



## World Vision Solomon Islands Community Channels of Hope

### Reducing gender-based violence in Solomon Islands

World Vision Solomon Islands has been working in 30 remote communities in Guadalcanal’s Weather Coast and Temotu province with a powerful and effective method to change deeply entrenched attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality.

In Solomon Islands, gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious problem and is perpetuated by local beliefs around acceptable social practices. There is frequent use of severe physical punishment to discipline women who are seen as transgressing their prescribed gender roles and a lack of support services available to women who are survivors of violence.<sup>1</sup> For example<sup>2,3</sup> :

- Two out of three women have experienced physical violence from an intimate partner
- 38% of women’s first sexual experience was forced
- 64% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 reported physical or sexual violence in the last 12 months
- 18% of women who had experienced violence reported they had sought help from health services, shelters, or legal advice, or from people in positions of authority.

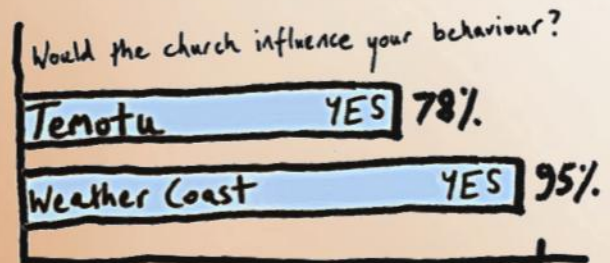
With support from the Australian Government, World Vision is addressing GBV using its ‘Channels of Hope for Gender’ methodology<sup>4</sup>. This approach partners with church leaders to affect positive change in the community by engaging them in discussion about gender equality and non-violence through faith messaging.

**“2 out of 3 women in Solomon Islands have experienced physical violence from an intimate partner.”**

The project also works with existing support services by providing links for survivors of violence and building capacity to address issues of substance abuse and conflict and supports church and community leaders to refer survivors to services.

The Channels of Hope for Gender approach was selected as an ideal fit for the socio-cultural context in which over 90% of the population in the project locations describe themselves as Christian and attend church regularly.

A recent World Vision household survey found that 78% of respondents in Temotu and 95% in the Weather Coast area indicated they would change the way they treat their spouse if advocated by their church leaders.



<sup>1</sup> Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A Study of Violence Against Women and Children. Noumea: SPC (Secretariat of Pacific Countries). 2009, p3

<sup>2</sup> The Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey of 2006-2007

<sup>3</sup> Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A Study of Violence Against Women and Children. Noumea: SPC (Secretariat of Pacific Countries). 2009, p3.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘Channels of Hope for Gender’ methodology was developed by World Vision International

The Weather Coast and Temotu ‘Community Channels of Hope’ (CCoH) project began as a two year project funded by the Government of Australia, through its Solomon Islands High Commission. This first phase ran from April 2013 to March 2015, and has since been funded for an additional two years.

## The Project

Weather Coast is the southern region of the largest island of the Solomon Islands (Guadalcanal). Temotu is the most remote province: small, scattered islands off the eastern tip of the Solomon Islands archipelago.

World Vision International's Channels of Hope methodology addresses the complexity of initiating and supporting positive change in social norms. Internationally, World Vision has recognised the part religion plays in forming individual and social norms. As such, to change negative norms around gender and gender-based violence, the Channels of Hope approach works through a community's predominant religion. In the Solomon Islands context, solid Christian analyses and messages from the Bible that promote positive gender relationships were the basis for teachings and stories.

**“... usually with these kinds of programs you see men are ones who talk...but in this project women are telemaot [speaking out] some things”.**

### Young woman in Temotu

Through this project, World Vision aimed to reduce GBV in 30 communities by delivering the following outcomes:

1. Changed attitudes and behaviours in relation to the value of men and women, girls and boys.
2. Improved linkages to support services for survivors of domestic violence.
3. Improved methods of addressing substance abuse and conflict, including domestic violence.

During the CCoH project, church and community leaders were trained as positive gender advocates via a series of intensive workshops. They were regularly supported with coaching to assist them to take action in their communities through sermons, Sunday School activities, community workshops and awareness-raising events. Song competitions and dramas on GBV and gender equality were held and well attended by the community, including children.

The leaders' influence was complemented with the formation of 'Community Hope Action Teams' (CHATs) in each community. These teams comprised of keen activists from the congregation and wider community to create and conduct local action and information-sharing about gender, peace, positive conflict resolution and substance abuse.

Also in each community, a Focal Point person was trained as a volunteer to link survivors of gender-based violence with support services.

## The Evaluation

**In Komuta'a the Pastor found this project to be life changing for the families it has touched. He explained that he will be in church preaching the CCoH messages and “sometimes men will have tears drop, running down their faces... they cry and ask (the Pastor) to prayer with them”.<sup>5</sup>**

In 2015 the University of Queensland completed a research evaluation of the project, based on extensive interviews and group work in 11 communities in the project regions.

The method of evaluation was a qualitative study conducted by the University's School of Political Science and International Studies, which was complemented by a World Vision household survey.

The research commenced with a World Vision project staff reflection workshop followed by community focus group discussions and interviews with key informants (who represented a cross section of community project stakeholders).



Temotu

In total, the research included interviews with 15 key informants in the Weather Coast area and 14 in Temotu as well as six focus group discussions in Weather Coast area and five in Temotu.

The evaluation findings were shared with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) gender programme managers in Honiara who were supportive of the findings and recommendations for improvement.

<sup>5</sup> Curth-Bibb, Dr J., et al, *Evaluation Report, Weather Coast and Temotu Community Channels of Hope Project Phase 1*, University of Queensland, 28 August 2015

## Project Outcomes

**“Start for change, yes. Even for myself... even before, I was violent. I find this program changing me – makes roles clearer...” Focal Point community volunteer, Marau, Weather Coast**

The University of Queensland found high levels of community support for the CCoH project and that the biblical messaging sits in harmony with cultural and social norms in both project locations. Without prompting, almost all communities visited explicitly requested the project be extended.

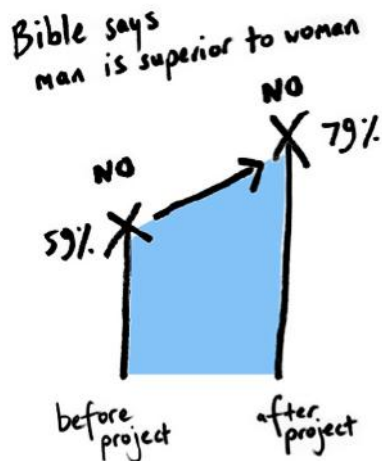
The research determined the following results in relation to the three main intended project outcomes:

### I. Changed attitudes and behaviours in relation to the value of men and women, girls and boys

- The project messages are addressing the needs and priorities of those affected by gender-based violence.
- There is considerable evidence of positive change attributed to the project. For example, in the Weather Coast household survey, in response to the question:

*‘The Bible affirms that man is superior to woman’*

79% of respondents disagreed, compared to a baseline of 59%.



- In all six of the Weather Coast communities where research took place, senior church leaders were preaching CCoH messages through church services and various church activities, as well as being involved in staging CCoH awareness talks and activities.
- In Temotu, senior church leaders are supportive of the project, even though the project had not actively engaged senior church leaders to the same extent as in Weather Coast.

- CHAT membership appeared to be strong and diverse in several Weather Coast communities, generally including: women leaders, faith leaders, youth leaders, and chiefs in areas where the project is working well.
- Women in three Weather Coast focus group discussions reported the project had started a public agenda that was benefiting women and children. These views appeared to be strongly held by the women who regularly reported that the biblical content gave them a freedom to talk about violence inside the home, for the first time ever.



Weathercoast

- In the majority of project communities, women reported a high level of satisfaction with the messaging and support mechanisms. They also observed reductions in the frequency and severity of violence and improvements in the communities' response to violence. Importantly, women attributed these changes to the project.
- The project's youth communication material in Temotu has reportedly been very important for young women, girls and boys, providing a source of information for understanding gender relations especially in terms of gender roles and violence.

### 2. Improved linkages to support services for the survivors of domestic violence

- Focal Point persons now have strong relationships with service providers and are supporting survivors to reach services.
- Focal Point persons are reasonably well known in both project locations. The household survey found that 68% of respondents from Temotu and 95% of respondents in the Weather Coast could identify someone in their community who is a focal point person who can help people find services to cope with family violence.
- The police are well integrated into the project. Police in Marau police station (Weather Coast) explained that the CCoH project is helping to align the community's faith, culture and the law. As a result, one officer asserted "the places to hide (excuses for violent behaviour) – we are taking them away".

### 3. Improved methods of addressing substance abuse and conflict (including domestic violence)

Where substance abuse training has been delivered, both police and community members report a high level of satisfaction with the knowledge and skills they have gained.

Two Weather Coast area communities included in the study have had surprisingly positive results – including successfully negotiating with narcotic growers and suppliers to either destroy their own plants or stop the circulation of drugs.



*Weather Coast community members working together to stop gender-based violence.*

### Learnings and Recommendations

The evaluation research suggests the CCoH project has had the greatest impact when it has been able to recruit existing community and religious leaders into project roles.

The CCoH project is implemented more effectively in Weather Coast communities than in Temotu. Weather Coast is a more accessible region; project communication is effective and volunteer selection and cohesion of the project with existing community bodies is very successful.

Some key recommendations resulting from the project evaluation are as follows:

1. The majority of training and capacity development should be delivered within the community, rather than centralised training facilities.
2. Recruit and nurture both male and female Focal Point people in each community.
3. Ensure that the messages addressing GBV are fresh, evolving and increasingly sophisticated.
4. Work closely with communities to adapt the youth communication material (where necessary) to the context.
5. More prominently incorporate the centrality of chiefs in interrupting violence, settling disputes, delivering justice and informing and enforcing norms in the approach/design.

6. Intentionally work with existing community and church group structures.
7. Strengthen links in Temotu with clinics and aid posts and develop awareness about the importance of getting to the clinic immediately after sustaining an injury or being otherwise assaulted.
8. Support the development of a wider range of events and activities to promote ongoing discussion about gender roles, violence and substance abuse - including: participatory drama events, staged shows, movie nights, sporting events, music days and expand the song competitions. Stage sporting events to encourage youth participation, in particular young men.
9. Develop consistent mechanisms for communities to select and remove volunteer advocates and activists.

### Conclusion

The Channels of Hope for Gender approach is locally appropriate and effective. As such, the CCoH project is making a valuable contribution to the reduction of GBV and improvements in gender equality across 30 remote communities in Weather Coast and Temotu.

World Vision Solomon Islands acknowledges it could not have achieved the project goals and benefitted the project communities without the ongoing support of the Australian Government's aid program.

