

THE EMANCIPATING POW

A lifelong dedication to adult education and community development has allowed Professor Barbara Pamphilon to build up women farmers' learning and address gender equity issues in remote regions of Papua New Guinea

and community development to help rural women in PNG. The project's overarching aim is to deliver training that can support the development of agribusiness-orientated farm management practices.

Early on, Professor Pamphilon decided to focus the pilot program on the more disadvantaged communities in four of the target areas in East New Britain and the Western Highlands.

In many remote areas of PNG, up to 30% of women have never been to school and many more did not complete primary school. Yet, it is these women that Professor Pamphilon describes as the 'backbone of the country', producing the food that sustains many households.

When she surveyed the women's needs, the most important issue she identified was low literacy rates. Low literacy is a consequence of a poor record of girls' education in PNG's past compounded by a sheer lack of schools in remote and rural regions.

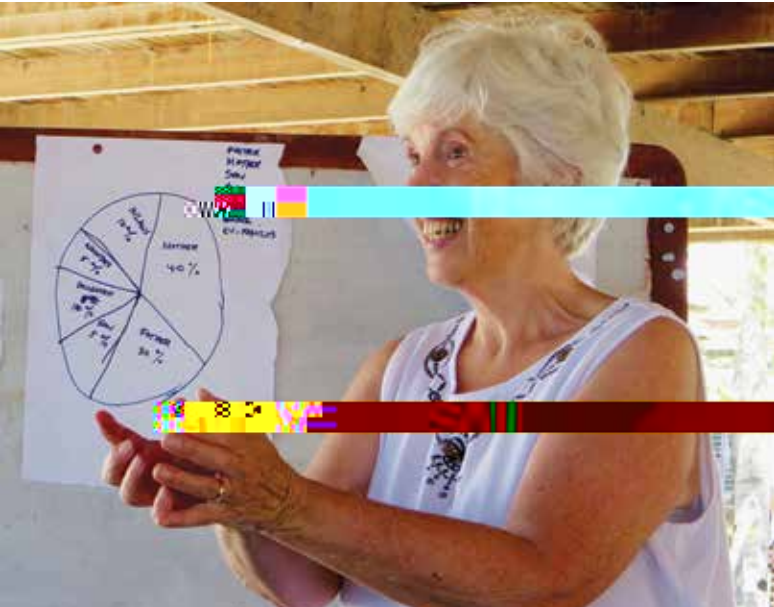
"The status of education in PNG is changing," Professor Pamphilon says. "There is a real valuing of education. Now, rural families are keen to see their children receive schooling and the women were extremely keen to learn themselves. They just did not have any accessible opportunities."

As a consequence, the training provided through ACIAR went out to the women and did not expect them to come to central towns. The program had to be packaged in ways that allowed women

to learn 'how to learn' while also empowering them to act within the broader context of their own household, farms and communities.

It took a careful blend of adult learning skills, tools, methods and strategies to realise that outcome, and even more skill to achieve it in ways that are self-perpetuating.

POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER



1. Susan Trapu, Kwinkya

that furthered the project's goal. For example, interactions at the village level revealed that many farmers were marketing the same kind of produce at the same time, causing market prices to drop. This understanding created opportunities to provide training on seasonal planning, crop diversification and introduce, with NARI's assistance, new production capabilities. With these new skills came greater resilience, including resilience to production constraints such as drought.

The training allowed the villagers to break out of habitual behaviours and see the household's strengths and assets. Training helped them acquire the means to map pathways to highly desired outcomes, such as educating children and increasing the family assets, for instance by building a house.

From the outset, some villagers were selected to receive extra training to become village community educators. These people act as peer educators who roll out the training they have received in ways they know will build on local skills and needs. In the future, these educators will further access outside sources of assistance and they remain in the village after the project team leaves. They also become the role models for more productive and gender-equitable ways to manage the family farm.

Both women and men took on these educator roles.

Professor Pamphilon explains that in targeting outcomes. The project ran for four years from 2011 gains for women, she prefers to focus on gender and is now completed. Comparisons of baseline equity, which recognises the strengths of both men and women, rather than on women's rights. While a rights-based approach works well in terms of legal frameworks, Professor Pamphilon says it can prove confrontational and divisive in the intimate setting of households and communities.

"A strong family is a goal shared by men and women," she says. "So we encourage a family team philosophy. In the process, we make visible gender inequality and show how it will be limiting the family's prospects. So it is important to include both women and men change."

That strategy has seen families acquire the ability to plan together, with women's voices included in deciding the family's aspirations and the management changes needed to achieve those goals. That approach included blurring the hard distinction between cultivating food for the family (traditionally women's business) and cash crops (the domain of men). Instead, farming systems and paths to markets are now viewed more holistically. The emphasis is on providing nutritious food for the family, optimising income-earning opportunities and gaining access to micro-financing and savings accounts to build resilience so families can invest back in the farm.

As a development model, it is applicable to other domains, including achieving better health

and discusses our goals. My husband and the children work with me and we always plan together. My husband and I work together as best friends and I am so happy (*iha a astru*)." So extensive were the gains that a second project has been launched to scale up and roll out the program to more regions. This project will involve training an even larger number of village community educators, led by a women's leadership team in each area, as the project continues to reach out to the most vulnerable women.

Since success tends to breed imitation, however, the families that are achieving more by working together more equitably are providing a beacon and that too is creating an impetus for change. "

ACIAR PROJECT: ASEM/2010/052 'Improving women's business acumen in PNG: working with women smallholders in horticulture'

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