



VANUATU INCLUSIVE WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE PROJECT (WAINUI)

Vanuatu | Impact Brief
(2018–2023)



About this report

This brief summarises the main findings from the final evaluation of the Vanuatu Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene project, known as the Wai Nui project. Wai Nui was implemented by World Vision Vanuatu from 2018 to 2023. The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant, Elise James, between May and July 2024.

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Front cover photo:
Linda washes her hands using the new tap installed outside the family kitchen.



SUMMARY

Goal	All community members, especially people with disabilities and women, have improved health through accessible, well-managed WASH solutions
Timeframe	2018 to 2023
People reached	15,849 people
Location	The island of Tanna, Vanuatu

OVERVIEW

Vanuatu’s largely rural population faces significant challenges in accessing clean water and sanitation. Frequent natural disasters damage local water sources and undermine efforts to ensure safe water and good hygiene practices. On the island of Tanna, rainwater is unsafe to drink, typically contaminated with sulphur dust from the active volcano Mount Yasur.

World Vision’s Vanuatu Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project, known locally as Wai Nui, aimed to improve health outcomes for community members in Tanna, especially the most vulnerable. Wai Nui was supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Australian Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Throughout its five years of implementation between 2018 and 2023, the project experienced an average of more than one disaster each year. Despite resulting delays to implementation as project staff switched to response efforts, the project’s final evaluation found that Wai Nui made valuable progress towards improving WASH facilities and practices for families in Tanna. Opportunities for further impact remain around strengthening inclusive WASH access and helping communities translate their knowledge on good hygiene practices into action.

KEY FINDINGS



World Vision Vanuatu was placed as one of the **most respected agencies in the country for delivering WASH services.**



86% of women reported access to reliable, safe drinking water and were fully able to meet their needs from an improved source.



67% of community members reported that their water management committee was doing a good job of managing their water supply.



93% of community members surveyed recalled at least three critical times for handwashing, and 98% recalled the need for handwashing after defecation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritise and budget for water provision in a complex environment to empower communities to practically implement their training on hygiene and sanitation.
- Continuously reinforce community ownership to ensure understanding and commitment for greater sustainability and long-term impact.
- Focus future programming on strengthening hygiene and sanitation behaviour change.
- Enhance monitoring, evaluation and learning processes, ensuring that the pathway to change is made very clear for the project team.
- Continue working through and with the Vanuatu Department of Water Resources to leverage World Vision Vanuatu’s strong relationship with provincial departments.



Diarrhoeal disease is sadly the leading cause of death in children under age five in Vanuatu, despite it being both preventable and treatable.

CONTEXT

The Pacific nation of Vanuatu hosts a predominantly rural population who are spread across its 83 islands. Access to clean water and sanitation facilities is limited in many of these remote communities and, as a result, children and their families face life-threatening risks to their health. Diarrhoeal disease is sadly the leading cause of death in children under age five in Vanuatu¹, despite it being both preventable and treatable. Vanuatu is also ranked as the world's most at-risk country for natural disasters² and is highly prone to catastrophic tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions.

Tanna is one of Vanuatu's most populous islands, known for the beauty of its landscapes and vibrant cultural heritage. While rain is plentiful in Tanna, the water typically isn't safe to drink as it is contaminated with sulphur dust from the nearby active volcano Mount Yasur. Local water sources are also susceptible to damage and destruction from frequent cyclones. Ensuring access to safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all people in Tanna, including the most vulnerable, is essential to communities' health and wellbeing.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO). 8 April 2015. *Vanuatu: Protecting children from diarrhoea*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/08-04-2015-vanuatu-protecting-children-from-diarrhoea>

² Mackey, B. et al. 2017. *Vanuatu Ecosystem and Socio-economic Resilience Analysis and Mapping* (ESRAM). <https://www.sprep.org/attachments/Publications/IOE/pebacc/vanuatu-ecosystem-socio-economic-resilience-analysis-mapping.pdf>



Access to clean water and sanitation facilities is limited in Vanuatu. As a result, children and their families face life-threatening risks to their health.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

World Vision's Vanuatu Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project, locally known as Wai Nui, aimed to enhance health outcomes for all community members in Tanna – especially women and people with disabilities. Wai Nui was implemented by World Vision Vanuatu from 2018 to 2023 and was supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Australian Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Program (ANCP). The project reached 15,849 people primarily on the island of Tanna, greatly surpassing its original target of reaching 8,900 individuals.

Wai Nui's strategy focused primarily on driving inclusive, community-driven action towards improved WASH. It also aimed to strengthen inclusive WASH access across World Vision Vanuatu's national portfolio, particularly in Santo. The project built contextually appropriate WASH facilities like latrines and handwashing facilities. Wai Nui also enhanced access to menstrual health and hygiene products, empowering women, children and people with disabilities to practice better hygiene and sanitation to reduce disease and improve health.

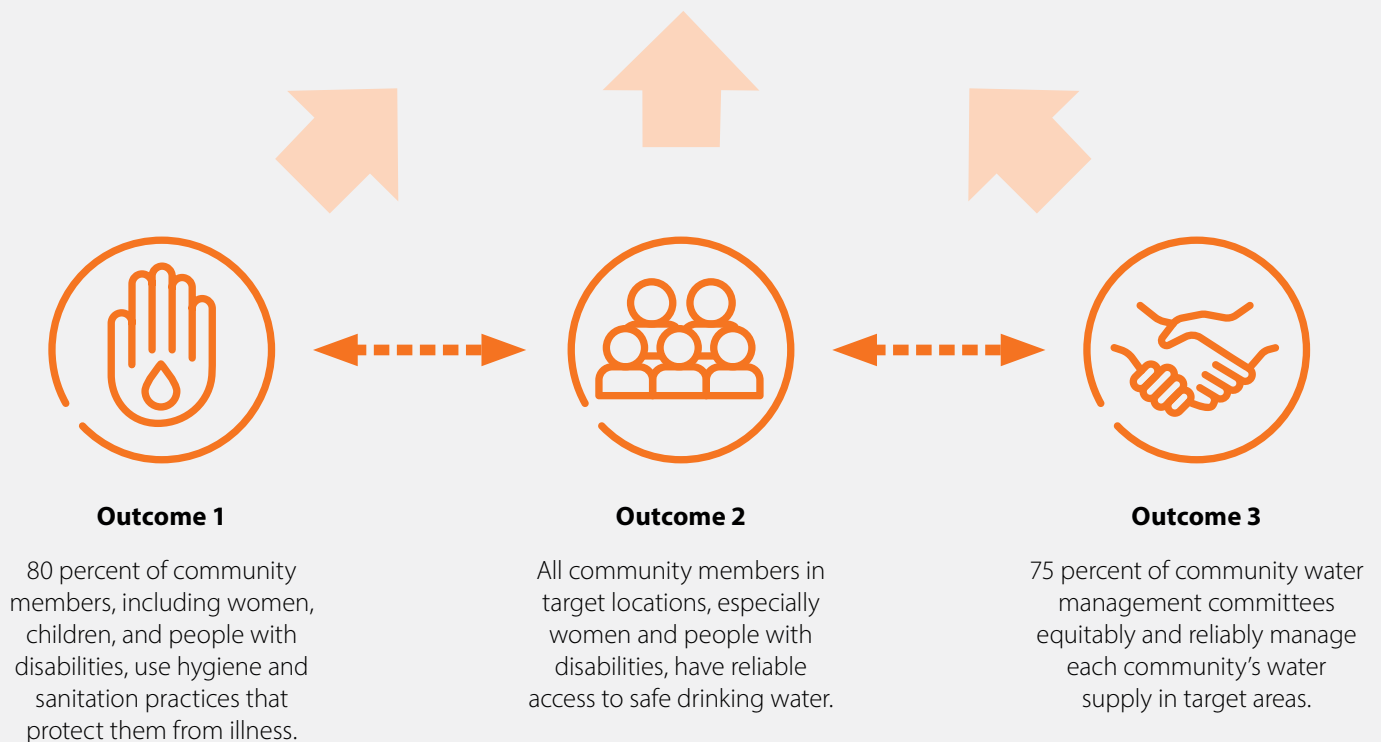
By closely collaborating with communities and establishing water management committees, the project developed water systems that met the Department of Water Resources standards, helping to ensure safe drinking water for everyone. These committees were supported with comprehensive training and strong provincial government links to promote the sustainable management of water supplies and long-term equitable access to safe, clean water.

"I feel like World Vision has really helped us...I put my handwashing station at the gate so that anyone who comes in has to wash their hands. World Vision also helped us by giving soap. When the soap runs out, I buy my own soap. When the kids come back from school, I tell them to wash their hands before going inside or to wash their hands before eating."

– Female project participant

THEORY OF CHANGE

Goal: All community members, especially people with disabilities and women, have improved health through accessible, well-managed WASH solutions.



EVALUATION OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVES

An endline evaluation of Wai Nui was conducted between May and July 2024. It reviewed the project's performance against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria and identified learnings and recommendations for future inclusive WASH programming, contributing also to the evidence base for this area.

Key evaluation questions included:

- How has the project met the needs of diverse beneficiaries, especially women and people with disability?
- Has the context changed and how has the project responded?
- What project strategies and approaches were most successful?
- What intended or unintended consequences were produced by the project?
- To what extent are the project's outcomes and activities likely to be sustained?

METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation combined primary data collection and secondary data review as follows:

- The evaluation began with a **desk review** of six annual and semi-annual project reports and 14 impact stories to provide background information.
- An **after-action review** with Wai Nui project staff helped reassess project direction, review successes and challenges, and extract key lessons.
- **Key informant interviews** were conducted with five representatives from the Department of Water Resources, West Tanna Disability Association or Osnalmok, and area/provincial staff, offering diverse perspectives.
- A **quantitative population survey** in five communities, focusing on men, women, people with disabilities and carers.
- **Focus groups** in six target communities gathered insights from separate groups of men and women, discussing shared experiences and general conditions.
- **The PhotoVoice method**, which was successfully utilised with three participants in the project's mid-term review, revisited only one participant in the final evaluation. PhotoVoice aims to empower participants with photography skills so they can share their personal perspectives and experiences of how these challenges affect the lives of individuals with disability.
- **Talanoa, or storian in Bislama**, is a Pacific-specific qualitative data collection approach. The evaluation collected 17 stories through this approach, enabling participants to tell stories about their past, present realities and aspirations.

Content analysis and thematic coding were applied to qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, talanoa transcripts and PhotoVoice documentation. Quantitative survey data, designed in KoBo Toolbox, was analysed in Excel.

LIMITATIONS

Twin Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin made landfall in early 2023 and delayed the Wai Nui project's evaluation as the necessary recovery efforts were undertaken. Recovery efforts and accessibility influenced site selection, potentially missing a true reflection of project outcomes. Project teams, who were also involved in response efforts, had limited time for after-action reviews and sense-making sessions, restricting the amount of data captured and analysed. As a result, the evaluation did not meet sample size targets, reducing the ability to draw significant conclusions. These constraints present challenges in fully assessing the Wai Nui project's impact and sustainability.



Tanna island was left with significant damage and limited communication after Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin made landfall within the same week in 2023.

FINDINGS

Overall, the evaluation found that the Wai Nui project made progress towards improving WASH facilities and practices in Tanna, particularly around water system rehabilitation, latrine construction and building knowledge through hygiene trainings. The project was able to achieve most of its output-level targets by indicator. However, the high uptake in knowledge was not always found to translate into behavioural change.

The Wai Nui project operated within a challenging and dynamic context, with an average of more than one major disaster per calendar year in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff were repeatedly seconded into emergency response efforts and juggling the needs of fast-moving responses with the continuation of development programming.

FINDINGS BY OUTCOME

OUTCOME ONE:

80 percent of community members, including women, children, and people with disabilities, use hygiene and sanitation practices that protect them from illness.

In terms of WASH 'hardware' or infrastructure improvements supporting hygiene and sanitation, the Wai Nui project supported the construction of 156 new latrines by July 2022. Endline surveys of community members in Tanna indicated that 86 percent were able to fully meet their needs for clean, safe water for bathing and personal hygiene, and 69 percent confirmed household access to water for handwashing.

Hygiene and sanitation training provided the 'software' components of the project. For example, children and caregivers were taught about the five critical moments for washing hands: after defecation, after cleaning a child's bottom, after cleaning the environment, before preparing food and before eating food. The number of respondents who could identify at least three key times for handwashing increased from 64 percent in 2018 to 93 percent by the project's end. However, translating knowledge into action remained a challenge, with only 35 percent of respondents washing their hands with soap and water the previous day, citing barriers like forgetfulness and the cost of soap. Focus group discussions validated these findings, with many participants readily admitting forgetting to wash their hands.



The number of Wai Nui evaluation respondents who could identify at least three key times for handwashing increased from 64% in 2018 to 93% by the project's end.

Menstrual hygiene and health efforts were limited to only 18 months of implementation due to delays caused by the twin cyclones. Nevertheless, 69 percent of survey respondents who had menstruated in the past year reported being able to wash and change in privacy at their home. Close to half (48 percent) of these participants indicated that their period did not interfere with their daily lives.

In terms of reaching people with disabilities and their carers, Wai Nui focused on improving direct service delivery from World Vision Vanuatu. Significant data on impacts for people with disabilities was limited in the evaluation, though individual stories of change were evident through the PhotoVoice exercise. Albert, for example, chose a photo of a new tap at his home as his most important photo. Before having water access within his home, he spoke about walking for 90 minutes down a hazardous pathway to collect water in old petrol drums.

“Water is a priority and this has been solved as an impact of the World Vision project in my community when accessing clean and safe water in my door steps which serves my personal needs and the people I care about.”

– Albert, PhotoVoice respondent and project participant

OUTCOME TWO:

All community members in target locations, especially women and people with disabilities, have reliable access to safe drinking water.

Wai Nui supported the rehabilitation or upgrade of seven existing water systems and the construction of one new system, helping to improve communities' access to safe drinking water. By the project's end, 80 percent of survey respondents used a protected water source, up from 69 percent in 2018. Among women surveyed, 84 percent used a protected water source, including all four women with disabilities surveyed. A significant limitation to note is that the evaluation took place just months after the improvements were made and they had not yet been used through a dry season.

Drinking water storage was a clear area of improvement, 88 percent of respondents stored some drinking water in their house in a sealed vessel to prevent contamination, compared to only 39 percent at baseline. This result reflects the water-focused training delivered through the project, providing participants with essential skills in water management and tap installation at home to improve health.

“Prior to attending the trainings run by World Vision, we did not know how to manage our water, we were using it carelessly. When World Vision came, we had more knowledge on water management, preservation of water and how to take care of our water.”

– Female project participant

“One of the trainings was on how to install taps in your home, how to maintain it so animals like pigs and cows cannot reach it. You have to install it where it is safe.”

– Male project participant

Strong partnerships with local authorities were crucial for the project's success, particularly with the Vanuatu Department of Water Resources (DoWR). Wai Nui's collaboration with the government ensured proper oversight and sustainable implementation of water systems, establishing World Vision Vanuatu as a trusted water service provider. Collaboration with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities was limited – there was only one known organisation in Tanna and was located outside the project's target villages. Government respondents acknowledged that disability support in the province is an area for future growth.

“World Vision really helped us in the department. One of the government's goals under the Sustainable Development Goals is being achieved with the help of World Vision.”

– Key informant interview with Provincial Authority

“[The project] has really changed our peoples' lives and educated them in sanitation and given them access to water. Over 90 percent of people in that area now have access to clean drinking water, maybe 98 percent. There is still some that have no access, about one or two villages.”

– Key informant interview with Provincial Authority



Community members set up a water catchment box ready to be installed in their village.



Selina, a water committee member on Tanna island, helped identify the source and route for water pipes to ensure easy access to water for her village.

OUTCOME THREE:

75 percent of community water management committees equitably and reliably manage each community's water supply in target areas.

During the final project evaluation, community perceptions of water management committees indicated the committees were putting knowledge from training sessions into practice. Among survey respondents, 89 percent stated their community had a water management committee and 77 percent had female committee members. Eighty-five percent of respondents said the committees were doing a good job of managing their local water supply, with reasons shared including the committees' prompt repairs, help with finding water and providing water access during the dry season. Focus group discussions largely reiterated these positive perceptions.

"Inside the committee, there is one faithful person who when there is a heavy rain and rubbish blocks our water system, or pipes are damaged, he makes sure to fix it and clean the water system that has blocked the water that supplies to our community."

– Female focus group respondent

"The water management committee checks our water system, checks water and latrines, sanitation station. They collect contributions from each household to use for any repairs or damages towards our water system. They follow our water system, clean it to make sure water flows to our community."

– Female focus group respondent

"We know our committee and the women inside. The committee works to take care of our water system. When the water stops, a committee member goes and looks to see what the problem is. Any repairs, the committee looks and fixes."

– Female focus group respondent

However, certain committees faced with management and maintenance challenges, with respondents citing issues such as poor training attendance and unclear responsibilities, suggesting that there is room to enhance abilities and management skills. Additionally, participation in the management and decision-making processes within water management committees remained limited.

LINDA'S STORY

NEW WATER SYSTEM UNITES COMMUNITY

Tanna Island's Yaruareng community has long struggled to access clean water. With only one tap at its base, hilltop families had to walk down to the seaside village to collect water. The water source would sometimes dry out, forcing families to collect water from two creeks even further afield.

Linda, a 29-year-old in a family of 11, remembers walking long distances to collect water with her sisters as a child. She says the creek water was often dirty and unsafe to drink. "Animals especially cattle could get in and mess up the source. This will make the water dirty and we would not be able to use it," she says.

Through Wai Nui, a new water management committee was established in Linda's community to manage their new water system. She was chosen as a representative for people living with disabilities, as she and two siblings share a physical impairment that affects their mobility. The committee made sure their new system complied with updated rural water supply guidelines.

Compared to the previous set-up, the new design included multiple taps so families did not have to walk downhill to collect water, supplying readily available water to 52 households, including 20 people with disabilities.

Linda and her family had a tap installed in the family yard, which she says has made a big difference to their daily life. "Now that the tap is here, we have not needed to go down the hill to fetch water for basic needs, even for bathing and laundry. We are able to improve our hygiene and sanitation at home because we can now use water for handwashing, washing food before cooking, wash hands after going to the toilet and also to clean the family home."

With less time spent fetching water, Linda says her family now has more time on their hands to attend church programs, tend to the garden and join other community activities. For Linda and other people living with disability, easy access to water has meant a more dignified way of living with their individual needs.



Linda no longer walks long distances for clean water. A tap installed in the family yard has made a big difference to her daily life.



Linda shows Vanessa, a staff member from World Vision Vanuatu, the water tank that is part of the new system upgrade in her village.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is one of the main challenges for water and sanitation services worldwide. Using UNICEF’s Sustainability Checks for WASH, the evaluation found that the Wai Nui project demonstrated strong potential for sustainability in its water systems – particularly if support continues from the Department of Water Resources and through the success of water management committees. Water systems showcased high functionality, with a substantial proportion of respondents reporting improved water access. Water access was similarly high, with many participants reporting being able to collect water within a 30-minute round-trip. While no water quality testing was done during the evaluation, the proxy for quality showed that a significant percentage of respondents met their needs for clean, safe water for drinking and cooking. In terms of sanitation sustainability, access to nearby toilets was certainly realised, though handwashing remains an area needing more work for lasting change.

“I learned so much, but the important thing I picked up was how to manage our water. Take care of the security of the water source that provides for the community. I learned on water management and how to prepare a budget plan for the water.”

– Male project participant

GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The evaluation found the Wai Nui project to have awareness and clear intentions to address the barriers faced by women and people with disabilities in terms of WASH access. Wai Nui has been particularly successful in increasing equitable access to and use of WASH services along the lines of geography and gender. There has also been significant progress in furthering equitable access to and use of WASH services for people with disability. Participating women were largely very grateful and appreciative of their increased access to water and the resulting benefits, like the reduction of disease – particularly for children.

There was less evidence collected to support how the practical needs of different groups have been met through the design of WASH facilities and trainings. The evidence gathered from people with disabilities gives a mixed picture of success, with some still waiting for WASH facilities that meet their needs, and others being satisfied with what they have received.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the project made notable progress towards improving WASH facilities and practices, particularly around water system rehabilitation, latrine construction, and hygiene trainings. The project was well-aligned with national WASH priorities in Vanuatu and its relationship with the Department of Water Resources was especially successful, with World Vision Vanuatu now placed as one of the most respected agencies in the country for delivering WASH services. However, some intended outcomes around inclusive access and sustainable management were not fully realised. Meaningful gender transformation was limited and though knowledge around improved hygiene practices increased, more work is needed to ensure this translates to changed behaviour, such as handwashing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prioritise and budget for water provision in a complex environment** to empower communities to practically implement their training on hygiene and sanitation, which is very difficult to do without reliable access to water.
- **Deepen community ownership earlier** by outlining community responsibilities in accessible formats for low-literacy populations. Continuously reinforce community ownership to ensure understanding and commitment.
- **Simplify future WASH programming in Tanna** to reduce confusion for staff and communities working across multiple thematic areas. Focus future programming on strengthening hygiene and sanitation behaviour change.
- **Enhance monitoring, evaluation and learning processes**, ensuring that the pathway to change is made very clear for the project team.
- **Continue working through and with the Vanuatu Department of Water Resources to leverage World Vision Vanuatu's strong relationship with provincial departments.** This collaborative approach aligns with and supports the government's decentralisation strategy, ensuring that services are effectively delivered to communities.



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Margaret, Betelia and Greg using a taro leaf as a make-shift umbrella to hide from the rain.

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THIS MEANS THE WORLD

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