Australia’s commitment to Papua New Guinea

BY WARREN PAGE

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his edition of Partners features a special report on Papua New Guinea (PNG), Australia’s nearest neighbour. Many of the stories were photographed and written by Paul Jones, a photojournalist who has worked for leading newspapers in Australia and the UK, and covered major stories such as the election of Nelson Mandela as the first post-apartheid President of South Africa.

Paul describes his travels on page 4 of this issue. During his time in PNG he met a range of people involved in ACIAR projects, each passionate about furthering development in the country. PNG faces many challenges, but there is progress and some good news emerging from ACIAR projects.

The contrasts within PNG are many. While the country is resource-rich and has positive economic growth, it is also struggling to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Perhaps the most striking example of this is found in the World Bank estimate that there are just 400 doctors in the whole of PNG, despite a population of 7.3 million people.

Of PNG’s population, about 40% live in poverty. Increasing agricultural productivity, particularly in isolated communities, has the potential to lift many people out of poverty.

The majority of those 7.3 million people work in and rely on the informal economy, where subsistence farming accounts for the bulk of economic activity. Of PNG’s population, about 40% live in poverty. Increasing agricultural productivity, particularly in isolated communities, has the potential to lift many people out of poverty.

ACIAR’s focus on agriculture draws together a range of thematic research clusters that encompass entire supply chains and are designed to deliver benefits to the rural smallholders who make up the majority of the population. The four clusters—economics and social sciences, crops, natural resources management, and livestock and fisheries—each contribute to the PNG program operated by ACIAR.

This issue reports on some of the main crops, notably research to overcome the challenges facing production of oil palm (see page 6), the emerging opportunities for vegetable production (page 24) and efforts to safeguard the leading export crops from pests and diseases.

A feature of agriculture in PNG is the role women play, including in science and research. The efforts of a small number of these women are reported on page 28, with another story, on page 16, focusing on some of the scientists working with ACIAR.

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR PARTNERS

One of the most difficult issues we face in compiling Partners is how to acknowledge all the individuals involved in, and who contribute to, the success of ACIAR’s projects. Just listing each person and the institute or organisation they work in would take up more than two full editions.

Inevitably we have to make hard choices, focusing stories around a particular approach or the availability of people for interview, or their presence on the ground. So we cannot include every project person. This does not mean we do not value their contributions, nor that we have ignored those contributions. It is a matter of editorial decisions and our ability to access project personnel.

Having said that we do occasionally get it wrong. In the 30th anniversary edition, on page 61 we featured a piece titled ‘Happy Seeder’, where we said the seeder was “a power tiller implement designed by semi-retired Australian farm manager and agronomist John Blackwell”. This should have said the Happy Seeder is “a power seeder implement designed by Australian Professor John Blackwell”. This was a mistake by the Executive Editor, and we extend our apologies to John.
PNG's scientific evolution
With its dependence on agriculture, Papua New Guinea is gaining value from developing the scientific expertise of its people.

Growing biosecurity
Pests and disease outbreaks in the production systems of coffee, cocoa, coconut and oil palm have the potential to seriously affect Papua New Guinea's economy. Australian biosecurity expertise is helping to find solutions.

Money can grow on trees
The combination of agricultural and forestry production systems is providing Papua New Guinean farmers with an opportunity to improve their livelihoods through the development of timber processing ventures.

A profitable patch
Population growth, increasing migration from rural to peri-urban areas and the expansion of the gas and mining industries have led to greater demand for higher-value food products in Papua New Guinea.

More than just chicken feed
Science from an ACIAR project is being put into action in remote villages in Papua New Guinea, where poultry feeds formulated with a portion of local resources are being tested to see if they are more financially viable than commercial options.

Celebrating women's contribution to agriculture
Celebrations for International Women's Day and the Global Conference on Women in Agriculture acknowledge the important role of women in agriculture in Papua New Guinea.

Cleaning up potato production
The Crawford Fund and ACIAR have provided three Papua New Guinean scientists with essential specialist training that will provide substantial food security benefits for key crops.

PROJECTS
FIS/2008/023 Increasing production from inland aquaculture in PNG for food and income security (page 11)
PC/2008/011 Strategies using floriculture to improve livelihoods in indigenous Australian and Pacific Island communities (page 13)
ASEM/2006/023 Re-commercialisation of the PNG pyrethrum industry and improving harvested yields in Australia (page 14)
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FST/2006/120 Increasing downstream value adding in PNG’s forest and wood products industry (page 20)
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SMCN/2008/032 Sustainable vegetable production in Central Province, Papua New Guinea (page 24)
ASEM/2005/094 Improving the profitability of village broiler production in PNG (page 26)

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For further information contact:
ACIAR Communications and Public Affairs, +61 2 6217 0500
Letters from readers are welcome, and should be addressed to:
The Editor
Partners in Research for Development, ACIAR
GPO Box 1571, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
Executive editor: Warren Page, ACIAR
Email: comms@aciar.gov.au  Photos: All photos ACIAR unless credited
Managing editor: Brad Collins, Context Pty Ltd, context.com.au
Editor: Dr Gio Braidotti, Context Pty Ltd, context.com.au
Design and production: Context Pty Ltd, +61 3 9670 1168

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