



Key success factors

- Family-centred approach to agriculture and inclusion of women
- Adding value to local products and targeting profitable markets from local to global
- Targeting booming tourism market
- Using digital services to digitalise smallholder agriculture
- Promoting youth engagement in agriculture, including capacity development
- Regional scaling
- Awareness raising and exposure

“Shifting away from a women-focused approach, WIBDI now uses an approach that involves the whole family, keeping all family members on board.”

The recent CTA workshop on ‘making next-generation ACP agriculture work for women’ identified seven critical success factors to enable women to truly benefit from agriculture: access by women to investment and finance; access to markets; skills support, networking and capacity development; access to information, knowledge and technology; access to land; overcoming socio-cultural factors; and appropriate recognition of women (in society, in policies, through targeted delivery of services).

This brief by Taaloga Apa, Isolina Boto, Chris Addison, Emil Ješov and Senou Osseni describes how Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI), a non-profit organisation in Samoa, works with farming families to produce high-value products for local and global markets. Shifting away from a women-focused approach, WIBDI now uses an approach that involves the whole family, keeping all family members on board. It has also invested in digital applications and resources to increase the efficiency of operations, profile the producers and their products, and facilitate engagement with markets and customers.

Introduction

Imagine a small women-led organisation with 29 employees supplying products sold in more than 3,000 shops in 66 countries across the world. Well, you don't have to imagine it, because WIBDI, working with more than 1,000 farming families in Samoa, is doing exactly this and much more (CTA, 2018a).

In Samoa, WIBDI supplies fresh produce and fruits, educates and mentors young farmers, develops farmer night markets and uses digital solutions to link producers with markets. It also exports various high-value locally sourced products globally (e.g. tea, coffee, cocoa blocks and dried banana). One of WIBDI's flagship products is locally produced and processed organic virgin coconut oil, which it supplies to The Body Shop, a global skin-care and cosmetics company. In late 2018, talks were underway with The Body Shop about the possibility of doubling its orders for the oil from WIBDI.

So, how does a women-led not-for-profit organisation from a small island state with a population of fewer than 200,000 people achieve global market recognition and transform the livelihoods of thousands of families in Samoa?

Women in Business Development Incorporated is a Samoan organisation that has been operating since 1991. Its vision is that women and vulnerable families in Samoa are able to contribute fully to their own development and the development of their community and country through income generation, job creation and participation in the village economy. WIBDI'S main goals are to identify and gain access to markets for products made by women and vulnerable groups.

Drivers of success

Family-centred approach to agriculture and inclusion of women

WIBDI was established in 1991 to promote and advance the economic status of women in Samoa. Shortly after, back-to-back cyclones devastated the majority of the country's staple food and cash crops. WIBDI's founding group of seven women reached out to suffering households and encouraged women to engage in activities to supplement their husband's income; in many cases, they became the family's primary cash earner. WIBDI organised monthly night markets to ensure that these women had the opportunity to market their products. The night markets proved very popular and are now embedded in everyday life in Samoa.

WIBDI's support and initiatives transformed village economies by empowering rural families to generate their own income, rather than relying on remittances as in the past. The continued focus on the community (i.e. village) as an economic unit led to development of niche export products and gave smallholder producers access to global markets. It also facilitated the introduction of several agricultural innovations, such as organic certification and a household microfinance scheme.

The family-centred approach builds on the notion that everyone has a role in agriculture and family food security and





nutrition. While the entry point is through engagement of women, the family-centred approach ensures the approval, engagement and assistance of their husbands, and also gives children first-hand experience of income-generating family farming. This approach has also attracted previously non-farming families to enter the sector.

Adding value to local products and reaching high-value local and global markets

A strong component of WIBDI's work is promoting the role of organic farming systems and economic development opportunities for smallholder farmers, highlighting the quality aspect of food (CTA, 2018b).

Small islands have only limited agricultural production capacity because of the small land area available for agriculture. The best option for such islands is to go for quality and branded products and target top-end high-value markets. This is exactly what WIBDI has done.

WIBDI has promoted organic production in Samoa and across the Pacific islands. Currently more than 796 Samoan families working 33,000 hectares of land are fully organically certified to international standards (the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture [NASAA], Australia).

Additionally, five processing companies and four entire villages have been organically certified. WIBDI also manufactures a variety of certified organic products such as coconut-infused soaps, dried bananas and virgin coconut oil and sells them locally.

Samoa's organic virgin coconut oil is now exported to The Body Shop as part of their fair-trade enterprise, and is also sold to New Zealand cosmetics brand, Ethique. WIBDI exports Kofe Samoa (coffee), herbal teas and cocoa blocks to a high-end roastery in New Zealand (C1 Espresso), and exports more than 15 tonnes of dried misiluki bananas annually to New Zealand. The human story behind these products is a key element of the marketing strategy. The customer, whether in Samoa, London, Paris or Amsterdam, will know the contribution made to communities across Samoa.

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Targeting the booming tourism market

Today, travellers are more experienced, have more disposable income and more leisure time to travel, and thus tourism allows them to escape their usual daily routine and immerse themselves in a world of freedom and novelty. More and more tourists are looking for opportunities to engage with local environments and cultures, and food plays an increasingly prominent part in these experiences.

WIBDI is seizing this opportunity for Samoan farmers by promoting visits to farms and processing facilities and participation in gastronomic festivals and food fairs.

WIBDI organises organic night markets every month in the centre of Apia; these are timed to coincide with the arrival of cruise ships or tourist events. They offer tourists and locals the opportunity to taste a variety of local food and to meet the producers. Farmers have the chance to sell their fresh vegetables and herbs to tourists and locals alike and to arrange farm tours. The markets also sell women’s handicrafts to tourists.

With support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), WIBDI has been working with local and international chefs to encourage the hospitality industry in Samoa to use local products in their resorts, hotels and restaurants, with considerable success. This, together with popular cooking shows on TV, has helped locals and tourists alike to connect with the richness of local food, which has fallen out of favour in recent decades. This is creating new markets for local produce and increasing awareness on the richness of local food.

Chefs Robert Oliver and Dora Rossi promote local products in their restaurants. Chef Oliver is the presenter of REAL PASIFIK and author of *Me’a Kai: The Food and Flavours of the South Pacific*, winner of the best cookbook in the world in 2010. *Mea’ai Samoa: Recipes and Stories from the Heart of Polynesia*, also by Robert Oliver, won the best TV chef cookbook in the world in 2013. It showcases Samoan cuisine, traditions and natural environment, and the stories of farmers and their land prominently feature WIBDI’s work on organic food.



Digitalisation of smallholder farmers

A common challenge for smallholder farmers throughout developing countries is accessing markets. WIBDI is using innovations in information and communications technologies (ICTs) to help farmers access markets, both local and international, and to increase efficiencies and lower transaction costs (CTA, 2018c; CTA, 2018d; CTA, 2018e). For example, its tailor-made ‘Organic Farm-to-Table App’ ensures more than 1,300 farmers (796 of them certified organic) have a direct link to the market and WIBDI. Farmers register what crops and products they have ready for collection using the app, meaning that WIBDI knows what to collect, from where, before their trucks set out. It also facilitates better production planning and marketing and helps ensure that supply matches demand. Customers, which include hotels, restaurants and organisations such as offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme are able to confidently place orders directly in the app, knowing that the product is available and where it comes from. This has allowed WIBDI to develop the market for local produce in the hospitality sector in Samoa. Individual customers can use the app to order a weekly basket of organic fresh fruits and vegetables.

This system also allows WIBDI to operate a supply guarantee system across the value chain – from certified organic farmers and WIBDI to restaurant owners and managers, increasing the confidence of the market.

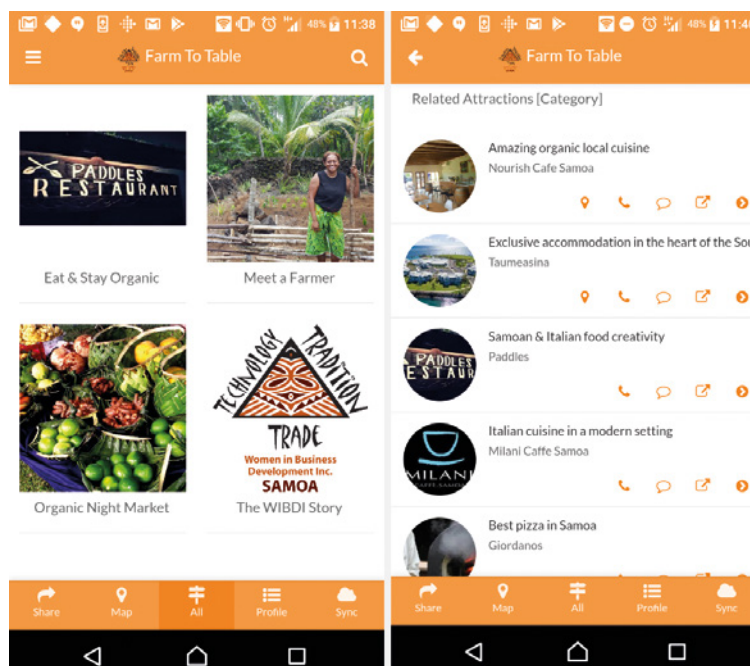
The app has now been extended to include local handicrafts, as well as food.

Promoting youth engagement in agriculture and capacity development

Samoa has a considerable problem with youth unemployment, especially in rural areas, and WIBDI is working to address this through its Organic Warriors Academy.

The Academy, launched in 2016 in partnership with the Ministry of Women,

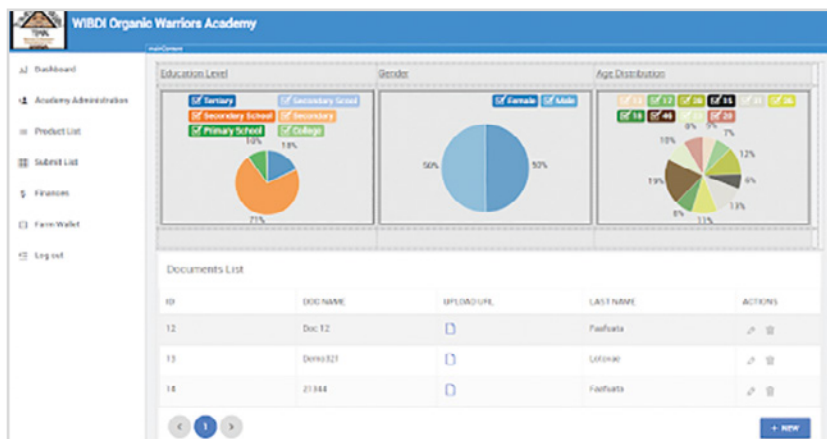
Screenshot of the Organic Farm-to-Table App



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Community and Social Development and Samoa National Youth Council and with funding from UNDP, offers unemployed youth of the island training in organic gardening, farm management and business. It also provides its graduates with support, including a grant, tools and seeds, for the first year. This helps them to venture into farming with a secure market for their produce: all the fresh vegetables and fruits they produce are sold via the WIBDI Farm-to-Table Market. By the end of 2018, more than 100 youth had received training, 15 of whom are selling their produce through WIBDI’s ‘Organic Farm-to-Table App’ and seven are employed by WIBDI. More than 80% of the graduates are women.

Engaging with youth in this way has two benefits; it both increases the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables on the market and creates employment for the islands’ unemployed youth.



CTA has supported the capacity building and tracking management system for the Organic Warriors project, helping to organise and measure impacts of the intervention by profiling participants.

Scaling up in the region

WIBDI has been working with partners to expand its model for empowering women in Pacific agriculture. The first such venture is the ‘Simbo for Change’ project in the Solomon Islands.

Simbo for Change is a partnership between the project founder (a development entrepreneur named Esther Suti), the Madegugusu Women’s Association, WIBDI and the Pacific Leadership Program (an initiative of the Australian aid programme). The project aims at empowering women and strengthening community leadership on the island of Simbo, in Western Province of the

Solomon Islands. WIBDI is bringing its expertise in organic certification, product development and market access to support the project, and is working with community leaders to empower women and girls.

In 2017, Simbo became the first island in the Solomon Islands to be certified organic by the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia. This opens the way for the creation of niche agricultural products for local and export markets and the development of organic tourism projects. This will complement other income-generating activities already developed by the programme, including the establishment of beehives and the extension of traditional weaving practices to service the Gizo and Honiara markets.

The programme also established savings clubs with more than 200 women members, helping Simbo women to send children to school and access medical treatment.

Results to date suggest that the programme has improved livelihoods and health and increased social and family cohesion. It has also helped increase women’s confidence and skills and improved their financial management. As a consequence, women’s voices are heard more often and some participate in leadership within their communities.



WIBDI Executive Director, Adimaimalaga Tafuna’i (left), has led WIBDI for more than 20 years. Her first global award was for economic empowerment from Vital Voices Global Partnership in 2012. In 2015, she was made a Member of the Order of Samoa in recognition of her work building sustainable economies in Samoa.

Raising awareness and visibility of Samoan women producers in global scenes

WIBDI has worked extensively to promote awareness of the achievements of Samoan women in global forums, and to share its experiences with other countries in the Pacific and the Caribbean. With support from CTA and others, WIBDI has participated in events such as the Brussels Development Briefings, European Development Days, the World Economic Forum and trade fairs to promote the cause of women-led rural and agricultural development among a wide range of audiences, including development organisations, the private sector, investors, and government agencies.

Looking to the future

WIBDI's community approach – promoting dialogue and exchange of best practices within families and communities – has shown real benefits. Rural communities feel empowered, get economic benefits and see new employment opportunities for their youth. WIBDI is now working on plans to broaden its impact and attract additional support to achieve this.

These plans include preparing to transition to a social enterprise, seeking out low-risk credit and alternative funding mechanisms to finance increased product quantities for additional markets, training more women in added value and processing, automating some manual tasks, supporting local businesses in product development, quality assurance and certification and extending the app to enhance the information that farmers receive and broaden their digital participation in the project.

Further reading

- CTA. 2018a. *Blending tradition with innovation to boost rural incomes*. [online]. Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2EBUpMZ>.
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This brief was created through a CTA-led process to document and share actionable knowledge on 'what works' for ACP agriculture. It capitalises on the insights, lessons and experiences of practitioners to inform and guide the implementation of agriculture for development projects.

A series of video recordings with participants gives personal perspectives on the issues raised during the workshop. See: <https://bit.ly/2FROq7r>

The products of the workshop can be found and downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/2sRaSVH>

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Photo credits

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About the series

CTA Technical Briefs document experience and learning in topical issues of interest to the ACP agricultural development community. They are intended as a practical guide for people involved in an issue professionally or for people with a strong interest in the topic.

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