

Is this Brooker Island?

Japanese technology transforms life on a faraway Milne Bay island

By ALPHONSE BARIASI

WHEN the lights first came on many a night traveller in a dinghy wondered if what they were approaching or passing was indeed Brooker Island in Milne Bay.

In recent weeks, this island community in the Samarai-Murua electorate has witnessed a life-changing moment in their lives.

Apart from the lights, mothers and young girls have ceased running to water holes to draw fresh water for cooking and drinking.

But that is not all; the islanders also have a solar and wind-powered freezer to store fish and other marine products.

This is all thanks to a Japanese water desalination technology that comes with wind and solar power installations.

It is so handy for rural communities that the inventor of the portable water desalination machine has been invited by Japan's envoy to the UN to take his brainchild to the Science, Technology and Innovation forum for the sustainable development goals next month in New York.

Mitsuo Omine and his colleagues from Japan's Y's Global Vision Incorporated were in the country last week to personally hear about the application of their invention in Samarai-Murua.

In fact the portable machine which Omine will take to the UN event on June 5 and 6 was developed after research work based on PNG conditions and needs.

Omine told a gathering last Thursday in Port Moresby that he visited PNG last September and was struck by the realisation that an earlier version of their equipment and indeed others manufactured elsewhere were either too bulky or required large amounts of power not readily available in places where these equipment are needed most.

"I realised that our desalinator available then required 1.3kW of power to run so I returned home and developed the smallest desalinator which runs on only 400 watts of power," Omine said.

When told of the excitement with which one of the first such units was received on Brooker Island in the Samarai-Murua electorate, he said his company was delighted that their equipment was making life for women and children easy.



Pacific International Ltd project manager Jack Talai (second left) and his team on the way to Brooker to install water desalination unit earlier this month. – Pictures courtesy of Pacific International Limited



Villagers taking a look at the desalination unit.

"The company is here to make people happy. We're happy that women and kids are happy. Thank you for choosing our devices," Omine told Samarai-Murua MP Isi Henry Leonard last Thursday. The MP signed an agreement with the PNG supplier of the desalinators, Pacific International Ltd, for the purchase and installation of 21 additional units.

Reactions from the community on Brooker Islands following the installation of the first desalination unit there have been overwhelming, according to Leonard.

When the lights were switched on for the first time, some islanders travelling at night were surprised when they saw "strange" lights on the island and had to ask if it were indeed Brooker Island, the MP related.

"The wind turbines and solar panels not only power the desalinator but also provide

light at night and additional power for a freezer which is being used to store sea food."

The desalination unit for Budibudi is now on its way to the island.

"After Brooker and Budibudi Islands, we will be looking at the whole of Samarai-Murua. I'm very excited."

Leonard said people from other Milne Bay electorates which are also facing climate change and water shortage, have asked him to speak to his colleagues to consider the same technology for their communities.

Pacific International project manager Jack Talai said the cost of the desalinators was affordable to districts such as Samarai-Murua but the logistics involved were a challenge.

"It took two nights and three days to reach Brooker Island by boat," Talai said.

Omine and his team were in Port Moresby last week and were all pleased to hear that their product was slowly but surely gaining ground in PNG.

Omine told *The National* in an email that the Japanese ambassador to the UN had recommended Y's Global Vision's small desalination machine to be exhibited at the Science, Technology and Innovation forum on June 5 and 6 at UN headquarters in New York.

"Our small desalination machine is the smallest in the world, so we want to introduce it at UN meeting place," Omine said.

"And also we introduced it at Abu Dhabi in UAE and Germany this past January.

"We (also) sell it to small boat and yacht owners.

"We exported our desalination machine into 10 countries so far."

For the many low-lying islands and other rural parts of PNG this technology seems for now the best solution to water scarcity and salinity due to climate change.

The biggest challenge, of course is the cost but as the saying goes, where there is a will there is a way.



Wind turbines going up to provide power for the water desalinator, lights and refrigeration.



Mitsuo Omine speaking to an official during a product launch in Abu Dhabi last January. – Picture courtesy of Mitsuo Omine



Wind turbines installed in Brooker Island.