



Addressing agriculture challenges through collaborations

28/09/2020

Addressing challenges in the agriculture sector will help the sector to grow and this is the approach Grow PNG is taking through the Working Group model.

Working groups are formed around challenges or issues such as market access, land access, and small to medium enterprises. A working group is made up of volunteers who have an interest in collaborating to develop the sector.

“The theory of change is that when those challenges or issues are addressed competently and conclusively, it moves the agriculture growth trajectory higher,” Grow PNG executive director Ivan Pomaleu said.

Grow PNG’s focus is the Markham District in Morobe Province. It’s main mode of operation is the establishment of partnership platforms to build important conversations on key issues. Working groups provide the platform through which all stakeholders can have a say in identifying key challenges and developing action plans to address those challenges.

A Small Medium Enterprise (SME) Working Group is being formed and will have its first meeting at the end of this month. This is the second working group to be established. The first was the Land Access Working Group.

The SME working group is also a voluntary group of stakeholders who are important in small and medium enterprise development in agriculture in Markham. Its mandate is to identify challenges affecting small to medium enterprise development for the purposes of developing agriculture in the area. The group is also responsible to encourage collaboration in collectively addressing those challenges and escalate issues that are required to be addressed at higher levels of business and government.

The broad role of the SME working group are:

- To seek to understand the prevailing small business development challenges in the agriculture sector which inhibits willing participation in agricultural activities including partnerships ventures.
- To help develop strategies on how to address those business challenges and to roll out programs reflecting those strategies
- To help build awareness on the different business models that are applicable in terms of crops or the market requirements.
- To develop reference materials which identifies opportunities, market access requirements and management practices which addresses the market requirements.
- To conduct seminars and workshops that addresses the key business development challenges in the agribusiness space.
- To help create awareness on business opportunities and disseminate support to the farmers and landowners.
- To coordinate the implementation of follow up work and to articulate how it can support other efforts taken by someone else to address the same issues.

Mr Pomaleu said the SME working group comprises all relevant stakeholders such as traditional landowners, landowner associations, agribusinesses, non-government organisations and government agencies responsible for commercial development including small business development.

“Membership to the group comes with the responsibility to promote a free and open flow of information with members such as to share data and information and maximize learning and the adoption of best practices.”

Prior to the establishment of the Land Access Working Group, Grow PNG had a Land Access Study done to help build an agenda for the working group.

The study highlighted 17 key issues which are land related or affect land access in the market. Out of the 17 issues, the study recommended 12 work programs that captured the gist of what matters are affecting land access. Issues such as development of alternative business models; development of understanding that farming is a business; improvement of farming and business management and associated issues of understanding supply chains, governance, finance, negotiations, entrepreneurialism, building business culture through youth engagement and the development of small profitable businesses.

Mr Pomaleu said half of these issues were not land issues specifically, but revolved around farmer empowerment, confidence building, farmer inability to interact with potential partners or to undertake business activities in agriculture by themselves.

“These issues are important because they build confidence and therefore willingness in farmers and owners of large land holdings to investigate business opportunities on their own or in partnership with investors.”

The land access working group in its first meeting in February this year agreed to the three top priorities which are to publish a land access guide; address alternative land dispute resolution mechanism; and build a land audit database for Markham.

The land access guide is under development following an extensive stakeholder consultation in Lae, Markham and Port Moresby in May. The objective of the guide is to provide information such as how to register land and different agribusiness development options.