

VILLAGE LEVEL EXTENSION WORKERS IN THE EAST SEPIK PROVINCE

By Elizabeth Cox, East Sepik Rural Development Project
Wewak, East Sepik Province

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, the East Sepik Provincial Government set down a new policy for Village Development Centres. The aim of the policy was to change the existing Vocational Centres into training centres based in the villages. These would be called Village Development Centres. The plan was that the Village Development Centres should run short informal courses to meet the special development needs in the area of each centre. The courses would be open to everyone in the villages.

Unfortunately, not much progress has been made in putting the plan into operation. However, the staff of the Education Sub-Project of the East

Sepik Rural Development Project. (E.S.R.D.P.) feel that they are in a good position to support the policy through a non-formal agricultural extension programme.

The aim of the Education Sub-Project of E.S.R.D.P. is to help development by providing better agriculture and nutrition education in schools and training centres throughout the province. One part of the project is to train and employ Village Level Extension Workers (V.L.E.W.'s).

WHAT ARE VILLAGE LEVEL EXTENSION WORKERS?

Village Level Extension Workers provide extension services for their own people using Development Centres as a base.



*A demonstration garden at Gavien - part of the
Village Level Extension Work Programme*



One of the extension groups in Gavien, working together on each others' food gardens, between young rubber trees



As part of the weekly extension programme, women who work together, cook together as a group - using food from their gardens



Resting after working on one of the nurseries



A good harvest of sweet potato
(Photo: N. Birge)

People who become V.L.E.W.'s should have had a good, long-standing relationship with their Village Development Centre. In their work, they need the support and interest of ordinary staff at the centre. Ideally, V.L.E.W.'s would be treated as part of the staff. However, their work is based in the villages and not in the centre.

All V.L.E.W.'s have to take part in a short training course in agriculture and nutrition, and provide regular reports of their work.

The idea to employ Education Sub-Project V.L.E.W.'s was approved in 1980. By January, 1981, ten positions had been filled. These V.L.E.W.'s are linked to the Bai Girls Vocational Centre, Bainyik Village Development Centre, the Bagi Agricultural Centre, and Yawatong and Hayfield Village Development Centres.

THE WORK OF V.L.E.W.'s

Extension work means going out and working with people in their own gardens and homes, to



Extension work - learning about the benefits of composting

try to teach them about better gardening and better ways of growing and using good food. A lot of extension work is just talking to people, to help them realise what problems they have with growing food and how to solve them.

The Village Level Extension Workers do all these things, but they concentrate on work in their own villages with their own people.

VILLAGE LEVEL EXTENSION WORK AT GAVIEN

Two women and one man are employed by the Education Sub-Project of E.S.R.D.P. as Village Level Extension Workers to work among settlers at Gavien. They also assist many community schools in agricultural and nutritional projects. They have built up their own resources since leaving the Bagi Agricultural Centre where they were once students. They have many demonstration activities on their own farms.

This is what the women V.L.E.W.'s do in a typical week:

Every Monday, they do agriculture and nutrition extension work. Work starts at 7.00 a.m. The young women each work with about twelve women in their gardens. During the day, they cook and eat garden foods with the women. They finish work late in the afternoon. Each week the group moves on to a different group member's gardens, always working together in cooperation.

On Tuesdays the V.L.E.W.'s stay in their own gardens and houses. They make sure that in their lives and work, they are setting a good example to the community, and that they themselves do the things that they have been trying to teach the

other women. These things are: grow good food; cook it well; use it well; and take good care of the family's health.



Carrying mulch to a food garden during the weekly extension programme

On Wednesdays the V.L.E.W.'s work with some other young people on a community garden which they grow especially to collect seeds to help the local farmers and schools.

On Thursdays they may spend some time making plans about their work. Also they organise the making of drum ovens, stoves, solar driers, compost and nurseries with their extension groups, preparing sites and collecting materials.



A drum oven (Photo: M. Quin)

On Fridays they bring women from all over Gavien together at the Bagi Agricultural Centre, for the Gavien Women's Development Club. Here they do gardening, cooking, crafts, and have lots of discussions and fun together.



Clearing a new garden site for the Women's Development Club. Note that grass is piled up for later use as mulch.

The young man who does extension work works all over Gavien. Since he is a driver, he spends some time transporting building materials for settlers and equipment for the nutrition projects in the schools.

He also visits families who keep small herds of goats. He is able to advise on breeding, help with births and castration, and give medicines (such as wormer). Every Thursday afternoon, he goes to the local Community school to work with the agriculture classes. He is helping the teachers and students in building a kitchen and fruit tree nursery and also with their school gardens.

He himself is a farmer/settler in Gavien, so he also has to spend time on his own land. He has been using good farming methods for five years and is one of the few farmers who knows how to look after his land for the future. In his work and together with the young women extension workers he is trying to teach this to all the other farmers here in Gavien.

OTHER CENTRES

There are nine Village Development Centres in the East Sepik Province. Ideally there should be two Village Level Extension workers attached to each centre. It is hoped that by 1982, 20 positions will be filled. A new E.S.R.D.P. In-Service

Training Centre will open next year (1982). It is planned that courses designed especially to train V.L.E.W.'s will be held there.

The success of the programme depends upon the Village Development Centre Managers. If they understand the Village Development Centre Policy of our provincial government and support the V.L.E.W.'s in their work, then the V.L.E.W.'s will be in the best position to help promote good development in their villages. Experience so far has shown that these young people can carry out an extension programme which many government departments talk about but never actually put into practice.