

Inspiring profile

Senita Wauwia

Champion for local women and fisheries
in Papua New Guinea

by Ruth Konia

“I am from inland East Sepik Province and there are no mangroves where I come from. When I used to come to the provincial capital of Wewak on the coast, I just saw mangroves as smelly places where people dumped their rubbish. But then I also began to hear people say they get crabs and fish from mangroves. However, I didn’t really understand the importance of mangroves for that. That was all I knew of mangroves before I joined The Nature Conservancy.” – Senita Wauwia, Field Coordinator, Mangoro Market Meri Program

In 2013, Senita Wauwia began working at The Nature Conservancy in Papua New Guinea (PNG) as a part-time support officer, supporting administration such as logistics for meetings and workshops. The following year, she was recruited full-time as Project Officer, under a United States Agency for International Development Mangrove Rehabilitation for Sustainably Managed Healthy Forest (USAID MARSH Project). “With the MARSH Project, I began to understand and appreciate the importance of mangroves, and the goods and services these systems provide.”

When the MARSH Project ended, Senita was retained as Project Assistant, providing logistical support to other projects. However, the women of The Nature Conservancy’s PNG programme wanted to be more involved in conservation work. In 2017 the team worked to develop a new programme called “Mangoro Market Meri” (meaning Mangroves, Women and Markets) in PNG. The project involved partnering with local women in their efforts to build markets for sustainably harvested mangrove products, such as shellfish and mud crabs. “Together, we are focused on training in leadership, financial literacy and business management and to generate much needed income and employment opportunities. And we’re helping to foster a knowledge-sharing network between local women’s groups so they can create more prosperous and healthy futures for their families and villages,” said Senita.

Senita has been an integral part of this programme. The project team felt that there was more in Senita than basic administration tasks. Senita was smart and keen to learn more about conservation and help women. Senita is now leading work with women in PNG to progress sustainable mangrove and fisheries management under Mangoro Market



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Meri. “The Mangoro Market Meri Program gave me the wings to fly. My workstation is in the mangroves. I love the smell of hydrogen sulphide gas from the mangroves. Getting my hands and feet dirty while working with the women, filling up the poly bags with soil for planning the propagules is what I do best.

“Mangoro Market Meri brought me out of my shell. I now have the confidence to speak-up and take the lead in discussions. Something I have never done before in my life. Mangoro Market Meri has not only empowered the women we work with but it also empowers us women who are working in this programme and team.”

“I am looking forward to new and exciting things working with women and men at different levels. I would like to see more men taking an interest in what their women are doing and appreciating their women more, so work will progress.”



Senita in the mangroves. ©Ruth Konia