

Evaluation Report: Women-led Protection Project Vanuatu



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Above: ActionAid staff member Mary Kaviamu leads women in Middlebush as they call "Women I Tok Tok... TOGETHER!". Photo: ActionAid

Executive Summary

ActionAid's response to Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu was a new kind of emergency response. It sought to strengthen women's leadership and voice in defining the protection response for women. The response also provided an opportunity to use the power of information to support women to demand the things they needed to realise their rights after the disaster, and in so doing to hold the humanitarian sector to account to recognize, value and respond to women.

Without an existing presence and with limited resources, ActionAid established a program to place women at the centre of the national disaster response by setting up Women's Information Centres at the heart of emergency operations. This action shifted the humanitarian response in Vanuatu, ensured women could not be 'forgotten' and established an entry point for ongoing work to support women to realise their rights and take greater leadership in long-term work related to disaster preparedness and response. Government, women's leaders and INGOs recognize ActionAid's work for promoting visibility and thus accountability to women in the Cyclone Pam response.

This was the overall conclusion of the internal evaluation of ActionAid's Women-Led Protection Project in Vanuatu, conducted 8 months after the project was initiated as an emergency response following Cyclone Pam. The evaluation was conducted with the support of DFID PPA, to feed into ActionAid's meta-evaluation of women's rights in emergency response. The evaluation's conclusions and recommendations are based on 5 days of observation, interviews and discussions in Vanuatu as well as a review of key project documents. The project was primarily assessed against the 10 draft "Defining the Difference" principles for ActionAid in emergency response.

Implementation has generated many lessons and challenges. The project has not been successful in generating outcomes for women in terms of immediate needs, as information systems and strategies to influence the humanitarian sector's activities required a higher level of planning and resources than were anticipated or available. Unexpected protection and security issues emerged as women have become active in seeking change without sufficient experience of activism and conflict resolution. The project needs to strengthen the links between resilience and disaster preparedness and response and to strengthen its relationships with its key local counterpart and women's protection services.

Yet women have responded strongly to the information they received for the first time ever about human rights, and are hopeful and inspired as they work together for change. The project's focus on creating safe spaces for solidarity, and fostering leadership among women, is highly relevant, needed and appreciated. The emphasis on human rights, women's protection and leadership comes at a time when the Government of Vanuatu is open to improving their record on support for women. The conceptual connections between "safe spaces", "leadership" and "protection" for women have proven their importance in practice. There is thus great potential to learn from the previous 8 months and make a significant impact on women's right and protection.

The evaluation proposes five recommendations for ActionAid International and 11 for the Women-led Protection Project in Vanuatu. They are presented once at the start of the report. Details of the project background, evaluation approach and findings follow.

1. Recommendations

Recommendations for ActionAid International

1. ActionAid's emergency response in Vanuatu shows how **HRBA can push a transformative agenda in emergencies**. Women's Information Centres were established quickly with strategic partners, cost little to start up and offered a unique approach that caught the attention of women and men, government and the humanitarian sector. They were the only women's spaces that existed at the time where women could openly speak out. AAI should consider how to use this approach in AAI emergency response across the Federation, because it offers potential to leverage resources across the entire humanitarian sector to support women affected by disaster to realise their rights.
2. Ensure sufficient **time and resources for strong collaboration with the humanitarian cluster system and government at all levels** from national to community levels. AA needs to ensure its relevance and maintain its position within these fora, as they are the centre of decision-making which AA and affected women and men need to influence. Humanitarian actors use these fora to allocate responsibilities and resources, and INGOs also position themselves for funding from donors, as well as for longer-term partnerships with governments and communities eg. national-level disaster preparedness planning. The UN cluster system is in many ways hostile for local actors, and AA needs to use its power to advocate for local voices;
3. Strengthen effectiveness of HRBA in emergency response by developing a clear and simple system and guideline for **"managing information for accountability"**, and commit resources to supporting teams to implement these guidelines during emergency response. Managing information for accountability requires a coherent vision and detailed systems that are challenging to develop in the urgency and stress of emergency response. Women and men in communities want to know what happens to the information they provide; humanitarian actors including governments want information that is easy for them to use; and often it will be necessary for ActionAid to track down requests that have been made but not met. These requests potentially form the advocacy agenda for communities and humanitarian actors going forward.

A system to support this would identify processes for collecting, recording and storing data; for identifying key stakeholders and sharing data in a way that will be easy to utilise; for following up on information shared and requests made from powerful state and non-state actors; for reporting back to women and men in communities; and for taking and following through subsequent actions. The guidance should cover establishment of a simple database in consultation with the NDMO in any given emergency. Guidance should be clear and specific, and build in flexibility for adaptation for each emergency context;

4. **Determine the human and financial resources needed to meet minimum operational standards in emergency response**, particularly in countries where ActionAid is establishing a new presence. Standards are needed to address high levels of stress and workloads for staff, to reduce risks around poor financial management, to support the development of positive and productive relationships with local staff and partners and to ensure the safety of the AA team. At the outset of an emergency response, AA needs resources to: conduct security analysis and planning; deploy finance/admin/logistics staff to work alongside program staff and ensure adequate systems for occupational health and safety (OHS); manage, train and

support local staff and partners; ensure sufficient communications, transport and accommodation. Resources (human and financial) are needed to backstop effectively to avoid the problems caused by high turnover of project managers in relief contexts. Figures will be different for each context, so a rapid costing exercise would need to be done when an appeal is launched.

5. **Analyse the risks related to HRBA in emergency response** from the perspective of Protection and “Do No Harm” and document these to support staff dealing with these challenges. An emergency response team needs program staff with the skills and experience to deal with the political impact of HRBA work as it addresses power relations and challenges the status quo. In a context where local staff are likely not to have worked with AA’s HRBA before, and where AA has limited insight into the local power dynamics in the absence of a local country program, this is important to avoid igniting community conflict or being co-opted by vested interests.

Recommendations for the Women-led Protection Project in Vanuatu

1. The project is highly relevant and potentially extremely effective, as demonstrated by the way that women have mobilised to become part of this HRBA project, despite pressure for material goods to address immediate needs. ActionAid should continue supporting the project at least until it can realise the outcomes outlined in the project plan until 2017.
 2. Women’s expectations of ActionAid are very high because they thought that all their requests were going to be addressed like in most emergency contexts. It is therefore imperative to address some of the immediate needs of the community so that they can have the confidence and ability to get engaged with the longer term resilience and protection work as well as gaining the support of men and communities. Communicate the link between the emergency response and long term, community-led programs that will address practical needs and lead to greater self-reliance.
- Reaffirm a focus on emergency response and the link with resilience and livelihoods work;
 - Strengthen the relationship and visibility of the women’s centres and links to other EVAW services to ensure there is a connection in people’s minds between WiTTT and services for EVAW/ protection. This can be done through establishing effective referral pathways with institutions that work on gender based violence and other services that address women’s rights and basic needs.
 - Follow up and document reports of ‘copycat’ WiTTT fora to demonstrate ActionAid’s influence and leadership, learn from different interpretations of the model and consider possibility of founding a network of WiTTT partners;
 - Find avenues to engage with men as allies and as participants in some HRBA trainings, whilst retaining women’s power and priority and standalone activities;
 - Identify physical safe spaces for WiTTT to use to protect their privacy and enable them to speak freely as they develop their confidence and relationships together. Churches, schools, child care centres, office buildings exist with potential at least in interim: integrate this as a deliverable within staff work plans

- Support women in communities with seed funds to manage travel and support costs related to WITTT.
3. Locate the data collected from women during the Cyclone Pam emergency response, store it securely and develop an action plan (with outcomes and MEL framework) to follow up on women's requests to address the sector's failure to meet women's needs after Cyclone Pam. The action plan should include outcomes and a MEL framework.

The work requires understanding of the information systems followed by National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and humanitarian system in Vanuatu. Actions to follow up on Cyclone Pam response should also integrate with actions around the El Nino emergency response as many of the same communities have been affected.

4. Develop the project's role in the drought response for Objective 3 of the project. Maintain a presence in the clusters together with DWA and NDMO. Use AA's position to partner or work with CARE (the sector leader in DRR in Vanuatu) and local authorities more closely on national disaster preparedness plans. Structures and committees are currently being established and women from WITTT should be present. CARE and Oxfam offer practical tangible examples of support for women and ActionAid needs to be visible and demonstrate the value of ActionAid's alternative approach;
5. Develop an HRBA capacity building plan for project staff: Options could include recruiting/ seconding a REFLECT-Action mentor to delivery training and support staff and women to develop advocacy and action plans, for a 6-12 month role.

Also provide training and/ or mentoring on advocacy and campaigns including risk and conflict resolution for staff and women in WITTT

6. Develop a strategy to strengthen the relationship with DWA, recognising the challenges of working with government partners with low levels of resources. Actions to consider include: developing a "capacity and contribution plan" to identify opportunities for AA to build DWA capacity through training or similar; improving joint ownership by strengthening visibility around the partnership; developing a joint communications protocol that includes stationary/ banners with both AA and Ministry of Justice/ DWA logos; developing and monitoring a partnership agreement (distinct from the MOU) committing partners to shared values and behaviours (see AACES for an example).
7. Build relationships and understanding of the history and dynamics/ relationships within the Vanuatu women's movement to strengthen the project's capacity to build on local capacities and support women's institutions for strong practical and policy outcomes. Promote collaboration over competition. Where copycats emerge, support them with technical advice and consider how to establish a network to coordinate and build and integrate with the existing women's movement, whilst ensuring recognition for ActionAid's leadership. Continue building links with champions and make it rewarding for them to engage with AA's work.
8. Hire an experienced ActionAid project manager to be based in Vanuatu long-term (preferably 12 months minimum) to provide stability to the program. The manager will need HRBA, women's rights and emergencies programming skills and have and strong management capacity, and be able to lead implementation of AA policies and guidelines on program, administration and finance.

9. Second or recruit experienced ActionAid Admin/ Finance/ HR staff to develop a project admin finance manual in line with ActionAid International policies and practices. A manual is needed to clarify AA policies and offer guidance on responsibilities of staff and partners, as well as to improve working conditions. Train all staff in policies and systems and clarify the responsibilities around implementing/ enforcing policies.
10. Develop a system and budget for managing transport costs and safety for project staff:
Request provincial managers to present options to address the recurrent issues around transportation availability and cost for project staff. Research options used by other INGOs in Tanna and Erromango; explore any potential through DWA and Ministry of Justice or other partners. Incentives could include AA supporting improving the quality of the vehicle to meet AA safety standards. Consider establishing monthly contracts with a driver / boat captain. Compare the benefits/ disadvantages of owning a vehicle before buying one, though this could be a long-term option.
11. Seek an alternative office space in Port Vila and establish office facilities for project managers in Tanna and Erromango with communications and IT capacity if possible.

2. Evaluation Background

In 2015, ActionAid Australia, with the support of the AAIUK Evaluation Challenge Fund, conducted a meta-evaluation of ActionAid emergency response programs, to develop a better understanding of the achievements and challenges related to women's rights and protection. An evaluation of the Women-led Protection Project in Vanuatu was conducted in order to analyze achievements and challenges, and to contribute to the meta-evaluation.

The evaluation was conducted by ActionAid Australia's Program Quality Coordinator, who had not been directly involved with the Vanuatu program design or implementation. Information was collected in Vanuatu between 23 and 29 November 2015.

In contributing support for logistics and sharing information openly, ActionAid former and current staff, government and community stakeholders demonstrated their commitment to learning and to the program. The constructive attitudes of all contributors were highly appreciated, as were the efforts to organize the evaluation logistics.

Vanuatu Context and Project Overview



1. The early days of the emergency response in Vanuatu; from a staff presentation to ActionAid Australia

ActionAid's work in Vanuatu is detailed in the 2015 IHART Emergency Response Plan (see Annex 1). ActionAid entered Vanuatu to establish a women-led response to Cyclone Pam, which hit Vanuatu in March 2015 and was one of the worst disasters to hit Vanuatu. ActionAid had no presence in Vanuatu prior to the emergency.

ActionAid responded immediately by mobilising ActionAid Australia and IHART to travel to the country. ActionAid partnered with the Government of Vanuatu's Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), under the Ministry of Justice. ActionAid sought to place the protection of women's rights at the forefront of the emergency response in order to prevent violence within stressed communities, provide trauma counselling for those devastated by the disaster, and resource women's leadership in the immediate disaster response and for long-term recovery.

ActionAid prioritised the following areas, which were heavily affected by the program:

- Efate Island – Eton and Port Vila (Shefa Province)
- Tanna Island (Tafea Province)
- Erromango Island (Tafea Province)

The project's purpose and objectives are outlined in the below table:

Table 1: Women-led protection project purpose and outcomes

| <p><u>Purpose:</u></p> <p>Create safe spaces for women to organise and develop a strong voice to address and strengthen women's leadership on protection issues post Cyclone Pam and future disasters that directly impact women. To deliver this vision, the project will have two key areas of focus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop leadership and disaster risk management capacity, and deepen understanding of women's rights as human rights to enable long term sustainable change in Vanuatu through the mobilisation of women through Women's Forums. 2. Mobilise women to take collective leadership to monitor and advise on protection issues post-disaster as well as disaster risk reduction work through the development of a National Women's Platform on Disasters | |
|---|---|
| Objectives | Targets |
| 1: We will have mobilised and empowered women from disaster affected communities in Vanuatu to come together and participate in local women's forums called 'Women Together: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By December 2015, 800 women will have registered in 'Women Together' and by December 2016 this number will have increased to 1700 women. ○ By December 2015, 4 Women Together Leadership Taskforce Groups will be established in Tanna, Erromango, Eton and Port Vila to lead and co-ordinate 'Women Together' Forums and will have participated in ActionAid's Women's Transformative Leadership training. |
| 2: By December 2016, we will have built capacity of women of Vanuatu and deepened their understanding of their rights and their role in community-based protection, disaster preparedness and response: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1700 women participants have built skills to revive their livelihoods, build resilience and economic security, understanding of governance, education on gender based violence and awareness of referral pathways within Vanuatu. ○ We will have built the capacity of the four Women managers of 'Women Together', the local administrators and community leaders to implement community based protection actions |
| 3: By December 2016, we will have enhanced the voice of women in advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 women leaders will have sought representation on area councils to influence disaster management planning processes at local level |

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|--|--|
| and governance processes related to disaster management planning: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 women leaders will have sought representation onto provincial councils to influence disaster management processes at provincial level ○ 4 women candidates will have contested the national election in September 2016 with support from 'Women Together'. |
| 4: By December 2016 we will have mobilised women leaders of Vanuatu to take collective leadership of women to monitor and advise on protection issues post disaster as well as disaster risk reduction work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women Leaders from the private sector, politics, academia media and law within Vanuatu will have developed a National Women's Platform on Disasters to strengthen women's voices in the public domain and advance women's rights. ○ The National Women's Platform on Disaster will have influenced national processes ensuring the protection of women's rights is mainstreamed in disaster response across all sectors |

In November 2015 the project had been operating for 8 months.

Over that time, the Vanuatu operating context has shifted. The country has experienced sustained drought since Cyclone Pam, which has undermined efforts at effective recovery, with many communities dependent on continued relief distributions. At the time of writing, the next typhoon season is about to start, bringing the prospect of further stresses to damaged and struggling communities. The country's parliament has also been dissolved due to a corruption scandal which placed a number of ministers in gaol. An election is scheduled for March 2016.

Evaluation approach and questions

The evaluation was conducted by ActionAid Australia, guided by the framework developed by through the independent Meta-Evaluation for assessing ActionAid's support for women's rights in emergency response. Research focused on qualitative data, as the focus is on outcomes and process at this point in time.

The overall evaluation questions were:

1. To what extent did the Vanuatu emergency response address women's rights and protection, in line with ActionAid guidance and Theory of Change?
2. What outcomes have been achieved for women, both in terms of addressing immediate needs and shifting power relations?

Areas of enquiry were taken from ActionAid's key guidance on women's rights in emergency response: ActionAid's Emergency Preparedness and Response Handbook; and the draft of "Defining

Difference”, developed by the ActionAid humanitarian reference group¹. The full list of evaluation questions and detailed framework are attached at Annex 3.

Project plans, reports, and ActionAid and government policies were reviewed prior to research in-country. In Vanuatu, the evaluator conducted Key Informant Interviews with stakeholders including staff, the key partner (DWA), national, provincial and municipal government and staff of other INGOs. The views of women and men in communities were sought through participatory exercises and focus group discussions in Tanna and Eton, involving approximately 100 women and 10 men. Other men were observers. The evaluation trip schedule and full list of consultations is detailed at Annex 4. ActionAid staff supported the evaluation with logistics and translation as needed. Although they were present at discussions with key informants and community members, staff understood not to answer questions on behalf of key informants or community members and the influence on information generated was limited.

At each meeting, the evaluator introduced the purpose of the evaluation, and explained how information shared would be used. A commitment is made to share the report with all those who contributed.

There were limitations related to time available, so it was not possible to travel to Erromango, triangulate or dig deeply into some issues raised.

3. What we learned

This section details observations drawn from interviews, discussions and documents reviewed. Information is presented to answer the key questions:

1. To what extent did the Vanuatu emergency response address women’s rights and protection, in line with ActionAid guidance and Theory of Change?
2. What outcomes have been achieved for women, both in terms of addressing immediate needs and shifting power relations?

The below table presents the areas of enquiry used to answer these questions. Outcomes for women are presented throughout the report rather than under a separate heading.

¹ Note that “Defining the Difference” is yet to be formally adopted by the Federation and is a draft document only.

Table 2: Areas of enquiry

| | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Women's rights as non-negotiables | Creating safe spaces for women | Strengthening access to resources |
| Taking sides with the poor | Promoting women's equal participation | Driving a transformative agenda |
| Building on existing capacities | Embedding community-based, women-led protection mechanisms | OPERATIONAL ISSUES |
| Addressing barriers to leadership | Campaigning against structural causes | OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN |

Findings

1. Women's rights as "non negotiables"; promoting women's equal participation; and a transformative agenda.

"I am very grateful to ActionAid. Never, since Independence, has anyone given us the chance to come together with other women, and we need it"
Vanuatu Evaluation Field Notes, 2015

"It made us Councillors realise our responsibility to tell women" _ KI with woman councilor regarding information-sharing during relief efforts

"The rest of us (other NGOs) sat on our hands because of the history of the women's movement" _ KI, INGO staff.

The focus on women's rights has been the response's defining feature. This was a radical program which challenged and continues to challenge the status quo and has made an impact across communities, government and INGOs, shifting attention to women's needs and rights in a way that multiple respondents said had never been done before.

ActionAid's "blue tents" (Women's Information Centres), located visibly at the heart of emergency operations, made a strong symbolic statement that made it difficult to avoid or 'forget' women's rights in the emergency response. It has enabled other agencies to strengthen their language and focus on women within their programming, as evidenced by comments from NGOs peer agencies interviewed.

Women from communities and all other stakeholders interviewed paid tribute to ActionAid's blue tents for highlighting both the level of need for projects to work

with and for women, and for showing that it is possible to claim space for women-only programs in Vanuatu. Some INGOs in Vanuatu, including Oxfam and CARE, mainstream support for gender equality, but have not engaged in standalone programming for women.

All stakeholders interviewed made it clear that there has never been a platform for women to meet together before and that it is highly appreciated. Women staff and community members spoke about the program with passion, and there were reports that women cried when the women's information centres were taken down at the end of their service.

The establishment of women's forums called Women I Tok Tok Together (WiTTT) to succeed the Blue Tents have potential to achieve outcomes that strengthen women's rights and power in the long term and already have a large membership excited about the possibilities. The Vanuatu team reported attempts to duplicate the program among local organisations seeking to replicate ActionAid's human rights based approach with women, which is testament to the project's relevance and value.

2. Taking sides with the poor

In line with HRBA, the project takes sides with the poor by seeking to address underlying issues affecting the fulfilment of their rights, but does not directly deliver immediate support to those most profoundly affected by poverty. It engages most with those who have the vision and capacity to engage with planning and advocacy to analyse and shift power relations, and hold the powerful to account. Many stakeholders interviewed, including some community members, recognized the value of the approach, but struggled in the face of needs expressed by community members who continue to experience extreme hardship following the cyclone and current drought.

"Will a tarpaulin solve all your problems?" _ FGD participant, Middlebush

Living it, trying to use HRBA in emergencies, it is so challenging', KI with AA staff

"Women I Tok Tok gives us hope" _ FGD participant, Middlebush

One staff member interviewed highlighted how critical ActionAid's HRBA is, to ensure that women's voices are heard within the sector, in the face of systems that often fail to consult communities effectively. She cited one example of interviewing community women who had received tarpaulins from another INGO that were the wrong size and useless, because they had not been consulted. Yet HRBA remains extremely challenging to implement in an emergency, as communities have ingrained expectations that NGOs will provide material support.

Regardless, the evaluation found that ActionAid in Vanuatu is successfully reaching women from a wide range of backgrounds. Interviewees ranged in age from "about 70" (ages are often unknown in Vanuatu), to their 20s. Participants came from areas where there was no employment at all, others worked for government or had families involved in businesses, or were community leaders. Women met in Tanna displayed very different levels of literacy and English language ability, yet were able to speak about what they had learned. WITTT taskforce members (leaders of the forums) had vision and capacity, but came from the same villages and were struggling alongside their neighbours.

According to one informant, ActionAid's participation in the cluster meeting at the onset of the response created an opportunity to influence the need to recognize women's leadership and community organizations. In the gender and protection cluster meeting AA managed to push for the need to do an assessment to look at the status of women. The initial needs assessment was facilitated by ActionAid and Department of Women's Affairs and this led to a more focused approach in the cluster.

HRBA training delivered in October was provided in a way that made it possible for very poor women to participate, and the effort to take equipment and even a generator to project sites was very much appreciated. Women understood and repeated back information they had gained from the training, and had clearly enjoyed it as demonstrated by the comments made in these 2-minute videos:

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As a result of engaging this wide range of women, the project is well placed to shift power relations in the longer term. However there is an urgent need to deliver some tangible outcomes for women to maintain this engagement, as described below in the section “Strengthening Access to Resources”.

“Tanna women want Tanna women” _ WiTTT taskforce member speaking of women’s desire to lead themselves.

3. Building on existing capacities

As a facilitator of change rather than an implementing aid agency, ActionAid builds on local capacities rather than imposing external solutions. In Vanuatu, the project respects existing capacities of women in communities and works to strengthen DWA as the principal government institution to represent women. This is important, as there is a women’s movement in Vanuatu, as well as a desire evident among community members and staff for ni-Vanuatu women to control their own futures.

The project is founded on recognition of women’s knowledge and critical role in emergency preparedness, as first responders in response, in recovery and resilience. The Women’s Information Centres (known as Blue Tents) were established because they recognized the value of information provided by women for the whole community, as well as women’s rights. This is also recognized by other stakeholders, even those who identify women only in their domestic role but see the value of their perspective in, for example, the design of emergency shelters. In Phase 2, the WiTTT is well structured to offer women opportunities to share and build on their existing skills and vision through participation in the taskforce which mobilises women and men and coordinates activities.

However, the project needs to maintain its focus to achieve this. In discussions with women in the communities in Tanna, it appeared there was an emphasis on resilience and livelihoods. The link to disaster preparedness, response and recovery was not articulated, although women are still struggling in the aftermath of the Cyclone and current drought. This is common following emergencies, where immediate family wellbeing is prioritized. Once the disaster is managed efforts should be put towards strengthening women’s ability to be resilient and participate in early warning and preparedness. Most recent activities appear to have been ad hoc trainings for income generating, food production etc, with a drift away from issues related to emergency preparedness and response, which were not raised by participants in the field discussions. Women in Tanna were asked directly about the community level disaster committees, but were unaware of them. Women in communities need to see livelihoods, resilience and other protection activities as they relate to disaster and the project should work to reaffirm this focus with the WITTT taskforces and membership.

An opportunity exists to strengthen the link with DRR work across the government and NGO sector, policies and services as CARE and the provincial government move to implement the national disaster preparedness plan. In Tanna, Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) that are being established by Provincial government and NDMO, with support of CARE, and reserve multiple places for women’s representatives. These committees are key to the government disaster preparedness strategy and should be the focal point for all community disaster prep work. If

ActionAid, CARE and government can link in the communities where there is crossover this would be mutually supporting to support the roll-out of the CDCCC initiative, the presence of women and stronger women's voices in dispre and response.

By engaging with the DWA, AA is supporting existing women's institutions in Vanuatu. AA's partnership with DWA under Ministry of Justice is strategic, as this department leads on the country's gender strategy, and the Ministry of Justice is supportive. KIIs with Gov't and NGOs indicated that DWA has not had support from other players and that this is needed and timely as DWA seeks to consolidate the open attitude towards women's rights that is emerging within some parts of government. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to assess this in detail, but KII's with government, staff and INGOs indicated that movement in Vanuatu has a troubled history of in-fighting that is seen to have undermined progress and achievement. DWA appointed two strong and experienced leaders to work in Tanna and Erromango, who have facilitated the wide engagement with women.

DWA is the strongest ally for women in government, and the right partner for ActionAid. Early challenges can be overcome as women look for the involvement of both ActionAid and DWA. It is important to find opportunities to build and demonstrate both partners' commitment to the project and to the relationship. Joint participation in strategic events and planning activities, more use of co-branded visibility materials and more rigorous information-sharing are opportunities for strengthening the partnership.

The evaluation concluded that the relationship continues to have strong potential to benefit ni-Vanuatu women. Possible measures to strengthen the partnership include organizing HRBA/protection training for DWA staff, which has been requested, as well as continuing with providing advice informally. ActionAid should also be active in informally supporting DWA as the co-chair of the Gender and Protection Working Group by attending meetings together and following up on activities. (UNWomen has recently funded a position for this role, so this should become easier). Both partners would benefit from strengthening shared ownership of the project, through recognizing and promoting DWA, for example through developing jointly branded information sheets and communications materials, and referring to the partnership in all community and stakeholder meetings. A partnership agreement would also provide clarity on values and expectations around the AA-DWA relationship, including the level of autonomy AA needs to realise its mission and take sides with the poor.

Although not explored in depth, there are also other women's groups in Vanuatu who are seeking to organise and support women. In discussions with women in Tanna and in KIIs with government stakeholders it was clear that there are various active women's groups and the project should seek to understand how to coordinate with these entities. Staff also commented that "copycats" were emerging from within women's civil society after seeing the success of the Blue Tents and WITTT in mobilizing women. This is a compliment to the project, but there was debate as to whether this was an opportunity or threat. AA will need to develop a strategy as to how to deal with this.

4. Addressing barriers to leadership

"I AM a woman leader." _ FGD with WiTTT Taskforce

"Men have been covering our eyes, but ActionAid takes this out" _ AA FGD with WiTTT Taskforce

"Taskforce gives a chance to build confidence, support each other a lot and build knowledge. It helps us to know the role of a leader...women have courage to speak out."



2. Nalau Andrew, 70, Taskforce member from Lamenu area. Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid's disaster response in Vanuatu laid the foundations for WiTTT, which is playing a unique role in creating conditions to support women to overcome barriers to leadership at community level. The project concept of creating women's forums led by as 'taskforce' selected by women offers strong opportunities for women to build capacities and grassroots support they need to become effective representatives for women.

Evaluation field work demonstrated women with the will to become leaders, but it was probably too early to identify women from the communities who had taken on a clear leadership role. Project staff, who also come from the

local communities, appeared to be strong leaders, and one staff member will stand for the national election. If she is successful this may be seen as an unexpected outcome of the project, but it also will be important to ensure space for women in the taskforce to take up their own leadership opportunities.

All stakeholders, female and male, government, community and staff members, agreed that women are marginalized in Vanuatu. Barriers to leadership for women in Vanuatu appear to exist at all levels of the culture and society, with no women at all represented in the national parliament. Generally, community decisions are made by a council of chiefs, who are by definition male, and women are prohibited from participating.

Barriers to leadership observed and discussed with women and other stakeholders were:

- Rigid community leadership structures that exclude women
- Minimal participation of women in all governance processes
- Women's lack of "exposure" deprives them of confidence to lead
- Social norms and women's roles: Husbands are to be obeyed and served; women internalise and accept a subservient position; church influence encourages submissiveness within marriage

- Women's unpaid care roles restrict their mobility and compound their lack of "exposure";
- High levels of VAWG;
- Lack of physical safe spaces for women makes it difficult for women to organise without observation or interference from men;
- Reported divisions in the women's movement undermines effectiveness

Opportunities for leadership:

- Recognition that women's rights are not met observed amongst men and women in government (varying levels) and recognition that Vanuatu government has a history of being 'gender blind' and overlooking violations or women's rights.
- Vanuatu is signatory to key international women's rights legislation / commitments though implementation and local legislation lags behind. (More detailed analysis needed)
- "Special measures" and upcoming election: women are being encouraged to seek positions in the election of early 2016
- Post –emergency disaster preparedness planning and introduction of CDCCCs with quotas.



3. Joylin David, 27, Taskforce member from WhiteSands area. Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid's work is supporting women to address a number of these barriers. Women were observed to embrace the concept of human rights and understand what it means to them. They were keen to take up leadership and act as change agents, and wanted to link with others who are working towards the same goals, particularly around the world. In Port Vila, it was observed that the project has strong links with women councillors, such as Cathrine Hivo (pictured below), who is strongly engaged with AA as a supporter of women and a network to support her own work.

"I want to help women understand and see what they couldn't see", KI with woman councillor.

Women's isolation ("limited exposure") is seen as key to undermining women's confidence to speak out and their capacity to engage with issues and demonstrate leadership. Appointing women in committees without strengthening their skills to lead is seen as setting them up to fail. AA's model, bringing women together to discuss and analyse rights, and draw strengths from others, including men and other allies in positions of influence, is essential for preparing them for leadership roles.

"Most of us don't have enough education, but we try our best." _ Focus group discussion, Middlebush

"I want to speak. My husband supports me. My challenge, I was not educated, but I find out through my husband. I'm helping women in the community."



4. Cathrine Hivo, Port Vila Municipal Councillor. Photo: ActionAid

The rights training and establishment of WiTTT has given women the awareness, confidence and support to begin developing a vision and confidence to speak out, which are the first and crucial step

"I am very proud that I am a member of Taskforce and I am inspired and happy but this is my challenge. People say, "You just go and Tok tok tok. What is it you are doing? Other NGOs, WV, Red Cross, CARE International, give us materials for the community. But what are you doing?"

"Women have chosen me to be the leader of the taskforce. My challenge is that because everyone is not working when I ask for a contribution they can't help me. I am facing so much challenge raising the money, but I really like being the taskforce leader." _ Participant in the Taskforce FGD, referring to the lack of tangible outcomes demonstrated to date, and the challenges of covering costs to travel to meetings. Her husband often funds her participation.

towards representing/ leading. Now, after 8 months, women need to be supported to achieve and demonstrate success. This is the next critical element to gaining respect within households and communities to shift power relations.

At a practical level, women need a small amount of funding to enable them to continue to travel, meet and learn. They also need seed funding to implement actions and achieve small changes that will strengthen their respect within the community and household, and their support base.

6. Strengthening access to resources

The project's greatest challenge has been around its limited impact on women's access to resources in terms of immediate needs. It is not AA's mandate to deliver services or goods, but this can be a difficult message to 'sell' to women and communities desperate for material support. HRBA in emergency response requires strong information management systems and networks that will help women and communities to benefit from the resources available. If AA's HRBA in emergencies is to be credible, it must offer systems that will strengthen accountability around relief.

The evaluation noted that some former and current staff and communities were dismayed by what they perceived as a lack of systems and a failure to support women to

receive goods they needed. *"I had to beg the Red Cross for 100 blankets,"* said one participant in a staff FGD. Strong language was used, with one participant saying that she felt that a huge amount of information was collected from women through the blue tents, but there was no way to use it. She said: *"It is a kind of violence against women too...."*

ActionAid and project staff stressed that meeting immediate needs was not ActionAid's mandate, and said that significant efforts were made to communicate this clearly to women and communities. However, women in the focus groups in Tanna and Eton were disappointed with ActionAid that requests for goods had not been fulfilled by any actor, and that they had not received further information updating them on what had happened to their requests. Some women reported that they had received some small part of what they had requested through the Blue Tents, but this was insignificant.

Since the cyclone, drought has compounded the need and undermined relief efforts to rebuild gardens. In Tanna a volcanic dust cloud further affected soil and communities reported that they remain dependent on infrequent, small food distributions. Many houses remain unfixed, and many remain without even tarpaulins. Water is not available, meaning women spend more time collecting water which is less healthy.

coordination is demanding as information flows in relief contexts are fluid, erratic and fast. The NDMO during the evaluation recommended that AA become a member of the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team, however it has also been suggested that this is something of a closed space for larger INGOs.

Although the women in the communities met regarded themselves as equally badly off as they were immediately following the typhoon in terms of material needs, there was strong appreciation for bringing women together in Women I Tok Tok.

7. Creating safe spaces for women

Now they have established solidarity to go forward”_ Local staff member referring to Blue Tents/ Women’s Information Centres and WiTTT

The project created safe spaces for women that have evolved from the Blue Tents into fora where women are organizing to build a vision, solidarity and actions to realize their rights. This is a big achievement.

The Blue Tents were successful because they were established very quickly, were strategically placed at the centre of emergency operations and because they were supported by the right local government partners in the Ministry of Justice and DWA. They attracted large numbers (4,010 women visited the 4 centres between 14 April and 30 June 2015, according to ActionAid’s report of “Key Findings from Women’s Information Centres”, July 2015) of women, and challenged assumptions that a standalone focus on women was not possible in Vanuatu.

ActionAid succeeded in defining the boundaries around the Blue Tents, so that they were recognised and respected by community members and other stakeholders as women’s only space. Men occasionally entered, but it was made clear that it was a place and program to support women. There were some expectations that women would raise VAW issues, but these did not emerge. KIs speculated that this was because of the strong focus on immediate and community needs. There was a discussion during the evaluation as to whether the tents created an additional burden for women, who were sometimes manipulated by men to promote their own needs. However, women in communities embraced the concept of the tents and the opportunity to connect directly with the relief system. The evaluation heard that women cried when one of the blue tents was eventually taken down, because it had meant so much to them.

The demand for the Blue Tents made it logical to establish WiTTT, which now reportedly has 3,700 registered members, well in excess of the target of 1,700 women by end 2017. Launches for WiTTT were major events undertaken to promote the women’s forums with women and men in communities. Male and female government representatives and community leaders attended and demonstrated their support for this women’s rights initiative. There was a big investment of time and resources in these launches, which one KI said raised unrealistic expectations in a very public way. As stated elsewhere in this report, it is important that WiTTT achieve some outcomes soon, but the launches were intended to create legitimacy for the forums, including the cooperation of local chiefs and husbands, which appears to have been successful.

The question of how to work with men is also important. Men’s power over women in the family and community makes it essential to engage with men for permission and access to women, and of course men are the perpetrators of VAW. However, men living in poverty in Vanuatu also have a low level of consciousness of human rights. One KI shared her experience that men have no awareness of basic women’s health including issues around menstruation and pregnancy, and are looking for this

knowledge. They also have had no exposure to human rights issues, and requested rights training when it was delivered in the community. ActionAid responded to their request. Several examples of men changing attitudes and becoming advocates for women's rights after training were also cited.

WTTT "very interesting and unique, but really need to have more males inside.... It's being seen as men against women" _ KI with government stakeholder

However, it is vital to ensure there clear boundaries and protect space for women. This was stated emphatically in KIs, by both male and female informants, who recalled a successful savings and loans scheme established by and for women in a previous project. Men "totally wrecked it" by pushing themselves into the scheme and taking up 'executive' positions without understanding the roles. Within a short time the money was gone, understandings established within the group were destroyed and the promising initiative had failed. However, engagement with men needs to be carefully managed. It was very clear that women value their exclusive space and this is one of the project's unique strengths. However, activities with men may strengthen support for the program and would also distract them when women are trying to work together. Men should not however be invited to be part of women's activities, due to the risk they will undermine the outcomes for women. An example was given by staff and provincial government staff of an effective savings and loans program that was destroyed by men once it started to generate good income. Men wished to benefit from the program, pushed out women on the Executive to take up their roles without knowing how to fill the positions. The funds and goodwill were decimated. *"The men will wreck everything" _ KI with government stakeholder*

The blue tents have been taken down in most places, as the immediate relief phase ended. Physical safe spaces for WTTT are now badly needed as men consistently broach women's privacy by staying on the fringe of meetings, as was observed and reported through the evaluation. Women need a secure place to store any resources for any activities to be undertaken (eg cash for revolving loans), as well as for discussions about sensitive matters. This evaluation therefore recommends that project staff engage with other community partners and service providers to locate a secure venue for women's meetings that can be used in the medium term.

8. Embedding community based, women-led protection mechanisms

The Vanuatu emergency response project has an explicit focus on protection. The project approaches protection through its HRBA, building the capacity and platforms for women to claim their rights through a staged process starting with the current phase of community mobilization and awareness raising for women. This approach recognizes the close relationship between power, rights and protection.

Effective community-led protection depends on empowered women and men claiming rights, and therefore demands management of conflict generated by change. This is a learning for the Vanuatu project.

During the emergency phase, the Blue Tents supported protection for women by raising visibility of women's issues and promoting women's voices. In the current phase, the project is motivating women through inspiring rights language and the solidarity and support they gain through WTTT meetings. The project is indirectly linked with the Vanuatu Women's Centres, which were well known in the communities visited through the evaluation. The connection with services related to VAW and justice is important and needs to be expanded and strengthened.

Women are excited about the inspiring language of rights. In Tanna, there is a call and response chant:

Caller (fist in air): “Women I tok tok...”

Women respond with fist in air: “Together!”

It’s spine tingling, joyous and moving, but also potentially threatening to men who remained present listening and lurking on the fringes at the community meetings observed. Given the high levels of VAW, there is a real danger that women might experience harm if they anger men. The project should explore the most appropriate ways to monitor levels of VAWG experienced by women associated with WITTT as a live protection issue. The question of how to engage / respond to men becomes a protection issue too.

One staff member has experienced serious threats after alienating a section of the community. She is unable to return to that community. She explained that the threats were a reaction to an interview she gave criticizing local government relief efforts with international media, as well as an ActionAid-sponsored community action to prevent a school relocation in Erromango. This highlights the complexity of local power dynamics and the risks involved in HRBA and community campaigning. ActionAid staff in Vanuatu are engaged and enthusiastic to challenge injustices through HRBA, but need to be supported and benefit from AA’s experience in managing the sensitivities. AA needs urgently to draw on experience from the federation to build capacity for campaigns planning including risk analysis, and conflict management and resolution skills.

The evaluation did not find a documented protection analysis per se, however planning workshops undertaken did discuss protection and included training. A documented protection analysis developed with WITTT groups would help define the concept and guide the project.

9. Campaigning against structural causes

Some campaigning work has been undertaken within the limited resources available to the team, but has not been a major focus at this early stage.

Staff advised the evaluation that AA has supported advocacy efforts as follows:

- Petition to Ministry of Education resulting in suspension of school fees
- Information shared about women’s needs with NDMO
- Petition in Erromango preventing relocation of a school.

The petitions contributed to an announcement suspending school fees and resulted in plans for the school relocation being scrapped.

In addition to addressing issues around conflict resolution referenced above, the project would benefit from stronger information management systems so that issues raised can be followed up and outcomes achieved. When interviewed, the NDMO director was unaware of a report or petition ActionAid reportedly presented on women’s needs collected through the Blue Tents, and staff were not clear how this could be followed up. Similarly, casual conversations with community members suggested they were still paying school fees, which raises questions about the suspension of school fees. ActionAid should be able to monitor these issues.

ActionAid’s potential to address structural issues related to emergency preparedness and response has also been affected recently by the limited connections with the international humanitarian sector, noted elsewhere in this report. AA has been excluded from opportunities to feed into the national and provincial disaster preparedness strategies led by government and CARE International, was not invited to a recent sectoral lessons learned workshop and INGOs with greater distribution capacity have been unaware of ActionAid’s work or the data collected through WICs. However, ActionAid has re-engaged with the Gender and Protection Cluster, which is reconvening to respond

to the impact of drought and which DWA is expected to co-chair. UNWomen is funding a staff member to take on this role.



7. Women in Middlebush greet the evaluation team. Photo: ActionAid

It will be important for ActionAid to continue engaging with the Gender and Protection Cluster, and to encourage and support DWA's commitment to participating in this cluster, which is the key formal body for influencing government policy and practice related to emergency preparation and response. There is also a need to bring AA's voice into the drought response, which is growing in significance for women as it extends further. This will be important for achieving Objective 3 of the Protection Project.

10. Program Support and Operations

"We worked quickly and did as much as we could with the resources that we had."_ KII

Despite limited resources, AA responded swiftly to Cyclone Pam and launched a project with the transformational potential described above. AAA was able to support the project at critical moments by sending staff for short-term deployments. AAA programs staff worked hard to support Vanuatu, but was also challenged to manage competing priorities. Australia's finance team also bore a heavy load, and dedicated many hours to administering the project.

AA has been lucky to have had dedicated staff who embraced the challenge of working and living under difficult working conditions. The context was relatively safe, and no accidents occurred during travel, which included light planes and boat trips on open seas. Future responses should ensure that sufficient resources are available to implement systems that will provide stronger OHS for staff.

The small budget and high turnover of AA project managers were challenges noted by all Vanuatu staff in KIIs. They were felt to have undermined the project's potential to support better outcomes for women, and to be potentially damaging to AA's reputation in the long term. AA's efforts to support the program despite these limitations were recognised. However, some quotations from interviews

presented below indicate the level of stress and anxiety caused as staff tried to deliver on the program's goals and expectations of communities. Key areas that were raised were: management of information collected through the Blue Tents and the need for system for utilizing the information; clarity around staff management; and how to move forward with actions now that women had been mobilized and expectations raised:

"If we don't have resources, I wonder, do we now just leave these women in the lurch?" KI

"We started something, but we didn't have the resources to carry it through... It was irresponsible... I couldn't sleep at night."

At the time of the evaluation, there were particular challenges around the very high and fluctuating travel costs for both staff and community women. ActionAid has a 'zero tolerance' policy on fraud. At the same time, constant questioning of costs is insulting for local partner staff and limits willingness to undertake travel or call community members for meetings. This is an example of problems that occur in the absence of strong systems and policy implementation. This can be addressed through decisive messaging from AAA going forward and by deploying qualified staff to put systems in place and train project staff to implement them.

As noted in the Recommendations section above, AAI would better be able to manage these concerns if it could identify the minimum resources needed to support staff and program and meet organizational policies and standards in emergency response and use these to guide decision-making. In Vanuatu, after 8 months it is important now to strengthen the systems that support the program and project staff.

Despite the challenges, ActionAid Australia's key programs staff and finance team were individually recognized by all staff interviewed for the efforts to support the program and team in Vanuatu. Their knowledge and dedication were respected and appreciated, and there is a strong commitment on all sides to take the project forward to achieve its goals. At the time of writing, ActionAid had secured further funding from UNWomen to continue its support for DWA and is continuing to seek new avenues for support.

Annexes

Annex 1. 2015 IHART Emergency Response Plan

Annex 2. Evaluation TOR

Annex 3. Evaluation questions and framework

Annex 4. Evaluation field visit schedule