

Pro-poor Growth Story

The long road to sustainable coffee in PNG



Life in rural Papua New Guinea is not the same as it was a decade ago. Basic living standards have improved as a result of many factors, such as promising new industries. In inland PNG, coffee farming has been a major contributor to this

change. Coffee provides income and improves traditional village ways of life by helping the community access amenities, such as electricity. For smallholder farmer Catherine Abaida, who have advanced from cultivating to aggregating coffee, the sector has changed her life.

Catherine is a single mother from rural Menyamya in Morobe Province. With three children to support, she farmed vegetables and sold them at the Menyamya government station to provide for her household. However, her earnings were not enough to meet her family's needs.



I made about 40 to 50 kinas (USD11-13) a fortnight, and that was enough for basics like oil, soap and salt. But I could not save enough for my children's school fees, and most of the time I would ask my relatives to assist me. We have land in the village, so we farmed vegetables and relied on our garden, said Catherine.

When Catherine's parents passed on, she inherited a block of land with coffee trees and in 2004, she started farming coffee. Over time, her income from this endeavour grew. Seeing this, Catherine planted an additional 500 trees in 2008, extended her coffee garden, and invested more time and resources into coffee farming.

However, Catherine and most coffee farmers in her village never received any formal training on improved methods of farming or other important complementary skills, such as financial management, that would help them increase their productivity and income.

In 2020, as part of MDF's work in the coffee market system, the PNG country team partnered with Morobe Mountain Coffee Export Limited (MMCEL) to support coffee farmers to produce high quality coffee beans in remote areas of Morobe, including Watut, Wau, Bulolo and Menyamya. The intervention introduced a coffee certification program designed to help coffee farmers meet international farming standards and obtain a referenceable accreditation. Becoming a certified coffee producer connects farmers to a higher-end market in which they can charge a higher price for their coffee beans.





We had never had training like this before! Some of the things we learned were new, so we are very interested to continue working together with the extension officers to improve our skills. I feel that this is good and we will benefit more from it, Catherine said.

The MMCEL training Catherine attended helps farmers develop skills in sustainable farming practices to meet the certification requirements, while also exposing them to a new world of coffee outside the village. Catherine now has a better understanding of the coffee supply chain from farmer to consumer and the important role she plays in ensuring quality coffee is produced to meet consumer demand. Catherine is now a certified farmer in Menyamya and earns a premium price for her coffee. With MDF support, MMCEL's extension team worked with the villages in Morobe, and through farmer training and monitoring, a total of 1,917 farmers, including 479 women, were certified as of end-2020.

With more money in her pocket now, Catherine's way of living has become more comfortable, along with the lifestyles of other coffee farming households in her village.



I did not have electricity in my house before. With the money I earned from the coffee sales, I was able to purchase a generator and a freezer. I now have light in my house and I sell cold drinks and ice blocks. I also have a small 'piksa haus' (village cinema) that people come to pay and watch movies, Catherine said, beaming.

Catherine has also started supplying coffee to exporters in the city of Lae. Working as an aggregator of sorts, she purchases certified coffee bean from smallholders in her village and supplies it to exporters, with a small mark-up. This new business venture has enabled her to start a new market in her home where she sells other store goods to people in her village.

Coffee has improved Catherine's lifestyle in the village and she is hopeful and optimistic for what the future holds.

