

# Report on My Recent ABV Assignment to the National Research Institute of Papua New Guinea

*Christine Brunton*

I have recently completed a six-week assignment as a representative of Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) to the National Research Institute of Papua New Guinea (NRI). ABV is a not-for-profit, non-Government organization, which is aligned with the aims of the Australian Government's overseas aid program to help reduce poverty and create sustainable development.

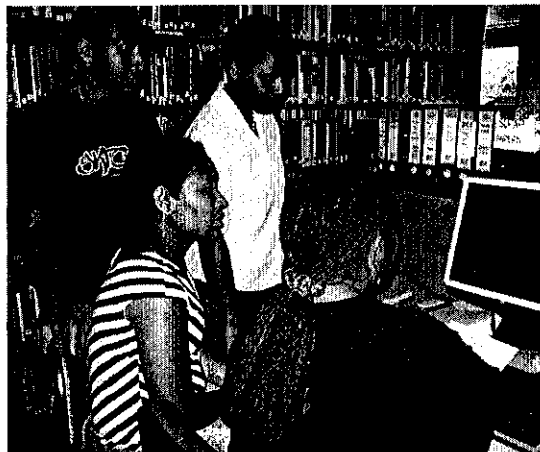
ABV contributes to poverty reduction, sustainable development and good governance by providing Australian volunteers, with expertise across a range of fields and professions who, through sharing their skills and experience, assist businesses and organizations across South East Asia and the Pacific.



The project I undertook was to provide in-service training for NRI researchers and library staff and assist in developing inter-agency information dissemination and acquisition networking. My role as an ABV volunteer was to contribute to sustainable growth in a developing community through the transfer of knowledge and workplace skills using my knowledge and expertise with Liberty3 software and general library procedures and systems.

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The National Research Institute is the leading research authority in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands Region and contributes to development, through the generation of appropriate research information. Its mandate is to affect informed decision making by Government, the private sector, civic society, and ordinary people, in areas such as cultural, economic, educational, environmental, political, and social concerns. In addition it provides professional, academic publishing and editorial services for researchers, donors and other clients. It also provides expert policy, technical, advisory and training services through consultancies for public, private and international agencies as well as opportunities for graduate researchers at Masters, Doctoral and post-Doctoral levels.



The outcomes from this project have lead to an

- Increased understanding of the Softlink Liberty3 software and associated Internet capabilities by library staff and researchers.
- Improved library practices and procedures in cataloguing, online accession and information management.
- Improved online access to information, data and knowledge which will enhance the Institute's research activities.

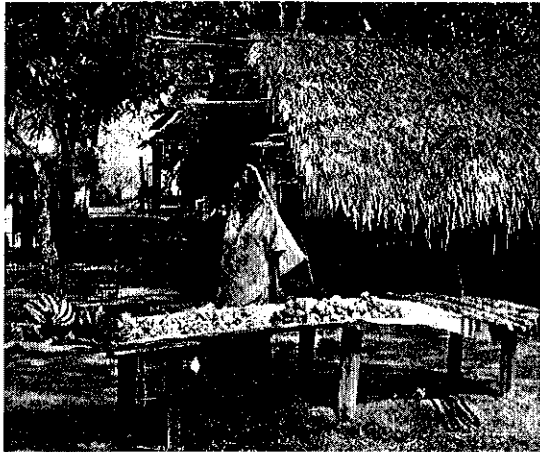
In addition, a number of useful databases were incorporated into the catalogue to enable more efficient access to information by researchers. These include the identification of "open access journal" portals, access to document delivery services via the Global Development Network, British Library, World Health Organization's Hinari database, UNESCO, etc. using the Institute's local area network (LAN).



For many people the term 'poverty' does not adequately reflect the reality of the situation in PNG. Many Papua New Guineans identify issues as being about a lack of opportunity, reflected in the lack of access to basic health and education services, employment opportunities and standards of good governance. This 'lack of opportunity' in PNG translates into approximately 40% of the population living on less than US\$1 a day, an increase of 25% since 1996.



I experienced first hand the pressures placed on the people living in a developing country - unreliable water supply, power and telecommunications failures, lack of good affordable public transport. I learnt to live with the security issues caused by the high unemployment rate, poverty and overcrowded settlements around the city – living behind razor wire and with guards on the gate.



Shopping in a local supermarket was vastly different to shopping in one of the few supermarkets serving the expat population of Port Moresby. Things we take for granted such as fresh milk and cheese and often, fresh meat were usually non-existent on the shelves of "local" supermarkets.

On the other hand, fresh fish was plentiful and affordable at the local markets, as was locally grown produce such as sweet potatoes, yams and green leafy vegetables. As one researcher pointed out, the informal economic sector is thriving and if it can be grown, sewn, woven, caught or carved it can put food on the table and a roof over the family. I admired the resourcefulness of the people and learnt to appreciate the simple things in life

PNG is at a particularly challenging time in its development. The years since independence in 1975 have not delivered on the aspirations of many Papua New

Guineans. While the economic outlook has shown positive signs in recent years, there is no doubt that living standards in PNG for the majority of people have declined rather than increased.



It was a tremendously rewarding experience to live with local people and experience everyday life and culture from their perspective. The library staff were extremely competent and eager to learn new skills and the researchers were very keen to share their knowledge and experience. I was fortunate to travel out to villages and see parts of the country not encountered by many other Australian expatriates.

In spite of the poverty of the general population, the overwhelming impression I carry with me has been the happiness, friendship and generosity of the Papua New Guinean people and appreciation of the rich diversity of their culture.

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