

ActionAid Vanuatu & Women I TokTok Tugeta (WITTT)

Mobilising Ni-Vanuatu women in response to climate change and disasters



Background

Vanuatu is one of the countries most at risk of climate disasters in the world, while also facing significant challenges in relation to gender equality and women's leadership. **Only one woman sits in the national parliament, and it is estimated that 60 per cent of Ni-Vanuatu women aged 15-49 years have experienced physical or sexual violence.** During times of crisis, this violence intensifies, along with women's food and economic insecurity and unpaid work. In this context, supporting women's organising and collective action is a critical priority.

It has been a core objective for ActionAid Vanuatu since it began in 2015, working in partnership with the Department of Women's Affairs to support women affected by the destruction caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam.

Building on temporary women's information centres set up in the aftermath of the cyclone, which provided a space for more than 12,000 women to access information and mobilise around their protection concerns, **ActionAid has supported Ni-Vanuatu women to establish Women I TokTok Tugeta (WITTT).**

The locally-led and driven women's forum now **brings together over 9000 women on five islands**, who meet regularly through women's collectives to advance their rights and drive locally-led responses to climate change and disasters. The network began in Erromango, Efate and Tanna as the islands most affected by Cyclone Pam and expanded to Malekula and Malo in 2020 following Cyclone Harold.

Our Model of Community Organising

Our model of community organising is underpinned by a human rights based approach, which centres on protecting and fulfilling the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion as the most effective way of eradicating poverty and injustice. This model explicitly focuses on marginalised groups of women given the clear linkages between poverty, gender equality and intersecting forms of discrimination. **It builds women's individual and collective conscious raising around their rights, and supports the formation of women's collectives**, which link women up at village, provincial, national and regional level to build a powerful movement of change.

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In Vanuatu, **WITTT is supported by two community mobilisers on each island**, who have been trained in areas such as women's rights, disaster preparedness and response, community-based protection and resilience building. These local women leaders roll out training and provide ongoing support through the WITTT structure.

At village level, women are organised in 'sister circles', and each circle has a leader represented on the WITTT Provincial Taskforce, which meets monthly and in turn has representation on the WITTT National Steering Committee, which meets quarterly and includes the WITTT Community Mobilisers. The WITTT Steering Committee guides the overall direction and growth of the network working in partnership with ActionAid Vanuatu.

Within WITTT, women with disabilities have also established WITTT Sunshine, which focuses on the unique needs and concerns of women with disabilities and supports their collective efforts to ensure inclusive humanitarian response that protects their rights and responds to their needs. It has over 600 members and is supported by two mobilisers who are women with disabilities themselves.

ActionAid Vanuatu and the WITTT network are also part of the regional Shifting the Power Coalition, which brings together **13 women-led organisations and the Pacific Disability Network to promote the leadership, voice and agency of diverse Pacific women on climate and humanitarian action.**

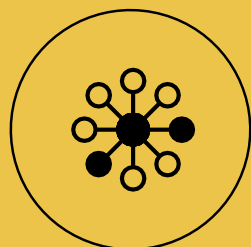
Overarching Goal & Objectives

The overarching goal of Women I Tok Tok Tugeta is to **create a locally led, national platform for diverse Ni-Vanuatu women to organise and mobilise around their rights and resilience to climate change and disasters.** The network's current objectives are:

- To support women's leadership on climate change and disasters, including preparedness planning, early warning, response and policy influencing
- To create a safe space for women to build awareness of their rights and to define and drive priorities for their safety and dignity during disasters.
- To build a movement that is inclusive of young women and women with disabilities and builds a resilient future for all women.

Underpinning ActionAid's approach in Vanuatu is a theory of change that sees crisis as a moment of societal upheaval that creates an opening to drive gender transformative change over the longer term, building back better in ways that work for women.

Through WITTT circles, ActionAid has been supporting the piloting of its Women-Led Community Based Protection model, which is a **world-first in supporting women from crisis affected communities** to define and drive their own protection needs in times of disaster. This model uses participatory methodologies for women to analyse how crises undermine their rights and to identify strategies for responding that draw on their own capacities, knowledge and networks.



The overarching goal of Women I Tok Tok Tugeta is to create a **locally led, national platform** for diverse Ni-Vanuatu women to **organise and mobilise around their rights and resilience to climate change and disasters.**

Impact to Date

Since 2015, the network has already achieved significant impact, including:

- **Establishment of women's information centres and safe spaces** on 3 islands which reached 12,000 women and ignited the WITTT movement
- **Successful lobbying for the establishment of a police post in order to protect women and their children from violence**, and the waiving of school fees during times of crisis. The network's disability chapter, WITTT Sunshine, also have secured recognition of consultation with women with disabilities as part of Government's Standard Operating Procedures in Emergencies.
- **Creation of a women-led information and early warning system** that has alerted more than 40% of the population to impending cyclones and health emergencies, supporting communities to prepare. The system has been recognised by the Government of Vanuatu as part of the National Emergency Operations Centre.
- **Driving uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination by educating themselves about the benefits of vaccination**, challenging myths and misinformation, and being among the first to be vaccinated, along with their children, which catalysed broader community uptake of the vaccine.
- **Coordination of an inclusive Ni-Vanuatu women-led response to twin cyclones in March 2023**, which provided 30,000 people with emergency baskets of food, water, sanitary items and other vital supplies and distributed 40 tonnes of locally-grown vegetables to local hospitals and two of the most impacted islands. WITTT Sunshine also led a response to some of the most vulnerable and excluded people with disabilities on the main island of Efate, providing relief targeted to their specific needs.

This is just a snapshot of the wide-reaching impact of the WITTT network.



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