WE, THE LOTE SPEAKERS

BY BASIL PEUTALO
Founder and Director
Freedom Sustainable Livelihood Foundation (FSLF)

A. INTRODUCTION

Hypothetically, the Government of PNG (GoPNG) and its donor partners have set up numerous technical and financial instruments and programs in order to reach out and assist the rural peoples and communities who have demonstrated willingness to help themselves in terms of social, economic and commercial developments utilizing their own resources including land, manpower, time and natural environment to improve their standard of living. Ultimately, these generous outreach programs aim to empower the rural peoples and communities to live and enjoy the benefits gained from the development of their lands and natural resources.

Papua New Guinea among the other Pacific Island nations is the major beneficiary of AusAID annual development budget. Papua New Guinea is also a recipient of generous funding assistance, both loans and grants from other major international donors including World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, China, NZAID and others such as JICA.

These funds with GoPNG’s counterpart funding are often tied to specific projects and programs that are implemented in various parts of the country. It is always good to have a project from one’s area get funding from the PNG Government or one of its donor partners. That is why as a person from the Melkoi LLG Area of Pomio District, East New Britain Province (ENBP), I was happy and very thankful that the Melkoi LLG Area benefited from an AusAID funding for the construction of school buildings and facilities of top-up classes 7 & 8 for its Uvol Primary School.

As a Papua New Guinean I have much interest and experience in getting involved in developments that put emphasis on people benefiting from their initiatives in which they have active roles. I believe that by participating the people will greatly enhance themselves not only in improvement of their area but develop themselves as individuals and as a community.

That is why I would rather see development funding programs managements seek out rural communities that are actually undertaking social, economic and commercial development initiatives for themselves.

These are the aspirations for which such external technical and financial interventions could be better utilized on initiatives that we are embarking on for ourselves now and for our future generations in the Melkoi LLG Area.

B. WE THE MELKOI PEOPLE

We are the Lote language speaking people, called the Melkoi, our tribal name. We are clan-based people who take a visitor in from any corner of the Melkoi Area under our tuele (clan communal house) and take care of him or her as a brother, sister, nephew, or cousin etc if the visitor identifies himself or herself as being affiliated or linked to any of these seven (7) main clans Rama, Menem, Kapu, Avila, Aluka, Amaia and Kaikai Mangmangu. We value greatly our relationships through our alang ina mur, in-laws and relations from other clans who are married into our clan or into whose clans we are married.
Our geophysical identity is called after one of the three or so big rivers that demarcate and intersperse our land. The Melkoi people occupy the area that covers the vast south western end of the Pomio District that extends from the south western coast line into the northern foothills of the central Nakanai range that forms the middle range of the New Britain Island.

See Language map, Papua New Guinea, Map 12, reference number 588 for detail (SIL)

**B.1. Ours is one of the odd eight hundred**

Lote language is one of the odd 800 languages spoken in Papua New Guinea, one of the odd 15 spoken in the New Britain Island, and a further one of the odd 7 spoken in the East New Britain part of the Island. There are of course about 2 or 3 sub-languages spoken by some groups of our people especially up in the hinterlands at the foothills of the Central Nakanai Range. From anthropological point of view Lote (also known as Lohote) is an Austronesian language and spoken by about 6,805 people who live around Cape Dampier on the south coast of New Britain. The language was earlier known as Uvol, after the name of a local river where the first wharf and later airstrip were built. The language, as per Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is scientifically classified as:

*Classification* Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Central-Eastern, Eastern Malayo-Polynesian, Oceanic, Western Oceanic, North New Guinea, Ngero-Vitiaz, Vitiaz, Mengen (SIL)

The 2000 National Census confirms the total population of Lote speaking Melkoi people at 6,805, with 3,508 females and 3,297 males. This is 15% of the total 44,964 population of the whole Pomio District, and a 0.032% of the total population of East New Britain Province.

We are a matrilineal society with the female members of our clans being the custodians of clan lands and traditional intellectual properties. This means that inheritance is derived from the mother side of the clan. In the olden days, this role and position were strongly respected and adhered to in relation to distribution of resources such as land and inheritances. Nowadays, the male members of the clan tend to usurp this role by deciding or actually taking charge of land and resources distribution and usage according to their personal plans and purposes.

Our diets are mostly vegetarian not by culture but by availability and use of types of foods that our people can access. Protein such as fish and meat are occasional treats especially during feasts and times of fishing and hunting. Our people are fisher-folks as much as pig hunters.

Like many parts of the New Britain Island our people have relatively long contact with the outside world though not as long as our compatriots the Tolais in the Gazelle Peninsula in terms of economic development.

**B.2. Melkois in the 21st Century**

Our area was first contacted in passing by outsiders from the Western world during 1700 when British explorer and environmentalist William Dampier came ashore in Uvol. He named two spots in the Melkoi Area where he actually landed, one after himself (Cape Dampier outside Ruach village in the east of Uvol Port) and another, after his second in command Montagu (Montagu Harbor south coast of East New Britain at Tavolo Village) in the west of Uvol Port. From the Wikipedia, the following said of this British explorer’s visit to the New Britain Island. “1700-1914 William Dampier became the first known European to visit New Britain on February 27, 1700: he dubbed the island with the Latin name Nova Britannia.”
Significant and longer contact with the outside world came in about late 1939 and early 1940’s when the first Catholic missionaries came into the area. This relationship between the Catholic Church and the people remains to date and managed from the Headquarter of the Rabaul Catholic Archdiocese at Vunapope, Kokopo, Gazelle Peninsula, ENBP.

We are an administrative constituent of the Pomio District, one of the 6 political composites of East New Britain Province. We are members of the Melkoi Local Level Government (LLG), one of the 5 LLGs in the District and Pomio Open Electorate represented by an elected Open Member in the National Parliament.

There are lots of things in life that many people both in urban centres and well to do areas, do not understand how rural traditional people in a remote areas such as Melkoi LLG Area yearn to access in order to improve their standard of living or just want to be like other Papua New Guineans in the towns without them having to migrate into urban areas.

Having said this, our people are after wholesale makeover of who they are or what they aspire in their standard of living. They wanted to be able to be served by agricultural and income generating services oriented agencies or institutions, afford school fees for their children, have access to better medicine at the Uvol Sub-Health Centre, good all weather road intra Melkoi and Pomio District, and inter East New Britain accessibility by road and shipping (latter is regular but too expensive), and reliable telecommunication network services.

These people are humble subsistent farmers who seemed to accept their lot even though they do have the potentials to bring about the kind of standard of living that they aspire. Lack of proper accessibility, especially road to their provincial headquarters in Palmalmal or Rabaul make them accept their isolation as a fact of life. They can go to Palmalmal or Rabaul (6 hours and 36 hours one way by sea respectively) if they can afford to pay about K200+ each way for one adult on a commercial coastal ship.

If they are selling their cash crops in these district and provincial headquarters they have to pay for that extra cost unless there is someone at their farm gates who could relieve them of these burdens by buying their goods. They are at the mercy of the cash crop merchants at their farm gates in the Melkoi LLG Area. There is an airstrip in the village but it has ceased being used many years ago in the early 1990’s because there are not much economic activities to justify its continued operation.

B.3. Poor landlords and resource owners

They are the landlords of vast areas of fertile land and natural resources therein but they cannot convert portions of these resources into tangible benefits successfully enough.

The situation of these people is a case of “so near yet so far away” in terms of development. They have land, relatively fertile at that and in abundance with the natural resources of forest, wildlife, the sea and its marine resources. These resources are under the custodian of female members of the clans according to custom. They have been cultivating these lands in manner that their fore-fathers and mothers have been doing – shifting cultivation to sustain the family, clan members and supporting traditional linkages and affiliations.

Government agricultural extension officers, often advised the people that they could develop their lands for so called better standard of living through cash-economy. But this is all the extension officers could offer. They could not and have not gone beyond this initial encouragement.

Families and clan members have demonstrated considerable interest and determination to do something about improving their lot. They planted cash crops on their lands that every government
agricultural extension officer and missionaries promoted in their area. Evidence of these interventions still remain with rundown coffee plots, chillie plants or whatever is left of it can be visible among the local vegetation, remains of vanilla vines competing with other vines for space on the overgrown shade trees. There are other smaller cash crops such as pineapples are produced at large volumes but consumed at family households.

It is not practicable and fair to ask these people to go into downstream processing of these natural resources such as pineapple, chillie, copra, vanilla, timber or cocoa as the same underlying problems have yet to be addressed. Appropriate skills and training with reliable and functioning market services must be provided and sustained in all points of these developments.

Copra has been, is still and will remain the mainstay of the economic interests of these peoples. Cocoa, a recent introduction has taken over from copra as a good income generator for these peoples.

Government and modern systems fail to put into physical realities these assurances of improved standard of living through cash crop development. The people are yet to acquire the know-how, the skills and the practices to apply the techniques of these modern systems to first of all sustain cash crop industry, save and invest moneys from these cash crops, and improve their standard of living.

It must be noted that cash crop production is not a full time occupation of these peoples. They are subsistent farmers whose main preoccupation is to grow their own food for family consumption and customary purposes. Hence, they devote most of their time to gardening and when there is need for money for shopping, school fees, customary obligations etc they would go into cash crop production for that much needed cash.

Their poor standard of health with no clean and running water, housing, poor level of education as evidenced in the very low number of their own children graduating from higher learning institutions of the country (in fact a high turnover of boys and girls from this area exiting from lower secondary levels), and unreliable contact and ad hoc visitations from appropriate government agencies at Palmalmal and Kokopo/Rabaul compound their remoteness.

B.4. Ever-dependent on developers

Literacy level among the Melkois is relatively good with 40% of the total population who can read and write in their local vernacular. Data from the SIL Bible Translators who spent about eleven (11) years (1993–2004) among the Melkois state that Literacy rate in Language 1 (Lote language): 40%; Literacy rate in L2 (Tok Pisin Language) 65%, and 40% English. This also shows that the people can undertake skills training and be taught new ideas and methods of doing business or development in general.

This has not been fully developed in a more consistent and constructive manner. These rural peoples are frustrated in not being able to participate positively and constructively in processes of development on their own land at their own pace – between gardening, generating income and other customary obligatory activities. They aspire to organize themselves into community organizations that can provide them with management leadership, systems or organizational skills, and capacity building in which they are active participants. They aspire to be partners with their governments both at District and Provincial levels in development.

Somebody or some group will have to come in from outside and take them through awareness, extension processes and helping to organize themselves into some structured groups or organizations.
Our East New Britain Provincial Government has taken the initiative of setting up “growth centres” whereby areas are identified and leased from traditional land owners in each of the LLG Areas in the Pomio District, and set up infrastructures and programs for social, economic and commercial development initiatives by the local people. These “growth centres” are supposed to be the incubators for micro, small to medium business initiatives by the local peoples. Though “growth centres” concept is an excellent idea, it seemed its implementation is starting at the wrong end with infrastructures being the first to be put in place. The local people should be assisted to get themselves organized in ways that are acceptable to them, socially sensitive to their customs and traditions, with the ultimate goal of implanting the ownership squarely with the local people.

The “growth centre” for the Melkoi LLG Area has gone dormant and there is no indication as to when and whether it is going to be set up at all in the near or distant future.

On another level the people are now being put through awareness and consultation processes in preparation for the implementation of a major and controversial Mukus Sigite forest concession permit under special purposes agriculture and business leases (SPABL). The Mukus Sigite forest concession project is deemed by the East New Britain Provincial Government through its Provincial Forestry Committee a impact project and promises lot of social and economic benefits for the area. The SPABL projects have been under much controversy lately and a special Commission of Enquiry (commenced its work 2nd August after some delay) has been set up in 2011 by the GoPNG to look into the manner and terms with which lands have been acquired or leased by the Department of Lands to these foreign developers. It is claimed that customary lands in the vicinity of 5.2 million hectares have been leased out by the Department of Lands to unknown developers. It has been claimed also that some of these leases are for 99 years. The Melkoi Mukus Sigite forest concession project covers two LLG Areas of some hundreds of acres of Melkoi and West Pomio Mamusi lands.

Mukus and Sigite are rivers of some significance to the people who live within the these areas. There are other rivers and streams as well as features of environmental significance in between the two rivers that are covered under the forest concession project. Oil Palm is mentioned as one of the agricultural activities that will be planted following the logging in the Mukus Sigite Forest Concession Project. Oil Palm is known for its extractive and exhaustive effect on soil nutrients.

The agri-business initiatives that are currently taking place in the area are ideal initiatives that should be utilized as community initiatives and community participatory tools that can be linked to the establishment of such “growth centres’. And if the Mukus Sigite forest concession project is a genuine project the agri-business initiatives may be greatly enhanced by this major intervention.

**B.5 Representation of Developers in Melkoi LLG Area**

Located on the coast and is easily accessible by sea, Melkoi LLG Area through the Uvol Port is serviced with services from both the Government of PNG through its Provincial Government of East New Britain and the Catholic Church.

During late 1970’s the East New Britain Provincial Government has established an administrative office for Melkoi LLG Area with a small staff under the leadership of a LLG Manager. The office is located in the Meletong Ward. It comprises mainly agriculture, fisheries, social welfare, law and order functions. All other functions can be sourced from the Pomio District Headquarter at Palmalmal on need basis.

The Catholic Mission came into the Melkoi area in the late 1939’s under the auspices of the Rabaul Catholic Archdiocese. As usual the mission set up its church buildings and programs all over the area.
and they are coordinated from its base at the Uvol Catholic Mission at Kavu with logistics support from Vunapope in Kokopo.

At Kavu the Mission established a Primary School with classes from Elementary through Primary to Lower Primary classes of Grades 7 & 8. The Mission also established a Sub-Health Centre at Kavu Mission station that services all of the Melkoi LLG Area. This health facility is linked to the main Catholic Church’s hospital at Vunapope in Kokopo for supervision, manpower and medical supplies. The Catholic Church also establishes a Vocational School at Kavu Mission Station. Due to its specialist training in tailoring skills this school gets its students from neighbouring Catholic Mission stations in Malmal in the east and Valanguo and Pililo in the west.

The current Melkoi Ring Road was the initiative of one of the German Missionaries who was the former Parish Priest of Uvol Catholic Mission during the late 1970’s.

One significant initiative that was jointly sponsored by the Rabaul Catholic Archdiocese and the Australian Colonial Administration was the resettling of people from the Melkoi hinterlands on lands belonging to their coastal relations. The rationale for this resettlement exercise was to enable the hinterland Melkoi people to be nearer to services from both the Government and the Catholic Mission. Several generations down the line, and this noble initiative has generated unwanted land disputes between the coastal and the resettlers’ relations.

C. IDEALS OF THE STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

These peoples will be greatly emboldened by what the national constitution, especially the National Goals and Directive Principles of their country, Papua New Guinea state. The National Goals and Directive Principles of the National Constitution of PNG, in some parts underpin these aspirations of these peoples, especially National Goals numbers 1 to 2 and associated Directive Principles.

D. THESE PEOPLE NEED HELP

The Melkoi peoples need help.

Who in rural PNG does not need help? General lack of development caused by lack or poor state of social and infrastructure support services in rural PNG seems so endemic that the Melkoi peoples cannot be the only ones seeking for help. The help is not in the form of hand-outs but in forms that can empower them to understand how they can develop their own resources — land, manpower, cash crops, time and cultural values. In this way communities can be truly satisfied that they have achieved something by and for themselves. They would define their own processes and mechanisms of addressing and resolving their own social, economic and political problems. They would define their own ways of generating their own moneys from their own resources inherited from their forefathers and mothers and meet the social and economic needs of one and all in their families and clans.

Their efforts and aspirations for improved livelihoods need to be upgraded to another level.

As the National Goal number 5 and expounded by related Directive Principles infers the development that is most helpful to the people can only be achieved “primarily through the use of Papua New Guinean forms of social, political and economic organization”. How does this apply remain a rich area of research, studies and trials by academics, researchers and development practitioners unless due to our lack of reliable linkage to researched information and data we are ignorant of the existence of these studies.
The help needed is in both technical and financial form. Technically, the people need persons who are innovative in their approach, sensitive to rural culture, team players but leaders with peoples who have not much exposure to the requirements of modern development goals and ideals. Technically the peoples need materials for resource centre such as libraries and training venues, to construct buildings, solar powered lightings, tools, computer electronic and voice telecommunications systems, vehicles for transportation both land and sea.

Financially any amount is much appreciated.

### D.1 Initiatives

The peoples now have a partner in a commercial organization that is providing them with a market at their farm gates for their cash crops.

Freedom Enterprises Limited (FEL) is a Papua New Guinean commercial entity that is incorporated with Investment Promotion Authority of Papua New Guinea in 2005. FEL has its roots in the Melkoi Local Level Government Area (MLLGA) of Pomio District in the East New Britain Province. Its founding principal, Mr Basil Peutalo is a member of the Kaekae Mangmangu Clan in the Melkoi LLG Area.

FEL’s overall goal is to make profit for its principals in the first instance, and its partners and clients from sales of its services such as in consulting works, products from agri-business income generating activities such as cocoa, copra and other cash crops, and commercial initiatives such as sale of household goods, transport and communication services.

It is also our long term goal to encourage, mobilise and establish savings and investments by participating farmers, members of the communities, public servants and professionals working in the Melkoi LLG Area. Initial contact has been made with Bank South Pacific officer responsible for retail services. It will take a while for the Melkoi LLG Area to qualify for this service. This qualification I believe can be attained through the increased volumes of cash crop and associated commercial activities in the area. This is achievable.

FEL is initiating and developing agri-business, in particular cocoa and coconut as well as other cash crops income generating activities in the Inahele Ward of the Melkoi Local Level Government (LLG) Area. These agri-businesses comprise cocoa and coconut products processing and sales in Uvol in the Melkoi LLG Area, Palm Oil nuts sales to New Britain Palm Oil Limited in the Hoskins Area of West New Britain, and soon Niugini Tablebird chicken project under their Small Holder Scheme at the Nadzab project area along the Highlands Highway, Morobe Province.

It is the firm belief of the proponents of agri-business development incentives of Freedom Enterprises Ltd Kaekae Mangmangu Clan Partnership for Sustainable Livelihoods Program that empowering the people through sustainable agricultural development incentives they will be encouraged to develop their own lands, generating much needed income with which they will improve their standard of living.

It is therefore an innovative marketing strategy that we integrate our commercial goals and objectives with community development approaches and methodologies to foster participatory inputs by the beneficiaries in their own development. The income they generate from their cash crops and produce from their land will help them to improve their standard of living within a framework of sustainable development. A grassroots process and mechanism in the form of a Community Development Unit will be supported by FEL at the levels of participating Wards.
For this end, FEL has embarked on some land-based agri-business initiatives that need to be upgraded and necessarily expanded for commercial goals and objectives. FEL therefore requires necessary external technical and financial interventions to leverage and improve its own initial investments in the initial commercial projects undertaken to-date.

FEL is creating market for the many farmers in the Melkoi LLG Area who are participating under the Freedom Enterprises Limited Kaekae Mangmangu Partnership for Sustainable Development Program by buying cash crops from them and providing technical and financial assistance to help improve their understanding, skills and facilities.

This is demonstrated by the staggering interest and initiative from the people outside of the Kaekae Mangmangu Clan and Sub-Clan communities who turned up at the first day of trading at the Inahele Ward. On the first day, a total of 749 bags of cocoa, that is about 45 tons was processed from cocoa wet beans brought in by not only members of the Kaekae Mangmangu Clan and its sub-clan but farmers from such areas as follows in other parts of the Melkoi LLG Area.

This high level of interest and volumes of cocoa beans produced by farmers in the Melkoi LLG Area is due to the following facts:

- Melkoi LLG Area, like the general Pomio District is a least developed area with very poor infrastructure and social support services from the Governments, both Provincial and National Government.

- FEL commercial services provide alternative markets and prices for the products of the rural farmers.

- FEL eliminates the shipping costs for the many individual cocoa and cash crop farmers by buying the products at farm gate in the Melkoi LLG Area.

- FEL provides not only market for the rural farmers in the Melkoi LLG Area but other support services such as improvement of cocoa fermentries, expansion and or development of existing and new cocoa blocks and cash crops, training and extension support services.

- Externally, Kokopo or Rabaul buying depots for cocoa products are looking to boost their volumes of cocoa products for export. This is due to the devastating effect of the cocoa pod borer that almost decimated cocoa plantations in the whole of Gazelle Peninsula. It will take a while or long time into the future for the disaster to be totally remedied and provide for cocoa production in the Gazelle Peninsula to reach its previous level.

**D.2. A Marketing Strategy**

Our commercial activities are carried out mostly in the Melkoi LLG Area, Pomio District, East New Britain Province.

FEL has established trading arrangements with individual farmers, in the Melkoi and Mamusi West Pomio LLG Areas in the Pomio District. Within the Melkoi LLG and Mamusi West Pomio LLG Areas FEL has initiated a binding system through signing of Memorandum of Agreement. Individual participating cocoa farmers are encouraged to subscribe to the Freedom Enterprises Limited Kaekae Mangmangu Partnership for Sustainable Development Program by signing the MoA. So far a total of 45 farmers have signed the MoA and a further 75 or so are waiting to sign as soon as extra copies of the document are available.
FEL has also established trading arrangements with a buying corporate entity in Rabaul who will buy our cocoa and cash crops when we bring them in for sale.

FEL has access to internet services and has begun initial but limited advertising of its activities, services and products with some interest and mostly acknowledgements. However, FEL believes that in order to sell overseas it must first secure an exporting license from the Cocoa Board of PNG, and that it must set up its own website in its own brand name. This is our medium to long term goal for which we have begun initial contacts and representation to the Cocoa Board of PNG.

A significant strategy for FEL is that we integrate community development ideals with commercial development goals. We work with participating farmers to set up Village Development Committee (VDC) whose function is to facilitate a kind of needs assessment based on well being ranking. Needs identified from this process are then categorized into major developmental topics or themes. The themes are further processed for prioritizing by the community of the Ward in order of importance in relation to their development needs as a Ward. FEL or other resource personnel whom FEL sourced from outside facilitates this process. The priority list is then organized into a simple plan of action according to the format of: Objective, Task/Activity, By Who, By When, Resources Needed, FEL in collaboration with the participating farmers will either contribute towards this developmental plan on its own or assist in seeking funding from outside.

Fundamentally, we are not conducting purely commercial activities but creating conducive environment for community participatory and sustainable development through commercial initiatives as vehicle to progress it.

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE PEOPLE

Through the commercial activities that FEL is leading the Melkoi peoples are assisted to set up their own organization that will encompass their ideals and aspirations for a enhanced standard of living that they undertake themselves.

The agri-business activities under the Freedom Enterprises Limited Kaekae Mangmangau Partnership for Sustainable Development Program serves only as a tool and vehicle for the people to organize, plan and incorporate themselves as a legally certified community organization that will assist them to pursue their socio-economic development goals that are tapped from their lands, rivers, seas, forests, sun, air in sustainable ways.

They need help to benefit from the processes and means of helping themselves. The ideals towards this end are expressed in the fifth National Goal and its Directive Principles.

F. A LET DOWN

The gap between the services from bureaucrats, technocrats, business world, and rural initiatives remains wide as ever. There are government and non-government agencies that are set up specifically to help rural peoples and communities help themselves remain bureaucratic and almost self-serving. It is daunting and can be traumatic experience for rural people to call into any of these agencies to seek help and even simple information on how they can access services from these agencies and programs.

First of all they do not know where, who and how to contact to get into these agencies. And if they get as far as the gate of these agencies, they have to put up with arrogant security guards who seem to have bloated egos more than simple customer service skills. If one does not know the name of the
officer or section/division of the agency that she or he wishes to visit then that is how close one comes to seeing the ‘big boss man or meri’ at the agency.

The worst part of this effort in sourcing assistance of relevant government and non-government agencies is the disservice of “we will get back to you”, which often never comes. One has to extract follow-up responses or actions that are at times grudgingly provided from these agencies.

One can get the feeling that the concerns and interests of the rural people in helping themselves with some help from these developmental agencies are not that important. If they are not too friendly the officers of these agencies would give one the impression that one’s visit is more an interference in their office works.

Of course there are systems and procedures. But relevant officers from these agencies often do not take time to explain, clarify or even help out in completing forms or such requirements to the rural enquirer.

Our experience is no different even though we are familiar with such office or organizational procedures and systems. Having initiated cocoa trading initiatives in the Melkoi LLG Area FEL was inundated with exceptionally high interest from our rural farmers in the area. Our coordinators on the ground informed us that not only farmers from our Inahele Ward are selling cocoa beans to us but also from 8 other areas in the whole of Melkoi.

Indications are that there are more cocoa beans to be harvested and brought to our fermentries from 8 other villages in the Melkoi LLG Area.

The participating Wards in this commercial endeavour so far represent 42% of the total 19 Wards in the Melkoi LLG Area. A further indication of the interest from farmers in the Melkoi LLG Area is the total of 45 farmers who have subscribed on our MoA so far with another 75 and more waiting to sign up.

FEL is now faced with a catch 22 situation where we have spent all our own moneys on start up phase activities – buying and setting up fermentries, buying new seeds, cultivating and planting new cocoa blocks, building new cocoa shed, and do not have any more moneys to pay for these cocoa beans that are brought to our cocoa shed.

We submitted four applications with our documentation of our activities in the Melkoi LLG Area to 4 agencies of the government seeking some assistance for seed funding. To-date we have yet to get feedback as to whether our applications are successful or not. It seems what is urgent for us is not so urgent for officers from these agencies.

We have heard much about initiatives of the GoPNG and joint programs with their donor partners that are set up in the country to assist rural peoples. We have heard so much about leaders both national and international emphasising the point about agriculture and land-based development initiatives as the backbone of the country. What we are not seeing is the trickle-down effect of these instruments and programs to the real agricultural promoters and farmers in the rural areas who live and cultivate their lands.

The GoPNG and its donor partners have set up and are implementing the following programs for agricultural development in PNG:

- GoPNG National Agricultural Development Plan
- Joint AusAID/GoPNG National Agricultural Plan
- Joint World Bank/GoPNG Productive Partnership in Agricultural Program
G. CONCLUSION

Melkoi people have the resources. However these resources cannot be converted into liquidity easily as the peoples do not have the know-how and technology to do that.

They aspire to acquire modern technology and transfer of innovative know-how that is sensitive to their cultural values and customs, environmentally sustainable, and socially conducive to their participatory involvement as partners in their own development.

These people desire to make sense of their current state as producers of raw materials and upgrade their standard of living to some respectable level. They are always willing and have been rising to the challenges of working the land and carrying agricultural activities to earn their livelihoods. Their youths who cannot continue onto higher educational levels or securing jobs in urban or development project sites away from home often return to the village and like their fathers and mothers till the land for family upkeep and cash crop initiatives. But it is always a “push-start” style of life for rural dwellers. That is why urban drifts, law and order, abuse and misuse of substance, HIV/AIDS and other social problems are on the rise even in the rural areas.

Unfortunately, the Government instruments and programs, as well as the private sector services do not seem to be making positive impact on the rural farmers and communities who have demonstrated willingness to help themselves in terms of social, economic and commercial developments utilizing their own resources including land, manpower, time and natural environment. Our government development policies and programs are not realistically connecting to the efforts and aspirations of our rural dwellers.