



# CASE STUDY

## The Arts of Chip-making and Attitude-changing

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### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Through the Leftemap Sista program, CARE International in Vanuatu is working with the people of Tafea Province to help empower women and girls become active and respected members of their society and the economy. Selina is one woman who has become an agent for change in her community through the Leftemap Sista program.

### Meet Selina

Selina David has always been one to stand her ground – but it hasn't always been easy.

The first time, Selina was 20 and her aunt and uncle wanted her to marry. Selina's aunt and uncle had adopted her when she was five, after her parents moved to Port Vila for work. Growing up in Lokatai on the southern island of Tanna, Selina had always wanted to do something worthwhile with her life. She had done well at school, though her family hadn't been able to afford the Year 10 exam fee, so she never got the graduation certificate to prove it. But when her family decided it was time for her to marry, Selina disagreed with their choice of husband. She said no, and in the turbulent months that followed found herself pregnant to another man.

Selina sheltered from the ensuing storm that broke out in her family and her community in Port Vila, staying with her mother for a while. When she returned to Tanna, she chose her own husband, got married, and moved to her new husband's village, the remote, rural community of Lowenata. Time passed and more babies were born. By the time she was 29, Selina had five children, but little else.

"I came to a dark place," Selina remembers. "I was sure that I would never do anything with



Selina has become a respected leader within her community. © Matt Abbott/CARE

my life. I stayed in the village; I stayed in my house. I hadn't finished school, what could I do? There was nothing for me but looking after the children. I still liked my husband, but I thought about leaving him so that I wouldn't end up with more children to care for."

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Selina was holding little hope that things would ever change when CARE came to Lowenata to provide Life Skills training for young women in the community. The training focused on building confidence and relationship skills, and Selina decided to take part – a decision that proved to be a turning point in more than one way.

"Before I attended the Life Skills training, I didn't know about healthy relationships or even how to solve my own problems. Sometimes people would talk about me and I used to feel really sad; I would want to run away and leave my children behind. But now, I feel like I have more confidence and skills to solve my own problems and communicate my ideas," Selina says.

It wasn't long before Selina needed to put those problem solving skills to the test – just a few months after the training, Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Tanna in March 2015. CARE was there to help Lowenata, working with communities to rebuild their food security and livelihoods as part of the disaster response.

Selina joined the women's group that formed to work together to earn an income, learning business, governance and finance skills, growing new crops and sharing their labour and resources. She was keen to learn and soon became the leader of the Lowenata Women's Seed and Tool Bank. When CARE helped Lowenata establish a Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC) to lead the community's disaster preparation and response efforts, Selina became a key member of that too. She has become a strong voice for women on the committee and she is acknowledged and respected as a leader not only for women but for the whole community.

"After CARE came to my village, everything changed," says Selina. "I realised I could be a leader right here in my village, and further too. And CARE gave me an opportunity to do it."

And she certainly is leading – on a number of fronts. The women's group is growing peanuts as a cash crop after negotiating use of community land. Selina has developed a small snacks business, value adding to her family's crops by making sweet potato and banana chips that she sells at roadside stalls across the island and the Tanna airport. She is sharing what she has learned with other women in her community and beyond, teaching them basic business and money management skills and encouraging them to start small businesses of their own. Some, she has taught the art of good chip making, others, she has guided through the process of sewing skirts, from buying fabric and elastic to calculating pricing and profit.

The impact of the knowledge Selina has learnt and is sharing goes well beyond the community's income earning opportunities. Attitudes and expectations are changing – both among women and men.

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“Before, men didn’t want to listen to me when I’m talking. Now, people in my community look up to me; they listen to me and mothers and young girls come to me for counselling. For young girls, I give them advice on good and healthy relationships and how they should plan for their future. For mothers, I give them advice on how we women can keep working together and help each other to find ways to earn income – without relying on our husbands,” Selina explains.

Change in Lowenata hasn’t always come easy, but Selina is still standing her ground. And now, much of her community is standing with her.

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