



**Australian Government**

**Australian Centre for  
International Agricultural Research**

# Final report

<i>Project full title</i>	Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province: Developing methods for strengths-based livelihoods
<i>project ID</i>	FIS/2021/113
<i>date published</i>	23/04/2024
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<i>approved by</i>	Dr Ingrid Van Putten
<i>final report number</i>	FR2024-013
<i>ISBN</i>	978-1-922983-94-7
<i>published by</i>	ACIAR GPO Box 1571 Canberra ACT 2601 Australia

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Background.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Objectives .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Achievements against activities and outputs/milestones .....</b>	<b>12</b>
6.1	Objective 1: Review existing development practices for Western Province and in comparable contexts across Western Pacific-Melanesian region .....	12
6.2	Objective 2: Critical comparison of development practice methods for Western Province .....	13
6.3	Objective 3: Adapt and assess applicability of select tools and methods .....	14
6.4	Objective 4: To develop recommendations for a program of research-for-development about agricultural resilience across Western Province .....	14
<b>7</b>	<b>Key results and discussion .....</b>	<b>16</b>
7.1	Strengths-Based Approaches in Western Province.....	16
7.2	Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Western Province.....	17
7.3	Place-Based Approaches in Western Province .....	17
7.4	Tools for effective community engagement: The PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers .....	19
7.5	Overall findings .....	20
<b>8</b>	<b>Impacts .....</b>	<b>23</b>
8.1	Scientific impacts – now and in 5 years .....	23
8.2	Capacity impacts – now and in 5 years .....	23
8.3	Community impacts – now and in 5 years .....	24
8.4	Communication and dissemination activities .....	24
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusions and recommendations .....</b>	<b>26</b>
9.1	Recommendations .....	26
9.2	Suggestions for future programming.....	27
<b>10</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Appendixes .....</b>	<b>33</b>

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# 1 Acknowledgments

We would like to thank PNG-based research coordinators Baia Warapa and Nancy Wobo for locating and interviewing some informants. We are grateful to Ireire Olewale for liaising and coordinating meetings with Daru members of the Stakeholder Reference Group, and to the whole Stakeholder Reference Group who have generously offered feedback and guidance throughout the project: Ireire Olewale, Axy Muri, Baia Warapa, Theresa Johnson, Geua Gorio, Goneang Yokowar, Dr Mark Moran, Chris Dale, Dr James Butler and Dr Jo Caffery.

We also thank the individuals who took part in interviews for this research, who shared their professional insights and experiences in agricultural research and development and community engagement in Western Province of PNG.

Finally, we acknowledge Country and the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work in Australia. Our work has been supported and nurtured on the unceded lands of Ngunnawal, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Wadawurrung peoples who have cared for country for millennia and continue to do so today.

## 2 Executive summary

Our research responds to the need for a different approach to improving agricultural livelihoods in Western Province and is intended to guide an alternative approach to development – one that emphasises assets rather than needs. The research consisted of one integrated scoping study broken down into two small research projects: **FIS/2021/122** which aimed to better understanding what people in the Western Province currently *do* in relation to economic activity and market engagement; and, **FIS/2021/113** which aimed to identify locally appropriate livelihood development practices for the agricultural development sector working across the diverse regions of Western Province. These projects were commissioned by ACIAR and DFAT to inform future programming in Western Province of Papua New Guinea. Both were undertaken with close collaboration and data sharing across the two teams.

Commencing during the travel restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the projects were designed as desktop studies. The findings rest upon a comprehensive literature review of the last decade's research and development programs in Western Province, discussions with our Stakeholder Reference Group, and 41 interviews with 37 expert informants. Respondents provided valuable reflections on their programmatic experiences, sharing success and failure stories along with insights into Western Province's various assets and strengths.

FIS/2021/113 was focused on identifying locally appropriate livelihood development practices for the agricultural development sector working across the diverse regions of Western Province. The four aims of this project were:

1. Review what is known about existing and past development practices in Western Province, and assess the extent to which they deployed a place-based, strengths-oriented, gender sensitive approach to agricultural livelihoods development across Western Province.
2. Identify approaches for accessing Indigenous and place-based knowledge & practices to inform agricultural livelihoods development across the region.
3. Develop a range of methods and tools to support strengths-based, place-based and gender sensitive community led agricultural development in Western Province.
4. Build capacity of local partners and community members in strengths-based development practice.

Our findings show that meaningful, thorough and culturally relevant community engagement is key to the success of future livelihoods programming. At the same time, the scaffolding is in place for community development planning processes which could ensure that external assistance responds to locally defined needs and priorities. The Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments (OLPGLLG) and local level Ward Development Planning processes have the potential for communities to set priorities, take ownership of the development process, and reposition external agencies so they can be called upon to fill identified needs. The PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers provides a set of tools and processes to enable 'best practice' community engagement, especially where robust Community Development Plans are in place.

To successfully strengthen agricultural resilience in Western Province, future programs must improve program design by tailoring to the specificities of Western Province (i.e., are place-based) and are able to harness community strengths and assets. To achieve this, we recommend that future research-for-development investments in the Province prioritise: place-specific programming; community-based development planning processes; incorporating training for Community Development Workers; inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches across programming, and use of local languages in community engagement and consultation wherever possible.

### 3 Background

Western Province is a complex region with a rich diversity of language and cultural groups, agricultural and livelihood practices, built upon varied physical environments that together create distinctive ecologies each with their own opportunities and challenges. It is also a province that has experienced large-scale environmental and cascading social trauma over the last 30 years.

While there is a substantial body of local knowledge about places, livelihoods, agricultural systems, cultures and development projects in Western Province, no work had yet been done to offer a systematic review of this body of knowledge. This SRA sought to draw out the lessons learnt from decades of research and development work in Western Province by using an assets-oriented, place-based and gender-sensitive lens with which to analyse this wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise across diverse stakeholders.

Across the varied ecologies of the Western Province, there are specific challenges for livelihoods and well-being. Subsistence gardening, fishing and hunting provide a proportion of basic food needs, but there are ongoing challenges to food security, such as mine-related pollution, drought, floods, and increasing climate uncertainty. Transport networks are not joined up, water security is an issue in many areas, communications infrastructure provides patchy coverage and District administrative centres operate in isolation from each other. Many economic development projects have attempted to increase household cash incomes by identifying opportunities for local production for markets (e.g. The Rangers Program, Family Farm Teams (FFT) and Empowering youth and Families (EYF), Sweet potato commercialisation in the Highlands, see Chapter 7 and 8 in the appended report: *‘Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province: A Scoping Study’*). These have met with varied success over the years.

Western Province receives a relatively lower portion of international aid assistance across PNG (i.e., Australian aid through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) (Moran & Curtis-Bibb, 2020). Substantial resources, mainly generated from mining, have been channelled to Western Province through various external organizations, whereby institutions have assumed the role of a ‘proxy’, substituting for the government in the provision of goods and services (Filer & Jenkins, 2017). An emerging concern with this assistance is that it has been largely following a deficit model, focused on technical assistance to address immediate needs and deficits.

Such investment in external technical assistance has been questioned globally, with concern about dependency from communities who come to rely on external resources (McKnight, 1995), and the desire for a ‘quick fix’ to address local problems (Green & Goetting, 2010). This can lead to a sense of powerlessness, and often results in solutions that do not sufficiently engage with local residents or develop networks that can sustain these efforts (Boodram, 2019). The PNG Government’s Vision 2050 acknowledges as a major challenge the “lack of meaningful participation of the rural people in income-earning activities” and lists as its first desired key outcome “Changing and rehabilitating the mind-set of our people” (Executive Summary).

The scoping study *‘Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province’* was carried out between 2021 and 2023 as an ACIAR small research activity (SRA) and is intended to inform future research and development programming in the region. The SRA was broken into two complementary projects that were conducted in close collaboration:

- **FIS/2021/122 – Mapping place-based strengths and assets**, led by Professor Katherine Gibson, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney,
- **FIS/2021/113 – Developing methods for strengths-based livelihoods approach**, led by Professor Katharine McKinnon, Centre for Sustainable Communities, University of Canberra.

Together, these SRAs offer an alternative to the needs-based (also referred to as a 'deficit-based') approach of past development projects. Research-for-development is diminished unless the foundational building blocks (strengths and assets of individuals, communities and places) are fully identified as a starting point for thinking collectively about solutions. It is by now widely recognised that Indigenous knowledge and skills are vital to ensure successful agricultural livelihoods development. Recent work for ACIAR by Cargill and Mahalaya, (2017) for example discusses the importance of understanding and building on Indigenous agrarian knowledge and practice, and the effectiveness of an approach that places farmer-to-farmer teaching and learning at the centre. Additionally, there is increasingly wide recognition that Indigenous teaching and learning systems are important conduits for both generating understanding of Indigenous knowledge and skills, and as a platform for more effective communication between research and development personnel and local communities.

Existing knowledge about needs and problems in Western Province is extensive. The economic focus of scoping studies to identify potential interventions relies upon attitudinal and behavioural research (i.e. what people say) at the individual and community level. Rarely are the actual practices of local people (i.e. what people do) documented in order to understand the context into which any new activity must 'fit', let alone the diverse activity profiles of women, men, young, old, able-bodied and disabled. Power dynamics limit what can be found out by asking groups what they would like to see happen. Invariably, the voices of women, the elderly and young people are less heard.

Respect for the depth and diversity of knowledge in Western Province has been undermined by various waves of westernization over the past century, from the impact of missionaries, colonization, extractivist economic projects and aid-oriented development interventions. Younger generations in Western Province are losing access to language and knowledge that has maintained lifeways in this challenging environment over millennia. There is limited understanding of how this loss of cultural knowledge could be halted with, for example, more sensitive and grassroots-led support for indigenous food security. This includes material strengths such as the growing of sago and processing of sago starch as well as immaterial strengths such as the Indigenous knowledge of land, plants, animals, seasons, practices of work and sociality, much of which is codified in stories and myths. It appears that any contemporary accounting of strengths and assets must contend with past processes that have effectively devalued local culture and knowledge.

In Western Province it is especially vital that any intervention is well suited to the particularities of diverse local contexts. Drawing on existing research in Western Province, including past ACIAR studies, this SRA documents the diversity of assets and strengths in the region (FIS/2021/122), and reviews how information about local economies has been generating, highlighting the extent to which place-based, strengths-oriented, gender-sensitive approaches have been used in understanding and engaging with agricultural livelihoods (FIS/2021/113).

The combined SRAs are able to recommend development priorities and practices appropriate for the diverse social, cultural, economic and ecological attributes of the region. From this foundational work, aid and development can more effectively support resilience by ensuring that research and development efforts have the means to work within existing community norms and values, build on existing community practices, enable adaptation as new challenges arise (in relation to e.g. climate uncertainty, health crises etc), and allow/encourage community learning, and meet the values and aspirations as defined by the community.

Building resilience will be enhanced by having a broader base of understanding of place-based [ecologies with their diverse economic practices \(or diverse economies\)](#) from which any intervention can start. As signalled in the Australian Government's DFAT Partnerships for Recovery, Australia's COVID19 and the PNG COVID response plan, there is an urgent need for a more integrated approach to development. The knowledge base produced by

this SRA will allow aid investments in the region to better design interventions to build on current economic activity, harnessing current strengths and assets and align developing market systems with traditional social systems, and associated norms and values. This knowledge base will inform ACIAR's initiation of research projects targeting gender-sensitive agricultural improvements that build on the strengths, assets, and diverse livelihoods of specific places across the Western Province.

## 4 Objectives

FIS/2021/113 aimed to identify locally appropriate livelihood development practices for the agricultural development sector working across the diverse regions of Western Province (SFRP, church-based groups, rangers, NGOs, local government officers and others). The study aimed to identify suitable tools and methods for participatory livelihood development activities that are tailored to the different geographic, ecological and social contexts across Western Province (including ecological, economic and livelihood contexts identified in the complementary work in FIS/2021/122). The study provides a broad review of the social, cultural, environmental and economic characteristics of diverse groups across Western Province and recommends suitable development approaches. In this way, future interventions can be better co-designed with women, men and youth living in rural communities, and create better alignment between formalised market systems and traditional social systems and associated livelihood strategies.

The project aimed to support the aid sector to better tailor development programs with appropriate place-based, strength-based, gender-sensitive approaches. The tools and methods identified in the study are important resources ('tools of the trade') to enable practitioners to improve their practice.

The four objectives of this project were:

1. Review what is known about existing and past development practices in Western Province, and assess the extent to which they deployed a place-based, strengths-oriented, gender-sensitive approach to agricultural livelihoods development across Western Province.
2. Identify approaches for accessing Indigenous and place-based knowledge & practices to inform agricultural livelihoods development across the region.
3. Develop a range of methods and tools to support strengths-based, place-based and gender-sensitive community-led agricultural development in Western Province.
4. Build capacity of local partners and community members in strengths-based development practice.



## 5 Methodology

This study was commissioned by ACIAR and DFAT to review research and development activities undertaken in Western Province of Papua New Guinea. Western Province is the largest province in Papua New Guinea by area: it occupies 97,000 square kilometres in the southwest of the country (Hanson et al., 2001). As the largest Province in PNG, Western Province encompasses great regional diversity. It shares borders with two other nation states (Australia and Indonesia) and remains one of the disadvantaged provinces in the nation. It has experienced the devastating impact of large-scale mining, with the legacy of the Ok Tedi mine still affecting livelihoods and entire landscapes both near and far from the site of mineral extraction. The Province occupies a strategic geopolitical location bordering Indonesia to the west and the Torres Strait of Australia to the south.

While focused on Western Province, this research was conducted remotely from Australia. The design of the work recognised the limitations that COVID19 imposed on travel to PNG and the constraints to working directly with communities and local agencies. It also acknowledges the level of consultations done to date in communities and the risk of further imposing on people's time and energy. In light of these concerns, the design sought to make use of the wealth of existing knowledge, both published and held by the people and organisations engaged in the development sector in the region.

The scoping study is thus based on an extensive literature search of academic and grey literature and 41 in-depth interviews conducted online with 37 individual key informants, including scientific experts and lay knowledge holders, both local and international. A database of place-based knowledge about Western Province has been built up by geocoding all information gathered.

This report draws on interviews with key informants who have deep knowledge and experience of the Province. The names and contacts of initial key interviewees were gathered from members of the Stakeholder Reference Group. We also utilized a snowballing approach to gather new contacts by acquiring referrals from the interviewees.

PNG-based research coordinators Baia Warapa and Nancy Wobo provided assistance in locating and interviewing local respondents. Our team in Australia included project lead Professor Katharine McKinnon, Centre for Sustainable Communities, University of Canberra (FIS/2021/113); project lead Professor Katherine Gibson, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney (FIS/2021/122); Dr Pryor Placino, University of Western Sydney; Dr Justin See, University of Western Sydney; and Dr Stephanie Houghton, University of Canberra/University of Western Sydney.

### *A strengths-based approach*

The overall approach taken in this study utilised a strengths-based, a gender-sensitive and place-based approach. In FIS/2021/113 – Developing methods for strengths-based livelihoods, this meant investigating appropriate methods for a strengths-based approach in the region.

A strengths-based approach assumes that communities already possess important knowledge and skills upon which to build (Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Saleebey, 2008; Mathie et al., 2017). The strengths-based approach used in this scoping study is informed by Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), an approach to working with communities pioneered by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). The strengths-based approach challenges traditional approaches to community development which assumes that community members “become clients because they have deficits, (and) are, in some essential way, flawed or weak” (Saleebey, 2009, p. 3). In contrast, a strengths-based approach focuses on assets, capabilities, and resources, and in doing so, encourages a proactive role for community members, instead of a passive and dependent role in

development practice (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). The appeal of a strengths-based approach lies in its premise that people in communities can drive the process of development themselves by identifying (often unrecognized) assets and then mobilizing them to respond to local issues. In PNG a strengths-based approach is particularly important for working against patron-client relationships that often emerge between external agencies and community members.

This approach challenges the common representations of Western Province as a problematic and deficient region. Constructing a detailed inventory of assets particular to villages and the different ecologies of Western Province can provide future programs and projects with the knowledge essential for shaping strengths-based development programs. Shedding light on these strengths and assets should go hand-in-hand with making Indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices more visible. A strengths-based approach can also help address the “patchiness” of the institutional landscape in Western Province in which various development organizations have the tendency to work in silos and undertake their uncoordinated and unsustainable plans that have little to show when project money runs out (Moran et al., 2021, p. 7). When these organizations apply a strengths-based approach, they will potentially be able to “bring the resources they have together through partnership in the most productive ways” (Moran et al., 2021, p. 7).

### ***Gender-sensitive approaches***

Both projects investigated the gender dynamics relevant to livelihoods development in Western Province. A gender-sensitive approach to community engagement promotes gender equality and empowerment, as well as respects pre-existing context-specific gender norms (Akondeng et al., 2022). It acknowledges the numerous obstacles to women’s involvement and sets up mechanisms to address these obstacles (Gurstein, 1996). In addition, since any development initiative is likely to affect men and women differently given differences in their roles, responsibilities, and constraints faced (Moser, 1993), a gender-sensitive approach tracks changes in gender equality and relations as a result of a particular intervention.

A gender-sensitive approach provides both men and women with equal opportunities to participate in development programs. An important prerequisite for gender-sensitive research and development is the availability of data disaggregated by sex and other types of information reflecting differences between women and men. Hinrichsen et al. (2014, p. 1) assert that only when “gender-relevant aspects are explicitly mentioned in the objectives system and the indicators of the projects... can we ensure that gender equality is adequately taken into account when steering and implementing projects...”. It is important to understand existing gender roles because it provides information on the different conditions that women and men face, and the differential impacts that policies and programs have on them. This information is essential in ensuring that research and development programs cater to the needs of women. Equally important is understanding how community members wish to alter existing relations and what a local vision of gender equity is. Making assumptions about what gender equity ought to look like and how it ought to be achieved can result in efforts that are ill suited to community members and fail to achieve results because local women and men do not see the relevance for themselves.

### ***Place-based approaches***

Place-based interventions refer to “collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location... characterized by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts” (Osborne et al., 2021, p.2). Bellefontaine and Wisener (2011) contend that place-based interventions have several key characteristics including: engagement of multiple stakeholders across different sectors, designed and adapted locally, shared ownership of the initiative, and attempts to integrate across silos and jurisdictions, among

others. Through meaningful participatory responses, local communities are provided with a framework to identify and respond to local needs and challenges in order to improve well-being in a particular area. Participation is “an active process by which... groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish” (Paul, 1987, p. 2). Meaningful participation usually involves bringing different stakeholders and community members together to establish a collective vision for the future, and to commit to achieving that specified vision. Thus place-based approaches are those that arise from local knowledge and priorities, and through processes that are appropriate and meaningful for the local context.

In this project, the investigations undertaken by FIS/2021/122 – Mapping place-based strengths and assets, provide the foundation for understanding and engaging with the specificities of place. Such understanding is an essential foundation for any place-based engagements. In FIS/2021/113 – Developing methods for strengths-based livelihoods, the research investigated the extent to which existing development programming in the region was applying a place-based approach, and the existing tools and methods that could support place-based programming in the future.

**Further discussion of the methods used is provided in the appended report:  
*‘Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province: A Scoping Study’***

## 6 Achievements against activities and outputs/milestones

### 6.1 Objective 1: Review existing development practices for Western Province and in comparable contexts across Western Pacific-Melanesian region

This objective provided a comprehensive review of what is documented and what can be gleaned from specialist interviews about the methods that have been, and are currently, used in Western Province development projects. We conducted a critical analysis of these of these methods from a strengths-based perspective that is sensitive to gender dynamics and responsive to the varying conditions in localities across the Province. The activity tabulated existing practice methods in use in current research and development activities and undertook initial tabulation of what contexts they have been used in, what kind of data they are able to generate, and what kinds of research questions they are able to answer.

No.	Activity	Outputs/ milestones	Completion date	Comments
1.1	Combined SRAs project teams workshop to fine tune research design (with FIS/2021/122).		Sep 2021	Held online over a series of Zoom sessions due to Covid restrictions
1.2	Form an online Community of Practice (CoP) involving development practitioners working in Western Province		Sep 2023	CoP replaced with a series of interviews with different informants per key theme: a) sago, b) gender, and c) NS-CDW.
1.3	Compile existing tools and methods being used in Western Province and Western Pacific-Melanesian region		Apr 2022	
1.4	Online Reflection Workshops with CoP to discuss existing practice and methods, and identify strengths and weaknesses		Sep 2023	
1.5	Progress Review Workshop in person in Canberra with FIS/2021/122, and SSS/2018/137		Jul 2022	In person workshop delayed due to COVID, replaced with a series of online team meetings
1.6	Writing of report and creating inventory of existing development practice methods		Jul 2022	
1		Interim methodological review & contextual assessment for Western Province	May 2022	Appended to Annual Report 15/05/2022

PC = partner country, A = Australia

## 6.2 Objective 2: Critical comparison of development practice methods for Western Province

This objective engaged in a critical analysis and comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of existing community-based participatory practice methods compiled from Activity 1. The analysis focused on elaborating the type of results generated, contextual fitness, and suitability for strengths-based and gender-sensitive research and development practices. This stage of investigation focused on finding examples from Western Province and other similar contexts of participatory methods designed to build understanding of place-based and Indigenous knowledge and skills, and inform development efforts appropriately. The investigation included critical comparison of formal participatory tools and their potential to inform agricultural resilience programs in Western Province. It also sought out models used elsewhere for engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems, including Indigenous pedagogies, that can inform approaches designed to engage Indigenous skills and knowledge, and forms of community-based teaching and learning.

No.	Activity	Outputs/ milestones	Completion date	Comments
2.1	Critically compare existing participatory approaches and methods with relevance to Melanesian and Torres Strait social, economic and ecological contexts		May 2022	
2.2	Identify approaches for engaging Indigenous skills and knowledge, and forms of teaching and learning		May 2022	
2.4	Stakeholder Reference Group virtual workshop to present and discuss findings (with FIS/2021/122).		Jun 2022	Originally scheduled for April, but delayed due to scheduling conflicts for key members of stakeholder committee.
2a		Interim Report on Development practice and methods for strengths-based, place-based and gender-sensitive development in Western Province	May 2022	Appended to Annual Report 15/05/2022

PC = partner country, A = Australia

### 6.3 Objective 3: Adapt and assess applicability of select tools and methods

This objective drew on the results of Activities 2 and 3 in order to further develop and assess select practices and methods for strengths-based agricultural research and development. This work focused on the PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers (NS-CDW) and associated toolkit, and investigating gender-sensitive approaches for the region.

No.	Activity	Outputs/ milestones	Completion date	Comments
3.1	Elaborate purpose and contextual fitness for select tools, based on Activities 1 & 2		Dec 2022	
3.2	Interviews with Key Informants and CoP members to modify and adapt selected tools for testing		Sep 2023	Replaced with a series of key informant interviews on the NS-CDW and gender
3.3	Assessing applicability of selected develop practice methods with CoP group		Sep 2023	Replaced with a series of key informant interviews on the NS-CDW and gender
3.4	Present and discuss with the CoP group (with <b>FIS/2021/122</b> ).		Dec 2023	Replaced with presentation and discussion with Stakeholder Reference Group
		Guide for development practitioners Western Province: methods for strengths-based, place-based and gender-sensitive agricultural resilience.	Sep 2023	Replaced with a review of the suite of tools included in the PNG National Standards-Community Development Worker, included in the appended report

PC = partner country, A = Australia

### 6.4 Objective 4: To develop recommendations for a program of research-for-development about agricultural resilience across Western Province

In collaboration with **FIS/2021/122**, this objective used the results from Activities 1, 2 and 3 to develop a set of recommendations on the design of strengths-based research and development practices to be used in projects aimed to strengthen agricultural resilience in Western Province.

no.	activity	outputs/ milestones	completion date	comments

4.1	Combined SRAs project teams ( <b>FIS/2021/113 &amp; FIS/2021/122</b> ) workshop to develop specific recommendations and associated research designs for a number of potential ACIAR research projects located in different parts of Western Province.		Nov 2023	Held online
4.2	Workshop (virtual) to review findings, discuss research for development priorities and ongoing capacity building and support needs with PNG based Community of Development Practice group, facilitated by PNG-based research consultant.		Sep 2023	Replaced with a series of interviews with different informants per key theme: a) sago, b) gender, and c) NS-CDW.
4.3	Stakeholder Reference Group Virtual Workshop to review findings and discuss research for development priorities for a number of potential ACIAR research projects located in different parts of Western Province.		Dec 2023	Stakeholder Group was subdivided into 4 smaller groups to better manage scheduling
4.4	Combined SRAs project teams Report Writing Workshop (in person Canberra)		Dec 2023	Conducted online due to team member illness.
4.a		Output 4a. Final SRA Report and recommendations.	Dec 2023	Submitted 22/12/2023
		Output 4b. Input into Final 'Synthesis and Recommendations Report' to inform the DFAT South Fly Resilience Plan and the Western Province Resilience Plan, as detailed in FIS/2021/122.	Dec 2023	<b>'Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province: A Scoping Study'</b> appended to the SRA Final Report

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## 7 Key results and discussion

*Below is a snapshot of the key results and discussions from FIS/2021/113. Detailed outcomes and analysis can be read in Section III of the appended report ‘Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province’.*

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### 7.1 Strengths-Based Approaches in Western Province

Our research assessed the extent to which research-for-development activities in Western Province draw attention to assets, strengths, and talents present in the community. A strengths-based approach challenges traditional approaches to community development which assumes that community members “become clients because they have deficits, (and) are, in some essential way, flawed or weak” (Saleebey, 2009, p. 3). In contrast, a strengths-based approach focuses on assets, capabilities, and resources, and in doing so, encourages a proactive role for community members, instead of a passive and dependent role in development practice (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). The appeal of a strengths-based approach lies in its premise that people in communities can drive the process of development themselves by identifying (often unrecognized) assets and then mobilizing them to respond to local issues. In PNG a strengths-based approach is particularly important for working against patron-client relationships that often emerge between external agencies and community members.

To assess the degree to which development and research projects in Western Province have deployed a strengths-based approach to building agricultural resilience, we identified indicators of strengths-based principles in development practice. These principles were derived from a review of analytical frameworks of strengths-based approaches used in relevant journal articles and policy reports (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Saleebey, 2009; Sullivan & Rapp, 2009; Willetts et al., 2014). The indicators are:

1. **Builds action from ‘inside-out’:** extent to which projects draw from internal resources and assets
2. **Community members as experts:** extent to which projects enable community members to take charge and direct their own initiatives
3. **Development practitioners as brokers:** extent to which development actors initiate introductions and ongoing relationships between community members and institutions
4. **Facilitation of processes that identify assets and strengths:** extent to which projects have facilitated steps in identifying assets and strengths present within a community
5. **Process of envisioning:** extent to which development actors enable community members to participate in visioning exercises

Our findings indicate that little has been done in Western Province in terms of adopting a strengths-based approach to community engagement and development. The majority of the research and development projects in Western Province tend to focus on what communities need and lack.

The National Standards provides an excellent foundation for effective community engagement specific to PNG, but does not at present incorporate a strengths-based approach. Building on the existing tools so that strengths-based approaches are included



in future Community Development Worker training for Western Province will increase capacity of local organizations to lead more effective program into the future.

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## 7.2 Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Western Province

A gender-sensitive approach to community engagement promotes gender equality and empowerment, respects pre-existing context-specific gender norms (Akondeng et al., 2022) and acknowledges the many obstacles to women’s involvement and sets up mechanisms to address these obstacles (Gurstein, 1996). A gender-sensitive approach tracks changes in gender equality and relations, considering how any development initiative is likely to affect men and women differently given differences in their roles, responsibilities, and constraints (Moser, 1993),

We assessed the extent to which research and development activities in Western Province are engaging communities in a gender-sensitive way. Our literature review identified a number of indicators that express the use of gender-sensitive principles in development practice. These indicators work to indicate how far and in what ways development projects have met their gender equality objectives. The indicators we used include:

1. **Proportion of women included in projects:** whether projects have equal level of gender representation (i.e., at least 50:50 gender balance).
2. **Sex disaggregated data:** extent to which sex breakdowns are available for each project.
3. **Gender equality objectives:** extent to which projects explicitly mentioned gender equality objectives and recommendations
4. **Analysis of gender roles and distribution:** extent to which projects offer any evidence of monitoring how different forms of work were being performed by men and women, how much time was allocated to performing the work and by whom
5. **Gender expertise:** whether gender experts were deployed in any of the project sites

Our findings showed that the absence of gender-sensitive approaches and analysis is a major weakness in the existing suite of research and development programs in Western Province. All projects should adopt a gender-sensitive approach and consider including team members with gender as an area of specialisation to ensure that this is done appropriately. A gender-sensitive approach should go beyond simply ensuring representation of women in research and development activities, to ensuring that there is space for women’s experiences and concerns to be aired in safety and to establish procedures for implementation that ensure that the differential impacts on women and men is ameliorated.

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## 7.3 Place-Based Approaches in Western Province

This section responds to Objectives 1, 2 and 3. Place-based interventions refer to “collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic locations... characterized by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts” (Osborne et al., 2021,

p.2). Through meaningful participatory responses, local communities are provided with a framework to identify and respond to local needs and challenges in order to improve well-being in a particular area. They usually involve bringing different stakeholders and community members together to establish a collective vision for the future, and to commit to achieving that specified vision. Thus place-based approaches are those that arise from local knowledge and priorities, and through processes that are appropriate and meaningful for the local context.

Bellefontaine and Wisener (2011) contend that place-based interventions have several key characteristics including: engagement of multiple stakeholders across different sectors, designed and adapted locally, shared ownership of the initiative, and attempts to integrate across silos and jurisdictions, among others. We identified several indicators of a place-based approach and assessed whether research and development projects in Western Province meet the criteria. Based on project reports and documents, we evaluated whether programmes have been shaped for the socio-cultural context of Western Province, and whether there was community involvement in study design, incorporation of Indigenous perspectives, and multi-sectoral collaboration.

The indicators we used for the analysis include:

1. **Type of participation:** extent to which local groups are accorded with power in decision-making processes
2. **Co-design:** extent to which local groups are included in all stages of the project
3. **Community leadership and governance:** which party carries the initiative in the projects
4. **Respect for diverse ways of knowing, being and doing:** extent to which projects leverage and build upon local knowledges and expertise.
5. **Storytelling:** extent to which storytelling was deployed as a method in the projects
6. **Culturally relevant location:** whether projects activities occurred in a culturally relevant location for communities
7. **Diversity:** whether projects catered to the needs of multiple groups
8. **Sector-wide approach:** whether projects sought to address multiple issues between and across macro, meso, and micro levels

Our review of the methods used by researchers and development practitioners in Western Province reveals that the use of place-based approaches has been limited. Most of the interventions are missing some of the key characteristics of place-based approaches identified by Bellefontaine and Wisener (2011). In particular, a majority of community engagement is limited to consultations, and very few of these programs have engaged community members themselves in design, analysis, and project evaluation. In addition, our findings indicate that external institutions instead of community members initiate and drive the implementation of the projects. Moreover, culturally responsive methods have been limited, with few studies drawing upon Indigenous perspectives, methods such as storytelling, and venues such as community longhouses. A silver lining, however, is the way that researchers and development are making some progress in ensuring that various levels of institutions and different actors are integrated and involved in research and development at the Province.

The picture that emerges of livelihood interventions to date is that they are seldom shaped around a locally defined set of priorities and aspirations. There is little existing information about what kind of aspirations local people hold, whether related, for example, to a desire for increased cash income tied to market access, or more basic wellbeing outcomes such as more reliable food and water supplies and access to education etc. One finding is that local communities are wishing to reactivate cultural knowledges, which could in turn contribute to healthy food systems and agricultural practices that preserve the diversity of

food crops and support the traditional staples, and avoid the adverse impacts of reliance on expensive chemical inputs.

We identified that the PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers provides a collection of tools that offer a good foundation for place-based work. The National Standards are designed to build the confidence, capacity, and professional identity of community development workers, and to increase capacity for participatory approaches to community engagement and development following best practice. Among the suite of tools the Ward Development Planning process, and Organisational Strengthening tool in particular are useful to: (1) help communities analyse their situation and identify priorities, (2) conduct awareness campaigns and training programs, (3) help communities develop their own plan, and (4) evaluate and monitor their progress. These tools highlight some of the most important elements of place-based approaches such as meaningful engagement and partnerships with community members as well as the importance of co-design and valuing local knowledges.

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## **7.4 Tools for effective community engagement: The PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers**

Based on the findings of our review of community engagement practices of past projects in Western Province, it is apparent that external agencies need to improve meaningful engagement with community members. There is already a package of tried and tested tools designed for the PNG context that offer simple tools to support community engagement, development planning and implementation processes: The National Standards for Community Development Workers. We reviewed the National Standards, explored the potential for their use in Western Province, and how they can be implemented to ensure that future programming addresses the need to offer a place-based, strengths-based and gender aware approach.

The National Standards outlines the skills, values, and processes required for effective and meaningful community development practice. It also presents a number of tools and techniques to help communities identify their own needs and priorities, make plans, challenge unequal power relationships, and take collective action. The National Standards has ten units, and each underscores the importance of collecting information about the communities, supporting them to come together and organise effectively, evaluating and monitoring their activities, and supporting the supervision and training of other community development workers. Ultimately, the National Standards provide guidance for community development workers to promote the active participation of people within communities in PNG.

The National Standards were developed in part to support the roll-out of the Ward development planning process that is mandated within the 1995 Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments (OLPGLLG), that pave the way for local development plans to feed into provincial and national development plans. PNG has a decentralised governance system consisting of national, provincial, and local level governments. While the national government is responsible for developing policies and plans, the implementation is mostly carried out in the local level by development agencies and partners. There are significant challenges associated with this decentralisation, with one problem being the absence of ward development plans in many parts of the country. In areas that do have ward development plans in place, it appears that these are rarely taken into consideration in the implementation of development programmes.

This study found that the extent of the roll-out and implementation of the National Standards in Western Province is still in its infancy. Knowledge about the existence of the National Standards is not widespread, and in Western Province utilisation of the associated tools and training are currently limited to the villages covered by the Ok Tedi's Mine Continuation Agreement. There is also some pushback from village chiefs and elders in encountering these new processes for community engagement. More work is

needed to raise awareness of the value of the National Standards, to adapt the tools and processes to suit local cultural and decision-making norms, and to engage with multiple stakeholders so as to facilitate engagement with the National Standards beyond the mining corridor.

A promising finding is that people who are aware of the National Standards have found its tools and resources to be accessible, easy to use, and tailored to the community's level of understanding. While still at an early stage, government and several development institutions are coming to see the importance of the National Standards and their tools to build people's capacity to participate in planning and decision-making processes. These tools provide an excellent foundation, but there is more work to be done to adapt these methods to be more strengths-based and build on Indigenous knowledge sharing practices. Working in a way that is in tune with existing community-level decision-making processes and Indigenous forms of consensus building would only strengthen the validity of the kinds of community or Ward development plans envisioned by the OLPGLLG.

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## 7.5 Overall findings

Overall, our methodological review of research and development projects in Western Province found that the level of community engagement on research projects relied mostly on consultation, with the most frequent methods of consultation being key informant interviews, surveys, participatory workshops, and focus groups. There does appear to be significant interest among institutions to employ methods and tools that use local knowledge and experience. Several projects have stated a concern to draw on local capacities and skills and identify community-defined futures. However, few projects encouraged citizen power or provided opportunities for community members to be involved in co-design and co-construction of knowledge.

Findings suggest that many past projects have failed to gain meaningful community-level partnership, with anecdotal evidence available that in some cases community members are reluctant to engage in further development activities following detrimental experiences. Other researchers (e.g., Moran et al., 2021) point to changing, inconsistent and sometimes conflicting modes of governance that further undermines trust in the delivery of development assistance. Our findings indicate that power sharing is uncommon in research projects, with decision-making usually held by a small number of key institutions and leaders. Some notable exceptions include: the ACIAR-funded Family Farm Teams program and the World Vision-led Healthy Islands Concept (HIC).

Culturally responsive methods were limited, with few studies consciously seeking to modify methods to suit Indigenous approaches to knowledge sharing. Only 13% of research projects and 1% of development projects were found to provide space for Indigenous learning and knowledge systems. Women's representation and involvement in research-for-development projects in Western Province tends to be poor. Although several reports included representation of women, it is not clear that data collection is conducted to ensure women have a safe forum in which to speak freely or address how their participation differs across communities and clans.

Our research identified the following '**success factors**' that were present when projects succeeded:

1. **Meaningful and thorough engagement with communities.** Past projects that have enabled community members to set agendas, determine priorities, and initiate actions have better project buy-ins from the communities. A sense of shared ownership by community members in governance, decision-making, and accountability is particularly helpful. In addition, projects that have been mobilised and facilitated through churches and schools tended to have a good chance of success.

2. **Developing long-term sustainable relationships.** Prioritising relationship-building between communities and development practitioners through physical presence, investing and spending time in the field, and engaging with communities in culturally responsive manner are important. A ‘fly in and fly out’ approach that does not take time to build relationships will not work. Our interviews reveal that community members prefer to deal with community workers who have a good track record. Consequently, the development of trusting and respectful relationships is a key to success.
3. **High regard for local and traditional knowledge, activities, and social norms.** Programs that are responsive to the history, language, culture, and traditions of communities are well-placed for success. It is important that development practitioners understand and appreciate the historical and cultural contexts of each community. In addition, the identification of local strengths, assets, and resources helps build people’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Our interviews indicate that a negative mindset tends to prevail in Western Province. A strengths-based approach that focuses on community strengths rather needs, and where there is more mentoring and less monitoring, are particularly important.

Our research has identified three key ‘**failure factors**’ from past interventions:

1. **Top down, one-off projects.** Short term interventions with little input from community members fail to consider people’s aspirations and social contexts. Instead, engagement with people in Western Province needs to be ongoing and sustained over time. Aid agencies need to develop ways to build longer term relationships based on trust and mutual respect with the community members themselves and other development organisations. Working collaboratively and sharing power are critical components in such a relationship. Other characteristics of long-term, trusting relationships include: devolved decision-making, explicit recognition of power inequalities, and letting community members set their own time frames compatible with their own cultural protocols.
2. **Uncoordinated development interventions.** The scoping study revealed fragmented and competing arrangements among development agencies, with each organisation trying to engage with the same communities to get things done. The go-it-alone approach can also lead to uncoordinated and unsustainable programs that benefit only a select few within the community. Horizontal coordination (across multiple stakeholders) and vertical coordination (across different levels of government) are necessary to address the problems in Western Province more holistically.
3. **Donor-driven ‘one size fits all’ development assistance.** There is widespread recognition that to succeed in Western Province development assistance must take regional specificities into account. The Province is characterised by significant diversity in physical, socio-cultural and economic geographies. This means that place-based programming is essential, building in the capacity for bespoke project development responsive to local conditions. Also, key to this is the inclusion of community members in shaping the interventions that will in turn shape their future. Drawing on the deep local knowledge and autochthonous expertise of community members can avoid the deficit model of development and patterns of dependency and dispossession that accompany top-down, needs-based interventions.

Australian agencies are in an excellent position to shape development investment in ways that build on our longstanding relationships in Western Province, and establish programs that gain strong community participation, and thus have increased chances of success. The recent report *People's Voices: Listening To Australia's Closest Neighbour* (Baptiste et al., 2022) suggests, however, that any future development planning should take heed of local concerns for some of the negative aspects of Australia's involvement in PNG and prevalent local views about 'boomerang aid'. What must be avoided, therefore, are interventions based on external priorities, that do not match with the aspirations and values of local community members, and do not build on their existing skills and knowledges.



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## 8 Impacts

The impacts listed below apply for both FIS/2021/122 and FIS/2021/113.

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### 8.1 Scientific impacts – now and in 5 years

This SRA was commissioned to inform future research and development investments in Western Province by ACIAR and DFAT, and our results have the potential for further impact as a model for a strengths-based approach to regional programming in PNG and elsewhere in the region.

Building resilience will be enhanced by having a broader base of understanding of place-based economies and ecologies from which any intervention can start. As signalled in the Australian Government’s DFAT Partnerships for Recovery, Australia’s COVID19 and the PNG COVID response plan, there is an urgent need for a more integrated approach to development.

The SRA Interim Report (2022) incorporated a summary of emerging findings, and initial recommendations, and informed the PNG-Australia Western Province Partnership Design. As the Western Province Partnership Plan is implemented we anticipate that the knowledge base produced by the combined SRAs will support better design of activities so they are positioned to build on current economic activity, harnessing current strengths and assets and align developing market systems with traditional social systems, and associated traditional norms and values. This knowledge base will also inform ACIAR’s initiation of research projects targeting gender-sensitive agricultural improvements that build on the strengths, assets, and diverse livelihoods of specific places across the Western Province.

In future we anticipate that the findings of this project will support an increased engagement and citation of strengths-based, place-based and gender-sensitive approaches to development programming in future ACIAR research and development projects in the region.

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### 8.2 Capacity impacts – now and in 5 years

Through engagement with members of the Stakeholder Reference Group and Key informants, the SRA’s have encouraged greater understanding of the strengths and assets of Western Province and the potential of using a strengths based approach.

Members of the Stakeholder Reference Group were impressed by the maps created through this project and thought that they were important resources to help better contextualise the geography of the Province. The maps and discussions can provide helpful baseline information for various projects in Western Province being supported by DFAT and ACIAR.

Leveraging the value of strengths-based, place-based and gender-sensitive approaches, the Final Report has been received by Stakeholder Reference Group members to provide good baseline information for future agricultural development project in Western Province, including the preparation of proposals for Community Grant Schemes expected to be undertaken through the Western Province Partnership plan

Developers of training materials for the National Standards-Community Development Workers (CDWs) will be able to incorporate guiding questions that draw upon strengths-based approach and improve CDW training accordingly.

### 8.3 Community impacts – now and in 5 years

As a desktop review this scoping study did not engage directly with community members. However, as our recommendations are implemented it is expected that community members will come to benefit in a range of ways, including:

- Prioritisation of the voices and priorities of community members in design of future interventions
- Identification of existing strengths and capacities at the community level as the foundations for development efforts
- Implementation of community-led development planning
- Strengthening of existing livelihood strategies, including fishing and agriculture investments that strengthening capacity for community-based innovation
- Better appreciation of their own capacities and resources as the basis for economic and social development
- Future livelihood programming around commercial primary production that incorporates leadership and governance, financial literacy and gender equity training, ensuring that community members are well equipped to manage initiatives and distribute their benefits equitably.
- Strengthening of traditional food economies with effect of increasing food security
- Better appreciation of and capacity to use and improve community-based climate change adaptation systems as future investment programming builds on traditional knowledges and amplifies current strategies that prepare and help local communities mitigate risks from tidal inundation, saltwater incursion, increasing drought and flooding.

### 8.4 Communication and dissemination activities

A project website was established to assist with communication and dissemination:

<https://sarwesternprovince.wordpress.com/>

The project was featured in The National Tribune on 02/05/2022:

<https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/new-study-to-draw-out-lessons-from-decades-of-development-work-in-png/>

The project teams for FIS/2021/113 and FIS/2021/122 regularly attended the SFRP Implementing Partners Coordination Group monthly meetings, and presented twice about the projects:

- 10/02/2022, Introduction to the project
- 09/03/2022, Update on progress

Members of the SFRP-IPC group were:

Organisation	Names of members
<b>Australian High Commission:</b>	James Marshall, Amanda Young, Euodia Mosoro, Joe Manteit



<b>Abt Associates</b>	<i>PNG-Australia Governance Partnership</i> Ireire Olewale, Charles Ihembe, Stella Koaipura, Lucy Moore, Paul Bedggood <i>PNG-Australia Transition to Health</i> Geoff Miller
<b>Reef and Rainforest Research Centre</b>	Sheridan Morris, Tammie Matson <i>INLOC International</i> Ray Barrett, Baroa Lakani, Dave Rutherford
<b>World Vision</b>	Godfrey Bongomin, Erica Bradford, Christabel Chan, Sonia Yeung, Clement Chipokolo,
<b>ACIAR</b>	Katharine McKinnon, Katherine Gibson, Ann Fleming, Justin See, Pryor Placino, Doreen Iga, Ruby Jones
<b>SFRP Specialists</b>	Mark Moran, Mark Wolfsbauer, Hans Mollinger

Professor Katherine Gibson and Professor Katharine McKinnon presented a lecture entitled “Bringing social sciences to the fore to address gaps in donor programs in the Western Province of PNG” on 2 February 2023 at the ACIAR Fisheries workshop in Maroochydore, Queensland.

Professor Katherine Gibson and Dr Pryor Placino gave a seminar entitled “Scoping agricultural resilience in PNG’s Western Province from afar: Negotiating challenges posed by COVID and colonial knowing” on 16 November 2023 in the Institute for Culture and Society 2023 Seminar Series at Western Sydney University.

Two journal articles are currently in preparation for submission in early 2024.

## 9 Conclusions and recommendations

Investigation of how well existing development practices across the Western Province align with place, strengths and gender approaches, found that there are not many examples of past projects that fulfil the criteria for genuinely place-based, strengths-based and gender aware approaches. To do this well would mean adopting methods that 1) seek to understand existing strengths in communities and value the quotidian expertise of regular community members and farmers, 2) seek to understand gender roles in rural economies and incorporate gender expertise and gender disaggregated monitoring and evaluation, and 3) support strong community participation, with opportunities for co-design and engagement tools that utilize culturally appropriate processes for discussion and decision-making. We learned that the existing suite of tools under the PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers do meet many of these criteria, and with further development and testing in the diverse cultural contexts of Western Province, these existing toolkits and training programs have the potential to provide the foundation for a strengths-based approach to development in the region.

Based on our findings, we suggest that future work in Western Province should prioritise the engagement of **trained CDWs to support community engagement and require that communities create development plans as a prerequisite for any new initiatives**. The existing suite of tools under the National Standards provide an excellent starting point for this work, and while further refinement of the tools should also be undertaken to adapt them to the culturally specific decision-making practices of local communities. Stronger engagement with the National Standards for Community Development Workers, and associated Ward Developing Planning processes would help to ensure that future technical assistance provides support that meets community-identified needs and priorities, ensures community engagement is robust and meaningful, and avoids the risk for poor community engagement to lead to adverse outcomes. Trained CDWs should have the skills to support effective community engagement.

### 9.1 Recommendations

Our recommendations are that future research and development investments in Western Province should support:

#### 9.1.1 Community-based development planning processes

All programs of work should support community-based development planning processes. This can be achieved by engaging with Ward Development Plans where they are in place, supporting the use of the package of tools included in the PNG National Standards for Community Development Workers (with trained CDWs), and by making use of existing National Standards Ward Development Planning and Organisational Strengthening tools and in turn the local governance structures that will be able to support community development in the longer term. Future community grants schemes, for instance, should utilize the scaffolding provided by the National Standards. Priority should be given to building the capacity of local communities and organisations to drive development and strengthen local governance.

#### 9.1.2 Training for Community Development Workers

**Providing opportunities for more community members and leaders to be trained in the National Standards for Community Development Workers, and utilizing trained CDWs where they are available.** Stronger engagement with people trained in the National Standards, and associated Ward Developing Planning processes would ensure that future technical assistance supports community-identified needs and priorities,

ensures community engagement is robust and meaningful, and avoids the risk for inadequate community engagement leading to adverse outcomes. Wider application of the tools would present opportunities for **further development of the tools to ensure they are adaptable to local cultural practices in village level planning and decision-making**. Trained CDWs have the skills to support effective community engagement.

### 9.1.3 Inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches in during design and implementation across programming

**All programs of work should incorporate careful gender analysis from the design phase and be equipped to report on the gendered impacts of work undertaken.**

Ideally this would involve a gender specialist as part of all teams and allow for cultural diversity in gender norms in response to the diverse cultural contexts of the Province. All livelihoods research and development projects should understand the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in the sector and involve gender expertise in project design.

### 9.1.4 Use of local languages in community engagement and consultation

**All programs of work should enable community engagement in local languages** (tok ples). Enabling engagement in language is a powerful and concrete step towards enabling local knowledge systems and local cultural practices to shape research and development. Adopting Indigenous methods will also be crucial, as will support for initiatives that recover and share cultural learning, and knowledge about Indigenous resilience strategies (such as traditional methods for food preservation).

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## 9.2 Suggestions for future programming

Based on our research findings across both SRAs and consultations with key informants and Stakeholder Reference Group members, we propose a series of possible future projects that could provide first steps to implementing our recommendations:

1. Address food security, building on Indigenous agricultural knowledge and traditional staple crops such as sago, to strengthen traditional food economies and harness opportunities for promoting gender equity based on place-based cultural and economic practices and knowledge systems.
2. Address water security: availability of clean water supply through community-based solutions for a) crop irrigation and improved production for food security in both drought- and flood-affected areas, and b) hygiene and gender equity.
3. Artisanal fisheries production and marketing – improving livelihoods through a) supporting small scale fisheries, improving access to markets with fish handling and storage solutions, and b) building capacity for community-led innovation in small scale fisheries.
4. Community-based climate change adaptation, harnessing traditional knowledges and amplifying existing strategies in anticipation of tidal inundation, saltwater incursion, increasing drought and flooding
5. Test viability of forms of a community income guarantee that supports a diversity of productive activities such as self-provisioning and commercial enterprises, natural and cultural resource management, etc. A basic income empowers people to choose how to solve their own problems on a voluntary basis in their own place, and

could provide a response to income loss from mine closure to prompt community-based livelihood innovation.

6. Build new export opportunities based on lightweight, easily transportable and high value crops like vanilla and native species that grow well in the climate and soils of Western Province, such as heritage banana species.
7. Community-based environmental remediation program in mining areas and sites affected by mining disasters requires participation from community for planning and involvement
8. Undertake place-specific programming to develop community development plans – utilising and adapting the National Standards tools and training, testing suitability for cultural specificities of Western Province, in concert with community grants program

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## 11 Appendixes

See attached report: '***Strengthening Agricultural Resilience in Western Province: A Scoping Study***'

