

CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER IN TIMOR-LESTE AND THE PACIFIC

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World Vision

Timor-Leste

-

Evidence Brief

About this report

This report summarises a Channels of Hope for Gender (COHG) meta-evaluation conducted from September to November 2022. The review examined four end-term evaluations and one mid-term evaluation of World Vision programmes across the Pacific and Timor-Leste that utilised the COHG model. The meta-evaluation was conducted by Elizabeth Fitton Higgins and Jessica Smith of the Mangrove Collective by drawing insights and recommendations from the five evaluations. Further guidance was provided by World Vision Australia (Isabelle Gurney, Katie Chalk, Louise Kilgour and Stephen Milford) and by the World Vision country offices of Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

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Front cover photo: Bety is a Channels of Hope Advisor in the Timor-Leste project, Towards a Future Free from Violence. The project addresses factors causing gender- based violence using World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender approach, which recognises the highly influential role faith leaders play in the region. With the majority of people identifying as Christian. Workshops guide faith and community leaders through biblical teaching on the equal value of women and children, challenging their beliefs and behaviours around gender relations and equipping them to address gender-based violence in their communities.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT:

- Positive theological messages around gender can lead to broad community changes.
- Faith leaders trained to provide counselling are more committed to gender equality and better equipped to support women's safety.
- COHG successfully creates and builds upon the link between communities and services.
- Efforts need to be made to target community leaders and other channels of influence beyond faith leaders.
- **Small achievements should not be underestimated** within the highly patriarchal and challenging environments of Timor-Leste and the Pacific.
- Engaging men and boys reduces backlash.
- Contextualising the curriculum is key countries and communities are diverse.
- Long-term engagement with young people can influence community decision-making.
- Change starts in the office staff must be equipped and empowered to respond to gender-based violence in their homes, communities and work.



Joyce, World Vision Development Facilitator, runs a Sunday school session in Vanuatu. Through songs, kastom stories and interactive play, she teaches children about healthy gender relationships.

CONTEXT

Across Timor-Leste and the Pacific, violence against women and girls takes many forms. These include intimate partner violence, sexual violence (assault), sexual exploitation and trafficking, as well as harmful practices such as bride price.¹

Violence against women is an abuse of women's human rights. Children of women who experience violence face high levels of mortality and emotional and behaviour problems. Boys are more likely to become perpetrators of violence and girls are more likely to become victims.²

Rates of intimate partner violence in Timor-Leste and the Pacific are well above the international average. Over 67 percent of women in PNG, 63.5 percent in Solomon Islands and 60 percent in Vanuatu report having experienced violence from an intimate partner over their lifetime, while in Timor-Leste that number is 58.8 percent.³ Intimate partner violence is often normalised and justified by individuals, families and communities.

Women and girls with disability face up to 10 times more gender-based violence than those without disability.⁴ Sexual violence is considered to be widespread, although data is limited and definitions of sexual violence are not unified.

"[C]hildren see VAW [violence against women] in the home, and it is normalised. The women [want] to create a generation that sees VAW as bad, not as normal, in order to cut the cycle." Female community leader, Solomon Islands

Access to justice and services for survivors is relatively weak across the Pacific region. Very few women who report experiencing violence in their lifetimes have sought services to support them.⁵

Women's rights organisations and Non-Government Organisations are pushing for greater recognition of violence against women and girls in the Pacific, with recent support from regional instruments such as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012), the global Beijing Platform for Action plus 25 report (BPA+25) in 2020 and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (Goal 5: Gender Equality).

As a faith-based organisation, World Vision's key contribution towards reducing violence against women and girls is through engaging faith leaders. The church plays a central role in the lives of Pacific people. The church can reinforce gender inequalities in the region. But it can also play an influential role in standing against gender inequalities and violence.

"As churches, we have confessed our negative contribution to the structural violence enacted upon women of all ages and social status in the Pacific. Patriarchal structures of leadership and decision-making, biblical interpretation and attitudes towards women in faith communities have underpinned the psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and economic violence that Pacific women have had to endure."

Reverend James Bhagwan, Pacific Conference of Churches, 2020

https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/

¹ Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Ending Violence Against Women (2017):

² Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

³ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Regional Snapshot (July, 2020):

https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2019_knowvawdata_regional_vaw_map_-_v2_updated_31_july_2020.pdf

⁴ United Nations Population Fund (2018). Five things you didn't know about disability and sexual violence.

⁵ The Asia Foundation. Understanding Violence Against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from the Nabilan Baseline Study (May 2016): https://asiafoundation.org/publication/understanding-violence-women-children-timor-leste-findings-main-report/

WHAT IS CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER?

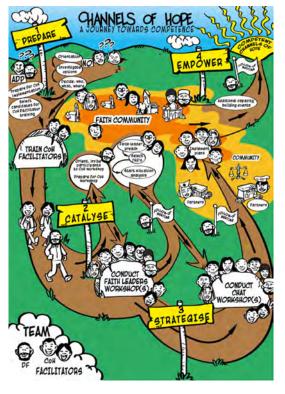
Channels of Hope equips faith leaders to apply their sacred texts to key social issues and encourage other faith leaders and faith communities to do the same.

CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER: OVERVIEW, WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL, 2019

Channels of Hope for Gender (COHG) uses a faith-based approach to address gender inequality and gender-based violence, recognising the centrality of faith to people's lives and its power to influence and transform community values and behaviour.

Through COHG, World Vision staff partner with local faith leaders, their congregations and communities and provide facilitation and guidance through four stages:

- 1. **Prepare:** World Vision plans and gains an understanding of gender dynamics and the drivers behind gender-based violence within the community, building relationships with faith leaders and ensuring faith engagement from the wider community.
- 2. Catalyse: Faith leaders and spouses attend workshops that give them an understanding of how the issue affects their community (Head), how their sacred scriptures and traditions view the issues (Heart), and introduce practical steps and community partners to address the issues (Hands).
- 3. Strategise: Faith leaders appoint Community/Congregational Hope Action Teams (CHATs). Teams attend a workshop to develop an action plan to mobilise their faith community and beyond to make a positive impact for children.
- **4. Empower:** CHATs and faith communities receive ongoing support, training and capacity building to execute their plans and better serve children in their communities.



COHG has been a consistent and effective part of World Vision's child protection and violence reduction strategies for over a decade. The model has also undergone previous evaluations and comparative studies in the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Early reviews and evaluations show that the model and curriculum successfully influence changes in attitudes, perceptions, norms and value systems concerning socio-economic relations between men and women. A key lesson learnt from these reviews is that a positive theological perspective towards gender contributed strongly towards broader community changes.

EVALUATING IMPACT IN THE PACIFIC AND TIMOR-LESTE

From 2014 to 2022, World Vision offices in the Pacific have been contextualising COHG for their own communities, working not only with faith leaders but also branching into life skills for young people, men's behaviour change and positive parenting. They also support the work of relevant government ministries and protection networks.

In 2022, World Vision Australia commissioned a meta-evaluation of five gender-based violence project analyses from four countries: Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. These projects spanned seven years of evaluated COHG and family violence programming.

The review considered organisational context and effectiveness and reviewed lessons learnt and their applicability across contexts. Significantly, it also assessed the theory of working through faith communities to bring about change, including strengths, shortfalls and dependencies on other actors and elements.

The six projects were:

- **1.** Gender Action Platform (GAP): Engaging Men, Youth and Children
 - Port Vila and South Santo, Vanuatu
 - Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

2. Pacific and Timor-Leste (PTL) Reducing Gender-based Violence Project

- Honiara, Malaita and Makira, Solomon Islands
- Efate (Port Vila) and Santo, Vanuatu
- Aileu, Timor-Leste
- **3.** Relationship Education About Choices and Healing (REACH)
 - Shefa, Sanma and Tafea, Vanuatu
- 4. Towards a Future Free from Violence (TFFV)
 - Baucau and Aileu, Timor-Leste
- 5. Community Channels of Hope (for Gender)
 - Temotu and Weathercoast (Guadalcanal), Solomon Islands

6. Gender Equality Project (GEP)

• Malaita, Honiara, Solomon Islands

All projects were supported by the Australian Government, with Projects 2 to 5 part of the Australian Government Cooperation Program (ANCP).



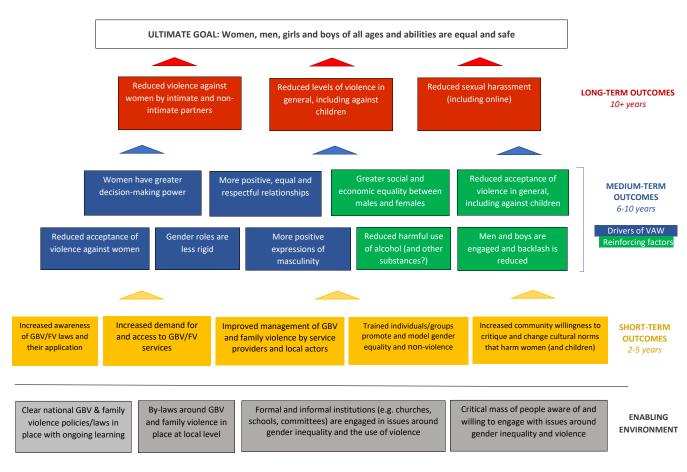
John Laruel is pastor of the Apostolic church in his community. After joining a COHG training program John has become a community advocate against violence in the home. Before the training his family lived in fear of his violence. "I was so terrible that I remember so many times when my family had to find a place to rest for the night out of their fear of me". John now uses bible teachings to preach non-violence and equality to his congregation. Vanuatu 2020.

METHODOLOGY

This meta-evaluation reviewed the programming, midand end-term evaluations for each project. Teams from the four countries were also involved in a 'sense-making' workshop, which tested whether the meta-evaluation findings reflected their own views and experiences. Quantitative and qualitative evidence was derived from individual endline evaluation reports.

The meta-evaluation compared the framework and theory of change for COHG and the five projects to those of Our Watch, a national leader committed to embedding gender equality and violence prevention in Australia. Our Watch is guided by 'Change the Story', a long-term framework for a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women. Change the Story stresses the importance of addressing the underlying drivers of violence against women.

Using this 'best practice' framework, amended slightly to recognise outcomes for children as well as women, the evaluation assessed the focus and progress made of each Pacific Channels of Hope implementation, providing insight into where the approach is most effective and where it requires improvement or partnership.



Pathways to Reduce Gender-Based Violence

Framework to reduced gender-based and family violence, adapted from *Our Watch, Change the Story – A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against woman in Australia.* https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/

FINDINGS

COMPARING OUR WATCH AND COHG

The Our Watch framework recognises that delivering transformational change on gender issues and genderbased violence is a complex and long-term process, with initiatives spanning 10 years.⁶ In contrast, World Vision's original COHG model uses shorter-term timespans of approximately three to five years. Correspondingly, its outcomes mirror those at the short-to-medium outcome level of the Our Watch framework.

The meta-evaluation found at short term and medium term, the COHG results align well with Our Watch/Change the Story. Projects adopting this model work with the community to increase awareness of laws surrounding gender-based and intimate partner violence, as well as improving awareness and management of cases, sensitising communities around gender issues and actively engaging men in behaviour change. However, the heart of COHG is creating a channel for faith-based interventions, not the intervention itself. Our Watch is survivor-centric and focuses strongly on reducing systemic violence against women. Findings from the meta-evaluation suggest that COHG needs a greater focus on women's agency, with connections to women's involvement in decision-making and economic empowerment, as well as an emphasis on strengthening referral systems and legal reforms through advocacy. These measures would strengthen COHG by emphasising women's equality.

Next steps for World Vision faith-based gender programming:

- 1. Greater inclusion of women in decision-making
- 2. A focus on economic equality
- **3.** More consistent awareness of legislation around gender violence
- **4.** Steps to address sexual harassment, including in 'Healthy Relationships' activities for couples and youth.
- 5. The risk of backlash, and how to address it



Participants of Channels of Hope, Manuel, 45, and Isabel, 37, parents to six children, have experienced dramatic change in their lives through the project. Timor-Leste, 2018.

⁶ https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/change-the-story-a-shared-framework-for-the-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women-in-australia/

RESULTS BY PROJECT

Projects were assessed on their progress towards gender equality goals and long, medium and short-term outcomes. The meta-evaluation also determined whether project activities made a minor, emerging, strong or significant contribution towards project outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1: Progress against Outcomes

Project	Contribution to outcome				Comments
	Minor	Emerging	Strong	Significant	
Gender Action Platform (GAP) & Action Against Gender Violence: Engaging Men, Youth and Children PTL Reducing Gender Based Violence					 Strong contribution to outcome Very positive results for Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) programming, with families reporting positive improvements in individual behaviours and family life Young people and men showing awareness of the need for gender equality Referrals are being made by qualified participants, such as human rights defenders (HRDs) Some/emerging contribution to outcome Messages from faith leaders about reducing gender- based violence were being heard by the communities Referrals were being made, and in some cases follow-up provided More work required to strengthen Congregational Hope
Relationship Education About Choices and Healing (REACH)					 More work required to strengthen congregational hope Action Teams (CHATs) Significant contribution to outcome Increasingly, community members are choosing to reject intimate partner violence. This change is backed by strong qualitative stories of change and quantitative findings
Towards a Future Free from Violence (TFFV)					 Minor contribution to outcome There is little evidence that young people are championing the safety of women or children Gender inequity and patriarchal norms, including violence against women and children, have not changed for communities. Women and children face higher exposure to violence in Aileu than Baucau
Community Channels of Hope (for Gender) & Gender Equality Project (GEP)					 Minor contribution to outcome Some evidence for decreased violence, however mainly reported by men. Some women held themselves responsible for men perpetrating violence and behaved in ways that would mitigate men's violence

KEY EMERGING THEMES

SKILLED AND SUPPORTED FAITH LEADERS CREATE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

After extensive training and support, World Vision Vanuatu encouraged faith leaders involved in the REACH project to offer counselling for gender-based violence. Overall, 83 percent of faith and community leaders interviewed referenced gender equality principles unprompted. Examples also emerged of faith leaders using formal reporting to support women and children.

FAITH LEADERS ARE NOT ALWAYS THE MOST APPROPRIATE ENTRY INTO COMMUNITIES

Although the church is central to many communities, and Christian faith plays a big part in people's lives, this does not mean that faith leaders are the most appropriate champions of gender issues. There are several project examples of faith leaders hoarding knowledge, deprioritising messaging, disseminating messages contrary to COHG programming and even domestic legislation, or putting their own religious interpretation and interests above the wellbeing of women and children. Many participants also noted that customary practice and community leaders still had the final say in community decision-making.

"[F]or greater impact, everyone within a selected community must be exposed to the program messaging simultaneously (children, youth, men, women, leaders, etc.) so they can support each other in transforming attitudes and beliefs about violence and hold each other accountable."

REACH project, Vanuatu

CULTURAL ADAPTATION IS CRITICAL

In Vanuatu, 'Gudfala Laef' ('A Good Life') is a gender equality curriculum that weaves Biblical scripture with Vanuatu kastom stories. The curriculum is taught within existing religious education settings, such as Sunday schools, to children aged from approximately 6 to 12 years. Overall, the project evaluation found that gender equitable attitudes among children participating in Gudfala Laef have improved.

For Timor-Leste projects, however, the COHG curriculum was last adapted and translated in 2016, before the beginning of the project. Implementing staff highlighted the importance of adjusting to changing circumstances, including the social and economic upheaval caused by COVID-19.



Attending church is central to Pacific communities. The South Sea Evangelical Church is the third most popular Christian denomination in Solomon Islands. World Vision works with churches using Channels of Hope for Gender through the PTL project to explore gender inequality and violence from a faith perspective. Solomon Islands, 2018.

LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE CHANGES COMMUNITIES

In PNG, young people were engaged in identifying topics of interest for programming, and this approach was successful in securing their participation.

In the Vanuatu REACH project, outcomes differed significantly between young people with prior experience of World Vision programs through the church and those reached through a one-off school intervention. Data showed twice as many church youth felt they could say no to unwanted sexual advances (41 percent) compared with the once-off student group (20 percent). This indicates the effectiveness of long-term and deeper engagement with young people, rather than trying to go 'wide' with multiple one-off interventions.

"You need to invest in kids if you want to stop the violence."

Service Provider, Timor-Leste, 2022

STAFF ABILITY AND PERSPECTIVE HAS A DIRECT INFLUENCE ON PROJECT OUTCOMES

An important foundational step for projects is to recognise that staff may also be experiencing genderbased violence at home. In Vanuatu, this led to the introduction of special leave and relocation assistance where needed. When World Vision Vanuatu shifted to portfolio management of their ending violence projects, they provided significant leadership and support through policy, systems and guidance across the organisation. Staff were supported and equipped to respond to violence. REACH's significant progress in Vanuatu validates this approach.

RAISING AWARENESS DOESN'T ALWAYS LEAD TO BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

While World Vision is recognised by in-country stakeholders for awareness raising and training, in a short-term project this doesn't often translate into action or outcomes. The causal link between awareness training and behaviour change needs to be built and proven, not assumed. Behaviour change is predicated on many more factors, including the ease and acceptability of alternative actions and the timeframe of the intervention.

STRENGTHENING EXISTING SERVICES SUPPORTS WOMEN'S SAFETY

In Solomon Islands, World Vision partnered with existing referral networks to support women to access crisis services. Part of the success of this approach involved sensitising local leaders through organising orientation visits to the crisis centres.

MARGINALISED GROUPS ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY INCLUDED OR EMPOWERED

Women commented on their desire for greater economic empowerment and skills development, in addition to training and awareness raising on gender issues. If extensive consultation were held prior to project implementation, these activities could have been developed from the start.

There was also little evidence of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people and groups, except for limited inclusion in the GAP project in Vanuatu.

While there was anecdotal evidence across all projects that people with disability were included the level of change seems limited to the level of awareness around people with disability and efforts to include them in training. This is problematic given the far higher rates of violence against women and children with disability

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS REDUCES BACKLASH

In Vanuatu, the Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) intervention creates safe spaces for men to express their feelings. Men are supported to change attitudes and behaviours that support violence, with faith leaders actively following up on referrals. Papua New Guinea's Male Advocates approach is also showing promise, with advocates actively supporting women to access safe spaces.

STORY OF IMPACT **A HOPE FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE**

Margaret is a Community Hope & Action Team (CHAT) member in the Australian Government supported World Vision Community Channels of Hope (CCOH) project.

As a CHAT member, Margaret is empowered with the skills to facilitate positive change and appropriate support inside her community regarding gender inequality and gender-based violence through World Vision's Community Channels of Hope project (CCOH). She believes that positive changes in society always begin at home.

"I have high hopes for my daughters when they grow up. I want them to be able to succeed with their education and become wholesome individuals," shared Margaret.

Her youngest daughter Cynthia is always excited to learn new things, whether in school or at home; "My name is Cynthia and I am ten years old. My favourite subject is maths and I really want to become a doctor one day when I graduate from school. I love my mum because she helps me a lot with my school work. She also taught me how to fish and cook dinner. My mother is my idol," added Cynthia. Margaret spends a lot of time with her daughters in the community while her husband works in Honiara. "I teach my daughters about respect and how to earn it. I teach them about the equal responsibilities that men and women share on this earth," said Margaret as she hugged her daughter.

One of the most significant consequences of gender inequality in the Solomon Islands is the high level of gender-based violence women face. A recent study from the World Health Organisation (WHO) found that in the Solomon Islands, 64% of women aged 15 to 49 years have experienced some form of physical or sexual intimate partner violence.

Funded by the Australian government, the CCOH project works to reduce violence against women and gender inequality in target communities. It partners with the national government, church leaders, communities and civil society organisations to adopt the Community Channels of Hope for Gender approach and utilises it in faith-based teachings across the Solomon Islands.



Community Hope and Action Team Leader Margaret is a role model to her daughter Cynthia. Solomon Islands, 2018.

CONCLUSION

For over a decade, World Vision has worked with faith leaders and communities through Channels of Hope for Gender. The framework addresses the religious and social norms that limit the ability of women and girls to make choices in their lives without fear of violence or stigma.

Backed by strong training and positive theological messages around gender, the impact of faith leaders on their communities can be significant. This impact is intensified through investment in young people and strong connections forged between communities and services. As a child-focused, faith-based organisation with a strong and enduring connection to communities, World Vision is ideally placed to continue to create impact in the nexus between gender equality, faith leadership and youth. Ultimately, however, the success of COHG is dependent upon each faith leader's commitment to gender equality and their scope of impact. Evidence suggests that, in many cases, engaging other community leaders may lead to more powerful results when targeting gender-based violence. Further recommendations include increasing project timelines, targeting other at-risk groups, such as women and children with disability and LGBTIQ+ people, and prioritising the voice of women throughout project design and implementation.

By expanding the COHG program to target both church and community leaders, World Vision is well placed to support those leaders to amplify women's voices, secure their safety and promote gender equality in Timor-Leste and the Pacific.



Changing negative gender norms in a training in Bougainville, 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Ensure faith leaders uphold project messaging

World Vision should work with faith leaders to help them understand survivor-centred guidance and avoid 'prayer and reconciliation' as a default position. When faith and community leaders continue to prioritise prayer and reconciliation messages there is a risk of retraumatising victims and putting them in unsafe situations. It is critical that faith leaders maintain a survivorcentred approach in their messaging.

2. Include diverse voices in project design

While training is strong in disability inclusion, the voices of people with disability were absent from the evaluations. Consultation with women, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and other marginalised groups should be included in future designs and evaluations.

3. Provide ongoing organisational support and capacity building for staff

Gender equality awareness and training should be included in all staff inductions and further learning, together with values clarification on World Vision's stance around gender-based violence and non-discrimination. The safety and wellbeing of staff and volunteers (who may be experiencing, exposed to or using violence) needs to be recognised and addressed through organisational policy, safety plans, counselling, and ongoing reflection.



Longer timeframes and commitments to existing communities

The timeframe allocated for most projects is too short and doesn't allow for incremental and sustained behaviour change, which can take up to 10 years. Given funding and resource constraints, projects need to realistically assess the scope of projects and time required for behaviour change.



5. Strengthen World Vision's engagement with the Church Hierarchy

Faith leaders can enable or constrain the achievement of long-term outcomes. Projects should engage higher up the church hierarchy and recruit the church as project allies so there is senior encouragement and greater incentive for community faith leaders to engage in COHG.

6. Expand engagement with community leaders

Chiefs are the traditional head of the community in project areas. Further iterations of the COHG approach should engage community leaders and their spouses and consider what are the main sources of influence for different members and age groups in the community.



Brenda Odo with her daughter outside their community's church, Kirakira. Their church delivers teachings and guidance promoting equality and non-violence according to CoHG principles. Kirakira, Solomon Islands, 2018.



7. Strengthen community action groups before creating new ones

Under the COHG model, Congregation/Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs) can successfully bridge the gap between the program and the community, but this outcome is not consistent across projects. World Vision should aim to strengthen existing groups before creating new structures.

Effort should also be made to avoid overworking these groups, which are already resource thin. World Vision is in a strong position to support and enable their development.



8. Strengthen connections with informal and formal response mechanisms

World Vision's role as a bridge between communities and services should be recognised and strengthened. Where referral services don't exist, strengthen appropriate informal response mechanisms at the community level. Explore other channels, such as community health provision, to widen potential support networks.



9. Continue to invest in young people

Continuously engage with small groups of young people rather than targeting them for a single intervention. Hold awareness-raising session in small groups in a safe space on a regular, consistent basis. Be clear about what the objectives are and design training that meets these objectives and support young people in the community with regular and consistent monitoring.



10. Look beyond World Vision and COHG for complementary curricula and resources

Use teaching resources from recognised and effective programs targeting gender-based violence in Timor-Leste and the Pacific. This could include contextualising existing frameworks, such as the UN Women's Respect framework, for local use.



11. Keep working directly with male perpetrators of gender-based violence

Promising results from male-focused interventions reinforce the importance of engaging directly with men and boys to reduce community backlash and champion behaviour change.



Chat Group Member workshop, Solomon Islands, 2019

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