

Food Security for Papua New Guinea

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26–30 June 2000

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Main: Land use in the Chimbu Valley with coffee and Casuarina in the mid ground. The Casuarina trees in the background have been planted in food gardens and fallow land to enhance soil fertility. (R.M. Bourke).

Bottom left: A high altitude (2700 m) sweet potato garden in the Tambul Basin, Western Highlands. Soil fertility is maintained using organic matter, which is covered with soil to form the large mound. (R.M. Bourke).

Bottom right: A villager constructing terraces for food gardens, Sogeri Plateau, Central Province. The stakes are from the introduced shrub *Piper aduncum*. (B.J. Allan).

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Welcome Address

Mr Luther Wenge, Governor of Morobe Province; Mr Valentine Kambori, Chairman of the organising committee; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great honour and privilege to deliver this address to the Papua New Guinea Food and Nutrition 2000 Conference. I note the very full program for the conference with about 120 papers to be presented and the wide breadth of topics to be covered. In particular, I note that the meeting has been structured so as to deliver outcomes for policy and programs for the Government of Papua New Guinea. It is an appropriate time for reflection and regrouping at the start of a new century and a new millennium and in the 25th year of our national independence.

The severe and widespread drought and associated frosts in 1997 provided a wake-up call for all of us. We were reminded that we cannot take food production, food security and nutrition for granted in PNG. It was only when there was a partial collapse of the food production system that we realised how important these issues are in PNG. Sometimes we are so preoccupied with other issues that we forget that the bulk of the PNG population live in rural villagers and produce most of their own food requirements.

Mr Chairman, my government takes the issue of food security and human nutrition most seriously. The government has recently approved the Food Security Policy paper. This document has laid the broad framework for achieving food security for all people in PNG. The next phase of our strategy is to define the detailed policies that will allow us to achieve these broad aims. We need to know what programs we should set up, where to place priorities in seeking assistance from our donor partners and what action plans we must put in place. This conference is most timely in helping us achieve these objectives. The information to be delivered here during this week, the debates and the discussion, will form the basis for our more detailed policies and programs. Again, I note with pleasure the way in which the conference has been structured to achieve these outcomes.

Mr Chairman, the government is aware that there has been extensive research on food production and issues relating to food security. We also know that there has been considerable development experience over many decades, both before and after independence 25 years ago. However, we are conscious that much of this information and experience is not readily available to help us with the challenges of today. We know much research remains unpublished and is thus effectively unavailable to most of us. The government is also aware that considerable development experience, both positive and negative, remains untapped. This experience has been acquired by national government staff, those who work at the provincial and local

government levels, workers from overseas, various nongovernment organisations (NGOs), the churches and many villagers themselves.

This major conference provides an important opportunity to draw on some of this rich experience, for you to exchange your ideas and experiences and to record them for the future. I have noted in the conference program the impressive list of people who will give papers, chair sessions and act as reporters for the conference. There is indeed a considerable body of expertise assembled today in this room. I urge you all to work together during this coming week to share your experiences; to identify the gaps in your collective knowledge that we might address through research and development activities; and to contribute to a positive outcome from the conference. This can only result in improvements in food security for both rural and urban Papua New Guineans.

Mr Chairman, allow me to return to the major food shortages and other disruptions to the economy that occurred during the 1997 drought and frosts. We were reminded that we are not immune to extremes of nature or indeed to human-made disasters. I note that the conference organisers have devoted all of tomorrow to analysis and reflection on the events of three years ago. I also see from the program that you will be examining these issues from a number of perspectives, including NGOs, commercial food suppliers, donor organisations as well as that of government. This examination will take place at a number of scales, ranging from national to that of individual village communities. It is important that we reflect on what we collectively did well and what we could do better next time there is such an emergency. We also need to examine how best to equip PNG for future food shortages, whether the causes are climatic extremes or other sources.

It is extremely important that this rich experience is documented in a permanent form through the conference proceedings. This will provide the blueprint for future policy and action. I am told that many actors in the 1997 drought drew extensively on previous experience from the 1972 and the 1982 droughts and frosts. This was possible because the previous food shortages had been extensively documented by participants, observers and analysts of these earlier events. Our generation also carries that responsibility for the future and I congratulate you on not shirking that responsibility.

Mr Chairman, international collaboration is important for any nation in the contemporary world. It is only through such collaboration that we will advance our knowledge and information base. This is vital for the development of any nation, but it is especially true for a nation such as PNG that joined the family of nations barely a generation ago. I am told that 25 participants have come from overseas countries to participate in your deliberations, and that they come from as far as Holland, Switzerland and Japan as well as from our Pacific neighbors of the Solomon Islands, Australia and New Zealand. I see that the overseas participants will present or jointly author many papers. I extend my warm greetings and welcome to those of you who have come from afar to work with us, and thank you for giving your

time to this meeting. The government wishes to enhance linkages both within PNG and with interested people from overseas. This conference provides a venue for such collaboration.

I am also told that people from three Australian institutions have made a significant contribution to this conference. The first is The Australian National University (ANU), which has provided 10 of the speakers at the conference, and has made a significant input to its organisation. Staff and students from the ANU have been working in PNG for almost 50 years and their continuing involvement in the development of PNG is greatly appreciated. The second institution that is providing significant assistance is the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). ACIAR will publish the conference proceedings and has supplied an editorial team to help with this process. Senior staff from a number of our national institutions in the Renewable Resource Sector will meet with our ACIAR partners in a month's time to conduct a major review of the future of our joint collaboration. Your discussions here, and especially the Friday afternoon workshop on Research Priorities for Food Production, will help to guide these discussions. Finally, it would be remiss of me to omit to mention the inputs made by our major donor agency, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). Some of their contractors have been very involved in organising the meeting, as part of the Australian Contribution to the (PNG) National Agricultural Research Systems (ACNARS) project. We appreciate the help from AusAID and this particular project, and AusAID's ongoing commitment to the development of PNG.

It is obvious that a huge amount of work has been undertaken by many people to prepare for this conference. I congratulate the Chairman of the Organizing Committee, Mr Kambori, and his entire team. I also congratulate the conference hosts, the National Agricultural Research Institute and the Department of Agriculture and Livestock. You have done the hard work and it is now up to everyone here to make this a successful meeting.

Before I conclude my remarks, I wish to highlight the outcomes that the government wants from the Papua New Guinea Food and Nutrition 2000 Conference. We are seeking the following:

1. Firstly, we wish to see that the research and development issues arising from your meeting that are relevant to food production, food security and nutrition are incorporated into our Medium Term Development Strategy.
2. In particular, we seek guidance on policies and programs that we should adopt that will enhance food security and reduce the impact of natural disasters.
3. The government wants greater collaboration and networking of those involved in research and development. We want to see greater interaction of people both within PNG and with overseas-based partners.

4. We also wish to establish mechanisms for research and development planning between national agencies, provincial governments and the regional secretariats within the context of the new organic law.
5. Finally, we ask you to highlight gaps in our knowledge. We need to know where significant research and development activity has been conducted but where the information is not readily available for today's practitioners. The government anticipates your recommendations for a number of major reviews, as we reflect on the considerable progress of the past century and as we prepare to address the challenges of the new century and millennium.

Again, I offer my congratulations to the Department of Agriculture and Livestock and to the National Agricultural Research Institute for hosting this important meeting. On behalf of the Government of PNG and the Prime Minister, I wish you every success. We look forward with anticipation to receiving the results of your detailed recommendations which will help the government move towards our goal of food security for all in PNG.

The Honourable Mao Zeming
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture
Papua New Guinea

Welcome by the Chairman of the Organising Committee

Welcome to the Papua New Guinea Food and Nutrition 2000 Conference. Your participation either as a presenter of a paper or a poster or as a contributor is very important to this Conference. We value your presence as an individual or as a representative of an organisation. Many important issues will be debated over the next five days. The only way to achieve optimal results is through cross-sectoral partnerships and alliances, and we are greatly encouraged by the broad range of institutions and organisations that are represented here today.

This conference is the event of the year for research and development planning for food production, human nutrition and food security. We will not assemble such a broad group of expertise in food production and nutrition at any forum in PNG this year, and perhaps not for some years to come.

Whilst there has been a lot of talk and many initiatives in food security policy, it has remained basically in the domain of conceptual frameworks and principles. Many of the pre-existing planning frameworks are inadequate because they have relied on outdated data and information. Furthermore, many of the policies made by international agencies are based on inadequate data or assumptions that are not relevant to the food supply systems and dietary patterns of the majority of Papua New Guineans.

The work still remains to update our knowledge and information, derived from competent studies and investigations, so that issues of food security can be addressed from a position of intellectual strength. In this manner, the essence of this conference is to share knowledge, experiences and ideas on a broad range of issues, and to draw lessons and directions for realistic intervention programmes for the future.

Some of you have come from as far as Europe and Japan, and some of you have come from closer to home, from Australia, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands. We acknowledge your invaluable contribution and professional friendship and passion for the issues of PNG agriculture, and thank you for making this effort to be with us. We also appreciate the presence of the Solomon Islands contingent who, despite the civil uprising, have come to contribute to this conference. Thank you.

Today we remember three special friends of ours who supported and were committed to this process but who passed away recently. They are the late Alfred Bala, former Director of the Food Security Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAL); the late Balthasar Wayi, former First Assistant Secretary in DAL; and the late Stephen Eka, a prominent member of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) council. All three men were great believers in science-based knowledge, and we certainly feel their

absence. For me the late Balthasar Wayi's sudden passing away on Sunday 18th June 2000 was a real tragedy. Up to his death, he gave us his fullest support in organising the conference and I salute him for his conviction and commitment as a member of the Conference Organising Committee.

We are indebted to the sponsors who responded to our requests in this time of financial constraint. Your generosity has allowed this conference to happen. If we depended on our own institutional funding, this conference would not have been possible. My many thanks to Trukai Farms, the major sponsor; to the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the European Union and Ok Tedi Mining Ltd, for their substantial sponsorships; to Arnott's Biscuits Ltd and Progera Joint Venture for their contributions; and to the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), which is making a substantial contribution to the editing and publishing of the conference proceedings. I also acknowledge the substantial technical and operational assistance of the AusAID-funded Australian Contribution to the (PNG) National Agricultural Research Systems (ACNARS) project in NARI and The Australian National University.

As to my committee members, your performance is a benchmark for future generations to follow. Despite certain criticism from expected quarters, you excelled in your duties to make this conference happen. Thank you, Dr Mike Bourke, Matthew Allen, Sharryl Ivahupa, Ipul Powaseu, Stephen Mesa, Philip Vovola, Dr Geoff Wiles, Peter Manus, Bernard Maladina, Sivasuprimamian and our late colleague Balthasar Wayi.

May this conference give us all a true platform to stand upon to make food security a reality in PNG. I look forward to meeting you all individually and making acquaintances that will last, for the improvement of food production and nutrition in PNG.

Happy deliberations,

Valentine Kambori
National Agricultural Research Institute

Farewell to Balthasar Michael Wayi

Balthasar Wayi was born in Sohoneriu village, Manus Province, on 30 October 1953. He received his initial formal education at Patu Primary School on Manus Island and Mongop High School on New Ireland.

I first met Balthasar Wayi, simply Wayi to those who knew him, when he joined the Land Use Section of the Department of Primary Industry immediately after he graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea in 1976, with a B.Agr.Sc. degree. With his easygoing manner and application to the job, it was easy to get to like him both personally and as a colleague, and so we developed a close friendship that strengthened with time.

Wayi was later awarded a Postgraduate Diploma from Massey University in New Zealand, and then obtained a M.Sc. degree in Soil Science from the State University of Ghent, Belgium.

Wayi always had a deep interest in the welfare of all those around him: his immediate and extended family; and his coworkers and their families. When his nephew was diagnosed with leukemia in 1993, Wayi not only used his personal financial resources to ensure that his nephew received the best available treatment in Brisbane, but he also used his entitlement under furlough leave to be in Brisbane to look after the young man while he was receiving treatment. This, to me, displayed Wayi's true character.

Wayi was sincere and untiring in his efforts to promote development for the rural areas of PNG. He honed his scientific skills and his understanding of the nation's renewable natural resources to a level that enabled him to appreciate the big picture. As a result he had a broad vision for the development of PNG's agriculture.

With his untimely passing in June 2000, PNG has lost its first national soil scientist. He worked hard on developing an understanding of land-plant interaction and thus became one of the most competent scientists that I worked with in the complex job of assessing Land Use Capability. He was always ready to adopt a new approach and took on the coordinating role of the PNG Resource Information System with enthusiasm. In this capacity, he demonstrated his true leadership ability. After progressing through the public service ranks from Chief Land Use Officer to Director of Research, he was First Assistant Secretary for Provincial and Industry Support Services at the time of his death. His death is an incalculable loss not only to land evaluation work in this country, but also to the achievement of the broader goals of sustainable development for PNG and the promotion of agriculture in this country.

David F. Freyne
National Mapping Bureau, Port Moresby, PNG

