PNGIMR at the NARI Show

By Elishebah Musia

The National Agriculture Research Institute’s (NARI) 2019 Agriculture Innovations Show was held at Bubia, outside of Lae, Morobe on the 29-30 May, 2019.

The Nari Director-General, Dr Sergie Bang mentioned that this is the second time that the show was held over two days because of the demand from stakeholders.

This year’s theme was on climate change with the theme ‘Building Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in PNG’. A forum was held on the first day with discussions on issues that are of importance to the country.

According to the Board Chairman of Fresh Produce Development Agency, Fabian Chow, NARI took the first step in understanding how climate change was affecting agriculture and developed innovations and technologies like improved crops with traits that can survive bad weather conditions.

“Such an intervention is a big need in Papua New Guinea especially for vulnerable communities,” said Mr Chow.

He added that a collective effort is required to minimize the threat on food stocks and making sure vulnerable communities are food-secure.

Among the delegates, stakeholders, invited guests, exhibitors and participants who attended the show was PNGIMR’s representatives, Dr Janet Gare and Barne Willie from the Sexual & Reproductive Health Unit.
Hello and welcome to the 59th Issue of IMR Nius.

This edition brings you stories of what makes PNGIMR special: its people.

All our research operations depend on highly motivated individuals. To maintain motivation and enthusiasm, we welcome aboard new HR officers – Mr John Wemin, Mr John Yogiyo and Ms Dale Saluap. The HR unit will be achieving many important milestones in bringing the best out of its people for the Institute.

We welcome back two National scientists who have completed their studies and submitted their PhD thesis – Ms Celestine Aho and Ms Gwendalyn Vengiau. We look forward in anticipation of your PhD’s being awarded. Our warm wishes to those who are continuing their studies, to do the best you can and become leaders in your field. You need not look far to gain inspiration, Prime Minister challenged each of us to ‘Take back PNG’ and it is our attitude, passion and loyalty that will go a long way to achieve this dream.

We look forward to your return to work towards improving livelihoods and saving lives.

We are honoured to have the Australian Parliamentarians visit the IMR to gain first hand of the diverse health research work we do.

Let us continue the spirit of team work, by standing together and work hand in hand with our partners to improve the health and well being of Papua New Guineans, and generate knowledge that will improve health globally.

Let us be proud of our past achievements, celebrate current achievements and use these experiences to continue the journey towards the next 50 years. It will be an exciting year for PNGIMR.

William Pomat, Director
PRESS STATEMENT
Public Misconception about Klebsiella outbreak at Goroka Hospital

Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) refutes allegations appearing on social media for being responsible for current outbreak of Klebsiella at Goroka Provincial Hospital. These claims have no substance, as the IMR is mandated to conduct research into health problems affecting our people and to find ways to alleviate these diseases/conditions.

The IMR was invited by Eastern Highlands Provincial Health Authority (EHPHA) and Goroka Hospital management to assist in identifying potential causes of infections that doctors and nurses at the nursery had suspected of causing sepsis among babies since February 2019. Senior Management, including the Director, Curative Health Services at the Goroka Provincial Hospital gave permission for PNGIMR to collect swabs from inanimate objects (beds, working benches, and other regularly used equipment such as suction tubes, weighing scales, baby cots, etc) in the Special Care Nursery (SCN) in an attempt to identify possible sources of infection.

Our laboratory confirmed Klebsiella spp and other Gram negative bacteria as the main bacteria/germs from these inanimate objects.

The results and recommendations were presented to the hospital management including the Director, Curative Health Services and hospital staff in an open forum for their deliberation and for decisions to be made.

PNGIMR assisted in an emergency situation and will continue to assist EHPHA and Goroka Hospital to help save lives and prevent illnesses. It is unfortunate that these gestures are deliberately misconstrued to mislead the public and taint the good name of IMR.

More than 50 students from the University of Goroka visited the laboratories of Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) to understand the work of PNGIMR and what PNGIMR does.

The students visited the Infection and Immunity Unit as well as the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit.

They were divided into four groups and took turns visiting the labs as the PNGIMR staff briefly explained to them what they (PNGIMR staff) do in the laboratories.
Noel Berry transfers to Maprik site
Scientific Officer, Mr Noel Berry from the Population, Health and Demography Unit was transferred from Goroka to East Sepik Province in April to look after the Maprik site for the Comprehensive Health and Epidemiology Surveillance System Project. The CHESS project will be running its rural site for Momase region in Maprik District.

Maria Gipis officially appointed as Finance Manager for PNGIMR
The position of Finance Manager which had been left vacant since August 2018 has now been filled by Mrs Maria Gipis. Maria was previously a senior staff on the PIH project and managed the finance and administration section in that unit.

Josephine Gabuzzi transfers to Madang site
Health Extension Officer, Ms Josephine Gabuzzi, from the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit was transferred from Goroka to Madang in June to supervise research nurses and co-ordinate the HPV Study. The purpose of her move was because the newly established Cervical Cancer Clinic at Modilon had no staff manning the clinic. This study is a new one for Madang IMR.

IN BRIEF

According to the Human Resource Manager, Mr Tobby Apa, each unit has different objectives to achieve so as to improve the systems of PNG Institute of Medical Research.

“This Institution is like a home-grown place, in each units, we tend to develop systems, protocols etc to improve and make our work even better to continue serving this Institution,” Mr Apa said.

One of the milestones for the Human Resource Unit is to have a database in place which will capture all the staff information and is centralized in terms of reporting which will help the Institute generate real-time information.

Mr Apa said it has been a need for the HR Unit as well as the IMR because there was no system in place to capture all staff information.

“With the new database system, we will now be able to review appraisals, establish key performance indicator and locate staff history,” he said.

He commended the Data Administrator, Yangta Ura, for his tremendous effort in creating the data system for the organization.

“Yangta came on board and created our own database server, so as we speak, we are now on the system. This is one achievement I feel that we should be proud and be happy that it can make our (HR) work more easy,” said Tobby.

Meanwhile, Yangta explained that having a database server will help in many ways to make work faster and easier.

“This system will now help the HR to review appraisals on time, access information for each staff and also provide information to staff,” Yangta said.
New Human Resource Officers

By Elishebah Musia

Last month, the Institute welcomed three new Human Resource officers. Ms Dale Saluap – site HR officer for Madang/ESP/Kokopo; John Wemin and John Yogiyo – both senior HR officers, based in Goroka.

According to the HR Manager, Tobby Apa, Dale was recruited to replace Sonia and she will mainly coordinate HR duties on sites and report to the headquarters.

“She had previous experiences mostly in the private sector and would assist well in the work of the Institute,” said Mr Apa.

Ms Dale explained her mission and vision for this Institute would be:
1. See that staff give back honestly to the Institute in terms of being at work at 7:45 and finishing at 4:06pm
2. Being more productive and proactive in what each individual is doing in their respective jobs/tasks
3. More cost cutting measure to be in place to help the Institute financially
4. Staff training to be emphasized
5. One step ahead in all HR related matters because of the new network system currently

Meanwhile, when asked about what John Wemin’s plans are in bringing new changes to this Institute, he said, “Change is inevitable and constantly happening every day. To be a progressive organization and delivering on the key goals and objectives of the Institute, we all have the opportunity to bring the change we want.”

Mr Wemin added that the significance of the work PNGIMR is doing will attract increased funding from national and provincial governments, the private sector and international donors.

“As a senior HR officer, I would like to make a difference and set a high standard of work attitude in this Institution,” he said.

Mr John Yogiyo has been internally transferred to the HR Unit from the Training Office. He will play a dual role by still maintaining his role as a training officer and report to Mr Mexy Kakazo on training matters.

Mr Apa says, since Mr Yogiyo is not new to IMR, we hope he will contribute well to the HR Unit.
About the Study

The Young People and Pregnancy study is a qualitative study that is examining the experiences of pregnancy among married and unmarried Papua New Guineans between the ages of 15-24 years.

It is a study that is carried out in partnership with PNGIMR and UNSW Sydney.

The overall aim of the study is to guide the development of youth centered health promotion strategies to prevent and mitigate the impact of pregnancy and associated health and social outcomes among young women and men in this age group.

Study Report for two sites

This is the first study to develop informed responses to pregnancy among young people in PNG. With the approval from the Western Highlands provincial health authority, the study kicked off this year in April with the first site, Kagamuga in the Western Highlands province representing a semi urban setting.

Working closely with the Susu Mamas clinic at Kagamuga and the community, interviews were conducted with 24 young people, and a number of community informants including community leaders, pastors, parents, teachers and service providers. Data collected is now in the process of transcribing and translations by the hard-working team of SRHU.

The young people and pregnancy study team took on Megabo 1 and Megabo 2 (Wesan) in Upper Bena, EHP in June and early July this year for the study’s second site representing the rural setting. Similar to Kagamuga, approval was gained from the Eastern Highlands provincial health authority for the study. After two weeks in Megabo 1 doing data collection, the team embarked on a 7 hour walk to Megabo 2 in the Wesan area – a very rural site with no basic health, road and education services. After a few days of data collection, the team took on the rugged trail back to Megabo 1 to continue data collection. Similarly, interviews were conducted with 24 young people and a number of community informants. Data collected in Megabo is also in the process of transcribing and translation.

The team is looking forward to the third and last site late this year, which is Port Moresby, representing a large urban setting. In early 2020, photovoice research will be undertaken with young participants from all three sites to explore young people’s lived experiences of pregnancy in more depth. These different study settings will provide a vast variety of different health structures and facilities in urban, rural and semi urban settings and other major issues involved in pregnancy among young people in the country.
Brief report for two islands

The household surveys were conducted in Kiriwina and Good-enough islands of the Milne Bay Province. Initially, the survey was supposed to be conducted on Kiriwina only, however, because MDA was implemented in all villages in Kiriwina, the team had no baseline to compare the effect of Artequick of malaria prevalence on Kiriwina, thus, two villages on Good-enough islands was included in the survey.

The villages surveyed included Kiriwina Island - Losuia station, Omarakana village, Kumwagea and Sinaketa villages on Kitava Island; Good-enough Islands - Belebele village and Vivigani village.

*Biological samples taken during the survey:*
1. Blood slides - microscopy reading
2. Dried blood spots - molecular processing

Results will be made available after August, 2019.

*Results as per survey*

A total of 130 households were surveyed with a total population of 545 participants (persons surveyed). Kiriwina total participants were 385 whilst Good-enough participants were 160. During the survey on Kiriwina, only one person was tested - mRDT (malaria rapid diagnostic test) positive for malaria and refused to take the Artequick during the MDA. In Good-enough, 12 mRDT positive cases were reported.

There were several challenges faced during the survey that had an impact on completing the survey in a timely manner. Those included:
- A small number of people available to survey, this was due to yam harvesting festival
- Rainy season
- Transportation on the island in terms of vehicle availability to assist staff during the survey
- Communication on Kiriwina was inconsistence whilst on Good-enough, there was no network coverage.

Please note that this is the first follow-up survey, several more malaria prevalence surveys will be carried out before PNGIMR can provide informed recommendations about MDA to relevant policy makers (Department of Health).
The launching of the Biotechnology Research Centre was conducted at the Mark Solon Auditorium of the University of Goroka on the 2 of May, 2019.

The Biotechnology Research Centre, of the School of Science and Technology, of the University of Goroka, will be a centre of research and education. It will be part of the proposed Sir Michael Thomas Somare Research Institute that will be established at the University of Goroka.

During the launching, guest speaker, Head of Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit of the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR), Associate Professor Angela Kelly-Hanku, on behalf of the PNGIMR Director, Professor William Pomat, congratulated the University for this achievement.

“I for one think partnerships are the way we need to operate, too often people think that they are an island, but we are not. We are all connected and a centre and university like this can only operate if we build on these partnerships and work with integrity, honesty and respect.”

She added, “We have to have respect that each of us have very different skills to bring to those partnerships and it is very important that the University is pioneering this centre and it should be the centre for excellence, not just for Papua New Guinea but for the region.”

“One behalf of the PNGIMR Director, Professor William Pomat and everyone at the IMR, I’d like to congratulate all of you, Dr Matthew Lando, Director of Centre for Biotechnological Research and the esteemed Vice Chancellor, Professor Musawe Sinebare, this is a momentous occasion and we look forward to celebrating many more achievements at this Centre into the future,” said Prof. Kelly-Hanku.
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**Describe PNGIMR in one word**
Great

**Number of years working with PNGIMR**
16 years going 17 years

**What do you love about PNGIMR?**
Staff are friendly with flexible work environment

**Inspiration/role model**
Dr Michael Alpers

**Last attended**
University of PNG

**Greatest fear**
Confrontation with gunmen

**Favourite quote**
Always think and stay positive
The most highly infectious disease that is spreading rapidly with population movement in Papua New Guinea is polio.

This was announced during an awareness made by a representative from the World Health Organization (WHO) and a representative from the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) at the St Paul's Lutheran Church.

According to the PNGIMR paediatric nurse Gerard Saleu, the only way to fight against polio is to be vaccinated.

“We are still doing polio rounds and will continue until all children are vaccinated. For some reason, we have received word that there are now four suspected measles cases in Okapa,” he said.

The PNGIMR team has confirmed the measles cases after carrying out blood tests on the four suspects.

He added that, because of that, the next round of polio will be done and on top of that, they will make sure all children are vaccinated to prevent measles as well.

“I am appealing to all mothers in the villages, churches and schools to pass the word around to prepare your babies and children to receive the polio drop as well as a measles injection,” said Mr Saleu.