

Hope for a safer Solomon Islands

Findings from evaluations of gender norms change and violence prevention initiatives in Honiara, Temotu and Weather Coast

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Channels of Hope for Gender

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Through the mid-20th century to the early 21st century, the Solomon Islands was a country too often characterised by unrest, violence and risk. While peace has since fallen across the archipelago, the women of the Solomon Islands understand that few places remain more dangerous than their own homes. With two out of every three women having experienced physical violence from an intimate partner; 38 per cent of women reporting their first sexual experience as having been forced; and 63 per cent of men believing it is acceptable to hit women in certain circumstances^{1,2}, many in the development community increasingly recognise that a history of volatility has not ended; it has simply been hidden behind closed doors.

The shocking rates of family and intimate partner violence occurring in the Solomon Islands cannot be attributed to one factor alone. Within the contexts of Melanesian states, patriarchal systems of social organisation and belief reinforce the dominance of men and boys over women and girls in almost all aspects of public and private life. This culture of dominance is deeply entrenched, and has been accepted by men and women alike. The covert acceptance of men's dominant role, however, is not unique to Melanesia; it persists across global geographical and cultural boundaries. In the Solomon Islands, the impacts of these patriarchal constructs are compounded by a comparatively under-resourced violence prevention and response sector, fragmented infrastructure, and limited service delivery capacity. The elimination of violence against women is a complex and multifaceted task, yet one that is by its very nature urgent. Development actors have therefore needed to consider calculated yet innovative approaches to engage with existing community entry points, and address mentalities underpinning violence at their roots.

CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER PROJECT MODEL

Arising from the highly stigmatised spread of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, World Vision's Channels of Hope model originally sought to engage with church and community leaders in order to prevent transmission, provide care, and support advocacy on behalf of people living with HIV and for orphans and other vulnerable children. Through three phases, Channels of Hope (CoH) worked with faith leaders to address community stigma and attitudes; form Congregational/Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs) to develop locally-owned implementation plans; and communities and individuals are empowered to access further training and opportunities.

The CoH model has proven to be an effective means of engaging with and empowering established faith groups to create more inclusive communities. The methodology has since been adapted to address maternal and child health, the Ebola crisis, and gender-based violence prevention.

World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG) methodology seeks to explore gender identities, norms and values from a faith perspective and mobilise faith leaders' influence to challenge misconceptions and reduce violence against women.

While faith leaders are amongst the most influential members in many communities, their interpretation and the resulting application of religious texts can be detrimental to gender relations. In some instances religious text, such as Biblical scripture, has been used to validate practices that perpetuate women's marginalisation and subordination within their

¹ Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and Macro International Inc. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007*. Secretariat of the Pacific Community, May 2009.

² Secretariat of the Pacific Community for Ministry of Women, Youth & Children's Affairs. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children*. Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009.


families and communities. The CoHG program methodology challenges faith leaders to acknowledge and act upon the gender injustices prevalent in the communities where World Vision works. The methodology is participatory, inviting participants into the kind of dialogues that identify and affirm positive aspects of culture and pertinent faith-based presuppositions while challenging negative attitudes and practices on gender. Channels of Hope for Gender has been implemented in over 59 countries.

CHANNELS OF HOPE IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

With 90 per cent of the Solomon Islands' population identifying as Christian, faith-based responses have been identified as particularly well-placed to address pervasive masculinities and the devaluation of women perpetuated by cultural and faith leaders.

With support from the Australian Government's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and DFAT post in the Solomon Islands, World Vision Australia has been working with communities in urban Honiara and rural Temotu and Weather Coast to implement the CoHG methodology and challenge those beliefs and behaviours leading to gender-based and sexual violence.





38 PER CENT OF WOMEN
IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS
REPORT THEIR FIRST
SEXUAL EXPERIENCE AS
HAVING BEEN FORCED

Evaluating change

HONIARA PROJECT EVALUATION

In early 2012, researchers from the Australian National University³ (ANU) conducted a baseline study to explore the core assumptions underpinning the introduction of the CoHG methodology to urban Honiara, and to generate data for the second phase of project implementation. Core assumptions and objectives of the baseline study included the role of faith in influencing perceptions of gender and gender-based violence; the effectiveness of the program design in achieving intended outcomes; and the alignment of the program with the priorities and needs of those impacted by gender-based violence.

This baseline was followed by an end-of-phase evaluation which included a review of relevant documents, key informant discussions with WV International Solomon Island (WVSI) staff, and a survey of 300 people from randomly selected households in the five project communities. For qualitative research, fourteen focus group discussions and individual interviews were held with stakeholders, communities, and project staff. The end-of-phase evaluation also considered the findings of an internal end-of-project phase qualitative evaluation conducted from July-August 2014 by WVSI's staff, which identified key lessons and recommendations to inform an extension of the CoHG Honiara Community Vision for Change project.

TEMOTU AND WEATHER COAST PROJECT EVALUATION

In the more rural Weather Coast region and Temotu province, a primarily qualitative evaluation of the CoHG Community Vision for Change project was undertaken by researchers from the University of Queensland's School of Political Science and International Studies⁴, with support from DFAT. Research approaches included reflexive staff workshops and a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). The findings and recommendations of this evaluation also referenced data by World Vision staff collected via a quantitative household survey. In addition to generating baseline data for project extension, qualitative discussions sought to explore participant's assessments of the progression of project implementation and its contributions to the anticipated outcomes; the extent to which messages taught in faith communities about gender and gender-based violence influence attitudes and behaviours; the degree to which the project had addressed the needs and priorities of those affected by gender-based violence to date; the impact of the project in changing or forming knowledge, attitudes and behaviours among faith leaders, passive (non-CHAT) members of participating congregations, service providers and community members; and potential improvements to the project in phase two of implementation.

This approach was designed to strongly align with the principles of the BOND Evidence Tool, including: Voice and Inclusion, Appropriateness, Triangulation, Contribution and Transparency⁵. At its heart, the evaluation fundamentally sought to allow for deeper engagement with a range of people included in the project sites to gain a better understanding of how the project was being received, and what could be changed to improve its effectiveness – from the perspective of those most closely involved.

KEY FINDINGS

While the two evaluations employed differing methodologies, both found compelling evidence of positive change attributed to the CoHG Community Vision for Change projects in key areas including progress towards recognising women's rights; increased openness to discussion;

³ Wu, J. and Kilby, Dr P. *Evaluation of Honiara Community Vision for Change Project*, Australian National University and World Vision Solomon Islands, 2015.

⁴ Curth-Bibb, Dr J. (UQ), Higgins, K. (UQ), Buataigha, D. (SI researcher), and West, G. (SI researcher), *Evaluation Report: Weather Coast and Temotu Community Channels of Hope Project Phase 1*, University of Queensland (UQ) and World Vision Solomon Islands, 7 October 2015.

⁵ For an introduction to the BOND effectiveness and transparency objective and a copy of the tools, please see <https://www.bond.org.uk/effectiveness/principles>.

demonstrated commitment to change; linkages to service providers; and addressing triggers of gender-based violence.

Towards recognising women's rights

Figures collected from evaluation participants in Honiara indicated that while progress is gradual, men and women alike are beginning to shift their perceptions of women's rights and roles. The percentage of men who believe that a woman is able to accuse her husband of rape rose from 70 per cent to 83 per cent; the percentage of women who claim that women should not make decisions fell from 34 per cent to 4 per cent; and the percentage of men who believe the Bible says that 'man is boss' dropped from 83 per cent to 66 per cent.

While community perceptions have begun to change, progress has remained varied within churches. Some church leaders, including some who had undergone training as part of the Community Vision for Change project, preferred to provide counselling to perpetrators of gender-based violence and urged forgiveness by the survivors and reconciliation of the couple. This reveals that mixed messages on protection for survivors of violence and gender inequality are given across some churches.

The Honiara evaluation also revealed that women and men 'hear' messages on gender-based violence and gender inequality in church differently, with 63 per cent of women recounting that pastors give the message to never use violence, compared to just 34 per cent of men.

Openness to discussion

Women in Weather Coast focus group discussions reported that CoHG had started a critically important conversation that they felt was benefiting women and children. In Honiara, women also talked more openly about community perceptions of gender-based violence, the role of the church and women's experiences of gender inequality and domestic violence. Women also became more outspoken and critical about the lack of response from the police, churches, and non-government organisations.

Men were also found to be generally more willing to discuss gender-based violence and gender relations within their communities. In churches, around one-third of Honiara pastors from the leading denominations had mentioned gender-based violence in their preaching, while a women's group was supported by the Lord Howe and Fulisango church ministries was supported to adapt the CoHG messaging for their pastoral care duties when visiting and counselling couples who experience domestic violence.

Commitment to change

While the Honiara evaluation found that church elders and pastors who were members of Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs) showed a high level of commitment to tackling gender-based violence and supporting the Community Vision for Change project, greater resourcing was needed to build the capacity and effectiveness of support structures such as CHATs and focal points. This was reflected in Temotu, where the local CHAT experienced high levels of commitment from participants, but suffered over time due to capacity issues.

Overwhelmingly, respondents to interviews and focus group discussions in both project sites expressed long-term commitment to the reduction of violence in the communities, and to the continuation of the Community Vision for Change project.

Linkages to service providers

Identified focal points in Temotu and Weather Coast were found to have strong relationships with service providers and 'were clearly supporting survivors to reach such services'⁶. Police and health workers were also found to generally have an excellent understanding of the Community Vision for Change project and have been successfully included in CoHG training.

Logistical variables hindering access to services and often inconsistent police responses to gender-based violence have provided challenges; however, many police have embraced their role in shifting social norms and have asserted that "the places to hide – we are taking them away"⁷. According to police, perpetrators have previously attempted to 'hide' behind culture or church

⁶ Curth-Bibb, Dr J., Higgins, K., Buataigha, D., and West, G. p. 49.

⁷ Curth-Bibb, Dr J., Higgins, K., Buataigha, D., and West, G. p. 8.

teachings as an excuse for violence, but such excuses have been refuted by the CoHG project and are no longer seen as permissible.

Addressing triggers of gender-based violence

In addition to addressing the embedded social and gender norms that give rise to acts of gender-based violence, both Community Vision for Change projects have also sought to address the substance abuse that is often correlated with high levels of violence. In sites where training in ending substance abuse has been delivered, community members and police have reported high levels of satisfaction with the knowledge and skills gained. Two Weather Coast area communities included in the study have had surprisingly positive results in this regard – including successfully negotiating with drug growers and suppliers to either destroy their own plants or stop the circulation of drugs.



Learning and future programming

CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

Although the evaluations of the CoHG Community Vision for Change projects in Honiara and Weather Coast/Temotu sought to determine the success of implementation to date, they also aimed to generate evidence to support improvements to phase two of project implementation. Both evaluations found a number of challenges to be overcome; a number of which are broadly representative of the challenges inherent to evaluating an intangible process such as social norms change.

The high commitment but limited capacity of CHATs and focal points indicates that one-off training is an insufficient foundation for social norms change. Measuring change after training will demonstrate a spike in increased understanding, but will not reveal whether capacity to apply this understanding has been effectively increased. In phase two of project implementation, there is a need for the reinforcement of CoHG messaging, and mentoring or support to communicate this messaging to the broader community.

Similarly, behaviour change initiatives must have a supportive structural framework outside of project-specific mechanisms such as CHATs. This includes referral mechanisms and support services. Without these linkages, measured changes in knowledge and attitude are unlikely to result in changes to practice.

As highlighted by the Honiara evaluation, which applied a wider-reaching methodology than previous evaluations in Africa, effective social norms change initiatives should include efforts to measure change at the whole-of-community level, as these indicators are likely to differ starkly from those gained from assessments at the individual or faith/community leader level. The effectiveness of community-wide awareness-raising activities should also be consistently monitored to determine which communication mechanisms are effective. This will look beyond participation at events, and will reveal which messages resonate with a broad audience.

The difference in men's and women's understanding of CoHG messaging also needs to be better understood. Targeting activities to men and women, and utilising effective change agents or role models, requires sophisticated gender analysis of M&E data to determine how and why men and women respond differently, and be able to recommend ways forward for more effective implementation. Phase two will need to explore why men and women 'hear' messages differently, and then target messaging appropriately, including by determining whether community activities or church sermons are likely to have the deepest and most sustained impact towards shifting entrenched and harmful gender norms.

BEST PRACTICE FINDINGS

The collection of evidence relating to gender-based violence and harmful gender norms is sensitive in nature, and requires a number of careful approaches to ensure that norms change is both effectively understood and monitored over time. In particular, the triangulation of data is necessary as there is some risk that questionnaire and post-training evaluation data collected by organisations implementing norms change initiatives may reflect what participants *think* should be the correct response, rather than reflect their actual beliefs which inform attitudes and behaviour.

In addition, it is both well-understood and demonstrated by the two CoHG evaluations that changes to social norms require time to work on knowledge, attitude and practice. Monitoring indicators in these three critical areas are required to see progress in short periods (e.g. four years) and to revise the project for continual learning. Further, the continued evaluation of change in implementing partners, such as service providers (particularly police and legal service providers), project staff, project volunteers, and community and faith leaders is important. Initial messaging must be reinforced, and support provided to effectively communicate key norms change messages to the broader community.

Norms change initiatives also function at their best when communities are engaged as active participants in the evaluation of project effectiveness. This includes involvement in the design of evaluation methodologies to ensure that we ask the right questions in a manner that is culturally appropriate to context, as well as in interpreting results. Local views as to what evaluation findings might mean for families and communities can be invaluable for translating results to effective implementation in subsequent project phases.

CHANGES TO FUTURE PROGRAMMING

As a result of the phase one reflections and recommendations provided by the Australian National University and University of Queensland, in conjunction with World Vision's own internal reflection and evaluation, the second phase of programming in both Honiara and Weather Coast/Temotu has made a range of programmatic changes relating to *whom* to engage, and *how* to engage most effectively for greater and more sustainable transference of attitude, knowledge and practice changes to the broader community.

Outreach approaches and messaging

In response to findings that different outreach approaches to men, women and youth would be beneficial, a greater emphasis has been placed on the identification of training participants to promote positive communication with their communities – whether through faith-based preaching, community leadership, or community volunteering – utilising existing community structures where possible. For example, the Weather Coast and Temotu evaluation concluded that it was important to 'more prominently acknowledging the centrality of chiefs in interrupting violence, settling disputes, delivering justice and informing and enforcing norms in the approach/design'. This has been taken into account, with a view to promoting protection principles in mediation between survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

The adaptation of messaging to specifically suit the programming context in Solomon Island communities emerged as particularly important for increasing the focus on protection issues, as well as child-focused and youth-tailored messaging. Feedback from phase one participants and stakeholders, and the demonstration that men and women 'hear' messages differently has led to greater efforts to tailor messages more effectively in order to resonate with different audiences. For example, specific content will be developed to promote strong messaging and consistent approaches by community leaders, faith leaders, and community volunteers for counselling families and individuals affected by gender-based and intimate partner violence. Based on a recommendation from the Honiara evaluation, training will therefore focus on communicating 'safety and legal rights, and to explore what the women want, and avoid attempts to reconcile where there has been a history of gender-based violence.'⁸

Strengthening the capacity of CHATs

In order to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of CHATs, the second phase project designs included selection criteria for CHAT members to ensure effective targeting of change agents. These teams are to be gender-balanced to build on the lesson that while there are 'clear and compelling benefits to having male [volunteers] in each community' – namely to offer positive male role models – it is also important to prioritise the recruitment and retention of female volunteers.

Connecting with service providers

The importance of community connectivity with duty bearers and service providers - such as health clinics, Ministry of Women, police force, Ministry of Health, Family Support Centre, Christian Care Centre, Peace and Trauma Counselling Centre, and SAFENet – has been highlighted by both evaluations and has resulted in new strategies for increased engagement. Service providers will connect to communities and deliver training and share information on support and referral processes, and will also be included in training on the CoHG methodology as well as joint awareness sessions with CHATs. Attempts to foster greater linkages through 'leverag[ing] off existing or previous gender programs such as the church male advocacy program' in Temotu, and to strengthen links with community clinics and aid posts, will also be made.

⁸ Wu, J. and Kilby, Dr P. p. 5.

Second phase programming in both Honaira and Weather Coast/Temotu will further support survivor access to help and services from village health posts/clinics, as well as 'safe havens' such as the Christian Care Center in Honiara. World Vision Solomon Islands are pleased to have established an agreement with the Royal Solomon Police and Ministry of Health for such continuity of service, a key component of result sustainability, as well as further system supports for survivors.

Extension of the Community Vision for Change project

The importance of the Community Vision for Change project in promoting and facilitating community discussions, coupled with support to design and implement tailored community activities to address gender-based violence and triggers for violence, was confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative evaluation data. Without prompting by the researcher, community members in Weather Coast and Temotu 'explicitly requested the project be significantly extended'⁹. The successful extension of the project in existing locations will ensure that in coming years, the impact of increased conversations about the value of men and women will hopefully translate to both behaviour change in individual change agents with responsibility for outreach to the broader community, as well as lead to demonstrable, measurable changes in community knowledge, attitude and practice.

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⁹ Curth-Bibb, Dr J., Higgins, K., Buataigha, D., and West, G. p. 8.