



CHANGE, HOPE, INCLUSION, LOVE AND DEVELOPMENT (CHILD)

Vanuatu | Progress Brief
(2022–2027)



About this report

This progress brief summarises results from World Vision Vanuatu's mid-term review of the **Change, Hope, Inclusion, Love and Development (CHILD) for Children in Vanuatu Project**, supported by the Australian Government through the **Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)**. The review was conducted by independent consultant Bethany Boyer-Rechlin, reviewed by Amy Gardiner, Sofia Lardes and Antonia Salamat, World Vision Vanuatu, and Katie Chalk and Darin Roberts, World Vision Australia. For more information, contact ancp@worldvision.com.au

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Front cover photo:
The CHILD project fosters strong family relationships.



SUMMARY

Goal	Vulnerable children in Vanuatu are safe, protected, resilient and healthy
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 1: Children in target communities experience improved safety and protection • Outcome 2: Children, women and people with disabilities in target communities have improved health and hygiene • Outcome 3: Children's needs and voices are driving the priorities of national partners.
Timeframe	2022-2027
Participants to date	2,565
Participants, targeted by project end	8,275
Location	Shefa, Sanma, Tanna Islands, Vanuatu

BACKGROUND

Violence against women and children is a major concern in Vanuatu. The impacts are profound, including as a driver of physical and mental disability, which in turn creates greater vulnerability to violence. To break the inter-generational cycle of violence, it is critical that girls and boys, youth and people with disabilities are protected from gender-based violence in families and relationships, and that community and local systems are strengthened to prevent and respond to violence when it occurs.

The **Change, Hope, Inclusion, Love and Development (CHILD) for Children Project** aims to reduce violence against children through community action in **Shefa, Sanma, and Tanna Island, Vanuatu**. Launched in July 2022, the project will work with 8,275 people (51% female, 11% with disability) by June 2027 to raise community awareness of violence and discrimination against children, alongside inclusive, gender-sensitive approaches to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and disaster preparedness and response.

HOW IT WORKS (THEORY OF CHANGE)



HOW DOES WASH HELP WITH CHILD PROTECTION?

Setting up water and sanitation that everyone in the community needs leads to discussion and education on rights and specific needs of different groups within that community. Additionally, WASH can be connected to climate change education and early warning systems, recognising impacts such as floods, droughts and cyclones are significant contributing factors to gender-based and family violence. Through this process, communities develop their own knowledge and understanding of issues like child abuse, its impact, and how to prevent and respond. The project can then support development of stronger demand-led community protection and disability inclusion initiatives.

TO DATE, THE PROJECT HAS UTILISED FIVE DISTINCT PROGRAMMING APPROACHES:

Strong Family Program	<p>Strong Family is a six-week parenting and family resilience program that equips caregivers with positive parenting techniques while providing children affected by violence with a safe, supportive space for healing through play, art, and mindfulness. Drawing on evidence-based, trauma-informed and therapeutic approaches, the program helps parents and caregivers strengthen their relationships, understand child development, and manage behaviour in healthy, non-violent ways. At the same time, children take part in creative, play-based activities that build self-worth, emotional awareness, and coping skills.</p>
Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)	<p>The MHPSS workshop is a one-day, evidence-based and trauma-informed program for families. Developed as a programming adaptation following the magnitude 7.3 earthquake that struck Port Vila in December 2024, it uses play-based approaches such as art, storytelling, and mindfulness to equip parents and carers with strategies to support children through distress, while children take part in creative activities that build resilience and self-worth.</p>
Other REACH Centre Programming	<p>Other child-focused programming at the REACH Centre included supporting children to safely participate in restorative justice processes linked to the Men Be the Change program. Through these processes, children's perspectives were shared with men in correctional centres who were preparing to return to their communities.</p>
Disability Awareness and Are you Disaster Ready trainings (EPIC Life)	<p>EPIC Life is a training package providing carers of people with disabilities with the knowledge and skills they need to better support the people they care for, as well as including elements of community-wide training focused on the three main A's of disability inclusion: Awareness, Acceptance and Action. The CHILD project delivered two EPIC life modules: the introductory Disability Awareness training, and the Are You Disaster Ready module. As part of the training, households of people with disabilities received vital disaster preparedness kits.</p>
Rainbow Theatre Plays	<p>Vanuatu NGO Wan Smolbag's Rainbow Theatre is a theatre group comprised of people with disabilities and their carers. They develop and perform plays on topics such as WASH, nutrition, and disaster preparedness, all with a strong disability inclusion message. For the CHILD project, the group performed a series of plays focused on disability inclusion and disaster in target communities.</p>
Child Wellbeing Research	<p>The Child Wellbeing Research captured children's voices and perspectives (aged 14 to 18) on challenges that impact their wellbeing, relationships and life choices. The core research questions explored were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are children experiencing child protection and personal safety in Vanuatu? How do they experience these things in terms of their protection, considering the impacts of labour mobility, climate change and disasters? 2. How do these experiences impact children's relationships and life choices? <p>The research demonstrated to the government how children's needs and insights can inform child-focused policy across all responsible areas.</p>



Women and young people with disability are supported with improved health and hygiene through the CHILD project.

PROGRESS TO DATE:

- **Responded to natural disasters** (Tropical Cyclones Judy & Kevin, 2023; Port Vila Earthquake, 2024) by adapting activities and developing responsive approaches, including **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) trainings**.
- Implemented **Strong Family workshops** (reaching **208 children and 237 adults**), improving emotional regulation and reducing the use of physical discipline.
- Conducted **EPIC Life disability awareness trainings** (reaching **758 people**) and **Rainbow Disability Theatre performances**, reducing stigma toward people with disabilities.
- Completed **Child Wellbeing Research**, with the next step to use the results to influence policy priorities.
- Strengthened **safeguarding policies** across **13 partner organisations**.

ADAPTING TO CONTEXT

The project timeframe included two massive disaster setbacks for Vanuatu as a nation: Category 4 Tropical Cyclones Judy & Kevin (TCJK) in March 2023 and a magnitude 7.3 earthquake in December 2024. This required some adjustment to project timeframes, especially to planned WASH in Tanna given the need for more direct community response and recovery efforts. However, it also called on project strengths, with the Port Vila REACH Centre rolling out their MHPSS training package for post-earthquake trauma needs.

The project also adjusted approaches as staff learned more about the communities they were working in. For example, in Tanna, the team found that support for people with disabilities often takes place at a full community level (with several people sharing responsibility, rather than being the responsibility of a single dedicated carer). As a result, the project adapted its approach to EPIC Life Carer's Training, delivering modules to larger community groups rather than on an individual basis as was originally intended.

ABOUT THE MID-TERM REVIEW

World Vision Vanuatu commissioned a mid-term review in the project's third year to inform local and national decision-making, document evidence of good practices and support donor reporting. This mid-term review was built around participant views, selecting a qualitative story-sharing methodology with culturally appropriate questions and tools. The data included:

- **A desktop review of relevant project data**, including the project design and baseline report, project training materials, annual and semi-annual project reports, and monitoring data.
- **Outcome Mapping activities** conducted with both the WASH and REACH Centre teams, to identify likely project accomplishments and challenges.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** conducted with project participants, community members, government, and civil society stakeholders, to test whether the information from outcome mapping could be independently validated.

Stories told in focus group discussions were analysed to test whether viewpoints were sufficiently consistent to draw a conclusion, and also to allow unexpected or negative results to emerge.

METHODOLOGY LIMITATIONS INCLUDED:

- **Recent timeframe for certain initiatives:** In some cases, discussions took place too soon after CHILD activities to be confident that any changes in knowledge or behaviour could be linked to the project. This was particularly the case for disaster risk reduction initiatives.
- **Project implementation delays:** Given setbacks from Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin (especially in Tanna) and the December 2024 quake, relatively few WASH activities were conducted before the review took place. No data on menstrual health and hygiene or upgrades to WASH infrastructure was available. Likewise, while the child wellbeing report was complete, it had not yet been widely shared to influence child-focused policy.

KEY FINDINGS

- Outcome one is on track, with Strong Family workshops being regularly implemented and strong progress in behaviour change (e.g., improved emotional regulation, positive parenting practices).
- Outcome two is partially on track. While all communities have been reached by EPIC Life disability awareness, and there have been strong examples of behaviour change (such as calling people with disabilities by their real names), Menstrual Health & Hygiene (MHH) training and sanitation upgrades have been delayed until the final years of the project.
- Outcome three is on track, with the Child Wellbeing report successfully finalised (although widespread stakeholder dissemination will take place in the final years of the project).
- Sustainability is promising, with both Strong Family and EPIC Life found to be simple, engaging and culturally relevant. It was clear from stories collected that people remembered and used what they had learned and told others in their community as well.

POSITIVE CHANGES

SHIFTS IN KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

Both adult and youth participants were able to share examples of new things they had learned through participation in the Strong Family and EPIC Life programs, such as the importance of parent-child time, and prioritising disability needs during a natural disaster. Some examples of sustained behaviour change were also discussed: parents who had attended Strong Family were now using violent discipline less regularly; EPIC Life participants not only recognised the importance of using the names of people with disability but were actively doing so; a mother indicated that her daughter now regularly shared her feelings, including her love, which in turn has increased her own emotional sharing.

For Strong Family, these findings on behaviour change are reinforced by quantitative data collected during workshop pre- and post-test comparisons. Before the workshop 24% of youth (n=30) said they would talk to someone else if they felt upset. After the workshop, the percentage increased to 42%(n=21)¹.

CHANGED EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Strong Family had a positive impact on emotional well-being for youth. Participants reported positive emotions during the workshop, feeling happy and making new friends, and developed increased self-confidence and ability to manage negative feelings, including suicidal thoughts. At the same time, a comparison question on emotional well-being outside the workshop had mixed results, with the proportion of young people saying they felt happy or very happy over the past week dropping from 83% beforehand to 56% after the workshop. This result may not necessarily mean that young people were made unhappy during the workshop. Given that talking about emotions, especially negative ones, is not generally acceptable in Vanuatu, it may have been that youth were more comfortable articulating this after the workshop.

In addition to the Strong Family program, REACH Centre staff reported positive emotional well-being impacts from the MHPSS workshops conducted after the Port Vila earthquake in 2024, as well as their work to support the involvement of children in restorative justice processes.

¹ All results cited are statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval or higher. "n" is used to represent the number of youth meeting the given criteria. It is worth noting that 126 youth answered the pre-workshop survey, while only 50 answered the post-workshop survey which may impact the results.



A young girl smiles as she chooses a picture to demonstrate her feelings at a Strong Family session.

PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Interviews with Tafea Province government stakeholders confirmed the value of collaborative planning with civil society on child protection. After a workshop facilitated by CHILD project staff, local government connected more closely and consistently with Osnalmok, an organisation for people with disabilities (OPD). This is an indicator of sustainability which will hopefully lead to more effective disability-inclusive services and consultations.

TESTIMONIES OF CHANGE

“Before, parents would just boss the children around and ask them to do chores. Parents bring up their children the way their parents brought them up. Often, hitting or swearing at the kids was just the way things were done. But with these workshops, we learned that things can be done differently. It has broadened our mindsets a lot. We never thought before about the fact that children can benefit from spending time with their parents, from talking with their parents”

– Adult Participant, Strong Family

“Anger is only a feeling. When that feeling is gone, the anger has been turned into smoke. Instead of acting on that anger, World Vision taught us to go for a walk. Because if we automatically hit, the disaster is there and that is hard to take away.”

– Community Leader

"We mostly played. What I learned? To respect others. Not to swear as much, not to get angry as much, not to shout at people."

– Youth Participant, Strong Family

"I realised that in times of disaster I did not pay enough attention to people with disabilities. After the training my perception of people with disabilities changed. We used to call people with disabilities by their disability; we did not see them as valued members of the community."

– Adult Participant, EPIC Life

"We were there with Area Administrators, those of us who are rights bearers. The focus is on them now and how we can make their work better.... because of lot of them don't know [about people with disabilities]. But they came and we all sat down together. They are and we are glad to have had the training."

– Osnalmok Disability Representative

"It is good that I can see the STOP signs in the house...they remind me to just breathe and go and do something else... they have stopped me from doing illegal things...like wanting to end everything."

– Youth Strong Family Participant

"I felt safe and free. Before I used to hide my feelings, but now I can share my feelings, and it helps me release stress."

– Youth Strong Family Participant

"I used to feel bad because children and adults used to call my child a name that referred to her poor eyesight. After the awareness they stopped calling her that way, and now I have the courage to tell others to stop it. I feel better."

– Parent and carer of a child with disability



Children feel safe and free to play and talk with each other about their feelings.

LESSONS

The project's existing plan provides many options for scaling outwards. The review documented promising examples of behaviour change, in particular positive parenting and better management and expression of emotions, as well as positive disability inclusion practices. In particular, the review found good evidence that Strong Family was consistently leading to its intended outcomes. Simple, practical tools such as the S.T.O.P. sign, Feeling Cards, and Magic River book were highly valued and applied by participants. The project should now continue to work with as many existing and new participants as possible to sustain and expand on their journey, and to share new methods for managing emotions with others.

Catching up on implementation is a priority for the coming year. Several activities under Outcomes 2 and 3 are still in the early stages of implementation. Now that earthquake response needs have eased, the team should prioritise rollout under these outcomes and ensure sufficient time for monitoring changes that weren't able to be measured at project's mid-term.

CHILD change indicators did not have targets, making it harder to quantify the degree of achievement. The review included support to finalise proposed targets as a starting point, which will support change measures in coming years, especially the end of project evaluation scheduled for 2027.

Results will be further strengthened by follow-up mentorship and support to individuals, helping them build on and deepen behaviour change already underway related to disability inclusion. Testimonials were shared from community members who had taken on new roles in their communities to promote disability inclusion, such as new caregiving responsibilities or participating in a community group for people with disabilities. Mentorship will sustain these community roles and help to document their impact.

Child Wellbeing report findings require creative communication methods. One interviewee had been part of the steering committee and the preliminary validation workshop for the Child Wellbeing Report, but did not feel he was familiar with the findings. This indicates the importance of continuing and expanding efforts to socialise this detailed report. Given many stakeholders will not take the time to read the full document, the project team should select a variety of modalities, such as short videos, handouts, infographics to share key findings.

Lack of water access was found to be a barrier for making sanitation and hygiene improvements. Resolving community access issues must be considered in the design of future disability-inclusive WASH programming.

Community members who had attended Smolbag's Rainbow Disability Theatre tended to display deeper shifts in knowledge and behaviour. This finding, though qualitative, underscores existing evidence on the value of community theatre, and it is recommended that the group continues to provide this service.

Stakeholders wanted a cost benefit analysis. Staff felt this design was a relatively low-cost pathway to social change and inclusion within the child protection sector. It would be key, however, to include analysis of time spent in preparation for project activities, such as building relationships with stakeholders and project community members, in addition to direct training facilitation. In future MTR/evaluations, this type of information will be useful for communicating impact to donors and advocating for more funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FINAL PROJECT YEARS

- **Prioritise remaining activities** (MHH/SRH training, sanitation upgrades, Child Wellbeing Report dissemination).
- **Strengthen sustainability** through refresher trainings and follow-up visits.
- **Improve water access** in WASH programming.
- **Share MTR findings** via **community-friendly formats** (visual summaries, videos).
- **Establish clear targets for all CHILD indicators**, using the proposed targets in the ITT developed as part of this MTR as a starting point.

FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

- **Continue Strong Family and EPIC Life models**—proven effective in behaviour change.
- **Continue prioritising simple, practical tools** (e.g., S.T.O.P. technique, Feeling Cards).
- **Address water access** in WASH initiatives.
- **Leverage local leaders** and **Rainbow Disability Theatre** for community engagement.

Focus group participants made their own recommendations. These can be considered when refining community initiatives, though noting they were not unanimously selected or ranked. They include:

- **Retain contact with youth and adult participants and support them to grow and maintain behaviour change**, for example through individual check-ins or refresher trainings. Where possible, incorporate more one-on-one sessions and support into Strong Family to allow for individual questions.
- **Ensure that the fun factor of Strong Family remains constant**, with games and music.
- **Broaden WASH plans to provide infrastructure for water access** either through upgrading existing water sources or helping communities access new water sources like rainwater tanks.
- **Ensure that all hygiene and sanitation infrastructure built takes a participatory approach**, involving training on construction offered to community members.
- **Work to improve community mobilisation practices**, drawing on existing community leaders and structures such as village police.
- **Expand project trainings to individual villages** rather than bringing participants from several communities together at a central location.



A group of children discuss their feelings using diagram cards as part of Strong Family.

A MOTHER STANDS UP TO DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

Janet is mother and carer of a 25-year-old son who is deaf. She knew soon after he was born, and it made little difference in how she viewed him. But as he grew up, the world around them began to work against him. The boy began to have feelings of helplessness; everyone in the community called him by his disability. “I gave him a name but no one in Ipai used it, they all called him by his disability – “Nambut” or “Sora i fas”. Janet tried to protect him by telling village children to stop, and she also asked her husband to tell the men to stop it. Not only was it unsuccessful, but she felt it was driving a wedge in their marriage. “I constantly felt like restricting my son from playing with other village kids, I could not bear to see how he was being treated and called. I would cry, but I could not stop him from going out to play... You know if your child is normal and gets called names you feel bad, but when you are a mother of a child with disability, that hurt feeling is deep, intensified and long-lasting.”

When World Vision’s disability awareness sessions began, the content resonated with Janet; every word mirrored her lived reality. All the things she had been trying to tell the community about the importance of her son’s inclusion were clearly outlined; she no longer had to say anything on her own.

World Vision said it all.

The impact was immediate and significant. Young people began to call her son by his name. His uncles, who had once kept him at a distance, now welcomed him respectfully into the nakamal. She watched the community transform: Everyone treated him well and respectfully, so much so that at night she would worry about him, as his uncles plied him with kava (a sign of respect), and he would return home later than he used to!

Janet also took on new roles within the groups set up by World Vision: women’s leader, leader of the group for people with disabilities, and vice-chairperson for the school committee.

“I am glad to be part of the changes that the community is going through. Thanks to World Vision the heaviness in my heart is lightened. My son is respected, and the community is developing!”



After taking part in the CHILD project, young people feel more confident to share their feelings with their families.

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