

A photograph of a woman and a young girl in a tropical setting. The woman is on the right, wearing a patterned top, and the girl is on the left, wearing a red top. They are both looking towards the camera. The background is a lush green forest.

GENDER EQUALITY PROJECT (GEP)

Solomon Islands

Phase 1
Final Review (2018–2023)

THIS MEANS THE WORLD



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The Solomon Islands Gender Equality Project is supported
by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO
Cooperation Program (ANCP). All photos © World Vision

Front cover photo: The project aimed to reduce gender-based violence
and promote more respectful and harmonious relationships in the target
communities, including through the promotion of positive parenting practices.





The project expanded on lessons from a previous World Vision initiative by stepping outside church networks to also include youth groups. Participating youth attended a workshop to learn healthy conflict resolution and relationships skills.

CONTEXT

Aim:	Assist communities in Honiara and South Malaita to address gender-based violence by targeting the root causes of gender inequality
Duration:	5 years from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023
Budget:	US\$1,864,675
Target:	3,647 participants across ten target communities in Honiara and Malaita

Gender-based and family violence have been found to be persistent human rights issues in the Solomon Islands. Patriarchal systems of social organisation and belief perpetuate the dominance of men and boys over women and girls in almost all aspects of public and private life.

According to a national study:¹

- **64 percent** of local women in relationships have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV)
- **One in three** women aged 15-49 have been sexually abused before the age of 15
- **82 percent** of women who have experienced abuse have never sought formal support

World Vision Solomon Islands Gender Equality Project aimed to shift these cultural attitudes to violence and create a supportive environment where women, men, boys and girls – with or without a disability – can treat each other with respect.

The project aligned to the Solomon Islands’ and Australian Governments’ joint commitment to **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

¹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community for Ministry of Women, Youth & Children’s Affairs (2009), Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Gender Equality Project (GEP) formed part of World Vision Solomon Island's (WVSI's) ongoing work to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and prevent gender-based violence in the Solomon Islands. This project was supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The aspirational goal of this project was that women, men, boys and girls, with and without disabilities, in Honiara and Malaita are protected and treated equitably.

The project worked within the predominantly Christian context of the Solomon Islands to challenge traditional cultural norms and improve the family and community status of women and children. The project adapted World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG) model to fit local faith networks of influence. This model explores power relationships behind family violence, while supporting community activities linking to protection and justice, revolving around churches, their leaders and congregations. By connecting to community in this way, the call can reach people of all ages, including children, to challenge traditional cultural thinking and behaviour on gender, and to act to improve women's family and community status.

The Gender Equality Project expanded on lessons from a previous project by stepping outside the church networks to include youth groups under a program known as Strongim Famili, based on the Peace Road curriculum. It also joined with government provincial assemblies and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) to strengthen communities' trust and connection with police and lawmakers and improve their knowledge of gender-related national policy. Another DFAT-supported project, 'Community Channels of Hope', continued working specifically with church hierarchies to integrate CoHG lessons into structures and systems.

Project activities included:



Positive parenting training



Conflict resolution and anger management workshops for youth



Community familiarisation of legal frameworks and support services



Faith-based messages on harmonious families and gender equality



Training for community leaders on taking action to prevent and respond to violence

In preparation for a second phase, World Vision commissioned a formative review of the project in its fifth year. The review collected qualitative data from interviews with a wide range of participants and partner organisations from all ten target communities to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the project and make recommendations for future gender programming in the Solomon Islands.

The review found progress had been made in some areas towards the goals of equality and protection from violence. In general, findings supported the link between information, attitude change and behaviour change. Where instances of reduced violence were identified, an improved knowledge of bylaws and fear of being held accountable were often behind this change.

“Youths used to be out at night and getting drunk, but much less now. One thing the project did is the sessions which helped our youth to understand what is right and wrong. Another is the community bylaws. People know now what is expected and what can happen if they don't follow our rules.” – Community Leader in Buiano

WHAT IS CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER?

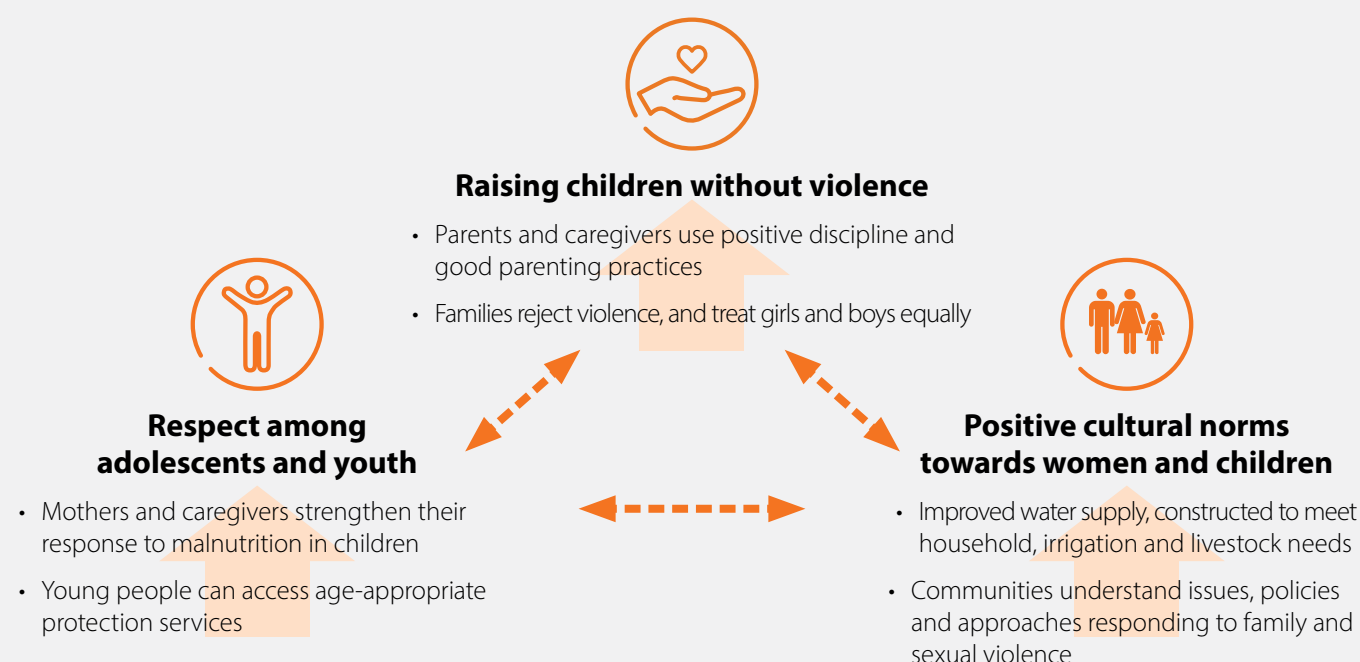
Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG) is a long-standing program developed by World Vision to empower faith communities to take action that contributes to the well-being of children. The COHG training program uses human rights norms, Bible passages and World Vision policy to explore gender norms in the community and identify attitudes that condone gender-based violence. As a faith-based organisation, World Vision is ideally placed to work in partnership with church institutions to address gender-based violence through COHG.

COHG is at the core of the change model behind GEP and other World Vision Solomon Islands (WVSI) projects aimed at improving gender equality and reducing gender-based violence. CoHG comes with a detailed guidance package, including a monitoring framework, guidance on a catalysing workshop for community and faith leaders, and steps to develop community advocates, known as CHAT leaders.



Since taking part in Channels of Hope for Gender activities in Malaita, Cornelius says he spends more time taking care of his children and contributing to household tasks alongside his wife Docas.

HOW IT WORKED (PROJECT THEORY OF CHANGE)



PROJECT ACTIVITIES BY OUTCOME

Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers raise their children without violence	
Celebrating Families / Strongim Famili	A World Vision training program that uses Christian-based messages to promote harmonious families through practical parenting techniques and influencing attitudes towards family relationships.
Positive Parenting	A training course to equip parents with non-physical forms of discipline and positive reinforcement techniques to build their children's confidence.
Child and Family Welfare Act	Lists the principles of care and protection of children and the responsibility of parents. The project conducted sessions with target communities to explain this law and the Family Protection Act, listed below.
Outcome 2: Male and female youths treat each other with respect and do not use violence	
Youth Workshop on Conflict Resolution	This day-long practical workshop taught youth about conflict resolution, anger management and skills for healthy relationships.
Family Protection Act	Provides a definition of domestic violence and outlines the penalty for the offence. The project arranged for community representatives in Honiara to visit local support services to increase their understanding of the support available and how to access it so they can share this information with others.
Outcome 3: Key leaders demonstrate positive cultural norms towards women and children	
Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG)	A faith-based training model equipping community leaders to take action to protect women and children from violence and respond appropriately to disclosures of violence and abuse.
Partner activities	A range of project activities took place through GEP's 14 partner organisations. Examples include the Malaita Police Force informing communities about new community bylaws and the Authorised Justice familiarising communities with protection orders in support of domestic violence victims.

CHANGES IN CONTEXT

The project faced two shifts in context over its five-year implementation, both of which were relevant to planning for a new phase.



POSITIVE CHANGE: INTRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY BYLAWS

Police in both Honiara and Malaita started promoting and enforcing community bylaws under the Family Protection Act. Given these laws also aimed to decrease violence in homes and communities, instances of reduced violence or more active reporting and referral may not be attributable to project activities such as CoHG or Strongim Famili. However, project partners and staff themselves worked with police on awareness campaigns for the Family Protection Act, contributing in part to their effectiveness.



NEGATIVE CHANGE: THE SPREAD OF KWASO

Originating in Malaita, Kwaso is a potent alcoholic drink that can be cheaply brewed from readily available local ingredients. It is illegal but still widely consumed throughout the Solomon Islands. The GEP design did not include components to address substance abuse in its violence reduction package, but interviews in 2023 frequently referenced the rapid take-up of Kwaso and its negative effects over the last five years in both locations. Kwaso poses a major challenge to harmony within families and the broader community.

Kwaso is a contributing factor to men’s violence and poses a major challenge to harmony within families and the broader community.



Project partners and staff worked with police on awareness campaigns for the Family Protection Act, helping to ensure local leaders were aware of available support services.

WHAT WORKED?

A REDUCED TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE

Interviews indicated violence had been a topic of discussion for communities in both locations, leading to less acceptance of violence as a norm, and an appreciation of reduced disruptive behaviour in the community.

This change was seen as a positive asset for communities. Particularly in working with youth, the project saw its best success in people curbing violent behaviour in public.

PARTNERSHIPS: POLICE, SERVICE PROVIDERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS

Strong relationships between different partners as the Family Protection Act rolled out were key to success, though varied from location to location.

Where partnerships were strong, communities not only understood the law, but helped to monitor and report against it. Where they were not, leaders were less aware or willing to promote project activities. However, the project was successful in working with and supporting local partners rather than setting up parallel response systems, giving a good basis for deeper community partnership in the next phase.

RESPECT AMONG MALE AND FEMALE YOUTH

Feedback from young people taking part in the project's youth workshops was complimentary.

Interviews noted that skills, attitudes and knowledge to reduce violent tensions and increase respect among peers had strengthened. This is significant in view of the concerning increased consumption of illegal Kwaso alcohol and suggests the project came at the right time for many young people.

MORE HARMONIOUS HOMES

Participants enjoyed taking part in Celebrating Families as couples and being able to discuss things together during and after the sessions.

While this is a starting point to reducing violence and improving family relationships, future programming would benefit from more explicit advocacy to support women's rights at home and in the community.

"Now I see young boys in this community change a lot from their past behaviour... a positive sign that our young siblings will see and learn from us because now they reduce this kind of behaviour, drinking and shouting in the roads or in the community."

– Youth leader, Honiara



Interviews with key project stakeholders and participants indicated that discussions about the effects and consequences of violence have helped to reduce disruptive and violent behaviour in public, particularly among youth.

WHAT FELL SHORT?

EQUALITY PRINCIPLES

The review found that faith-based messages in community settings had been effective in changing attitudes to violence.

However, the messages themselves did not challenge cultural beliefs about men, women, gender and rights. Some interviewees also saw the messages as coming from outsiders, not from their own leaders. Overall, project activities did not substantially challenge the belief that violence against a woman is justified if she somehow breaks cultural norms (especially around fidelity or putting family first).

MAINTAINING INTEREST

Male engagement was key to success in this project's design.

The review found that not all men were interested in activities, either because they did not understand the purpose or they did not wish to change. Some interviewees commented that it was mainly non-violent, 'good' people in the community who came to faith-based events; it was harder to engage people who were not close to church networks. The curriculum itself was also problematic as it required reading, and some resources were in English without translations.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN

Raising children without violence was a prominent outcome in the design but was only partially achieved due to the strength of tradition in punishing children to control them.

Some interviewees talked in broad terms about positive change in families, but these changes were not consistent with more detailed conversations on whether beating children was right or wrong. Some forms of physical punishment against children, such as smacking, are not considered violence in Solomon Islands culture. Alternatives to violent discipline were not well understood.

STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP TO ADDRESS GENDERED VIOLENCE

When community and faith leaders were interviewed, they were thankful the project had raised issues of violence.

However, most did not offer examples of their own leadership to reduce violence within families or the community, or protection for children with a disability. Where relevant, they had stepped in to resolve conflict, including violence, but they did not show signs of holding violent men accountable. The review concluded therefore that little progress had been made against outcome 3, *'Key leaders demonstrate positive cultural norms toward women and children'*.

Many men in the community understand well what violence is and what GEP is all about, and they are very interested and keen.... However... many are illiterate and will find it hard to understand quickly what GEP is all about.

Are men not interested?

Some are interested and some are not, because they feel targeted.

– Excerpt from interviews with local leaders

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While some change in attitudes and behaviour was reported, the review found that long-term reduction in gender-based violence was unlikely. The project is now designing a refreshed approach for the next five-year phase, incorporating the following lessons and recommendations:



LESSON 1:

At the end of the project's first phase, the most prominent factor in reducing gender-based violence was the knowledge that perpetrators could be prosecuted and held to account for their actions. This does not reflect a shift towards gender equality.

Recommendations:

- Build a suite of activities that can be replicated consistently with local government and other organisations, and that raises awareness of gender inequality as the fundamental driver of unacceptably high rates of violence.
- Develop localised systems for recording community feedback and pre- post tests to measure what is understood and resonates well, and what remains controversial for participants.



LESSON 2:

Men did not take up the challenge to examine harmful gender norms, and both women and men showed little change in violent punishment of children.

Recommendations:

- Engage men differently, and more regularly, such as by using organised sports which may appeal especially to male youths. Ensure a more deliberate approach to engaging couples and the community that clearly recognises men's power over women and works to support women's rights at home and in the community.
- Equip and empower parents with practical alternatives to physical discipline so they feel confident to try parenting their children without violence.



LESSON 3:

For many reasons, women are not leaving violent relationships or reporting their abuse. Better economic independence helps women remove themselves from situations of violence.

Recommendations:

- Continue to support development and communication of bylaws with clauses in support of women's and children's safe removal from harm – a 'survivor-centric' approach.
- Explore options for strategic inclusion of economic empowerment activities, such as savings groups, so women can access money in an emergency.



LESSON 4:

Project results varied between communities, largely because of the different levels of interest and commitment of community leaders to explore gender partnerships (police, government and service providers).

Recommendations:

- More tailored support for each target community, in consultation with a representative group (women, youths and people with disability), to ensure best possible timing, language and content of orientation and training.
- Cross-exposure between partners and community leaders so those with stronger skills in meeting information, protection and referral needs, including for people with a disability, can influence others.



Gender-based and family violence are persistent human rights issues in the Solomon Islands. The project aimed to challenge harmful cultural norms and patriarchal systems that reinforce this difficult reality for women and girls.

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