


Conservation and empowerment

How women combined mangrove conservation with new livelihoods

 **Location**
Milne Bay and Manus Island,
Papua New Guinea

Tucking her sleeping baby into the billum over her shoulder, Senita slips out of the canoe into the mangroves. She searches among the roots for her crab pots, hoping she would have a good catch to sell at the market tomorrow. School fees are due for her older child and the family needs cash to pay them.

Meanwhile back at the village, representatives from a conservation NGO meet with the chief and some local men. “Where are the women?” they ask. “They are in the mangroves looking for our dinner” the men reply. As key users of the resources, women need to be empowered to come to the table, engaging in conservation and the economic opportunities that it brings.

The challenge

Women are often disproportionately impacted by disasters and vulnerable to climate change. In Melanesia, they are often underrepresented in political, government and business forums. Women in coastal areas of Papua New Guinea (PNG) work hard collecting seafood to sell and to feed their families, and women’s work accounts for 60-80% of all food production in PNG.

The women rely on sea and mangroves to provide for them and in turn value the protection that mangroves give them. Women’s involvement in conservation can support improved economic outcomes as well as empowering their decision-

making, enabling them to ensure sustained access to resources while also protecting wider communities.

The actions

In an effort to generate employment and income, women in PNG were supported by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to develop and trial business and conservation ideas, build their leadership skills, strengthen financial literacy and learn conservation management methods.

Nature’s Leading Women At the 2017 event, women from across the Pacific and Indigenous Australia gathered for a week-long mentoring process with business leaders. Following mentoring sessions, the women pitched their ideas to a panel of leaders from businesses and donors (USAID, DFAT, Qantas).

The women developed concepts related to mangrove economic opportunities, eco-tourism and blue carbon. Following the Nature Leading Women event, they formed the group Mangoro Maket Meri (Mangrove Market Women, MMM) to sustainably manage the mangroves and draw on the benefits the mangroves can provide.

MMM facilitated a mangrove awareness campaign, produced and delivered by a local female entrepreneur in mangrove communities of Milne Bay Province. PNG’s female mangrove specialist Mazzella Maniwavie provided technical support to the awareness training.



This included material and handbooks for ecology and restoration trainings. Following focus group discussions on mangrove usage, training on mangrove ecology and restoration was provided to 50 women from three villages.

The results

The program resulted in numerous achievements:

- ▶ It supported women to use clean cookstoves, reducing their need for wood and exposure to smoke;
- ▶ Women acquired nursery skills in mangrove pot planting and transplanting;
- ▶ Crab handling and marketing training;
- ▶ Formation of a women’s micro-bank.

Plans are in place to facilitate biodiversity and conservation training for tourism operators in Milne Bay Province, and TNC continues a partnership with Villink Tours and Expeditions, a woman-owned company, to promote information and importance of mangrove ecosystems in the province.

The 45 women who participated in the mangrove ecology and restoration training will provide voluntary awareness campaigns with the tour operators.

The lessons

Initially, the women’s sense of ownership of the project was weak, likely due to a lack of sufficient community and stakeholder engagement and, therefore, lack of clarity and

MANGROVE GUARDIANS

With mentoring and training, a group of women formed Mangoro Maket Meri (MMM) to pursue new livelihood opportunities, while protecting and raising awareness about the value of mangroves. Photo: The Nature Conservancy

agreement on what they were trying to achieve. The project was implemented too quickly, before all stakeholders were on board — and required going back to step 1 to scope context, needs and options.

This time, the process was inclusive of women, men and government departments and much more detailed information was gathered on the communities’ use of mangroves. Activities to increase awareness on the role and benefits of mangroves were then identified as the next step forward.

Economic benefits to pay for schooling, food and shelter were identified as a priority, along with environmental benefits that help preserve livelihoods.

Ensuring that the community needs were supported, helped increase: a) ownership, as well as strengthen governance, for the effort; b) influence and effectiveness of women’s groups; and c) success of activities related to the effort.

Plans exist to scale up and become a model for women and mangroves globally.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- ▶ [Watch the video](#) on the Nature’s Leading Women 2017 event (4:52)
- ▶ [Watch the video](#) on MMM and hear the women explain their concept and activities (2:05)
- ▶ [Read a story](#) on some of the MMM results