



New treatment cures common malaria strain



In recent years, the development of drug-resistant strains and insecticide-resistant mosquitoes has seen a resurgence in malaria.

By Joanne Wayang

A group of Australian and Papua New Guinean scientists believe they have made a breakthrough in treating malaria.

Dr Moses Laman is among these scientists. Dr Laman is an employee of the PNG Institute of Medical Research and this study was for his PhD which he was undertaking under the supervision of Professor Tim Davis.

Professor Tim Davis from the University of Western Australia's school of medicine and pharmacology said vivax malaria is a devastating disease that affects many of the world's developing countries.

"Malaria is a disease of poverty and it makes it difficult for young children to develop normally if they're currently unwell with infections like malaria. It also puts a big burden on the local health infrastructure. Countries like Papua New

Guinea have limited resources and wealth to deal with major medical problems like malaria. If something can be done to reduce the impact, that frees up funding for use in other areas," he added.

The treatment was trialled in Papua New Guinea on 250 children over two years and together with his team, Dr Laman found that they could kill the vivax malaria parasite in the children.

The treatment works by combining two drugs, and giving it to patients over three days. In the end, researchers found that the treatment completely eliminated the vivax strain of malaria.

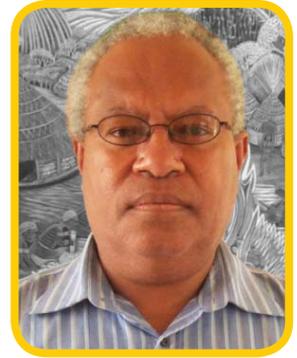
Normally, the parasite hides in the liver, re-emerging to attack the host again and again. This treatment breaks that cycle. Vivax malaria is not lethal, but it can make a child anaemic and vulnerable to other diseases.

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Director's Message



Professor Peter Siba

Hello everyone!

I would like to warmly welcome all staff, collaborators, funders and friends of PNGIMR to a new year of work, 2015.

In this issue of the IMR Niusletter, we bring you updates from both our Science and Corporate Affairs sections, stories of our research work, projects and important visitors to the IMR.

2015 is a year of reconciliation.

It is the year to forget the past and move onto bigger things.

It is a year to co-operate and perform to the best of our abilities and beyond expectations and to build a bridge of good relationships between staff and management.

Despite the problems that we've had, it has not once affected our work as we have produced and continue to produce a high quality standard of research.

I would like to assure our friends and partners both locally and internationally that the hiccups that PNGIMR has had during the past year has been settled.

"PNGIMR is back on track and we are ready to tackle 2015 with enthusiasm and determination."

This year looks very promising as we have had 3 big grants from three different organisations.

I am proud to say that our National Government has also increased our annual budget allocation from 7.7 million since 2014 to around 10 million as of this year. This is a reflection of the government's confidence and trust in the research work we do.

Until the next issue of the IMR Niusletter, happy reading!

Cheers,

Prof Peter Siba
(Director)

The headquarters of PNGIMR opened its official business for the year with a dedication service as is the tradition. The Management and staff were honoured to host Rev S. Paitadra and his family who came from the United Pentecostal Church International in Goroka. The one hour service saw Rev Paitadra preaching words of encouragement to the staff and management who were very keen and attentive.

"We must love one another", He said.

"That is the key to a lot of problems facing employees in organisations everywhere in PNG. If we respect and love one another, we will co-operate and work as a team and move our organisation forward". The IMR Director, Prof. Peter Siba expressed his gratitude to the Paitadras and added that his staff really needed that spiritual boost at the beginning of the working year.

On the same note, the proposed reconciliation ceremony for all staff at IMR has been discussed but a date is yet to be set for the actual event.

Dedication Service



The Pathaidra Family posing in front of the IMR sculpture after the dedication service.

Young mothers' and their experiences of pregnancy

By Joanne Wayang

Maternal health is a serious issue in the world today and increasingly so in adolescent health in the Pacific Region.

Rebecca Emori, a Public Health Scientist from the Population Health and Demography Unit of IMR is currently undergoing an interesting study involving teenage women and their experiences during their pregnancy.

The study titled *'Teenager's experiences of pregnancy in two sites, Goroka and Madang of Papua New Guinea'* began in late 2013.

The primary objective of this study is to explore and describe the experiences in pregnancy of young mothers in the Eastern Highlands Province and Madang Province of Papua New Guinea.

Rebecca said maternal health, apart from TB and countless other diseases, is negatively affecting PNG. She wants to do her part by contributing through public health research of our population; therefore she has begun with maternal health, particularly in the field of adolescent health.

So far she has researched widely among publications in the world around this topic and has found a few publications from Papua New Guinea.

"I want to help our young Papua New Guinean womenfolk in addressing this particular issue which is teenage pregnancy and in turn contribute to improving the health of Papua New Guineans as stated in the National Health Plan for Papua New Guinea".

The study will explore and describe the experiences of teenage mothers who are currently pregnant; to capture the experiences and perceptions of teenage women accessing ANC services; to explore the experiences and perceptions of women who have experienced pregnancy; find the perceptions of first time teenage mothers; to understand the circumstances and factors leading to the pregnancy;

and, to identify ways to assist the development of relevant strategies to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents. It is a rising concern that due to the lack of appropriate adolescent, maternal health, sexual and reproductive health information, it leaves young people vulnerable to HIV STI's and teenage pregnancies.

The research was conducted at the Kama Antenatal Clinic, Eastern Highlands Provincial Hospital and Modilon General Hospital, Madang.

"It is a very interesting and informative study from what information I've gathered so far", she said.

This is a social science research and according to Rebecca, it is in its coding and analysing stages and there is a lot of data that has been collected that needs to be managed.

The duration of the project is expected to last 22 months which has commenced in January 2014 and is expected to end in October 2015.

Rebecca acknowledges the staff of both the Eastern Highlands Provincial Hospital and Modilon General Hospital for their support in making sure that the research was conducted successfully in their clinics in 2014 and also thank the Provincial Health Authorities of EHP and Madang. She is also grateful to the IMR Institutional Review Board and PNG Medical Research Advisory Committee for giving the ethical clearance for this study.

Notable people who should also be acknowledged are Dr John Bolgna from Modilon Antenatal clinic and Sr. Helen Pok from the Kama Antenatal clinic for their assistance in making this study possible.



Pictured is Rebecca Emori (left) conducting research with a young, pregnant woman at the Eastern Highlands Provincial Hospital in 2014.

Staff Profile : Edwin Mondo



Name:
Edwin Mondo
Position:
Senior Accountant
Unit:
Finance

Edwin Mondo recently joined our Finance Unit as the Senior Accountant. He hails from Mendi in the Southern Highlands Province but he was brought up in Lae, Morobe Province.

Edwin obtained his Bachelor's Degree in accountancy in February 2007 from Divine Word University. After spending two years working with private companies in Lae, he moved to Port Moresby where he was accepted into Deloitte Touché Tohmatsu's Graduate Development program in 2010. Whilst working for Deloitte in the Solomon Islands in 2012, he was offered a job with another reputable (Big Four) accounting firm, Ernst & Young. This saw him leaving the shores of Honiara to return to PNG.

During his tenure of working with these accounting firms, Edwin has proven to be a valuable member of his team and this saw him taking leading roles in the audit of big companies like Coca Cola Amatil (PNG) Ltd, BSP (PNG)/ (SI)/ (Fiji) Ltd, Hargy Oil Palm

Ltd, Red Sea Housing Services, Brian Bell Group, Solomon Islands National Provident Fund, just to name a few. He was elevated from being a graduate accountant to senior accountant within three (3) years.

With the vast experience he has acquired whilst working with reputable accounting firms in PNG and the Pacific, Edwin decided to venture into commerce and the opportunity to take up this job with the PNGIMR presented itself at the right time when he was considering his options.

Like in other Units, there are challenges that need to be identified and addressed. Edwin is determined to create an open working environment within the Finance Unit to encourage the staff to contribute ideas that addresses the issues at hand. This will increase staff efficiencies and contribute to an overall improvement in the manner the finance unit is performing.

With a new job comes new challenges and Edwin says there is room for improvement in his unit. Change does not happen overnight, but with perseverance and commitment improvements will be seen in the Finance Unit, Edwin and his team will be working closely with management and other units to gradually restore confidence in the Finance Unit..."one step at a time", he says.

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"It is satisfying to not only see our work, but all the other malaria research and the time and effort and planning that malaria has recently attracted globally. And so the incidence of malaria globally, not just in Papua New Guinea, have been declining so as someone who has come from an endemic setting, it's satisfying to see", Dr Laman said.

He stressed that the treatment still needs to be assessed and approved by the World Health Organisation and the Papua New Guinea government.

However, he added that Papua New Guinea's existing treatment program was only relatively recently introduced so it will take a while for the new treatment to be introduced but Dr Laman believes that it should be introduced now rather than later.

According to SBS TV News, Professor Davis says that results have shown that the new treatment is very effective than the drug that is being currently used.

Visiting US and PNGDF Personnel



From left to right: SM Sergeant Ricardo Russo (US Air Force), WgCDR Brent Barker (Royal Australian Air Force), Dr William Pomat (IMR Deputy Director Science), and Lt Colonel Peter Kaminiel (PNG Defence Force).

On Wednesday 28th January 2015, Dr Brent Barker – Australian Exchange Flight Surgeon, Senior Master Sergeant Ricardo Russo from the US Air force and Lt Col Dr P Kaminiel from PNGDF visited PNGIMR to learn about research conducted here and to establish a dialogue for future collaboration. The US Air force is conducting various exercises with PNG Defence Force code named 'Pacific Angel'.

One aspect of the exercise is to train in a disaster relief scenario, where army medical personnel, environmental scientists, and biomedical technicians can train to save lives using available infrastructure. The IMR has data available from various research as well as diagnostic assays that could be helpful to defence personnel. They intend to hold a meeting among IMR researchers, key scientists and clinicians in early June to learn about IMR research and also provide information on their experiences with disasters around the globe including the Ebola outbreak in Africa. It is a great opportunity for them and the IMR to build a network amongst colleagues from different countries who will be involved in the exercise.

The Science Update

with Dr William Pomat, Deputy Director for Science



To achieve the health priorities of Government of PNG (GoPNG), the IMR has developed and is implementing its research services through five (5) units: Environmental and Emerging Diseases, Infection and Immunity, Population Health and Demography, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Vector Borne Diseases Units. Programs within these Units are cross-cutting to provide evidence needed to improve health outcomes. These research activities cannot be achieved without a strong administrative and infrastructure support. Research conducted by IMR to date have achieved many of the priorities, however, much remains to be done.

2014 was as a very, very productive and successful year for Science and Research at IMR in view of the uncertain financial future we were facing. The uncertainties did not hamper the work of our researchers who continued their innovative work that led to more than 50 publications in world class peer-reviewed journals while successfully hosting the 50th Medical Symposium.

Our research

Several important research outcomes helped lead to knowledge that will change health policies for better health outcomes. Within Population Health and Demographic Units, the MalCon project demonstrated that using long lasting insecticide treated bed nets throughout PNG reduced malaria incidence from 18% to 1% or 18 out of every 100 children born each year were dying from malaria before bed nets were used, today only 1 out of 100 children is likely to die of malaria. Funding from Global Fund and advice from NDoH was significant and the dedication and commitment of our staff was fundamental to achieving the research outcomes.

Our studies on demographic surveillance in LNG impact sites provided evidence that life-style diseases like diabetes, heart diseases and so on are very common and we must begin to address them before it is too late. This is because life-style diseases are usually chronic in nature, and PNG does not have necessary health facilities with appropriate equipments to treat and manage patients with these diseases. Our best option to minimize chronic life styles diseases will be to educate people on eating and exercise habits.

The key research tool being utilized by our HDSS team led by Dr Bang Pham and Dr Pulford to gather these information on

emerging or existing diseases is a framework called 'cradle to the grave framework', where all births, deaths, marriages, migration and so on. This tool is being presented to relevant government agencies to acquire relevant information to measure population growth rates, economic development, infrastructure so that resources can be allocated to achieve PNG Vision 2050.

In work conducted by the Sexual Reproductive Health Unit, the world first finding that penile dorsal slit provided some degree of protective from HIV acquisition is welcome news in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This does not mean that condoms and other prevention methods should be neglected.

Work on maternal health confirmed that infrastructure, cultural beliefs and education are among risk factors that women have to overcome to attend antenatal care. These barriers must be removed to help mothers survive the ordeals of child birth. Behavioural research using a technique called photo voice to tell stories of life impediments, challenges and so on was successfully trialled and tells some very interesting views expressed by people. Using these techniques to compliment current technology will highlight challenges that are continually faced by people.

Research on malaria and pneumonia; two diseases that take lives or hospitalize many young lives led to important policy decisions and new knowledge being generated. In 2013 the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) was introduced in PNG and in 2014 roll out began throughout the country. Research by IMR showed that scheduling this vaccine at 1-2-3 months was as safe, protective and protected early against pneumococcal pneumonia. This schedule is in line with EPI schedule, making it less likely for mothers to forget their immunisation dates. Research on the causes of pneumonia at Goroka Hospital highlighted the need to strengthen vaccination systems as children being admitted to hospital are most likely to have received only one dose of vaccine.

Our team in the Vector Borne Disease Unit continue to conduct excellent research to understand vector behaviour, host responses to parasites, find interventions to prevent malaria and filariasis and maintain vigilance on drug resistance using novel techniques is second to none. The entomology section has found that mosquitoes are changing their biting behaviour, biting earlier before people go to sleep in their bed nets. Malaria can be prevented in mothers and children

using anti-malarials but drug resistance must be monitored carefully.

Our EEDU team have assisted with the cholera and later the Chikungunya outbreaks by confirming the causes of these infections, showing that we have the capacity for outbreak responses. The team continues to monitor these diseases for potential outbreaks. The team is also collaborating with NAQIA to monitor possible outbreak of bird flu that can potentially wipe out the poultry industry.

These researches form only a small part of the scope of activities being carried at IMR and highlights the locally relevant research activities to achieve the overall goal of IMR 'to improve health of our people.'

Our Collaboration and Funding

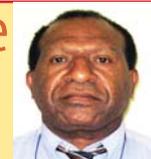
Many of our research are conducted in collaboration with local, regional and international partners. These include National Health Department, NACS, UPNG, DWU and Universities and research institutions is Australian, New Zealand, USA, Canada, South America, Europe and Asia. These collaborations also allow us to compete for research grants through funding agencies including Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, National Institute of Health, National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia, Wellcome Trust, Global Fund, DFAT (formerly AusAID) and many more. Locally, budgetary allocation from the Government of PNG (GoPNG) funds our core activities while partnership with private sector including Exxon Mobil allows research into areas where funding may be difficult to find. In 2015, new competitive research grants from NHMRC, Global Fund and World Bank will fund new research and funding allocations from GoPNG and DFAT to fund administrative and research activities.

Of course our research will not proceed if communities we work in refuse to be involved in research. Their decision to take part in research to improve their health and the health of fellow Papua New Guineans is of fundamental importance that shows health research is a partnership. To this end, staff will be involved in Strategic Plan for 2015-2020. This road map will provide the direction and vision for the next 5 years.

So in 2015, let us work together, put the pieces of knowledge we have gained together to help avoid unnecessary deaths.

The Corporate Affairs & Support Services (CASS) Update

with Samson Akunaii, Deputy Director for CASS



2015- Challenging Year

The year 2015 will be a very challenging year for the Institute especially as it tries to addresses some of its critical challenges facings the Institute which it inherited in 2014.

One such major challenge is the restoring of its critical funding from one of our key development partners ie DFAT. The Institute management has put in alot of effort in framing the 2015 Annual Activity Plan and the activity based budget in close consultation with unit heads and senior staff to ensure that the activities of the Institute is clearly spelt out and the appropriated budget costed which will upon implementation can be clearly monitored to measure the outcome against the actual funding allocated for the activity.

The management of the Institute is grateful to the assistance of Mr. Kelvin Waukave, a local consultant who is on secondment to the Institute from HHISP for his perseverance and assistance in framing this massive task. The budget has been submitted to HHISP and DFAT for further deliberation and approval and the management of the Institute remains optimistic that the 2015 Annual Activity Plan and the budget will receive due consideration and approval.

Staff Exit;

The management of the Institute is planning to allow some long serving staff to make an exit in 2015. One such exit will take place in March 2015 where the first lot of staff identified will be allowed to go, The Human Resources office is dealing with this matter and letters have been communicated to the staff concerned and these particular staff are expected to leave the employ of the Institute by the end of March 2015.

Some of the staff ear marked for exit have been with the Institute for quite awhile and their departure will definitely create alot of sadness but as the saying goes, life goes on so we wish them and their families all the best in their future endeavours.

A full list of these staff will be published in the next IMR Nius, however in the interim, we take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation for their contributions to the work of the Institute and wish them and their families all the best wishes as they depart the Institute.

Other exits late last year included but not

limited to the following;

Eunice Wotene, the former senior accountant at the HQ left in November .

Johannes Haay or more commonly known as Papa Kela has finally called it a day and has decided to live a happy and quite life outside the Institute. He left in December 2014.

John Taime is another notable personal who has spent most of his working life at the Institute. He left the Institute in December.

Andrew and Lisa Vallely of Alotau have gone finish and are now residing in Cairns, far North Queensland. Andrew and Lisa are not gone completely as they still have projects in PNG with the Institute and will visit the Institute during the year.

New Faces

A local consultant has been at the Institute since last year. He is Mr. Kelvin Waukave, His initial engagement was for the period August 2015 – Jan 2015 and this engagement has been further extended to June 2015.

We have seen some positive developments emanating from his placement at the Institute and are grateful for his involvement in some of the key changes happening at the Institute and we look forward to his positive contributions during his stint at the Institute. Another notable new comer is Mr. Edwin Mondo, who is employed as a Senior Accountant and has taken over from Eunice Wotene.

Edwin brings to the Institute a wealth of experience from the private sector. He is making significant improvements in restoring the credibility of the unit by introducing some critical changes.

The management is happy with the way things are progressing and will continue to support the efforts of Edwin and his team as he drives the change that is desperately needed at this critical functional office.

The management encourages every one to embrace and support the changes that is taking place under the stewardship of Edwin and his team.

Inoni Betuela now heads the Alotau Branch

Inoni Betuela who was formerly the head of the VBUDU has now take over as the head of the Alotau office. He has taken over from Dr. Andrew Vallely in January this year when the Vallely family relocated to Cairns.

Some projects have been identified in close

dialogue with the Milne Bay Provincial Health Authority and the branch will shortly be busy with alot of activities. We wish Dr. Betuela well in his new role.

Goroka Genset problem

The Goroka Power standby Generator has had some major problems on the : 26 Feb 7.30pm. It was discovered that the generator had some faults within its conductor and its voltage regulator and it was further confirmed when these critical parts were taken out and checked by the electrician and the auto electrician brought in to assist in the repairs and the following work has now being completed:

(i) Rewind (Reconstruction) of 1 of 2 damaged conductor windings

(ii) Replacement/Upgrade of Voltage Regulator (AVR) burnt out

External Contractors have been sought for assistance including the original supplier Hastings & Deering. They have been called upon to give also a mechanical over-haul of the engine-side of the Genset.

Once the Internal Conductors of the Generator have been reconstructed and replaced; and the Generator undergoes a full Mechanical service.

PNGPOWER has been made aware of our current predicament and have assured us of support from their Back-up Generators in the event of a long Black-out.

Disposal of Madang/Karkar Boat

Advertisements were placed in the daily newspapers for the disposal of the Karkar based Stinger boat named MV Quinny.

The advertisement has attracted three (3) bidders who were all Madang based. The bids were competitive and the successful turned out to be the Ramu Development Foundation who submitted the highest bid of K 250,000.00

Formal procedures of disposal will be effected immediately once the payment is received from the Foundation.

Strategic Planning Workshop Policy review

The current PNGIMR Corporate plan 2010-2015 is up for renewal whilst the Strategic Plan 2010-2020 is still valid, however the management has decided that it is only fitting that both these plans come under

review so that experiences including challenges and positive outcomes can be re looked and the way forward be charted for the medium to long term sustainability of the Institute as well as to ensure that the work of the Institute is aligned closely with key national development agendas of the Government especially in the Health and Social sector generally. The review took place from the 23rd- 25th March 2015.

The Institute's management is grateful to the WHO who had assigned Dr. Manju Rani of their key officers from the regional office in Manila and she led the discussions and perform the role of lead facilitator.

The workshop was attended by key employees of the Institute in order to make the policy more relevant and practical. The workshop was held in Goroka and a further workshop will be held in Port Moresby in June this year. Much of the discussions and strategic plan and direction of the Institute agreed to by the March meeting will be further evaluated by a wider stakeholder group where key government departments and agencies including selected private sector organisations will contribute so that the final outcome will be a nationally focussed plan.

Institutional Policy Review

Following on from the strategic Plan review workshop, the Institutional policy review took place on the 26th March 2015 which was also in Goroka. The existing policies went under scrutiny to ensure its relevance and applicability as well as additional new policies will be reviewed and adopted.

As a procedural matter, the policies would then be compiled after the review and presented to the senior executive management to review and endorse, for council ratification, paving the way for its adoption and implementation.

News in Brief

Sybiz Accounting System



Tony Sheehan (Fourth from right) with the Accounts personnel. He was at IMR Goroka to provide software support and assistance to the Accounts personnel on the use of the Sybiz Accounting system.

PiHP Training



A Data Analysis using SPSS and Report Writing skills training was conducted in IMR, Goroka purposely to train basic data analytical and report writing skills to a core group of young scientific officers of the Partnership in Health Project (PiHP). The skills acquired in this training, will support the national scientific officers to contribute with the write up of the IMR-LNG report for March 2015.

Back row (from left to right): Dr. Bang Nguyen Pham, Ronnie Boli, Miriam Vano, Seri Maraga

Front row (from left to right): Jacob Kumai, Rebecca Emori, Tess Aga, Dr Regina Wangnapi

G.I.S Science Fair



These IMR staff recieved an award for participating at the Goroka Insternation School's Science Fair last month. Some of the staff were appointed to be part of the judging panel for the students' projects in their respective grades while others set up a display table show casing IMR's work.

(From left to right) : Barry Nagepu, Morris Sinivei, Ben Toto, Dominic Lore, Tilda Orami, Debbie Kisa and Mary Amos.

Training Nius

PhD Training

In 2014-2015 two PhD degrees were awarded to our researchers for their excellent work.

Dr Inoni Betuela successfully defended his PhD thesis through the University of Barcelona in Spain in 2014. Dr Betuela is currently based in Alotau, strengthening ties with Milne Bay Provincial Health Authority and implementing research there.

In early 2015, Dr Moses Laman, another successful clinician submitted his PhD through the University of Western Australia. Dr Laman's work is critical to our understanding of severe malaria work which was highlighted by news articles in Australian media and with Moses winning two awards for his excellent research. Moses is continuing his excellent work in Madang that will add to our research achievements.

By the end of 2015, we hope three more staff (Mr Livingstone Tavul, Mr Dagwin Suarkia and Ms Janet Gare) will join the ranks when they put the final FULL STOP to their PhD thesis.

As the final full stop nears for these three, another four begin their PhD journey: Dr Patricia Rarau, Ms Gwendalyn Vengiau, Mr John Bosco Keven and Ms Celestine

Aho are all currently in overseas universities beginning their candidature.

At Masters, Honours, Degree and Diploma levels, many more staff are being trained to take up responsible positions at IMR to maintain a highly trained, specialized workforce.

Masters Program

Four of our staff are currently undertaking their Masters Program in overseas universities. They are all females.

Ms. Tamara Koleala is at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia. Ms. Koleala is from our Madang Branch.

Ms. Diana Timbi is doing her Masters in Science-Epidemiology at the University of Basel, Switzerland.

Ms. Maringjo Jonduo is on a scholarship by the Asian Development Bank and JICA and she is attending the Tokyo University and Ms. Rebecca Vinit is at the Michigan State University, Michigan USA.

Other Staff on the Masters Program

Mrs. Sharon Jamea Maiasa will be departing in June to attend the University of Queensland taking Masters of Science in

Public Health.

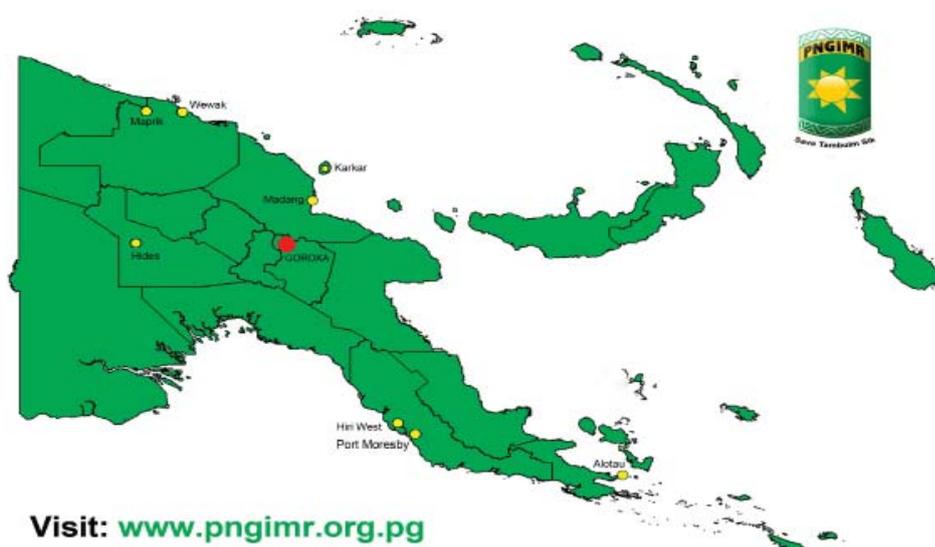
Ms. Joyce Obed is another staff on the Masters Program but her training has been deferred to 2016.

Sybiz Training

The Institute in Goroka hosted Tony Sheehan who was here to provide software support and assistance to the Accounts personnel on the use of the Sybiz Accounting system. Tony, from Evolution Bites is based in Cairns and suppliers of the Sybiz Vision Accounting Software systems was at the Institute from the 2nd – 4th March and during this time he spent quality time with the software users and trained them on the different features of the Accounting system and answered their queries on the difficulties and misunderstandings they had and provided mentoring and coaching assistance to many of the users.

Training Nius is compiled by Dickson Kuvi (Training Officer) and John Yogiyo (Assistant Training Officer). Phone: +675-531 4259.

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