



**Working effectively with women  
and men in water, sanitation  
and hygiene programs**

**Vanuatu Case Study Snapshot**

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### Acknowledgements

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Back cover artwork: 'One Aim' block print, 2009 – "Ol woman mo man i mas gat wan aim nomo – Holem han tugeta mo wok tugeta blong gat gut fiuja". (Women and men must have one aim – to hold hands and work together for a good future.) Andrew Tovovur



# Vanuatu

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Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs provide an opportunity to influence the roles women and men take in WASH and relationships between women and men within communities. WASH initiatives offer a powerful entry point for generating positive gender outcomes. During 2009 and 2010, a research project to explore the links between WASH and gender was undertaken by a team from four organisations: the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology Sydney, the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Live and Learn Environmental Education Fiji (Live & Learn) and World Vision Vanuatu. The research was supported by AusAID through the Australian Development Research Awards grants program.

The research focused on Melanesian communities engaged with non-government organisation (NGO) WASH programs in Fiji (July 2009) and Vanuatu (October 2009). In Vanuatu, two communities participated in the research, both of which had been engaged in WASH projects facilitated by World Vision Vanuatu using the Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) methodology. In using this methodology, World Vision placed particular emphasis on socially inclusive community engagement strategies.

The methodology used in this study allowed community participants to share their own ideas about what women and men valued as changes resulting from the project with regard to women and men's roles and relationships. A strengths-based research approach was used, informed by principles of empowerment, appreciation and participation. The aim was to support a constructive reflection and learning process for community members, NGO staff and researchers. In each case study community, the research team spent two days working with 10-20 men and approximately 20 women. Research activities included story-telling, group discussion, prioritisation, visioning and a pocket voting activity.

This summary details five positive outcomes arising from World Vision Vanuatu WASH projects that were repeatedly mentioned through these research activities by women and men in two communities and describes the major enablers of these outcomes. Names of the communities have been changed to preserve anonymity.



## Relationships between women and men at the family and/or household level have improved

Men showed an increase in respect for women in their family and household, and men were taking an increasing role in hygiene in their home to support their wives. This outcome was valued in both communities, although different aspects were visible in each. In Pulan, whilst women's roles as the main caregivers within the family did not change, improvements in health and hygiene resulted in increased respect for women. In some cases this allowed women to negotiate sharing of more roles in the home. In Nanen, stories focused more around improved communication in the relationship between husband and wife.

“ Previously women were responsible for all household work. But now you must share the responsibility – both men and women – to bring about change in the community.

*Nanen Village male chief*

Water and sanitation information helped improve our lives; it also helped strengthen our relationship in our home, especially family, because we now share responsibility. In the community, we now work more closely together.

”  
*Pulan Village woman*

**“** *It's like a chicken, if it has only one wing it will go in circles. We need to work together and not have women left behind.* **”**

*Nanen Village woman*

In Puluau, there had been a reduction in arguments about water management, as improved access to water removed points of tension. Previously, disputes often arose when women requested assistance from their husbands to fetch water and at times resulted in violent responses from husbands against their wives. Such arguments and violence were reported to have been dramatically reduced with the new availability of water.

**“** *Water has solved family conflicts, especially violence in homes, because most violence happens just because of laziness to fetch water by men. And now we can see happiness in the home, just because of availability of water. Most of the fighting is only about water.*

*Puluau Village man*

*If this is how it is in the future, then there will be no more quarrelling or fighting.* **”**

*Nanen Village woman*

### **Relationships between women and men at the community level have improved**

Men's attitudes towards women in the community had changed. Women's contribution during the WASH projects and in other community work was strongly recognised and valued by men. Men saw women as trustworthy in their contributions to community events and other labour. Men had increased their respect for women which in turn led to valuing their voice in decision-making. In Nanen, women felt that men's recognition of their work was the first step in changing men's attitude towards them, and ranked this as the most important outcome achieved by the project. In Puluau, women felt able to take up roles on the committee because men had recognised their hard work, and because the women themselves recognised that they had a valuable contribution to make.

“*Yu tok wetem action*” [women talk with action] – when women want something to happen they talk and they do it themselves. They put into practice what they learn in workshops.

Puluan Village man

Why women are in the committees? Because men and the majority of the community now trust women just because of their commitment in community works.

Puluan Village man

### **Women are more included in decision making processes in their community**

The WASH projects involved both women and men in participatory processes, and this had helped to create some important ‘firsts’. Women reported that they had taken on leadership roles for the first time within their community, noting that this had built their self-confidence and sense of growing empowerment and also led to increased respect for women in the broader community. Men indicated that they had become more supportive of women having a role in community decision-making and recognised that lack of self-confidence had at times prevented women from sharing their views.

“*I was elected to the committee and am very proud, it is unusual to have a woman on a committee and contribute to decisions e.g. about payment for water etc. I feel more respected by my husband, like my status has improved and I am taking more of a leadership role also in the religious group of which I am a part. In my family the relationship is improved and I am happier.*”

Puluan Village female water committee member

In the past all discussions and decisions were made by the men in the nakamals (traditional meeting places). Women were just kept behind. In this project we came together, almost, and worked together but with different roles.

Nanen Village woman

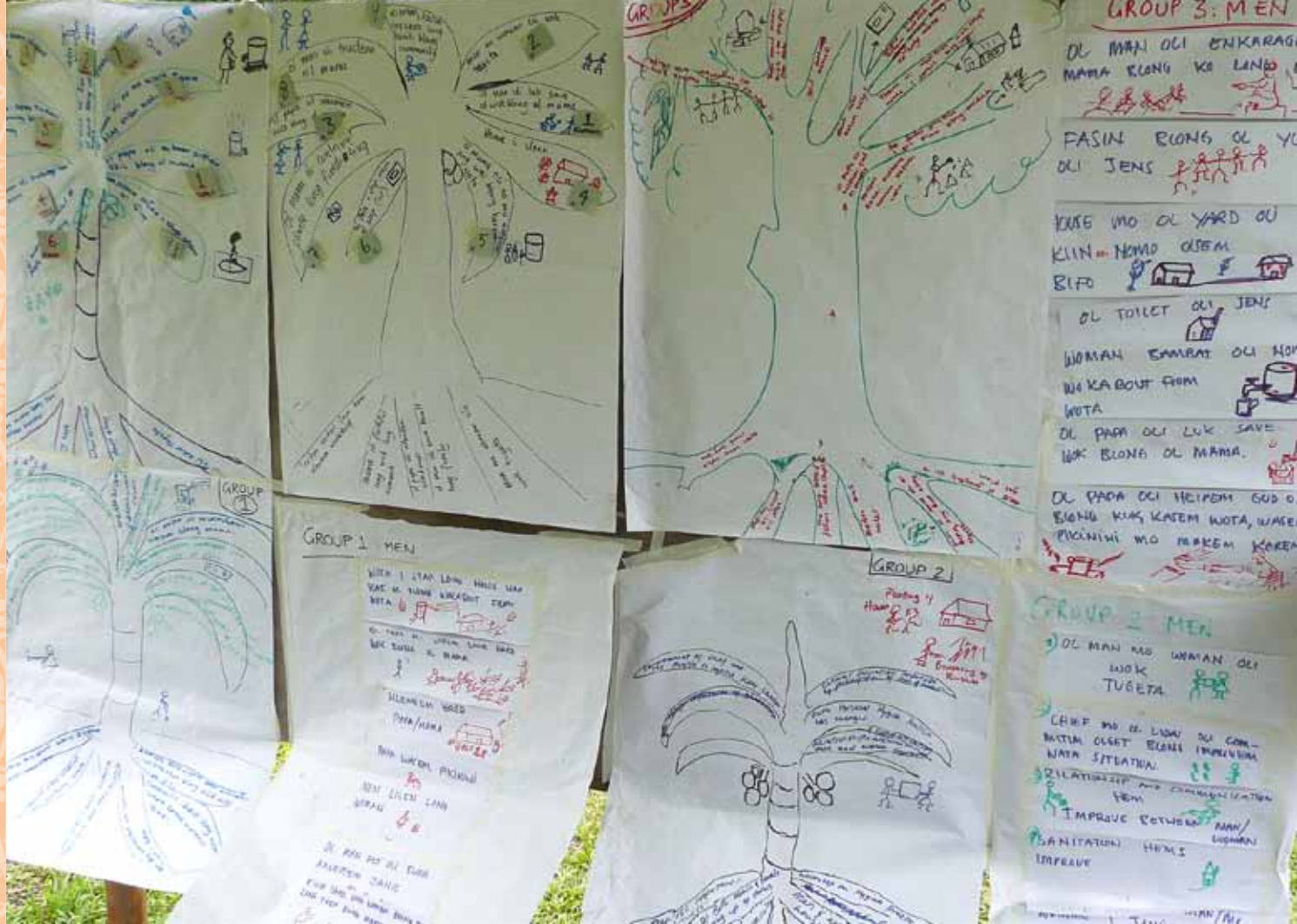




### **Women’s labour in collecting water has reduced and their practical need for water, hygiene and sanitation facilities are met**

In both communities women and girls are the main collectors of water, and also the main users of water. In their care-giving roles in families it was clear that women, more than men, appreciated hygiene education and resulting changes and having easy access to water and sanitation facilities. These practical needs were satisfied through the WASH projects, reducing women’s labour and satisfying their need for WASH in daily life. These outcomes were at the forefront of women’s minds when asked about positive experiences with respect to the project, and were ranked as highly important by both women and men. This outcome is the most commonly reported one for women involved in water, sanitation and hygiene programs however, as is clear from other outcomes identified above, it is only one of many potential positive gender outcomes.





“ In the past they [women] were catching water with bamboo and plastic bottles.... nowadays there is a reduction of burdens.

Puluan Village man

Children every morning used to have to walk long distances before going to the shower. Now it's at home.

Puluan Village woman



I was really struggling to get water from the creek at the coast and our toilets were very poor standard but now we have water here and improved toilets and they are much closer to our house.

Puluan Village woman

## What enabled these outcomes?

### NGO approach

World Vision Vanuatu's approach to community planning was critical to the positive outcomes that eventuated.

- World Vision Vanuatu's approach to WASH was inclusive and participatory and used the PHAST technique as a community planning methodology.
- The World Vision Vanuatu approach was openly stated to be "child focused AND women focused".
- Staff paid particular attention to the needs of women when deciding timing and locations of project activities. They encouraged women to participate and worked carefully with community leaders to ensure women were supported.
- The participatory planning approach relied strongly on the use of pictures which made it enjoyable, accessible and suitable for low literacy groups. As part of this, a 24-hour clock activity was used to raise awareness of the division of labour between women and men and how equitably it was shared.
- In both communities women were elected to the committees following strong encouragement by World Vision Vanuatu staff before and during the elections.
- World Vision Vanuatu's programmatic approach provided for the committees and their action plans to be supported by follow up training on roles and responsibilities for committee members and leadership training.
- There was preparation and follow-up with the male community leaders to support women's role in the process.
- The quality, commitment and attitude of staff members involved in the projects enabled positive outcomes. The staff included locally recruited women and men, all of whom were well versed in the culture, language and dynamics of the communities and had established good relationships with each community.

### Community strengths

Communities believed having strong role models was important for achieving positive outcomes for women and men. In both communities, strong, respected male leaders supported efforts to ensure women's needs were met and their voices were heard. The chief and other community leaders in both communities were fostering appropriate attitudes towards women amongst the men, including respect, assisting in the home and valuing women's participation in committees and decision-making. The men also emphasised spirituality and the church as underpinning the positive outcomes that were achieved and felt that the influence of the church had contributed to changing their attitude. Women said that recognising their own contribution at the community level provided the foundation for positive outcomes, and both women and men said that they had realised that decisions made only by men may not be as good as those that are also contributed to by women.

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