their education, they should return back to their land, and work on their land. Land is life, and we must go back to our land.”

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.



Salome 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 Salome during a field visit

Lala Kembai

“Better empowerment for women in PNG”

Lala believes in hard work and would like to see other women excel in the agriculture industry with greater governmental support. While her SME training was satisfactory, there was still a challenge for farmers to pay their dues. “We don’t earn big money, and where can we get the money for equity and deposit in the bank?”

She would like to see women work on their land. “Women must not depend on their husbands alone. We must work on our land as the bible says, and God will bless us.”



Lala Kembai is a contracted farmer to Nauti Kuembu Winima (NKW), a local landowner company operating out of the Bulolo District in Papua New Guinea. She grows different vegetables and supplies to NKW as her means of generating income to cater for her children’s school fees and other household needs.

Lala grows the following vegetables; original lettuce, aibika, fancy lettuce, pumpkin, French beans, Chinese cabbage, green girl, green boy (hybrid cabbages) and baby choy.

With rising costs of living, Lala has raised concerns about the low offer prices for her vegetables and hopes that NKW can raise prices so that she and the other farmers can be better remunerated for their produce.

Lala has experienced many challenges as a farmer such as market access, logistics, volatile prices of vegetables by buyers or contractors, and the lack of quality and value chain training for farmers, and hopes that these concerns may be tended to by the relevant authorities.

At the same time, there are multiple benefits for farmers like Lala to work together with NKW. Additional support provided can increase production at a farm level and facilitate coordination between demand and supply. This ensures farmers are supported, nothing goes to waste, and everyone stays happy.

An additional area for improvement is to ensure the turnaround time for payment is improved so that farmers can continue to supply as per demand.

Margaret Kandilop

"a single mum who knew no limits"

Grows Local Crops in

0.5 Hectares of land

Margaret is a single mother to one child. After completing Year 10 in Busu Secondary, she enrolled at Malahang Vocational School for a Tourism and Hospitality Certificate Course. After completing her course, she was employed by Lae Yacht Club for a year, but returned home after her dad passed away. Since 2016, Margaret has been growing local crops like taro, bean, broadleaf plantain (aibika) watercress and chayote (choko) leaves in her customary land of about 0.5 hectares for local markets as well as for consumption.



Margaret Kandilop is a young, enthusiastic vegetable farmer who hails from the mountainous region of Morobe Province in the hinterlands of Boana, Nawaeb District.

After being introduced to and assisted by the Fresh Produce Development Agency (FPDA) in 2018, she started to grow crops such as round cabbage, potato, pak-choi, spring onion, capsicum and french bean through a semi-commercial farming system. However, her commitment to lifelong learning doesn't end there. Margaret was also involved in NKW Group's (a local landowner company) Managing and Marketing skills training.

After training with FPDA, she has increased her annual sales earnings by 200%. Margaret sells most of her vegetables at the District Station Market, earning between K100.00 to K200.00 daily. When there is surplus produce, she travels to Lae and sells at the main market instead, earning between K200.00 - K400.00 daily.

On top of being a farmer, Margret faces additional challenges as a single mother. Family participation with weeding, drainage work and ploughing has not been consistent and she finds this discouraging at times. Since vehicles might not operate extensively during rainy seasons, accessibility to markets is a real struggle due to the slippery and muddy road conditions along the rugged terrains and mountains.

Despite the challenges in her way, Margret is dedicated to diversifying her income and expanding her business. She recently engaged in trade store operations at Boana Station and has even started pig farming, aspiring to venture further into a Small Medium Enterprise (SME) in the future.

Her encouragement to other women, regardless of education level, is to engage in agriculture. "Women must not rely on their parents to cater for their needs, especially single mothers. Where there is land there is money." Margret believes that farming is a viable industry that enables many people to earn income and sustains livelihoods.



Margret's plot with the nursery shed in the background



Margret with Conrad Anton
– FPDA Senior Extension Officer during a training

“
Women must not rely on their
parents to cater for their needs,
especially single mothers.
Where there is land there is
money.”

– Margaret Kandilop

Appendix: About GrowHer, Grow Asia and Grow PNG

Launched by [Grow Asia](#), alongside [AGREA Agricultural Systems](#), [Corteva Agriscience](#), and [WOMAG](#), GrowHer is a community-based platform that connects women to learning events, essential resources, and best-practice sharing from other women agripreneurs, with the aim of supporting women's economic empowerment in the agriculture sector.

Grow Asia brings together farmers, governments, the private sector, NGOs, and other stakeholders to cultivate more inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems in Southeast Asia. We do this by convening, facilitating and scaling inclusive agriculture value chains as well as multi-stakeholder sectoral coordination. At the core of our work are three goals: to lift the productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability of smallholder agriculture in the region.

Grow PNG, a subsidiary of Grow Asia, was established in 2019 with the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Grow PNG's vision is to accelerate the growth of the agriculture sector in the Markham Valley; enabling smallholder households to increase their income by 20% within 8 years. This vision is achieved in alignment with the deliverables of Grow Asia and the PNGAus Partnership program in the country.

Grow PNG's multi-stakeholder platform remains the most viable approach to facilitating collaboration between network partners to deliver value to their women program and practices, while Grow Asia's Women Economic Empowerment Flagship works with all partners to mainstream gender within their contexts.

Appendix: Grow Asia's Flagship on Women's Economic Empowerment

Goal: To amplify the business case for women's economic empowerment in order to further incentivize investment into gender mainstreaming actions, practices, and policies.

PILLAR 1: MAPPING VALUE CHAINS

Grow Asia will work with partners to gather evidence and generate better information for decision-making through mapping agricultural value chains to identify prevailing best practices and opportunities in promoting women's economic empowerment.

Grow Asia's partners will be invited to participate in the collection of data and to assist with the construction of a repository of best practices and useful tools.

PILLAR 2: MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE

Grow Asia will scale up its work with [Country Partnerships](#) to generate case studies and videos that demonstrate the benefits to the private sector of becoming more inclusive and gender-responsive. This includes attracting and retaining top talent, increasing returns on inclusive procurement spending, sustaining value chains, and generating positive reputational value that encourages increased consumer spending.

PILLAR 3: ADDRESSING SKILLS GAPS

Grow Asia will build on the success of its [THRIVE](#) and GrowHer pilot programs by raising women's knowledge and capacity in agricultural value chains and recognize them as a critical component of economic recovery and sustained prosperity. This will include a series of post-COVID workshops with women agripreneurs and community influencers designed to increase women farmers' skills in IT, marketing, business planning, and financial literacy.

PILLAR 4: INFORMING POLICY MAKERS

Grow Asia will use the data and evidence collected in Pillars 1 to 3 assist policymakers to better understand the support needs as well as the support available from investors and agribusinesses, to better develop policies, incentives, and access for women.

Grow Asia's Country Partners will be invited to lead and participate in high-level discussions with policymakers and regulators and to share examples of barriers and enablers that are crucial to women's economic empowerment.



Grow PNG



Grow Asia

GrowHer 

The main logo for GrowHer, featuring the word "GrowHer" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by a stylized leaf icon with a red stem and a green leaf.