

## Case Studies



Women in Subun Tua Lele village, TTU District, peeling tamarind to make medicinal tonics.  
(Photo: Nina FitzSimons)

# When Small Business becomes Big Business

Women in NTT increasing household income through home enterprise

by Nina FitzSimons

Between 2007 and 2015, the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), partnered with a local NGO, Yayasan Mitra Tani Mandiri (YMTM), to deliver a comprehensive program to improve food security and reduce poverty in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). One poverty reduction method was helping women develop small home industries by making products from their crops.

Most farmers in rural NTT are small holder subsistence farmers. The program targeted the farmers living in the more arid, mountainous areas in West Timor and Flores. These farmers are unable to grow enough staple crops – maize, yams and sweet potatoes - to feed their family. YMTM introduced an alternate cultivation method known as agro-forestry. This system diversifies the crops the farmer grows and increases productivity.

YMTM provided training to women farmers in post-harvest processing to turn their crops into goods, such as snacks and beauty products that can be sold, thereby; increasing household incomes.

Serafina Kolo, a 34 year-old mother of four from Manusasi village in TTU, jumped at this opportunity. Before joining the program, she describes her life as tough. "There was never enough food

for the children and we often had to beg from the neighbours. Sometimes they had none to share. If the children got sick it was up to God if they survived."

Serafina and her husband joined the agro-forestry program in 2007 and began cultivating a range of crops such as maize, yams and many aromatic tubers, like turmeric, kunyit (an aromatic ginger), ginger and galangal. In 2008, Serafina learned how to make chips from banana and yams as well as small snacks from maize kernels. From there her life as an entrepreneur took off.

"At first my recipes were not so great," admits Serafina. "But as time went by, my chips and snacks became tastier and more people wanted to buy them." Serafina initially sold her snacks to neighbours and then to a small kiosk in the village. She made enough money to buy the ingredients she needed for her chips, such as oil and sugar, and was soon making a modest profit.

In 2008 the Department of Health, with support from YMTM, trained Serafina and her friends how to make herbal medicine. "We were taught how to make instant tonics from turmeric, tamarind and aromatic gingers. I also learned how to make body scrubs and rheumatic rubbing oil," explains Serafina. "This traditional medicine was the first doctor



Serafina preparing turmeric for her herbal medicines. (Photo: Nina FitzSimons)

**“I have gone from a woman with nothing to a woman with something to give. This is what gives purpose to my life.”**

- Serafina Kolo

we ever had in our village," she says, laughing.

YMTM provided training in marketing including improved packaging and promotion. "It costs money for the packaging, but when I was invited by the Coordinating Body for Regional Investment to include my products in an exhibition in Kefa, I realised how important packaging was," says Serafina.

The Unit for Medicine and Food Control trained the women in how to meet the necessary standard for food certification. "Three of my products are now certified –my medicinal instant drink sachets, my banana wine and my rheumatic rubbing oil," says Serafina. "This means I can sell my goods commercially. It's a big thing."

Serafina's market has now widened because of the exhibitions. "After my first trip to the district capital of Kefa, I was invited by the Department of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives to represent TTU district at an exhibition in the provincial capital, Kupang. It was the first time I ever flew in a plane or visited a big city," tells Serafina. The stock in her showcase was supposed to last ten days but Serafina's products were so popular

they sold out in two. Serafina now has a regular buyer in Kupang. "I put the products on a bus in Kefa and the buyer transfers the money to my account. It is the first time I have ever owned a bank account."

Serafina is now making a monthly profit of Rp 2.2 million (\$220). Prior to this, she made no income at all. The women are using their money to improve their homes. Some have installed electricity, others have built toilets. One buys a piece of corrugated iron each month to replace her thatch roof. Everyday expenses can be met. "I don't have to worry about finding money anymore if the children get sick," says Serafina.

In TTU, there is a saying in the village 'just fill in time waiting to die'. Serafina and the other women don't feel this way anymore. "I have a purpose to my life now," says Serafina. "I play an active role providing for my family."

Serafina says her proudest moment was when she was asked to train women in Timor-Leste to make instant ginger drinks. "I have gone from a woman with nothing to a woman with something to give," says Serafina. "This is what gives purpose to my life."

## AIP-Rural

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AIP-Rural is a suite of programs that improves smallholder farmers access new markets, better inputs, knowhow and technology, irrigation and small loans. Its goal is to achieve a sustainable 30% increase in the net incomes of 1,000,000 male and female smallholder farmers in eastern Indonesia by 2022. AIP-Rural operates in East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua and West Papua.

The program focuses on agricultural sectors that have strong growth potential and are the main source of income for a large number of smallholder farmers. All of this is done through co-investing in new business models with local, regional, national, and international market players to create business models that improves the agriculture sector's competitiveness, especially smallholder farmers.