

# AGRICULTURE AND THE BOUGAINVILLE PEACE PROCESS

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Honourable Mao Zeming, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Livestock; Senior officials and distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

Village-based agriculture is the main source of food and cash incomes in Bougainville, as it is in other rural areas in Papua New Guinea.

Farmers and agricultural officers in Bougainville face many of the same challenges as their counterparts in the rest of the country. But certain challenges are unique to Bougainville. Some result from the eight years of death, destruction and general disruption which occurred during the period of violent conflict from 1989 until the **Burnham Truce** was signed in October 1997. Others are integral to peace-building and the prevention of further conflict.

So let me begin by outlining the effects that the conflict has had on Agriculture in Bougainville. I shall then suggest how the agricultural sector can contribute to lasting peace by peaceful means.

I shall show what is required - and what is being done - in other economic sectors and government activities, including foreign aid, for agriculture to succeed.

My conclusion is the same as the policy - objective I believe must be pursued. Government at every level, the private sector and the community must all work together to ensure that sustainable agriculture helps to ensure self-sustaining peace.

## EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT

While public attention has tended to concentrate

on mining at Panguna, the reality is that agriculture has always been the backbone of the economy as far as most people in Bougainville have been concerned.

Agriculture fed and provided cash incomes for people in rural areas. It provided more people with productive employment. If properly managed, agriculture, unlike mining, has always been potentially sustainable in the long run. As in other parts of Papua New Guinea, people have had regular access to adequate quantities of a variety of nutritious foods.

Before armed conflict broke out in 1989, Bougainville was - by far - the largest cocoa - producing province in Papua New Guinea accounting for over 40% of national cocoa exports, and about 2% of global production.

Cocoa not only contributed to the macro-economy but - with **75 per cent** of total production coming from Papua New Guinean smallholders - it did so in ways which were consistent with such national goals as equity and participation.

Home to some of the largest commercial coconut plantations in the South Pacific, Bougainville was also a major copra-producer. Again, smallholders played a very significant part. Village-based cocoa and copra production was generally additional to subsistence agriculture. Vegetables and fruit were sold at urban markets in Buka and Arawa.

Locally-produced meat came from hunting, village pigs, and chicken projects. Fish were a further important source of protein. Most Bougainvilleans not only had enough to eat but were able to earn a small cash income. Their lifestyle was typical of what is widely described as 'Subsistence Affluence'.

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