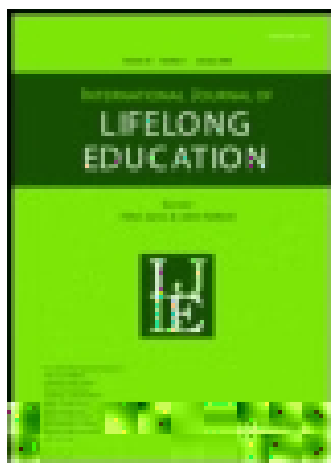


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'Training by Papua New Guinea women, for Papua New Guinea women': lessons from the development of a co-constructed course for women smallholder farmers

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‘Training by Papua New Guinea women, for Papua New Guinea women’: lessons from the development of a co-constructed course for women smallholder farmers

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This article examines the lessons from a collaborative project that worked with women agricultural leaders in Papua New Guinea. The project sought to build the capacity of these leaders as trainers in a way that would enable the development of a sustainable community of practice and worked within a critical and place-based pedagogy underpinned by asset-based community development principles. Whilst the process of our collaborative work has a number of salutary lessons, the co-construction of the training course with PNG women farmer leaders did illustrate a particular knowledge design continuum: that is, *local* knowledge, *shared* knowledge, *integrated* knowledge and then *consolidated* knowledge. From this consolidated knowledge, together we were able to design locally valid and locally relevant modules. As the trainers went out to trial their training, they were then engaging in *practical* knowledge and *experiential* knowledge which then lead to our collective ability to *transform* knowledge that will enhance future training in this area.

d : training; learning and development; women’s learning; Papua New Guinea; women smallholder farmers

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Across the developing world, agricultural extension has been funded as a major platform for enhancing agricultural productivity through the training of farmers. Such training has been the major vehicle for technology transfer within the overall global project of modern, scientific, industrial farming practice. Although

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there is evidence that technology transfer and skills training have a place in the lifelong learning of farmers, that place is quite limited. As Braun, Jiggins, Röling, van den Berg, and Snijders (2006, p. 16) argue in their discussion of the place of conventional agricultural extension:

If simple messages, and simple technologies, are required to deal with straightforward problems in largely homogenous landscapes, and among largely homogenous populations, cost-effective options are available to guide extension and communication practice.

However, farmers in the developing world face complex contexts that require them to be active problem-solvers who have the ability to adapt information for their local application. There is a place for technology transfer; however, to be effective this must be located within a place-based contextualized approach to farmers as lifelong learners.

It is only in the last decade that agricultural extension has been interrogated for its assumptions about farmers as learners or about the process for developing culturally appropriate learning experiences. Although there is no agreement on the boundaries of the new participatory approaches to farmers' learning such as participatory learning and action research, participatory technology development and farmer field schools (Braun et al., 2006), they typically focus on capacity building within which technology transfer is just one factor. As Lauzon (2013) emphasizes, this turn to capacity development, especially one founded on intimate, empathic and connected relationships rather than didactic information transfer signals an important shift in the discourses that construct both farmers and their learning/education. Lauzon (2013, p. 264) challenges his audience in the following way:

I am sure there are readers who will argue that this [empathic capacity building relationship] is not practical, perhaps not helpful in realizing our goals as we work with marginal and resource-poor farmers; it is too philosophical, too impractical. Yet we, as professionals who aspire to work with others and to assist them in living full and rich lives must also enter into intimacy—intimacy with the people and contexts in which we work—and do so. However, farT ticapimainsophC

Agricultural extension was initially conceptualized as a way to 'extend' research-based knowledge to the rural sector (Akinngbe & Ajayi, 2010, p. 353). In PNG, agricultural extension was extensively developed in the post-war period when the country was a colony of Australia. In the manner typical of this era, the services were run through the three levels of government (national, provincial and local) and focused on the development of cash crops. Following Independence in 1975, under the Organic Law on Provincial Governments, as with many government roles, responsibility for agricultural extension training was primarily devolved to the provinces. A further development of agricultural extension

country. One of the goals of the PNG National Agricultural Development Plan 2007–2016 is ‘to improve the recognition of women’s contributions to rural industries and increase opportunities for women’s decision-making in agriculture’. However, to date, women smallholders’ learning needs have been overlooked as the major focus of extension has been on cash crops (male-dominated spheres) rather than the informal and subsistence areas in which women predominate (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1997). As women smallholders primarily grow subsistence crops, selling only the surplus for cash, the focus of training on cash crops has not been seen as relevant by most women.

There are a number of sociocultural factors as to why PNG women have not benefited from the agricultural extension that has been offered. Cahn and Liu (2008, p. 135) note that a number of factors have created an ‘invisible barrier’ for women in accessing training. Culturally, PNG women may not be permitted to attend training run by men. Further, because most extension is held in a central town location rather than at a local village level, because of the time needed for family responsibilities and issues of cost and safety when travelling, even if they are permitted to attend by their husbands or fathers, PNG women smallholders are not easily able to attend training (Cahn & Liu, 2008).

A further significant barrier to agricultural extension is the low literacy and numeracy of PNG women. According to the most recent published census results (2011), literacy rates of people aged 15 and over are improving with male rates of 65.4% and female rates of 59% (World Factbook, 2012); however, in the previous census in rural areas such as the Western Highlands women’s literacy rates have been cited as low as 19.4% (United Nations Development Program [UNDP],

training materials and ToT course itself are typically piloted before broader roll-out. Hence, the approach is a top-down 'expert' designed training curriculum and process, ready-made for delivery by the team of local trainers who will receive the ToT before going on to train others.

There is, however, growing data emerging that suggests that externally designed ToT is significantly limited in many development settings, and especially for women smallholders. In their major review of international training projects and the literature on the training challenges that women smallholders face in enterprise development, Collett and Gale (2009) argue that to be fully effective training must use a decentralized structure that focuses on local needs first and that uses processes that bring communities together through the training process. Our own assessment of a number of reports on PNG agricultural projects that included training also found that most had recommendations to better involve women (and youth) to ensure that the diversity of local smallholders' needs was addressed.

In contrast, as we sought to develop the leadership of PNG WiA in a sustainable way, we believed that capacity building and the development of a 'community of practice' must underpin our process. Hence, our co-construction

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The training was held over four days and was led by the first author and a staff member from NARI. Eleven women and one man were nominated by the PNG WiA President. Only two trainers were in full-time paid employment (the man who lead a provincial agricultural unit and his women's agricultural officer) one woman ran a small family business and three of the women had occasional paid employment. The trainers' farming activities were predominantly growing food crops and some floriculture. Only the male produced cash crops, although one woman had developed a cooperative to sell on vegetables. The education levels were quite varied (university 4, college 1, technical training 4 and high school 3) and none of the participants had received any training about being a trainer. All participants spoke English and Tok Pisin; however, in the group activities, it was clear that the majority were more comfortable speaking Tok Pisin. Whilst there was no cost for the workshop, participants agreed to work in a peer group of two or three to run one training module for village members in their own

to design the introductory Level 1 modules, and we acknowledged that the higher level modules would require further external input and may be more effective if run in collaboration with bodies such as the Microfinance Expansion Project (2013). It was agreed that our trial training modules should focus on Level 1 as that was the greatest need in the leaders' communities and was one that they felt they had the experience and knowledge to deliver.

At this point the trainers were introduced to a range of ways to engage people in learning, including creative activities such as role plays, stories, photographs and posters as well as more standard approaches of giving a talk, preparing handouts and using guest speakers. This process involved the facilitator modelling the activity using an 'outsider' (Australian) example, then inviting the group to work together to create local PNG contextually relevant activities or learning materials.

The trainers then self selected into teams of 3 or 4 to design a training module on one of the Level 1 building block topics. Based on collaborative discussions, trialling of learning activities, peer feedback and reciprocal sharing, we had built up to a co-constructed course that could address local priority areas and that would begin to build the business skills of women smallholders. By the final day, the group had developed a proud identity calling themselves the Women in Agriculture Training (WiAT) Team with the slogan 'Meri Kirapim Femili, Meri Kirapim Komuniti: Courses by PNG women, for PNG women'.

The WiAT team divided into teams to design and deliver one training module in a community of their choice. The modules ranged from one four-hour session to two full days of activities and targeted a local church group, invited village members or members of local women's cooperatives. All of the modules focused on aspects of financial literacy, especially budgeting and/or saving. One of the women charged a small amount to attend the training to defray her costs whilst another asked people attending to contribute food for a shared lunch.

The trainers had agreed to return in three months for a follow-up WiAT team evaluation workshop; however, due to their family obligations and farming priorities, (summer harvest, Christmas, new school year and an early Easter) the group could not re-convene for five months. Although four of the group could not attend this second workshop, the evaluation feedback from the remaining participants did indicate that, at a general level, the training had been successful (direct quotes from the evaluation).

Whilst a report template was given to the trainers, in order to continue the collaborative and situated learning approach a storying process was used for feedback on the training delivery. Storying has been shown to be a strong and valued cultural process in PNG and has been validated as an effective and congruent method for participatory projects (see for example, Sigsgaard, 2002), and for evaluations (see for example, Dart & Davies, 2003). In our process, the trainers were asked to bring one story about successful business thinking they heard during the training and one that showed a key business challenge faced by

women. Similarly, in order to reflect on their experience as a trainer, each was asked to bring a story about what worked well and another that reflected a major challenge. These were shared, discussed and analysed for their key components by the group. Whilst only six of the trainers were able to run their module, they were rightly proud of their achievement and returned with many ideas for improving the content and the process. By using the story process to create and interrogate key experiences, those that had not actually conducted training were still able to meaningfully contribute by drawing on their stories of attending and reflecting on training, both as women and as smallholders, and in this way be part of the peer reflection—

Following the storying evaluation, the group identified the need for further development of specific training skills, including the use of computer technology, sourcing funds and writing reports. Finally, to complete the co-construction process and model the final stages of 'evaluating and reporting on training', our last day was spent evaluating the training issues and collaboratively deciding how it might be possible to move forward from that point.

Most of the trainers valued the personal skill development (

between our countries—for example, the women spoke a lot about PNG as having a ‘spending not a saving’ culture and together we explored the many ramifications of this for women, men and families. The training group especially valued the role-plays and creative activities that made business ‘mistakes’ made by women more readily apparent in a non-threatening way. In these activities, in particular, as was also found by Taylor and colleagues (

women typically do not have control over the family finances (Banthia, Tyroler, Schoeffel, & Saho, 2013), the issues of financing the ongoing development of women as trainers or in any other voluntary role cannot be ignored. To significantly and sustainably build communities of practice, we must not overlook the social and structural barriers to ongoing capacity building. These barriers impact

indeed for our own teaching of university students. The way the group persisted in ongoing requests for PPT training illustrated a confidence in challenging the power of the outside facilitator and showed how that the WiAT Team had begun to move from trainees to trainers with agendas that they wanted and indeed demanded. Equally the outsider facilitator had been challenged to listen more deeply to what really was being asked and to trust the group in their expression of needs.

Although we were committed to a 'building learning from the inside out' in a mutually beneficial way and had designed a sequential process of iterative and collaborative course development, the process demanded significant ongoing reflection on the learning exchange. We are reminded of the warning by Braun and colleagues (2006, p. 18) that

much of women's knowledge waits to be harnessed. Surfacing and valuing this knowledge through non-formal community-based adult-learning projects should be seen as a national investment. As our WiAT team noted, building women's capacity builds families and communities, which in turn becomes the building block for a learning society.

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1. The definition of a smallholder farmer differs by country, however, in the PNG areas of this study a smallholders' garden (the local term for cultivated land) typically ranges from half a hectare to two hectares.
2. See, for example, the work of the PNG Sustainable Development Program <http://www.pngsdpc.com/index.php/what-is-csip>.
3. funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) <http://aciarc.gov.au/publication/fr2012-23>.
4. Bride price is a significant family expense in which the family of the husband must pay cash, pigs and other valuable resources to the family of the new wife.
5. widely used Tok Pisin term that means 'one talk'. The wantok system can be loosely defined as the system of relationships (or set of obligations) between individuals characterized by some or all of the following: (1) common language, (2) common kinship group, (3) common geographical area of origin and (4) common social associations or religious groups' (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2012, p. 90).
6. see <http://aciarc.gov.au/project/ASEM/2010/052> and <http://pngwomen.estem-uc.edu.au/>.

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