

Village Coffee: a better deal for PNG growers

by Pana Wiya

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Beans drying, Eastern Highlands (image: Village Coffee)

About us

Village Coffee is a bold, new, independent business that aims to improve earning conditions for PNG coffee growers. We offer ethical and fair deals in a market that has long exploited local growers to benefit big corporations.

Village Coffee was established solely to increase the earning capacity of PNG growers, by selling organic Arabica smallholder coffee directly to coffee lovers. Coffee growers typically only earn 2-5% of the retail price in supermarkets and online. This is clearly unjust considering that growers contribute 90-95% of the labor, and utilise their most fertile land to provide consumers around the world with their morning doses of coffee. But we aim to increase growers' earnings to about 30-35% (and in the longer term, more than double the income for PNG from coffee exports).

Village Coffee is charitable and grower-focused, but it also has the potential to make a profit. We aim to meet the fundamental needs of local growers' desire for fairness, and we provide a much-needed ethical business model in terms of sharing benefits. Village Coffee requires all coffee growers to be registered in their local co-op.

Coffee growing in PNG

I grew up in the highlands of PNG where Arabica coffee was introduced as source of income. My father allocated his best land for growing coffee. It provided the income to pay for my school fees and other educational needs, a priority for my family. We had very little, so things like rice and tinned fish were luxury items.

I've lived in Sydney for the last 25 years doing retail business to support my family here and those back home in PNG. I visit home in PNG at least once a year. I started Village Coffee because local growers in my village receive a tiny fraction of the price of roasted coffee in the world. I want to bring about justice and fairness for

the growers, and to offer hope and sustainability for the future.

Land ownership is critical to subsistence farming and now a cash dependent society. In the West, a person's survival depends on jobs and qualifications, and they can move from one location to another without much inconvenience. This is a totally foreign concept in PNG, where people are who they are based on land ownership, clan and family.

The land that my father had to provide for his family is now divided between four sons, who themselves average four children, some of whom are married. How can they all survive on that one piece of land? Tribal warfare flares because of land and as population increases the chances of conflicts in the villages will escalate. We need answers for this increased population.

Parents work hard to send their children to schools; however, these are neglected, poorly run, and of low quality. The whole system lets down both parents and children because of lack of support and job opportunities after school.

Coffee growing has always been a family affair, with everyone contributing. But today, young school leavers do not see coffee growing as being able to sustain their life style. The hard work that goes into growing coffee and processing it for sale simply does not result in enough of an income.

The Village Coffee project aims to tackle some of these issues. Improving and increasing production will be a way for the younger generation to re-engage with local coffee growing, and earn a better income. It will benefit not only themselves, but the whole family and nation.



Progress so far

Village Coffee has purchased a new 5kg capacity roaster, and is roasting on average 50kg per week, packaged into 250gm, 500gm and 1kg bags to sell directly to consumers. We have received excellent feedback from customers. We've also engaged a branding specialist to design and implement the Village Coffee brand. More recently, we have developed Tenkyu Coffee and Kokoda Coffee for the USA market.

Village Coffee has participated in two coffee expos in the city of Guangzhou, China. The Chinese market is an especially challenging one, but offers vast and exciting potential.

We've also been researching the US market and talking to possible partners who also believe in our vision for growers. And we have registered all three brands with [Integral Trade](#). Unlike Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance and other similar certifications, Integral Trade costs the farmer or grower nothing to belong.

We've planned a few important and practical measures to increase our business. This includes investing in a new coffee roaster and machines; investing in skilled, coffee-knowledgeable personnel for efficient operation and marketing; preparing a professional business/budget plan for the first five years, and a 10-year plan; and establishing an accountability system for the coffee growers within their

cooperatives, to liaise between Coffee Industry Corporation and Village Coffee. But these require capital, which is limiting our vision to make real progress.

Many stakeholders in PNG from coffee growing areas — but in particular growers themselves — are keen to see a change from the current exploitative system.

Village Coffee has been privileged to receive support from Hon Gary Juffa, Governor of Oro Province, and Mr Kurubu Ipara, Chairman of Mineral Resource Enga.



The future

We have an excellent product and keen supporters of the vision, but the project can only progress with more investment in capital. With the right capital, Village Coffee will be able to take the necessary steps to become truly marketable and competitive.

Our initial estimates show a minimum of two years would be required before seeing a flow of benefits to the growers. Clever marketing of our story — a story unlike any other — is critical. I would like to see Australian aid funding used to promote PNG coffee in Australia. This would mean that most of the budgeted money would be spent within the Australian economy in employment and all other associated costs, but the benefits would flow back to the coffee grower and the PNG economy.

DEVPOLICYBLOG

Village Coffee is a future-focused project that looks at the needs of coffee growers as the country wrestles with the changing world of cash economy and escalating prices of goods (mostly imported) and services. The potential for the people is vast, especially given that mining in PNG has a limited future. Agriculture represents the only opportunity for 95 percent of our people, and this project is designed to address that future need.

Pana Wiya is the founder of [Village Coffee](#).

Author/s:

Pana Wiya

I come from Baiyer River in the Western Highlands of PNG. After graduating from university in Lae, I was an officer in the PNG Defence Force, Engineer Battalion. Since migrating to Australia in 1980, I worked in the field of engineering with BHP and Baulderstone Hornibrook and for approximately five years with a mining company which took me to USA for two years. I resigned in 1992 because I could not be part of a system that left the needs of the people, the rightful resource owners, on the bottom for the scraps. I've since been doing retail in Sydney and Melbourne to support my family here and those in PNG with school fees, family/cultural obligations and training of Christian leaders through university ministries for the next generation.

I have a heart to make a difference for those I see in the world being unfairly treated. I live for justice where there is injustice. I strongly believe in accountability and transparency, and in thinking of the needs of future generations and passing onto them opportunities that can sustain their lives.

More about Village Coffee project, and the positive future that we are trying to achieve, can be found [here](#).

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/village-coffee-better-deal-png-growers-20170726/>