

# NUTRITION COURSE FOR DIDIMEN

By Kath Perry, Assistant Publications Officer,  
Education and Training Branch, D.P.I., Konedobu.

## INTRODUCTION

The level of malnutrition in some parts of Papua New Guinea is alarmingly high. This can only be reduced if the people learn about food so that they know which foods are good for them and how they should be used together to give a balanced diet.

The diet of village people is largely dependant on what they grow in their gardens. One group of people who can exert quite a strong influence on the crops grown and on how they are used, are the didimen and didimeris of the DPI Extension Service. If their advice is based on a sound knowledge of nutrition then they can make an effective contribution to the lowering of malnutrition levels.

Most of the didimen who are just starting their careers now have had formal agricultural training which has included courses on nutrition. However, many who started work earlier did not get this sort of training. To help these didimen to learn about nutrition so that they can teach the villagers, a nutrition course was started in East New Britain last year.

This was the first in-service course on nutrition for the didimen in East New Britain. It was run by Kathy Carmen who works for DPI in Rabaul and who has been involved in agricultural extension for over ten years. Kathy is now planning a course on subsistence agriculture to help the didimen to increase their knowledge of food crops as opposed to cash crops.

## THE COURSE

The nutrition course started in June, 1978 and was taken by 38 didimen. The first time it was given, it was run as six, half-day units taken one per week for six weeks. Related practical units were carried out as part of the didimen's normal extension work. The course was then changed through a couple of intermediate stages to the final version which lasted 8 days. This last course was taken by 18 didimen and was based at Vudal Agricultural College.

The course was divided to give theory in the morning and practical work in the afternoon. The theory topics studied were:-

- 1) the three types of food (for work, for growth and for protection);
- 2) how to make a balanced meal using these three food types;



*Kathy Carmen*

- 3) poor value foods such as cheese pops and lolly water;
- 4) the different food needs of the various members of a family;
- 5) malnutrition, what it is, what it looks like, what causes it, how to measure it and how to avoid it;
- 6) how to prepare and give a talk on nutrition;
- 7) how the nutrition course can be applied to the extension programme;
- 8) family planning.

Practical sessions were related to the theory topics and included inspecting village food gardens to see what crops were being grown; dividing the crops into the three food groups; finding out which trade store goods had good food value and which didn't; planning a more nutritional way to spend the cost of a carton of beer; and checking family diets to see if each member was eating properly.

There were also visits to a clinic, a school and the malnutrition ward of a hospital to practise recognising and measuring malnutrition. A cooking demonstration was held to show how food should be cooked to keep all its food value in and the didimen gave talks to the local villagers on nutrition.

The didimen were given tests before and after the course so that they could see how much they had learned.

#### APPLICATION

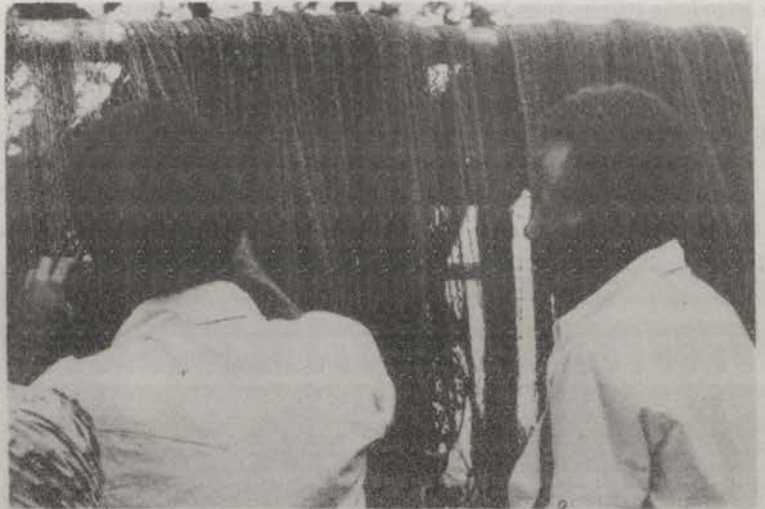
One of the people who took the course was Henry Malmaluan who is a Fisheries Officer in East New Britain. Fish is a very good food because it has plenty of protein and Henry is working hard to help the people of East New Britain to improve their diets by catching more fish.

One of the ways in which Henry is doing this is by giving demonstrations on the use of nets. Eight local Community Governments have





*Fisheries extension team weighing fish offered for sale along the road*



*Henry shows a local fisherman how to mend his net*



*Two other members of the team demonstrate net mending to a young fisherman (right) near Kokopo*

netting projects which are visited regularly by fisheries extension staff who give advice on setting and mending nets. Help is also given to high school agriculture teachers who are interested in expanding the subject to include fisheries.

Another project of Henry's is a fish survey which is being carried out in order to find the numbers and kinds of fish which are being caught throughout the year. This will help in advising fishermen as to which type of fishing method is best at a given time of year. One method which is just being introduced to the Gazelle Peninsula is "long lining". This is a good way of catching tuna, mackerel and sharks which have high food value.

## CONCLUSION

Apart from its effect on the fisheries extension service, the nutrition course has also resulted in the setting up of some demonstration food gardens and in talks on nutrition being given to villages.

The course has substantially increased the knowledge of nutrition among the didimen and so will hopefully go a long way towards eliminating malnutrition from East New Britain. It seems likely that other provinces of Papua New Guinea could also benefit from this type of course.