

Bank reaches out to villagers

MiBank establishes an agency in rural Sissano near Aitape, West Sepik to help locals

REACHING out to the far ends of West Sepik, MiBank has established an agency in Sissano Lagoon, supported by UNCDF to upscale its agent network models and QR code payment solutions in the Sepik Region under the STREIT PNG Project.

The goals of this initiative are to build a strong agent network channel to provide financial services, digitise merchant payments, and expand outreach to rural communities, particularly women, in the Sepik Region.

The initiative is targeting farmers and agri-buyers engaged in the three value chains of cocoa, vanilla, and fisheries under the project.

MiBank is assisting farmers who have previously been unable to access financial services due to tough bank requirements, a lack of information, and access points.

MiBank-STREIT PNG project manager Steven Ereman said the bank was ensuring that farmers could access banking services right at their doorsteps for convenience.

"More organised farmer groups collaborating with MiBank will en-

able more financial opportunities for their farmers," Ereman said.

Sissano Lagoon is located west of Aitape which was hit by three tidal waves in 1998 (the Aitape Tsunami), which swept through the Sissano villages, killing over 2000 people and injuring others. It was one of Papua New Guinea's most devastating natural disasters.

Many people have relocated to higher ground or further inland. Government services, such as a primary school and a health clinic, have also been relocated to higher ground.

Economically, the people of Sissano Lagoon are heavily reliant on fishing and betel nut trading to meet their other needs and wants, such as school fees or a packet of rice.

The majority of betel nut trading occurs at the border, particularly in Jayapura, Indonesia, where there is a high demand for betel nut.

A 10kg bag of betel nut is worth approximately K150 and can be exchanged for a gallon of petrol or diesel fuel.

The barter system has continued to exist between the people of Sissano and Jayapura for many decades. Furthermore, the lagoon is rich in



shells and mud crabs, which provide another source of income for the locals.

More than 20 years after this tragic event, a group of young people led by Ronlee Ainep is working together to improve the living standard of their community by participating in the STREIT Project.

"I want Sissano youths to have a positive impact in our community," Ainep said.

It is his belief that economic empowerment would alleviate many of the social issues affecting the youths and the progress of the Sissano community.

"We're starting with our cocoa

farm where I've organised my group members to clear the land and plant clone cocoas," he added.

The group intends to expand into fisheries and vanilla.

Ainep, whose father was a long-time public servant and former district administrator, attended Governor Bird's STREIT Project launch in 2019. His father was intrigued by the project's goals and assigned him to work on the old cocoa farm. Ainep established the Mawemsor Business Group (Inc.) and encouraged all of his cousins and other youths in the Sissano area to join and become members. The organisation is divided into two clusters, with a total

membership of 300 people, the majority of whom are youths.

Each member is responsible for clearing one hectare of land. According to Ainep, they had already cleared 30 hectares of land to plant cocoa. With the help of the Cocoa Board through the STREIT PNG Project, the group has cloned 3600 cocoa seedlings, the majority of which have already been planted, leaving only 367 cocoa seedlings. He intends to increase the number of seedlings to 15000 and plant 400 cocoa trees per hectare.

Mawemsor Business Group (inc.), led by Ronlee, has signed up to become a MiBank Agent. As a result, the group opened more than 30 accounts for its members, who received their cards instantly. The Bank's presence in the area, has attracted the attention of many people from neighbouring villages who wish to open accounts. Ronlee believes that this collaboration with MiBank will not only encourage his members and other interested individuals to open an account and save, but will also provide future access to other MiBank financial services and products.

GROW WITH US

To open a Bank Account on your mobile phone:

just see one of our friendly staff at any of our branches nation wide or call at one of our Account Opening Agents. For further information please contact our Customer Call Centre.

CALL MIBANK

16789

www.mibank.com.pg



MiCash