

From the practical to the strategic: creating space for women's leadership through water, sanitation and hygiene programs in Vanuatu

AusAID-ACFID Workshop on addressing gender
equality and violence against women in development
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When women benefit, the whole community benefits.



About the research

- ❑ The research project was undertaken by the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney in partnership with International Women’s Development Agency, Live and Learn Environmental Education Fiji and World Vision Vanuatu (WVV).
- ❑ The focus was on how gender equality can be supported and evaluated within the context of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs in the Pacific. The research incorporated two case studies in Melanesian communities engaged with NGO WASH programs that emphasise community engagement strategies, in Fiji (July 2009) and Vanuatu (October 2009).
- ❑ The research used a participatory, strengths-based approach, focused on identifying successes, and associated enabling factors that might be replicated.



Documenting successes and enablers



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Case study context, Vanuatu

- ❑ The focus today is on Vanuatu and positive gender outcomes identified by teams and participants in WWV WASH projects with rural communities in Tanna and Santo, using Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) to engage communities and strengthen promotion of hand washing and sharing of gender roles.
- ❑ Re-named ‘Nanen’ and ‘Puluan’ to protect the anonymity of participants, the two communities are in rural Melanesia on the island of Tanna, with populations of approximately 602 and 259 people and high levels of illiteracy. Custom is considered to be strong and upholds males in dominant positions as leaders, chiefs and decision makers.
- ❑ Successes were those outcomes that were repeatedly mentioned through the multiple research activities of story-telling, discussion, prioritisation and visioning and some were assessed through a participatory quantification activity.



PHAST approach

- ❑ Based on adult learning principles, PHAST is particularly successful in settings where literacy is low, and makes it easier for women to participate alongside men in the Pacific context.
- ❑ Activities involve analysing health issues in the community including exploring how diseases are being transmitted and effectively blocked, community mapping, three pile sorting (of good, bad and unknown hygiene behaviours), and ranking of technologies in water and sanitation ladders.
- ❑ These activities feed into community planning that includes roles and responsibilities. Each plan is based on the community's own priorities and context.



Summary of gender outcomes: Vanuatu

1. Positive changes in gender relations at the family and/or household level
 - Increased respect given to women by husbands and other men in the household
 - Changes in gender division of labour with men taking on an increasing role in hygiene in their home to support their wives
2. Reduction in violence at the household level
3. Positive changes in gender relations at the community level
 - Recognition of women's hard work in the community
 - Increased trust in women



Summary of gender outcomes: Vanuatu

4. Women's inclusion in decision making processes in their community
 - Women taking on leadership roles for the first time in their community
 - Women's inclusion in committees and decision making processes
 - Increased space and support for women's voice to be heard at community level
5. Women's labour in collecting water reduced and their practical need for water, hygiene and sanitation facilities satisfied

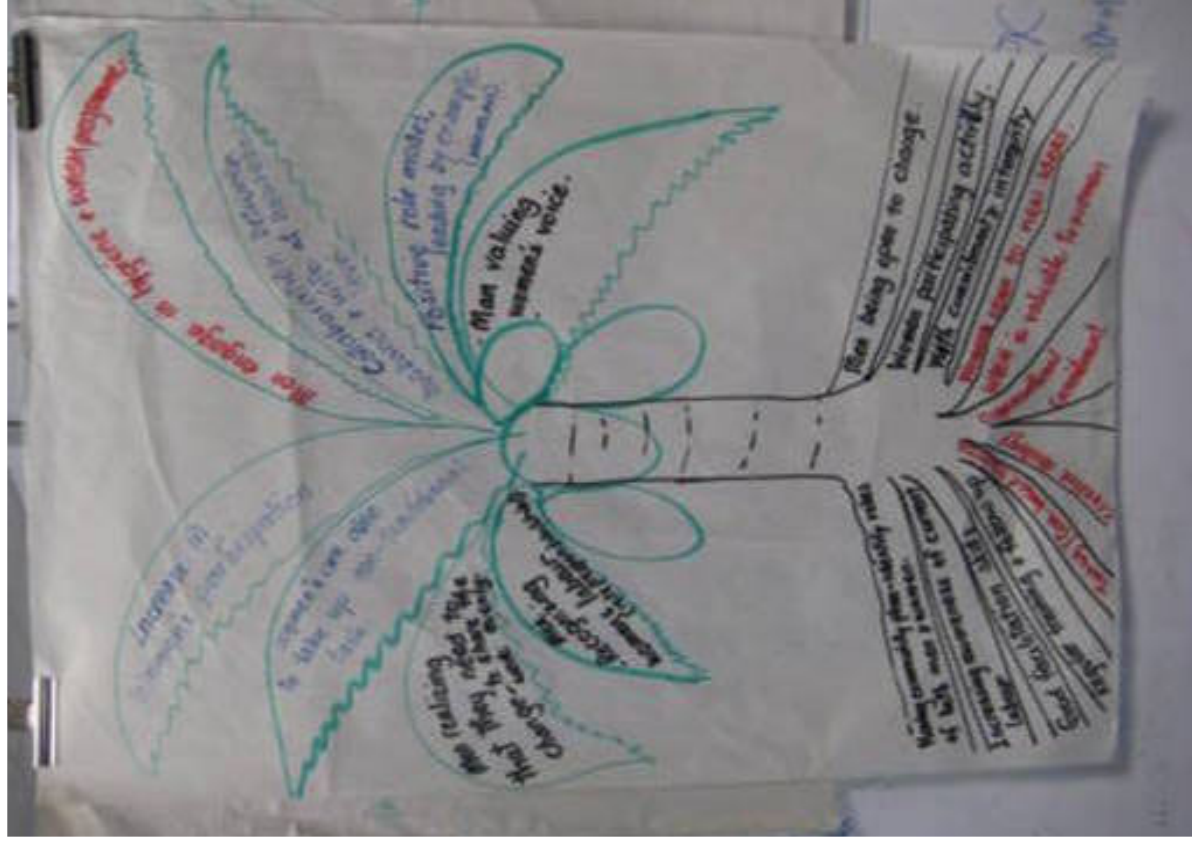
Women's inclusion in decision making processes in their community

- Women taking on leadership roles for the first time in their community, resulting in increased confidence and a sense of individual agency
- Women's inclusion in committees and decision making processes increased space and support for women's voice to be heard at community level
 - Suggests leadership opportunities grounded in traditional gender roles can be a good platform for wider strategic gender benefits and changes



Women's inclusion in decision making processes in their community Cont'd

- ❑ The outcomes on the previous slide relate to changes in women's involvement in positions of responsibility and in decision-making more broadly.
- ❑ The project, with its participatory planning processes (explicitly involving women and men) and advocacy for gender balance in water and sanitation committees, created some important 'firsts' in increasing recognition of women's right to have a voice in decision-making.





Women, men and community leadership

- ❑ Women reported that they had taken on leadership roles for the first time within their community, noting that this was positive in terms of their self-confidence and sense of growing empowerment and further led to increased respect for women within the broader community.
- ❑ Men indicated that they had become more supportive of making space for women's voices in community decision-making and recognised that lack of self-confidence at times prevented women from sharing their perspectives and views.
- ❑ Men's support for including women was considered to have stemmed from another positive gender outcome (increased recognition by men of women's contribution to the community and increased trust in women).



Women on community leadership

- '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, female water committee member).
- 'I was the treasurer last year for the community [water] committee. I was very proud. The men had chosen me and voted for me. I was very proud as I was the first and only woman to be on the committee. I was faithful in attending the workshops, the community trusted me and gave me this position of high trust. It made me feel proud to be a woman. I was the first lady to have a position of responsibility. As the treasurer I was responsible for organising the fundraising as part of the action plan' (Nanen, female water committee member).



Leadership roles & women's empowerment: mutually reinforcing

- Beyond an individual sense of growing empowerment, the inclusion of women on committees and in community level decision-making about water and sanitation matters was positive for women and the wider community and led to a sense of collective empowerment for the women:
 - We used to be scattered and not working together (between the women), now we have representation in the committee. Now women start to talk in meetings, now there are women who help take decisions. Before women didn't talk in community meetings, now they participate and also take decisions. It makes me so proud that we have a voice in development compared to previous years where only men talk. This is through the encouragement from World Vision (Puluan woman).
 - The committee was very important in the project. Women and men always talked together about matters concerning water (Puluan man).
 - In the past all discussions and decisions were made by the men in the nakamals. Women were just kept behind. In this project we came together, almost, and worked together but with different roles (Nanen woman).



Attitudes to women's leadership

- ❑ In both communities it was evident through the voting process that both women and men considered it important that women be on the relevant committee. In Nanen, 92% of men considered it important or very important for women to be on the committee with only one respondent not considering it important, whilst 89% of women thought it important or very important.
- ❑ In Puluau all respondents considered it important that women be on the water and sanitation committee.

Increased space and support for women's voice at community level

For women to participate in decision-making, changes in men's attitude towards supporting women's involvement and genuinely wanting to hear their views is paramount.

– ‘Our dream is that men respect us and they start to do the same work we do and that we be given permission to speak in meetings’ (Nanen woman).

– ‘Previously during the meetings the men would tell us we are women so we can't talk and we remain silent, but now we are talking since World Vision's project’ (Nanen woman).

ANALYSIS - IHARKAK

GENDER OUTCOME	Samir	Gal	Geoff	John	Ellen	Tracy
MEN						
1. Men recognise women's labour + contribute	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)	Spends 1/2 of his money on family (for his, for her)
2. Men + women working together (only + fam)	Participates in household	Participates in household	Participates in household	Participates in household	Participates in household	Participates in household
3. Sharing roles + responsibilities at home	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)	2 men + 1 woman (only + fam)
4. Men respect women more (fam + com)						
WOMEN						
1. Reduction in labour getting water						
2. Improved relationship between men + women at home + com						
3. Women are represented in committees						
4. Women being involved in decision-making						
5. Women being respected						

Enablers





Gender composition of teams: creating space for women's leadership

- ❑ In Santo the female hygiene promoter works with two other male staff as part of a small team that is based for long periods in the inaccessible and isolated North West Coast.
- ❑ Her stories of positive experiences focus on being the only woman working closely with male technical staff as part of the WASH team.
- ❑ She describes the impact of this - on the traditional gender division of labour, her own sense of competence and confidence, and the ability of women in the community to imagine women taking on roles alongside men.



Modeling: helping women and men imagine different roles and relationships

- ‘When I came in to World Vision I didn’t know how to construct all of these slabs. But with the male staff we work as a team. I’ve learnt how to do all of these things – seat raisers, tap stands, soakaways. I had no idea, so it’s a big change. I can do it by myself and help my own community. I don’t need to wait for the male staff. When they aren’t there I can do it by myself.’ (female hygiene promoter)

When asked why she identified this as a success,

- ‘It’s a success because I’m a women and I can do these things. I know in my heart for the other women they are thinking “Yes we can do it”.’



Creating space and time for women's leadership in Tanna

- The hygiene promoter in Tanna, supported by her team, went beyond discussion of the 24-hour clock and workloads as part of the PHAST planning process, to deal with the imbalance in work loads between women and men, and provided opportunities for men to be involved alongside women.

- Her effort to involve men as hygiene advocates resulted in unexpected positive gender outcomes, with men increasingly sharing household responsibilities and playing a greater role in hygiene.

- She has been supported by the male members of the team who encouraged the sharing of roles and responsibilities within WASH committees and brought the message to households.



Seeing women's contribution matters

- ❑ For women, realising their own contribution and worth enabled other gender outcomes. One group of women mentioned that they realised through the project that they had an important contribution to make at the community level and this increased their ability to participate in committees and decision making.
- ❑ Another group mentioned that both women and men had realised the need for change, and that decisions made only by men may not be as good as those that are contributed to by women.
- ❑ Men also shifted in their recognition of women's work and the value of their contribution. In both communities men noted that the women worked extremely hard to make the water and sanitation project successful and in doing so gained the respect and trust of men.



Guiding principles

- The research findings are being used to develop guidance material for practitioners. This will propose **four key principles** to support field workers to work more effectively with women and men in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives, at the community level and at the family or household level.

Principle 1 – Facilitate participation and inclusion

Focus on ways of working that enable women, men, girls and boys to be actively involved in improving their water, sanitation and hygiene situation.

Principle 2 – Focus on how decisions are made

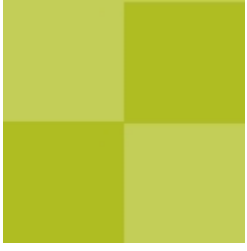
Enable women's and men's active involvement in the ways decisions are made within the project and in WASH activities.

Principle 3 – See and value differences

See, understand and value the different work, skills and concerns of women and men related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Principle 4 – Create opportunities

Provide space and support for women and men to experience and share new roles and responsibilities.



For more information...

- www.genderinpacificwash.info
 - Includes detailed case studies for Vanuatu and Fiji, articles, and (soon) guidance material for practitioners

Photos: Gai Halcrow, IWDA

