Despite their beauty, pyrethrum’s ornamental flower heads are not what attracted Papua New Guinean highland farmers to adopt the plant as a cash crop long ago. Instead, the flower heads of the white pyrethrum daisy, *Tanacetum cinerariifolium*, are a source of a fast-acting, low-toxicity insecticide and repellent.

Pyrethrum was introduced into Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the late 1950s and grown in areas of the highlands above 2,000 metres. From the 1960s the pyrethrum industry played a major role in sustaining the livelihood of up to 85,000 people, primarily in Enga Province, until the processing factory closed in 1995.

Although the factory re-opened in 2000, the PNG industry was unable to re-establish a market for its pyrethrum products. In 2007 a 4-year ACIAR-funded project set out to recommericalise the industry.

The project, however, could not succeed without the involvement of technical and commercial collaborators. To that end, ACIAR formed partnerships with the Enga Provincial Government (through the Enga Pyrethrum Company Ltd), the National Agriculture Research Institute (NARI) and the University of Tasmania.

These organisations work with Botanical Resources Australia (BRA), a Tasmanian company that is one of the largest pyrethrum producers in the world. The company agreed to purchase PNG pyrethrum conditional on the PNG industry improving production and processing standards.

The project has proven popular, highly effective and lucrative, especially for women. Extension and promotion officers Janet Yando and Manday Yaso have been key agents in the revival of the pyrethrum industry in Enga Province. Since 2006 they have been building awareness among the farmers of the best ways to grow pyrethrum and have distributed pyrethrum seedlings to more than 10,000 farmers. Achievements include the establishment of more than 130 pyrethrum nurseries and the distribution of some 900,000 seedlings to growers in Enga Province. Since the project began the total number of growers has more than doubled, to 7,423 in 2010. Flower production has increased six-fold and is expected to continue to increase with improved planting materials and training activities.

A weekly market has been set up in Wabag for growers and transporters to deliver and sell their produce. Six cooperative societies were formed to act as local district ‘centres’ for pyrethrum production, with emphasis on seedling production and trade in harvested flowers. This strategy has enabled economies of scale to be achieved through communal land tillage, harvesting and marketing.

Farmer training workshops have been held in local and remote villages, covering crop establishment, management, harvesting and postharvest storage. A bonus outcome has been increased awareness of HIV/AIDS and gender issues. Since many of the growers are women, village workshops have included distribution of HIV awareness pamphlets and condoms.

Growers receive K2.50 (A$1.15) per kilogram at the market, potentially providing up to K125 (A$57.50) per week. Income from pyrethrum usually stays with the women and is spent on the household, including children’s school fees, food and health care.

This injection of money into the village economy provides a multiplier effect to the community. Income is used to improve the standard of living and to meet social commitments such as compensation payments and bride price.

Another very important outcome from this ACIAR project has been the capacity building of PNG participants.

One senior NARI research scientist, Kud Sitango, was awarded a John Allwright Fellowship during which he completed a masters degree in agricultural science at the University of Tasmania.

Teams of up to four PNG officers associated with extension, chemistry, crop production and factory operations have visited BRA in Tasmania. In addition, BRA staff have made 14 visits to PNG to provide guidance and support on all aspects of the pyrethrum production chain.

One of the major outcomes from this project is that pyrethrum can be incorporated into a smallholder mixed cropping system. For instance, it can be grown in rotation with a range of vegetable crops such as potatoes, carrots, beans and onions.

The success of this cropping system could become a sustainable industry strategy with long-term benefits for the community in terms of reduced poverty, empowerment of women, and better education and health outcomes.