

## SUCCESS STORY

# A Collaboration of Hope and Empowerment

**Accelerating an arts and crafts SME to benefit the entire community.**



MSME operator Cathy Wariapa and the artisans of the Lalibu community.

Source: REAL Social Impact

**“I believe that the craft industry in this country is a sleeping giant. We know how to weave baskets but we didn’t have a market to sell to, so that’s why we stopped. No one has told the community that handicraft is a sleeping giant — this is a surprise to them, and this will impact their life.”**

**– Cathy Wariapa**

The USAID PNG Lukautim Graun Program (LGP) is a five-year project led by Cardno International Development that works with Government and stakeholders to reduce threats to PNG’s biodiversity. LGP also works to advance women in the workforce, promote women’s entrepreneurship, and remove legal, regulatory, and cultural barriers that constrain them from fully and freely participating in the economy.

Cathy Wariapa had a vision for change for her community in the Lalibu District where she operates her business, Cwakama Arts and Crafts. Although Lalibu is known for its unique weaving techniques and woven baskets, Cathy and her community had limited access to markets and capital, the same problem that confronts micro-, small-, and medium-enterprises (MSMEs) around the world. Cathy tried selling woven products to tourists and locals at weekend markets, but sales were limited and inconsistent. Low sales in markets and lack of other sales channels led communities to believe their work had little value. Community weaving activities dropped until the passing of these traditional skills to subsequent generations almost ceased.

Then, Cathy joined REAL Social Impact’s acceleration program for MSMEs in PNG. REAL, a partner in the USAID-funded USAID PNG Lukautim Graun Program (LGP) led by Cardno International Development, focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs in PNG. With REAL’s support, Cathy began seeing a path forward for her company and its community of weavers and artisans. With hard work, her business finally met the minimum requirements for early stage capital investment. As Cathy’s knowledge grew, so did her opportunities, and finally her team successfully secured a fully funded, zero-interest KIVA© microfinance loan, the first of its kind in Papua New Guinea. Supported by REAL, Cwakama Arts and Crafts now uses the Lalibu weaving technique to produce new, re-imagined, and high-value products for export in countries such as Australia, Japan, and the United States.

“I believe the craft industry in this country is a sleeping giant,” says Cathy. “USAID support is giving us what we need to wake up this giant. Cwakama Arts and Crafts will lead the way to saving our crafts and weaving skills,” she shares. The next step for the weavers will be to complete USAID-supported training by REAL to certify them as an export-ready producer group. But Cathy isn’t waiting around. “USAID funding is already helping me scale up my business to increase production and economic opportunities for both Cwakama Arts and Crafts and the weavers in the Lalibu District.”

LGP is led by Cardno International Development in collaboration with CARE, REAL Social Impact, The Nature Conservancy, the PNG Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. With support from the American People, USAID works with the Government and stakeholders to support economic development and biodiversity conservation in PNG and empower women as entrepreneurs, leaders, and successful and free participants in PNG’s economy.