

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

WMBL to open access centres around PNG to test new branchless banking model.



15 March 2018

Port Moresby, PNG – A new branchless banking solution will be piloted at six locations in Papua New Guinea with the aim to provide basic financial services to PNG's unbanked women.

Women's Micro-Bank Limited (WMBL) through a partnership with UNCDF's Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) will set-up Mama-Bank Access Points (MAPs) across the country using a low-cost structure. Each MAP will be managed by two staff that are equipped with tablets that uses biometric technology to identify customers and authenticate transactions. This solution will help WMBL to overcome many of the identification challenges that financial service providers in PNG are facing. The new technology also allows WMBL to perform transactions in off-line mode to address the connectivity issues in many remote areas in PNG.

During the pilot MAPs will be set up at strategic locations:

- Port Moresby (National Capital District)

- Kwikila (Central Province)
- Kerema (Gulf Province)
- Madang (Madang Province)
- Maprik (East Sepik)
- Goroka (Eastern Highlands Province)

The project aims to reach out to existing and potential new women clients of WMBL in rural areas who are currently not able to access basic financial services due to the costs associated with travel to distant bank branches. The project will not only offer services closer to the women in these communities, but will also support WMBL to reduce the cost of funding for its loan portfolio through increased mobilization of savings deposits.

“With WMBL clients being 100% women, this project will be a big leap for women’s economic empowerment in PNG. We are grateful for the opportunity to expand our services to reach more communities and to bring the services closer to the women customers,” said Gunanidhi Das, General Manager of WMBL.

“Through this project, we will help break cultural barriers and make it easier for to women to start savings accounts that will not only impact their lives but their families and communities,” added Ricky Mito, Chairman of WMBL.

PFIP Programme Manager Bram Peters said that access has been the biggest impediment for financial inclusion in PNG. “While brick-and-mortar bank branches are expensive to operate, by having a presence through the Mama-Bank Access Points we will be able to reach out to rural areas. This is important as particularly women are more likely to use financial services when they are close by and easy to sign-up for and use,” he added.

In launching the project today in Port Moresby, the Australian Government’s DFAT Senior Program Manager in PNG, Mrs Julienna Leka-Maliaki, said that by investing in programmes like PFIP, the Australian Government was boosting women’s economic empowerment and contributing towards the country’s economic development.

“These initiatives we believe will lead to more women being able to access critical financial services that can help them take control of their own finances and strengthen their control over household budgets,” she said.

PFIP’s support to WMBL will allow it to set up these MAPs in new geographies, which it would not have been able to do on its own considering the financial limitations of a small financial institution like WMBL. PFIP will also provide technical support to implement the pilot through capacity building and bringing in expertise in branchless banking.

If the model is proven successful during the pilot, it will be scaled up throughout PNG and could potentially be replicated in other Pacific Island Countries with similar small to medium sized financial service providers.

About WMBL

Women’s Micro Bank Limited (WMBL) is a licensed Micro-Bank regulated by Bank of PNG. WMBL formerly known as PNG Women in Business Microfinance Institute limited established in 2010. The Bank received its banking business license from Bank of PNG in May 2014. The bank is the (5th)



deposit taking licensed micro bank in the world and more importantly the first women's micro bank in PNG and the Pacific region. With its first few months of operations, the bank has been selected as one of the best 50 companies for women among APEC countries. The bank is a subsidiary of PNG Women in Business which sprang from PNG Women in Business Foundation formerly known as City Mother's Business Foundation, established in 2006.

About PFIP

PFIP is a Pacific-wide ~~programme~~programmer that has helped 1.78 million low-income Pacific islanders gain access to financial services and financial education. It achieves these results by funding innovation with financial services and delivery channels, supporting policy and regulatory initiatives, and empowering consumers.

PFIP operates from the UNDP Pacific Office in Suva, Fiji and has offices in Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Solomon Islands. It is jointly administered by the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and receives funding from the Australian Government, the European Union and the New Zealand Government.

For more information or media inquiries please contact:

Erica Lee - Communications Associate

Phone: +679 3227538 Email: Erica.lee@undp.org Website: <http://www.pfip.org>

