

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 Gembogli 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."



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