

# 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."

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**- Maria Linibi**

