

REAL PEOPLE REAL STORIES

THE PNG WOMEN FARMERS BUSINESS PROJECT

Meet Carol - Village Community Educator from East New Britain

Carol is from a small village in the East New Britain province of Papua New Guinea. Carol is a local farmer and small business operator, and a valued Village Community Educator (VCE) for the PNG Women Farmer Business Project. Here she tells of the difference the project has made to her and her family's life, reflecting on her journey from experiencing poverty, to proudly operating two small successful businesses.

Over twenty years ago Carol started baking and selling scones and doughnuts to support her family. A few years later, due to health issues from the drum oven, she decided to plant and sell oranges and cabbages instead with plans to sell them at the local market. As her garden was located quite a distance from her home, Carol then started growing ginger and capsicum—which was much easier to transport than oranges and cabbages. This however generated little income and Carol struggled to support the family. Determined to escape poverty, in 2010 she began working in floriculture, and despite concerns about selling flowers at the market where most women sold vegetables and fruit, the flowers were highly successful and this was the beginning of a new business for her.

“In the past I tried to earn money doing a lot of things. Today, I am only running floriculture and livestock and I do catering when required. In the past I never carry money with me in my handbag but today, I always have some money in my handbag which makes me feel good.”

Carol has also noticed the significant difference the VCE training has made to her and her family's lives in terms of generating income, access to gardens and livestock, and savings practices. 'Training has made it possible for us to have cash crops for income near our homes. Now I can keep my eyes on my garden where I have planted my pineapple, oranges and flowers, and where I have my livestock [chickens and pigs]. We used to think we have to go faraway places to earn money but now everything is right here at our doorsteps. This training has taught us how to save - now we know how to do it.'



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Carol said that the training has taught the community simple practices that have helped address food and income shortages, and assisted people in planning for the future. 'Earlier we used to have [a] shortage of money and food, now this forward looking knowledge has assisted us to organise our lives to get rid of shortages... storing water in containers has made big differences in our families, gardens and livestock.'

In addition, she explained that the project had also helped families work together as a community, and for her personally, her husband started to contribute more toward the businesses, which in turn supported the family. 'In the past I use to get upset and angry with my husband because he never bother about helping me in my flower garden or help me plant our vegetables in the garden, but today, he is happily helping me with my projects and he even planted his own vegetable garden. This has been good for the whole family because that has supported us for a few years and our children have realised their fathers' contribution to our family.'

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Carol is a hardworking mother, farmer and businesswoman. She values what she's learned from the project and from all her life experiences. Her actions are an example to others. 'I have been working hard and I try to tell them [other mothers] to work hard. I am trying to be an example to them. I know that if I do well, they will then believe that anyone can do it and hopefully they will try out something.' She will continue her valuable work as a VCE even after the project. She wants to find opportunities to share what she has learned with others in her community and aspires to equip young girls in small business projects of their own.

Carol is one of several VCEs in PNG involved in this ACIAR funded project. We share her story with her consent. Go to <http://pngwomen.estem-uc.edu.au/> to find out more about the project.