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Micro Business Opportunities for Remote Kokoda Track Communities

Business and agriculture workshops piloted by the Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) are inspiring remote Kokoda Track communities to improve their sources of food and income.

Under a new development project supported by the joint PNG-Australia Kokoda Initiative, KTA are piloting micro-business support activities in two villages on the Kokoda Track.

The project aims to increase village income through tourism opportunities as well as improving village food security through diversified crops and livestock.

With the expertise of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and non-profit community development organisation, Ginigoada, the workshops delivered technical training in agriculture, livestock and basic business skills.

Ginigoada, which means "stand up strong" in the Motuan language of the people of Central Province, facilitated sessions in cash flow, business planning and goal setting.

The first pilot workshop was held at the end of February in the remote Naoro villages, located 16 hours walk into the famous Kokoda Track from Owers Corner.

As this workshop was the first of its kind more than fifty men and women participated in the two day workshop.

Mark Inara from Naoro 2 village met the workshop facilitators on their first consultation visit which sparked keen interest amongst villagers willing to experience a whole new range of opportunities.

"I know a little bit about keeping honeybees but I needed to learn how to set it up as a business and run it," Inara said.

"This workshop helped me have a longer term look at outside markets; it's the first time we have had a workshop like this in Naoro, the whole community is really interested," Inara added.

The Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF), who led the research study for this program, also attended the workshop to discuss the market demand of trekkers and their expectations on the Track.

Chillion Billoi, from Naoro 1, is a guesthouse owner near a Wartime Japanese campsite along the Kokoda Track popularly known as 'Japs Ladder'.

"In the past I didn't make (business) plans but after this workshop I know about setting goals, bookkeeping and making sure to improve the business," said Mr Billoi.

"We are now learning that we can offer more for visitors to the Kokoda Track, making a better experience in simple ways that we can manage."

Not wanting to miss a great opportunity, the Naoro women made time between housework and attending their gardens to participate in the workshops - many of them attending sessions while breastfeeding.

Mary Kendy from Naoro 1 said she was happy because she wanted to learn new things.

"I wanted to learn business skills because I have bigger plans," Mrs Kendy keenly stated.

"As a mother of three I can still make a contribution to my family and community and I want to encourage other women to be independent," she added.

Four major projects relating to food security have been identified by community groups from both Naoro villages.

Villagers also hope to tap the trekker market by selling honey, meals, carved walking sticks, and laundry services.

KTA, NARI and Ginigoada will make regular treks to Naoro to support the growth of community business projects and start planning for the second pilot village.

With the imminent start of the trekking season, communities will be putting their new skills in place to impress those who brave the rugged mountains and valleys of the Kokoda Track.

Note:

The **Kokoda Initiative**, a joint understanding between the governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia, works towards sustainable development for Track communities including improved economic opportunities and livelihoods, health, education, transport and related services.