

RESEARCH

COVID-19



WASH, Foodways, Markets, Women and COVID-19 in Vanuatu

Water for Women is the Australian Government's flagship Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program aimed at improving the health, gender equality and wellbeing of Asian and Pacific communities through inclusive and sustainable WASH.

Research is an important element of Water for Women. It is a key pathway for development innovation and helps to inform policy-making and program delivery.

With the challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, research can also help affirm the crucial role of WASH in preparedness, response and recovery initiatives.

Water for Women partners have played an important role in supporting COVID-19 response and learning across the Indo-Pacific, and are continuing to contribute to the region's stability, resilience and future prosperity.

Led by **International WaterCentre** and **Griffith University (IWC-GU)**, this research project will build a shared understanding of WASH-related COVID-19 vulnerabilities experienced by food 'workers' and across the food supply chain (from garden to market) in order to improve prevention measures against COVID-19 and other communicable diseases in Vanuatu.



Research can affirm the crucial role of WASH responses to COVID-19



Vanuatu



Seaside Market House, Port Vila (Tima Allanson)

Supporting urban food security and livelihoods through improving WASH outcomes for protection against COVID-19 in markets, food and agricultural chains

Formal and informal ‘workers’ are the backbone of food supply chains in Vanuatu, with women making up the majority of market vendors. These women and their families are dependent on selling produce for their economic wellbeing. Urban and peri-urban residents are highly reliant on purchasing fresh produce from local markets.

These local food supply chains are vulnerable to various COVID-19 induced challenges; logistical (e.g. transport disruptions, social distancing regulations) and health security (e.g. inadequate access to safe and reliable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services) and the status of WASH services in local market contexts in Vanuatu are not widely understood.

An inability to access adequate WASH services in these contexts increases vulnerabilities to infection by pathogens such as SARS-cov-2, as well as other communicable diseases. The International WaterCentre and Griffith University, working in partnership with The University of the South Pacific and World Vision Vanuatu are working to better understand the current WASH situation in markets in Vanuatu, as well as select other food/agriculture business contexts (e.g. cooperatives, livestock-related workplaces).

“We are afraid to come to town and sell at the market, so now we don’t have enough money for soap, rice, salt, and nappies. My children are no longer going to primary or secondary school [as I now struggle to pay school fees]...We need a better market house with access to good water...”

41 year old Female market vendor from Valangar, South Santo, Peoples Investment Market, Luganville, Santo

Drawing on surveys and interviews with market vendors and managers as well as government, civil society organisations (CSOs) and agri-business representatives, the project uses a research to policy collaborative approach that draws together stakeholders in a series of workshops to identify WASH challenges and opportunities so government and CSOs can make more informed policy and investment decisions – including awareness outreach campaigns – that contribute to improving WASH knowledge and services.

In addition to building research capacity and WASH knowledge amongst local partners, the expected outcomes of this research are to fill current gaps in WASH knowledge associated with markets and other short food supply chains in

Vanuatu, improve awareness of WASH-related vulnerabilities to COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, and ultimately contribute to both improved protection against COVID-19 infection and economic stability for food workers.

“Before COVID-19 there were more vendors coming to sell and there was a lot more customers; now there are not... when they heard people were dying [overseas] they stopped coming.”

Mary Willie, Market Manager Freshwota Park, Port Vila, Efate

This transdisciplinary research will benefit the Vanuatu Government, local civil society organisations and industry bodies as well as the market vendors. It is a collaboration between Water for Women and lead partners, International WaterCentre and Griffith University as well as The University of the South Pacific (School of Agriculture, Geography, Environment, Oceans, and Natural Sciences) and World Vision in Vanuatu.



Australia believes that equitable WASH access is of crucial importance to develop communities. Water for Women and our partners provide innovative solutions to WASH delivery and use research to contribute evidence to the global WASH sector. By working together and building evidence, we can create better, more sustainable WASH outcomes whilst also contributing to strengthened gender equality and inclusion.

COVID-19

WASH is a critical response to COVID-19. Water for Women partners are undertaking research to better understand, and support, WASH responses to COVID-19 in the Indo-Pacific region in support of the Australian Government’s Partnerships for Recovery.

