



CASE STUDY

The Women Taking up Tools in Tafea

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Globally, CARE International puts women and girls in the centre of our programs because we know that we cannot overcome poverty until all people have equal rights and opportunities. When CARE in Vanuatu started work on constructing and rehabilitating sanitation facilities and water systems across the islands of Tanna, Aniwa, Futuna, Aneityum and Erromango, we prioritised engaging with women in the communities. Two women joined CARE's WASH technical team in November 2016, paving a way for new thinking on gender roles and opportunities.

CARE's female technical team members

Vanuatu has always been an agriculture-based economy, but year by year, things are starting to change – especially for women. Growing food for their own household is still the most common form of employment among ni-Vanuatu, with 49% of women engaged in subsistence farming. However, the proportion of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has almost doubled over the last 20 years, and almost half the people who worked overseas as part of seasonal worker schemes – a significant source of income generation opportunities for ni-Vanuatu – are now women.¹

Yet, like in many countries worldwide, employment opportunities in Vanuatu remain split down gender lines, with industries such as childcare and domestic services dominated by women and industries such as construction and manufacturing dominated by men. Entrenched, traditional beliefs about the role of men and women in the household often contribute to the divide, which in turn can reinforce discriminatory behaviours that restrict women's participation in society on a range of levels.

For this reason, addressing gender inequality as a root cause of social injustice is a key focus of CARE International's work around the world, and is integrated throughout all of CARE's development programs. Accordingly, including women in all aspects of the WASH program that CARE International in Vanuatu launched in Tafea province in September 2016 was a key priority of the program design. For the technical team, who are responsible for constructing the latrines and handwashing stations, installing or repairing rainwater harvesting systems, and installing and repairing piped gravity-fed water systems, this mainly involved ensuring that women in the communities where the work was being carried out were invited to participate in the community demonstrations that always form part of the construction projects. For the first two months of the project, every technical team meeting included a discussion about engaging with women in the community to establish the practice as a core part of the day-to-day work.

To further promote women's involvement in the project, CARE also actively targeted women recruits for the technical team. Staff from CARE's Women and Girls Empowerment team assisted with this process, encouraging

young women within their community networks to consider volunteering with the WASH technical team to build new skills and broaden their employment options. In mid-November, Ruth and Marianne joined CARE as the technical team's first female volunteers. Like CARE's other community volunteers, they have received on-the-job training and mentoring, as well as a small stipend to help cover their costs.

"I had done a little bit of work in construction at church working groups, and I heard that CARE was providing opportunities to help communities so I decided to volunteer so that I could help communities too," says Ruth. "Since I joined the technical team, I have learned a lot of new things that I never knew before."

"When Ruth and Marianne first started working with the team, it was a bit hard for them to adjust to being women working in a field that is seen to be only for men," explains Andrew Koda, WASH team leader. "During the first week, the two women were very shy and it was very hard to get them to open up to the boys on the team. But today they are so confident with the work that they have been given responsibility to oversee some areas; they are very competent members of the technical team."

Ruth and Marianne have been a vital part of the construction work that has taken place in schools in Whitesands, Tanna, building latrines and handwashing stations among other projects. Apart from the practical contribution they make to the team, carrying out the same tasks as the other workers, Ruth and Marianne also play an important part as role models for other women and especially girls in the schools where they are working.

"It's exciting to see women in CARE's technical team," says Tauline Nahi, a woman from Loweipeng. "It's good for women to learn these skills and to show other women that they can also do the job."

Evelyne Nahi, a student at Loweipeng Secondary School, agrees. "At first, I thought it was funny for girls to join the technical team. But then it was good to see the women constructing latrines, because now they can construct their own. Other people in my community also thought it was a good idea for women to learn about construction because then men and women know how to build things, and if a woman's husband dies, she will know how to do things herself."

"Now I would consider working in construction – I know I could do it if I wanted to work in that sort of job."

Now, Ruth and Marianne have become even more than an example to other women, with the two also offering a new women's perspective on the team's work that has helped to shape ongoing WASH projects.

"Even though Ruth and Marianne started with very low technical knowledge and experience in construction work, they have contributed a lot to the team in helping us to consider and include gender aspects and diversity in WASH," says Andrew. "Recruiting women in the team has really impacted on how the



Marianne is one of the first female volunteers in CARE's technical team, and is proving to communities across Tanna that women are capable of working in any area they want to. © Jeffrey Iausalok/CARE

boys handle gender in WASH. The team is much better at planning ways to include women and girls in our activities and the men often ask for input from the female team members, which improves the planning process.”

As work on CARE’s WASH program continues in Middlebush in Tanna, Ruth and Marianne are also continuing to put their skills to good use, and now hold full-time positions with CARE as WASH technical officers. No matter where the two go from here, the legacy of their work will live on.

“When I started working with CARE, my family said this work is for men only – but here I am doing it!” says Ruth. “Now my family says it’s good because when I go back to my community I can help my community to do the same jobs.”

“It has been eye opening for the people in the community to see women taking up construction tools and doing carpentry work and other tasks that people always suggest are men’s jobs,” says Andrew. “Now Ruth and Marianne correct men in their measurements and teach them how to do seat risers and so forth. Most people in the community are so impressed by what that the women have been doing.”

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¹Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011