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## **Women farmers and market access**

**Rufina Peter**

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# Women farmers and market access: the PNG context

Rufina Peter

PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation

## Abstract



Women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have a vital role to play in managing the long-term sustainable supply of food to the formal and informal markets. With over 85% of the food grown by women, and with relatively little public investment in the food crop sector over time, national non-government organisations such as PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation (PNGWiADF) have been formed. They aim to help smallholder farmers address supply constraints and physical and market infrastructure issues, and to provide opportunities and assistance such as agricultural and business training, and brokerage services. They lobby and

advocate for improved utilities as well as providing quality assurance. This paper outlines the key characteristics of the agricultural sector in PNG, discusses the markets for fresh produce, and analyses the value chain using case studies from PNGWiADF. It also outlines strategies and recommendations made by the PNGWiADF to contribute to the development of a viable food crop sector in Papua New Guinea.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG) it is largely (85%) the women who produce food, and so they're quite important — which is why the title of my talk is 'Women Farmers and Market Access'. I think that situation is not unique to PNG; I think it is quite common in developing countries.

The paper briefly outlines the features of the PNG food sector, then the role of women and the non-government organisation (NGO) 'Women in Agriculture Development Foundation'. It looks at two case studies, and the way forward.

A key feature of the food sector in PNG at present is the poor market-access opportunities, which largely stem from lack of public investment into physical and market infrastructure. It is also an unregulated market.

The assistance that has been given to the sector, to date, has largely been production orientated. The statutory research organisation, called the Fresh Produce Development Authority, is specifically mandated to work for the food sector, and their primary focus has been on agronomics and biological research. It also includes extension — mainly the village extension model of farmer-trainer, or farmers training other farmers. Not much has been done to look beyond production to the other segments of the value chain.

Smallholder farmers make up the majority of the producers and, as already mentioned, 85% of them are women. A large part of their production goes into informal or 'wet' markets, though some of it goes into formal markets.

Formal markets supply the mines and other major resources projects, to feed workers in those areas, as well as hotels, supermarkets and major institutions such as the educational and correctional services institutions. Supermarkets are quite an insignificant market for farmers at the moment, in terms of domestically produced food.

There is competition for land use now in PNG, and population pressures. The competition for land use may stem partly from the global phenomenon of land grabbing that is happening in many parts of developing countries, but population pressures are also being experienced. In talking about food security, it is important to consider how women can be empowered to address that issue.

However, the formal markets are increasingly playing a bigger role, and we need to equip our farmers to meet that demand with respect to volume, consistency and quality of production and, obviously, commercial practices, so farmers can meet formal market requirements when starting from a subsistence base.

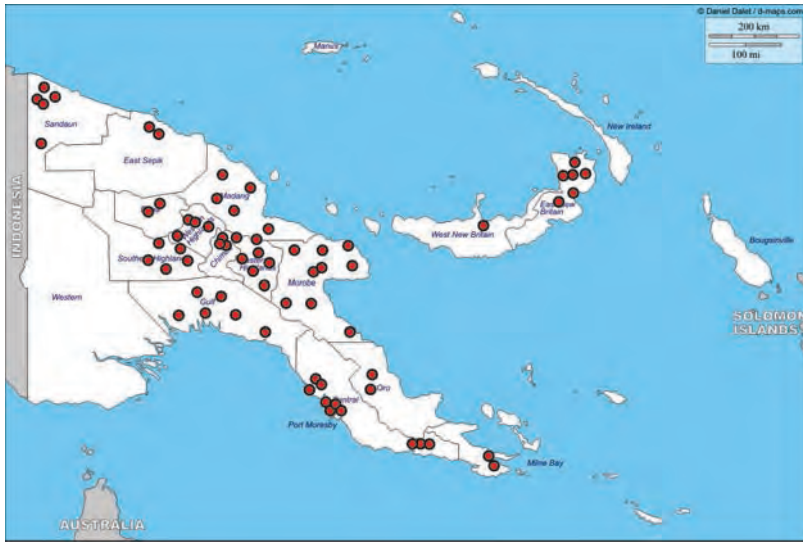
### **Women in Agriculture Development Foundation**

I want to give you some background on how the Women in Agriculture Development Foundation (PNGWiADF) was set up, and how long it took to get to where it is at the moment. Basically it started in 2000 with a group of scientists who got together at a workshop called ‘Women’s Voices in the Food Chain: Shouts and Whispers’. The aim, in that initial consultation in 2000, was to identify issues along the whole food chain. Women at the meeting identified issues and made recommendations, but after that, nothing happened for about 7 years because the initial workshop was government-driven and there was not really any way to push forward. Then in 2007, with assistance from Australian Women in Agriculture and especially because of Kathy McGowan (a delegate at this Crawford conference), the PNG women decided to set up an NGO to have the freedom to be able to move things along, which perhaps could not be done in a government setting.

After initial meetings in 2007, the organisation (PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation) was launched in 2008, and the strategic plan, work plan and everything else were completed by October 2010.

**Table I.** PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation

<b>Date</b>	<b>Progress in developing the PNGWiADF</b>
2000	‘Women’s Voices in the Food Chain: Shouts and Whispers’
2007	Meetings towards establishing PNGWiADF and policy document
2008	Launch of the PNGWiADF
2010 March	Review and endorsement of the PNGWiADF. Round table talk with key stakeholders and partners
2010 May	PNGWiADF 5-year work plan
2010 October	Finalised 5-year work plan, revised structure of PNGWiADF



**Figure 1.** Existing coordination locations, across Papua New Guinea, of the PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation, whose key activities are horticulture, floriculture, livestock, aquaculture, eipculture, eco-tourism, fisheries and agro-forestry

The map in Figure 1 shows the network in 2011; it has spread throughout the country since the time of launch. The women who are members of the PNG Women in Agriculture include farmers, who may have little or no formal education, and also very well educated women who have college and university degrees. All the women agriculture extension officers in the national and the provincial departments of agriculture are members.

Where these officers have no recurrent money to operate their recurrent functions, Women in Agriculture supports them: they work on the programs that Women in Agriculture can fund, to provide an extension service to both the women farmers and the male farmers — the group is not biased; it does not help just women farmers!

## Two case studies

The first case study is a taro commercialisation project by East New Britain Women and Youth in Agriculture Cooperative Societies. These groups have set up a taro supply chain, and they have targeted the retail markets in Port Moresby, which are really the supermarkets. They have a seed nursery which provides the groups with good quality planting materials. Figures 2 and 3 show a sample of the taro crop that they sent to the market, and it being bagged.

The group has sent three trial shipments to Port Moresby. They have learnt lessons during that trial, in terms of harvest techniques, in terms of pricing, and so on. They are now scheduled to make a bigger shipment of 14 tonnes into Port Moresby and that will happen early next year. According to their calculations they will be making about K18,900 per container. In total, they are sending 18 tonnes to Port Moresby, so it is profitable exercise.



**Figure 2.** Some of the taro crop that the East New Britain Women and Youth in Agriculture send to Port Moresby



**Figure 3.** Bagging the taro crop for sale in Port Moresby

The way these groups organise themselves in their respective localities depends on, really, the cultural setting and other factors that exist in each locality. The East New Britain Women and Youth decided that they should form a cooperative. They have 15 cooperatives now, with about 375 members.

Obviously, these groups did not work alone. They needed to form strategic alliances and gain the collaboration of players along the value chain — from production researchers all the way through to distributors and the markets. They have collaborated with researchers in the agriculture research institutes such as the PNG Cocoa & Coconut Institute and the National Agricultural Research Institute, the University of Natural Resources and Environment, and the National Department of Agriculture. They have collaborated with provincial administrators, and even, at the ward level, the ward councillors. They have also collaborated with the Pacific Adventist University which really is their distributor, and the retail market outlets. So this project is about collaborating with people along the value chain with a win-win outcome for all.

The second case study is a floriculture project in Lae that includes women and youths of this region where these groups are vulnerable. They have organised themselves and they now supply flower seedlings and vegetative cuttings to surrounding areas within Lae and also into adjacent provinces.

Among the clients of this group are business houses that want to hire pot-plants, and to have cut-flowers for special occasions, and the group also supplies the demand from hotels. They provide 'training of trainers' (ToT) training to other groups who would like to go into floriculture, and that too has proved to be a profitable business.

These two case studies are intended to demonstrate that assistance — a little bit of assistance in targeted areas — can go a long way towards making a difference for people.

Using the lessons learned from these two case studies, I suggest the way forward is for partners, including the Government of PNG, to increase their public investment into public goods such as roads and other infrastructure, and extension services. Also we need public–private partnerships into the other areas along the value chain.

We definitely need to see some support going into the Women in Agriculture, the national organisation. The country is so diverse that the setting up of the national Women in Agriculture Development Foundation has been quite instrumental in bring women together. It has led them to organise themselves to be able to access capacity-building for skills that they are lacking, and in other areas as well. The Foundation has also been empowering women to be able to negotiate and collaborate with other players along the value chain.

As a final comment, as an illustration of the importance of women in development, here is what Kofi Annan, as Secretary of the United Nations, said in 2005:

*‘Study after study has told us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV AIDS, and no other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation.’*

Rufina Peter is currently a Senior Research Officer in the PNG Institute of National Affairs, and formerly a Senior Project Officer responsible for the natural resources sector with the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council. In her role as Senior Project Officer, she was largely responsible for facilitating tripartite dialogue on pertinent issues affecting the agriculture sector among key stakeholders. She was an Economist with the Cocoa Board of PNG for a period of 3 years and a Policy Officer with the Department of Agriculture and Livestock also for period of 3 years. Ms Peter presented this paper as a member of PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation.

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