

REAL PEOPLE REAL STORIES

THE PNG WOMEN FARMERS BUSINESS PROJECT

Rose's Story

The strengths of village women leaders - stories from the local leaders in the PNG Women Farmers Business Project



Rose was born to Baptist parents—her father a pastor, her mother a church leader. Rose went to school up to Grade 9, but tribal fighting meant she had to stop then. Rose's mother used to lead women in different church activities before she was involved in a serious car accident several years ago. Now she can no longer do this work. So when the local women asked Rose to become their leader she used her mother as her role model and did the best she could to lead without any training.

Rose became involved in the project last year. She became the women leader for Village Community Educators (VCEs) in her community. She gladly accepted this role and took on the challenge; she said the training has helped her and her family. 'I would have struggled as a leader if the training was not provided to me. This training changed my life and helped to change my husband's life and our family is collaborating and communicating more than ever.'

In the past Rose never sat with her husband to discuss the family budget, but after the training one day she went home and asked if she could discuss it with him. She wanted to sit together and discuss and plan the family's future—to propose they work together and explain the importance of doing a budget. Her husband was a gambler, drank alcohol, and chewed a lot of betel nut. She didn't know if he would listen or change. Rose followed through with her plan and talked to her husband. She now sees changes not only in her husband, but also in her family. 'My husband is now attending church with me and we are budgeting our money together. In the past my husband and I never talked about the budget and he always look[ed] down on me because I am not educated and I am just a simple village woman. He always told me to work hard in the garden so I can earn money and feed the family. He would use his wages to buy what he wanted but today we are planning our budget together. The training truly changed my family to be united and happy.'

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Rose says her leadership is now at a different level and her family is now a role model in the community. She said everyone has noticed a change in her family and she's observed changes in others as well as personally gaining confidence and courage. 'I use to be a very shy person, I cried easily when others upset me and I never had the courage to make a speech in front of a crowd or the community. Today, I am leading six communities – when I call them to come, they all come, some of them come from well-respected families but they always come down to my level and listen to me when I talk. I visit everyone in the community and I have seen changes in some families. I have around 500 members (farmers) and I support them when they are in need. I even give them money when they are in need.'

Rose says by others noticing changes in her family she's gained respect and community members follow her advice. It's also given her an opportunity to share with people what she's learned in the training modules. Rose continues to speak highly of the training and about what she's learned. 'This training really helped me to humble myself and to be patient. I never did what I use to do before, I always wanted to confront people who hurt me but today, I sit and listen without saying a word. The seasonal calendar has really helped me. In the past I would plant different crops on my plot and will not plant another garden until I harvest the first one. I now plan what to plant and when to plant it. We always have enough food these days. I have realised that the new technique of planting a single crop on one plot has increased the yields we are harvesting. I would like to have my own account so I can practise the banking and saving techniques we learned in this training.'

Rose now wants to reach out and train ladies in other communities. She and her husband are also trying to save money to pay for their children's school fees and are planning how they will support them in the future. And whilst being a leader has had its challenges, Rose wants to make a difference in the lives of the young women in her community. She is also working with young men as she knows this is important. She wants to spend a lot of time working with young people and women in the future. This is her leadership story.

Rose 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.