

TEACHING TO TEACH

By Fritz Robinson, Lecturer, and 2nd year Students at Highlands Agricultural College

A request for help from villagers has given students at the Highlands Agricultural College an opportunity for practical extension experience.

In 1974 village farmers of the Roni-Pingiri group helped students from the Highlands Agricultural College to learn about subsistence crops. Students spent a week living with the people, working with them, and getting to see for themselves the problems that a subsistence farmer has, from the inside.

Later the students thanked the Roni-Pingiri people at a mumu at HAC. It was then that the villagers asked the students if they could help them the following year. They said that their aim was to drain their swamp to prepare it for cropping.

This approach from the Roni-Pingiris was most welcome, as staff at the college felt that teaching should be combined with practical experience.

We undertook to assist the Roni-Pingiris for a period of two years.

The Roni-Pingiri group

The Roni-Pingiris are a small group of about 250 Medpla-speaking people living about 20 km south of Mount Hagen. They are divided into a number of haus-lains; despite this they live and work together very happily.

They have recently divided their 70 hectares of swamp land into 36 blocks. Their aim is to develop this land for business. They are changing their lives from customary ways of living to more modern ways of life.

The programme

In 1975 we started our course with a week's patrol and a series of meetings.

After this, first year students began work with the group. Courses in extension, farm management, perennial crops, livestock and surveying all included practical experience with the Roni-Pingiris.

In the second half of 1975, annual crops, farm buildings and mechanics were included. One of the projects completed was the bridge over the Kuna River. Students and villagers



Wimp of Kaip and his family with student Mukate Lapemu, of Finschhafen (the man on the left). Wimp is an economic leader in the area.



Building the bridge over the Kuna River.



A new house on the blocks. People are moving to the blocks gradually as old houses decay.

both contributed labour and materials to build the bridge.

Students spent half a day a week on the programme, although some of us thought that half a day a week was not long enough. Future courses may have a full day, or even an overnight patrol.

What we learned

We have learned about the culture and some of the beliefs of the Roni-Pingiri group, and this is important. We have stayed with them, ate and slept with them.

We have also learned a lot about the subsistence gardening system in the area, how it is organized, and what plants are grown. We did a nutrition survey at the same time.

We also learned some practical lessons from the farmers in organization—how some jobs are organized to be done by the whole group, and how other jobs are run by individuals. Finally we were able to watch group decision-making in action. It takes a long time but it works.

The major problem was that of communication. Although we used young people with standard 6 education in the village, this was not always useful. We propose to change our college course work so that the students learn the communication

part of the extension course early in the year, and also to introduce a unit of Pidgin so that Motu speakers can have fewer problems.

What we taught the farmers

It is very hard to change everything at once; and it is very easy to confuse people by teaching too much all at once. Wherever it was possible we taught the people the simplest and cheapest ways of doing things. For example, we taught people ways of making their own compost, rather than buying artificial fertilizer.

Among the things we taught in 1975 were:

- . Methods of planting vegetables.
- . How to use some useful chemicals—herbicides, fungicides, insecticides. This meant that we had to teach people all about safety, as well as how to use the knapsack spray.
- . How to use their knowledge and skills that they already have.
- . Simple record-keeping.
- . How they can solve their own problems.
- . Technical skills involved in coffee husbandry.
- . Better nutrition, using mostly the foods that they already have.
- . Basic pig husbandry skills, drenching, girth measuring and ear-tagging.

LIKLIK BUK BILONG KAIN KAIN SAMTING

Many agricultural officers will already be familiar with *Liklik Buk Bilong Kain Kain Samting*, that extremely handy book of information for village development.

Liklik Buk is published by the Melanesian Council of Churches in Lae. It contains short articles from many contributors on a wide range of topics, including agriculture, health, machinery, and so on.

Liklik Buk has already sold out its first 5 000 copies, and the MCC is working on the 1977 edition now. The new edition will be an updated version of the 1976 edition, with new material added.

The Agricultural Secretary of the Melanesian Council of Churches, Mr David Williams, is now asking all persons interested in contributing to the new edition to write to him as soon as possible.

The closing date for contributions will be 15 August, 1976. Write to—

Agricultural Secretary
Melanesian Council of Churches
PO Box 80
Lae
Papua New Guinea.