

VANUATU COUNTRY SUPPLEMENT



1 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

This paper is a supplement to *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Regional and Global Promising Approaches*, which addresses the issue of violence against women in the region as a whole. The main report describes all promising approaches identified by the team from across the region, and proposes, through a series of recommendations, an action plan relevant to all countries studied. This supplement provides more country-specific information on Vanuatu, permitting a more nuanced approach to proposed solutions. The regional report and the Vanuatu report, when read together, provide a comprehensive picture of promising approaches for addressing violence against women, recommendations relevant for all countries and specific direction for where to focus efforts in Vanuatu.

The process began in 2007, when the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) Office of Development Effectiveness identified violence against women as a major barrier to development in the region, with serious effects not only on the health and welfare of the women experiencing violence, but on their families, communities and countries (AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness 2007). Following a review of international lessons learned, visits of four to nine days were carried out by the international evaluation team to each of the five countries in the region (East Timor, Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu) during September and October 2007.

Interviews and focus group discussions using a set of participatory exercises were carried out with policymakers, service providers, users of the services, civil society groups and community members. These were continued by locally recruited researchers, except in East Timor, where there was a shortage of qualified individuals, but a number of recent studies.¹ Selection of the potentially promising practices to be reviewed was made in collaboration with AusAID Post personnel and local activists. Local advisory groups of prominent individuals were established in each country to provide feedback and direction to the evaluation team, to encourage ownership of the review's findings and to help promote and implement its recommendations. (Annex 1 lists the advisory group members for Vanuatu.)

In all, 140 individual were consulted in Vanuatu, including 43 individual interviews and 97 people who participated in focus group discussions. (Annex 2 lists the organisations consulted.²) Regional recommendations on the four theme areas (access to justice, support services for survivors, prevention, and multisectoral coordination) were developed during a workshop in Port Moresby in March 2008, involving all local researchers and representatives of the advisory groups from all countries.³

¹ Local researchers in Vanuatu were Emily Niras and Naomi Bolenga.

² To protect confidentiality, individuals have not been named.

³ Vanuatu was represented by Merlyn Tahī, Director of the Vanuatu Women's Centre, and Morris Kaloran, Ministry of Justice.

This is not a situational analysis, nor is it a comprehensive or complete listing of all the good things happening in Vanuatu. Many inspiring examples of work are underway in all parts of the country on violence against women, but only those brought to the team's attention could be covered. The study examined lessons learned and examples of promising interventions that could be scaled up, or applied in other countries. It focused as much as possible on women's own experience of violence, and what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention.

2 SITUATION OF WOMEN AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Men need to explain the cultural ways of doing things, and women should abide by it.
(community man, Port Vila)

Men are the head of the family, and when women are well-educated, it is difficult for a man to exercise his authority over the women. (men in Nakamal)

Women have 10 heads, so that if I want to straighten her out, I can beat her as much as I want to, but will only succeed in cutting one of the heads.(men in Nakamal)

There are no systematic studies of domestic or sexual violence in Vanuatu. However, information on cases collected by women's groups, such as the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), highlight the high rates of gender-based violence, especially intimate partner violence, in the country. Many women noted the use (and misinterpretation) of *kastom* and prevailing norms to excuse such violence. According to some researchers, for example, the payment of bride-price is used by many men to justify abuse, or even the murder, of wives (Tor & Toka 2004).

The VWC is currently carrying out an ambitious study on the prevalence and characteristics of violence against women in Vanuatu, based on the methodology of the World Health Organization's (WHO) *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women*. This should provide valuable evidence for the purposes of advocacy and improving programmes to address violence against women.

Despite its small size (barely 200 000 inhabitants), Vanuatu has an extraordinarily diverse population, spread over 68 inhabited islands and speaking more than 80 languages (not including dialects). The majority of the population live in rural and remote areas, which can make it extraordinarily difficult and expensive to provide timely access to health services or the formal justice system. Vanuatu is one of the poorer countries in the region, ranked 12 out of 14 Pacific countries in 1999 and 118 out of 177 countries worldwide in 2005, according to the United Nation's (UN) Development Programme human development index. Women are nearly invisible in the public service, with only 2 female parliamentarians out of 51 in 2006 (slightly less than 4 per cent), and only 15 per cent of senior government positions held by women.

Although the Constitution of Vanuatu grants equal rights to women, Vanuatu has a highly patriarchal society. Political and social life in Vanuatu, including gender roles and power relations between women and men, are also greatly influenced by traditional cultural attitudes and practices—*kastom*. The strictures of *kastom* permeate all aspects of society, and customary practices and rules as decreed by local chiefs, or by the national Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, have the status of law, particularly in rural areas.

Thus, despite Vanuatu's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international conventions on women's rights, the murky area between traditional and modern laws can lead to discriminatory practices, such as a ruling of the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs forbidding women to wear trousers, or setting a ceiling on the payment of bride-price (which was seen by women's rights activists as legitimising a practice that discriminates against women). Violence against women, by all accounts is common throughout Vanuatu, is often justified as a part of *kastom*.

However, this interpretation is disputed by one study completed on *kastom* and violence against women. The authors argue that *kastom* itself, or practices specific to Vanuatu culture, is not a static concept, and has undergone many changes throughout history. They distinguish between 'traditional *kastom*' and 'modern *kastom*', and show how over time, customary practices such as bride-price (originally an exchange of goods between families that recognised the value of women), have become distorted and are now used to imply men's ownership of women (Tor & Toka 2004).

Churches—particularly Christian churches—also play a prominent role in Vanuatu society and frequently provide ad hoc support for women, often through the many Christian women's groups and societies. Churches also provide counselling and some mediation and advocacy of peaceful family relations. However, churches are vocal opponents of broken homes and often discourage women from leaving violent situations in order to maintain the family. In drawing heavily from biblical teaching, the churches often reinforce notions of family that place women below men.

3 MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

Multisectoral coordination, both among government agencies and among Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), has been recognised as a weakness in Vanuatu. In 1997, violence against women was placed as the number four priority out of nine benchmarks for improving the status of women in Vanuatu. The Department of Women's Affairs developed a policy on violence against women in 2002, and recently developed a Plan of Action for Women, which has yet to be approved by the Government. The Department of Women's Affairs is seriously under-resourced, and

it does not appear that many of the activities included in the national plans have been implemented. Although there are other women's NGOs concerned with violence against women, albeit not to the extent of the VWC, there is no formal network functioning at present to coordinate activities on the issue.

4 WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

4.1 Legal reform

The most significant piece of legislation with respect to violence against women is the Family Protection Order Bill. This Bill was drafted in 1997 and passed by Parliament more than a decade later, in June 2008. The Family Protection Order Bill provides women with a means for protection from violent partners through restraining orders. Most importantly, it provides protection for women in rural areas where there are no courts. It authorises an alternate agency, like a chief, church leader, or any 'notable community leader, male or female', appointed by the Department of Women's Affairs as a 'registered person', to intervene in cases of violence.

Despite intensive lobbying by the Department of Women's Affairs, the VWC, and many other human rights organisations, the Bill met with strong opposition from powerful groups, such as the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs and religious groups, who argued that it would erode the authority of chiefs in *kastom* courts and promote the breakdown of families. However, after extensive consultations, the lobbying efforts finally paid off and the law was passed in 2008. However the law is still controversial and being contested by some conservative sectors of society and due to a challenge from the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC), it has not been gazetted and remains on hold while the Supreme Court determines its constitutionality⁴.

4.2 Formal justice system

Many women in Vanuatu do not have easy access to the police because of their remoteness to the nearest police post. Even when physical access is not an issue, in general, women consider the police a last resort, in part because of fear of inciting greater wrath and violence from their partners, but also because of the callous treatment women often receive from the police, who typically share the same attitudes on violence against women as the rest of the Vanuatu's male population. One police officer explained that the purpose of hitting your wife '*is not to kill her, but to teach her*'. Another police officer acknowledged that '*many police here believe that women wearing trousers cause men to rape women*'.⁵

⁴ The Vanuatu Christian Council petitioned the President of Vanuatu to not gazette the Family Protection Bill on the grounds that it contravenes the Christian principles stated in the preamble of the Constitution. At the time of publication, the Supreme Court had not yet made a ruling.

⁵ A study of rape victims was carried out by the women's movement to refute this charge, which found that all of the women in question had been wearing either traditional island dress or grass skirts at the time they were assaulted.

A senior police official acknowledged that 80 per cent of police incidents are related to domestic violence or violence within the family. However, very few cases are recorded or investigated.

We give the couple ample time, because three days later the wife usually comes back and wants to withdraw the statement. So we tell the wife we will keep her statement for a few days before proceeding, because we don't want to waste our time. (police officer)

Only in more serious cases—‘where the wife is being threatened and it is likely she'll be assaulted again’—do the police refer the woman to the VWC, which can help her obtain a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO).

Several survivors of violence told stories of police indifference:

I also was not feeling safe and comfortable with the whole thing because there was no confidentiality at the police station when dealing with my application. This is because the policeman who had dealt with my case is a friend and family of my husband, and even before the order was served, my husband had already known about it. (woman in focus group discussion)

The Port Vila police station has a Family Protection Unit (FPU), which deals primarily with cases of rape. There is no standard protocol for dealing with domestic or sexual violence cases, and no training for police officers has been held in Vanuatu. Police officers themselves have identified that a clear procedure for dealing with domestic violence would be helpful:

Vila is small, so if a neighbour or relative comes in, [the police officer at the desk] would have to dismiss the case because of the personal connection. Or, if it was the wife of another police officer, no one would want to deal with it. But if there was a protocol, it would help a lot. (senior police officer, Port Vila)

In some provinces, the police have become more sensitive to cases of violence against women, due to the Male Advocates Programme of the VWC. Many male advocates are themselves rural police officers who credit participating in the program with having changed their own views about violence and gender. In addition, a few police officers have received training in Fiji under the Pacific Regional Police Initiative. However, no follow-up has taken place with these officers. The review team met one police officer who received training in Fiji but he was transferred to the Fraud Squad shortly afterward and no longer deals with domestic violence cases. The VWC supports the adoption of a ‘no-drop policy’ in Vanuatu, similar to the one in Fiji. To make a difference, this would require a large amount of training and high-level commitment within the police force, as well as increased capacity in the courts.

The capacity and reach of the courts also limits women's access to justice. Access to the legal system is extremely problematic in rural communities, occurring only when courts are on provincial circuits. A lack of access to state legal institutions for a large proportion of the population not only makes accessing formal justice extremely

expensive, it has resulted in the chief taking on number of legal functions. Despite having no jurisdiction, Chiefs often hear cases of sexual assault and violence. When cases do get to magistrate court they are prosecuted by police prosecutors who have para-legal training, but no specific training on gender or violence against women. There are significant problems with backlogs, exacerbated by difficulty filling judicial appointments and most recently by the destruction by fire of the main court house in Port Vila. Failure of witness to appear is also a significant strain on the court system, requiring hearings to be rescheduled or cases abandoned. This is a frequent occurrence because of the geographic isolation of most of the population and the limited resources police have to track down and detain witnesses or perpetrators.

4.3 Domestic Violence Protection Orders

As a result of Parliament's delay in passing the Family Protection Order Bill, the Chief Justice of Vanuatu, urged by women's rights activists, took the unusual step in 2001 of issuing a court rule to enable women to receive DVPOs. The orders are processed by the Public Solicitor's Office, and the VWC is able to facilitate the process. DVPOs provide relatively quick and effective legal protection against domestic violence for a short period (typically 14 days), after which the victim and the accused need to appear in court. In the provinces, the VWC is able to obtain the orders by fax from Port Vila.

Many women are now using it. It's good, fast, and very effective. It's just a matter of the women deciding to use it. If they're determined, it can be very good for them, and helps the marriage, too, so both parties have time to assess the marriage safely. It reduces the violence and makes the man think. It makes him realise there's someone more powerful than him that is superior and can order him how to behave. (official from the Ombudsman's Office)

In theory, when there is a breach, or the accused does not appear in court, the magistrate has the power to order his arrest. However, there has never been a charge of breaching a DVPO brought before the court.

Most survivors of violence interviewed for this report felt the DVPO had been very helpful.

When I applied for the DVPO in September 2007, it provided me with the protection I needed against my husband, who at that time, was violent for the first time in our married life together. The DVPO enabled me to return to my children after hiding in a neighbour's home for more than two days, and this also meant that my husband had to leave the house temporarily to allow me to return home. I think the DVPO was a rude awakening for my husband, who after moving out of the house, came to realise the seriousness of his violent acts and was eager for us to meet and reconcile, and that is exactly what we did and we're now living together again with our children. (survivor of domestic violence, Port Vila)

Nonetheless, a DVPO can be difficult and prohibitively expensive for women to obtain, even in Port Vila. One woman reported that she had to go to five different offices to obtain one: she went to the police station, then was sent to the hospital for a medical report, then to the Government Finance Office to pay the fee, then to a legal clinic at the University of the South Pacific (USP) for help in preparing the DVPO, and finally, to the magistrate's court for signature. After that, she had to return the signed order to the police, who took two days to serve it. During this period, she was fearful her husband would track her down and hid for three days at a neighbour's house while waiting for the police to serve the protection order.

“I personally felt that it was too much for me to go through, especially when I was walking from one station to another in utter fear.” (Survivor of domestic violence, Port Vila)

For women living in rural areas, gaining access to orders is even more difficult. Others felt the 14-day period of the order, with limited opportunities for renewal, was not enough time to ensure their safety while they decided what to do.

From my experience, I personally feel that a 14-day order is too short for a woman who is scared and trying to get away from her violent partner. The problem is that the 14-day order is very expensive, and if a woman would like to have a longer period of order, she cannot afford this. (survivor of domestic violence, Port Vila)

DVPOs are also inconsistently applied in some cases. The review team found that in one provincial town, for example, women who receive orders have to leave their house, as opposed to their husband, and they usually have to leave their children behind because, according to *kastom*, children belong to the father (despite custody laws specifying that cases should be decided ‘in the best interests of the child’ regardless of traditional practices).

When this happens, the father would tell the children that their mother ran away because she did not like them. Children suffer when their mother is not there. (local court clerk)

4.4 Traditional and community-based justice

As noted earlier, the chief system and *kastom* law are extremely strong in Vanuatu, even in urban areas. Traditional courts, led by local chiefs, are empowered to hear cases dealing with various issues, such as robbery and land disputes, as well as cases pertaining to family disputes, including child maintenance and custody and domestic violence. A typical traditional court case is resolved by means of a ‘grace solution’, which involves exchanging goods on both sides of the dispute, such as woven mats, pigs (those with round tusks being more valuable), cash and *kava* (a narcotic drink commonly used in Vanuatu). The goal of traditional justice is always community and family harmony and reconciliation over individual rights; therefore, a chief will rarely fault only one side of a dispute and will never support the separation of the couple. Chiefs are all men, and women feel they are frequently disadvantaged in traditional court hearings.

In the case of domestic and sexual violence, a woman will almost always turn to her local chief for support before the police or other institutions. Going through a *kastom* ceremony does not preclude pursuing criminal charges, but compensation may mitigate any punishment.

Even in Vila, she'll go [to the chief]. The chief will try to reconcile them and make them pay the fines, and then send them home. The woman will have to pay a lot of money if she's the one who asks for the meeting, so her family will have to help her. The chief will maybe also give a fine to the husband and then make them shake hands and go home. This will not solve her problem because he will hit her again anyway. He will say he's paid bride-price so that gives him the right to hit her. The chief and the family will agree with this. They will say that 'You are his property'. (member, Committee Against Violence Against Women [CAVAW])

The chiefs are not supposed to deal with sexual assault or incest cases, but in practice, many chiefs hear these cases as well. For female sexual assault victims in rural areas, this may be the only practical option, as they are far away from the police and courts, and have limited or no access to appropriate medical treatment that would allow for the correct collection of evidence. Even if a rural woman was to take her case to the police, the police often do not have the resources to locate and detain the perpetrator, and in such situations, the chiefs are seen as the only form of redress.

Under the penal code, all sexual offences are police matters. But the chiefs do still take these in Kastom Court and order compensation. Sometimes they fine the girl for being in the wrong place, or even make the girl marry the rapist! (women's rights activist)

The treatment of women in some traditional courts has improved recently, with the training provided by the VWC's male advocates, some of whom are police officers and chiefs. This is described in greater detail later in the report.

5 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

Until recently, few options were available for women and girls seeking support for domestic or sexual assault. As mentioned earlier, it is common to feel that bride-price gives husbands the right to treat wives as property and beat them when they disobey. If a woman seeks refuge within her own family, they are unlikely to support her for more than a few days, for fear of being required to return her bride-price.

Because domestic violence is seen as a private matter, other community members or relatives are unlikely to intervene to protect a woman from her husband. '*Mi no wantem save*' ('I don't want to know' in Bislama) and '*Ino bisnis blo mi*' ('It's not my business') are common refrains from bystanders. In addition to local chiefs, many women seek support from Christian pastors. Like the chiefs, the pastors have a strong orientation toward reconciliation, so the likely outcome will be counselling, either to forgive and forget or to become a more obedient wife, to avoid beatings.

The VWC is the main source of support for women living with violence. Founded in 1993 by a small group of dedicated women in Port Vila, it now has branches in the provinces of Sanma and Tafea, in addition to the main location in Port Vila.

The VWC provides legal support and counselling for women and girls who have been abused, and can offer temporary shelter (Box 5.1). The Centre has also developed two innovative programs, the Committees Against Violence Against Women (CAVAW) and the Male Advocates Programme, both of which aim to increase access to support for rural women and transforming community attitudes toward violence against women (Box 5.2). Over time, the VWC has become recognised throughout the country for its outstanding work on behalf of women and children.

BOX 5.1: THE VANUATU WOMEN'S CENTRE

The VWC is an independent community service organisation established in 1993. It is based in the capital of Port Vila. The VWC's program on violence against women includes providing counselling services, community awareness and legal advocacy interventions throughout the country.

The VWC manages two branches, the Sanma Counselling Centre on Santo and the Tafea Counselling Centre on Tanna, both established in 2003. The VWC has a network of island-based CAVAWs, which undertake local community-awareness activities and help women and children living with violence in remote communities.

The VWC's activities include centre-based counselling; mobile counselling in Vila settlements and rural areas on Efate and during visits to CAVAWs in the islands; referrals to other agencies; and legal assistance, including representation in court for survivors and telephone counselling. Clients from outer islands are assisted through the Client Support Fund. Safe-house services are provided for women from Efate and the islands. A Court Fees Fund is used to assist women with court fees for domestic violence court orders, child maintenance claims, medical fees or other legal fees, such as payments for custom court hearings.

During 2008, the VWC is carrying out an ambitious study on the prevalence and characteristics of violence against women in Vanuatu, based on the methodology of the WHO multi-country study. This should provide valuable evidence for the purpose of advocacy and improving programmes to address violence against women.

The VWC is managed by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), which is also the Secretariat for the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women.

BOX 5.2: COMMITTEE AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The WVC has set up a network of community-level CAVAWs in all six provinces of Vanuatu. The volunteers receive basic training in legal literacy and counselling skills and are available to provide support to community women suffering domestic abuse or sexual assault. There are now 33 CAVAWs functioning in Vanuatu. They coordinate closely with the branch offices of the WVC, as well as local authorities, such as police, health providers and chiefs. They receive periodic visits and training from the WVC, and a small stipend to help with transporting survivors, paying court fees and meeting other needs. In addition to support to survivors, an important part of the CAVAWs' work is raising community awareness around women's rights and violence against women.

As they have become increasingly skilled and respected, CAVAW members have played critical roles in helping women obtain DVPOs, reporting and accompanying women to the police or magistrate courts, and even advising local chiefs on settling domestic disputes. Because community leadership tends to be heavily male-dominated, village women have appreciated receiving information and counselling from women who are willing to advocate on their behalf. The leader of a CAVAW in West Vanua Lava, herself a survivor of violence, spoke of the difficulties in setting up the CAVAW in 2002:

Before the establishment of the CAVAWs, lots of children and women died from bashing from husbands and fathers. Women now remind their husbands/partners that they can report them to the CAVAW, which has reduced fighting in the homes to a great extent. Men themselves now realise that women no longer have nowhere to go but have the CAVAW to help them. Men are beginning to respect their wives because there is now a body [CAVAW] in place that will support the women and punish the men for mistreating them.
(female CAVAW member from Torba)

This CAVAW leader has come to an agreement with the village chief, such that if a husband repeats violence after a report was brought to the attention of the chief, the chief will allow the CAVAW to help the wife file charges with the police.

Since the establishment of the CAVAW, there has been a big difference. The chiefs and the church are now inviting the CAVAW into their problem-solving meetings. The women have suffered too much, but nowadays, life is much better than in the past for women in this area. (male CAVAW member and local chief)

There is no coordinated response for women seeking medical treatment for violence-related injuries or sexual assault, and no formal procedures for dealing with domestic violence or sexual assault. Doctors and nurses receive no formal training on treating sexual assault or collecting medical evidence. Limited resources are available for training nurses and a generalised nursing workforce shortage. Currently in Vanuatu, for every three nurses that retire, only one is recruited.

In Port Vila, domestic violence and sexual assault victims are generally treated through the accident and emergency department, which has no private waiting area, leaving women feeling exposed and vulnerable. There is no formal referral service to either the police or for formal counselling, and women frequently have to return to the hospital for their medical report if the doctor is not available at the time. Likewise, no formal procedure exists for police to escort women to the hospital for medical treatment, and the review team heard conflicting accounts of whether a woman needs to seek treatment before she sees the police, or whether police have to request a medical report before the doctor will provide one.

These issues are exacerbated for women in rural areas who frequently have only limited access to basic health treatment and, in the case of sexual assault, virtually no access to appropriate pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted infection treatments or post-exposure prophylaxis. There are also limited resources to collect and store appropriate evidence.

6 VIOLENCE PREVENTION

One important lesson learned in more than three decades of work around the world is that prevention must be a key part of the strategy to eliminate violence against women. Preventing violence involves providing communities with information and building awareness around the issue, as well as challenging the attitudes that promote the superiority of men over women and accept violence as a way of resolving conflict. Changing attitudes on such deeply entrenched values and beliefs is a long-term goal. As mentioned above, the VWC carries out advocacy for new laws and policies. Additionally, the group is working to raise awareness at both the country level—through national media such as radio and newspaper articles—and the community level, through the CAVAWs and the Male Advocates Programme.

6.1 The ‘midel man’: Male advocates in Vanuatu

The Male Advocates Programme is modelled after the training program set up in Suva by the FWCC, and the first men recruited to it were trained in Suva by the FWCC. Subsequently, with continued help from the FWCC, training courses have been held in Port Vila. The VWC’s strategy is to engage men in leadership positions in their communities, particularly police officers and village chiefs, to support violence-prevention activities. Many of these male advocates are also members of the CAVAWs. The review team met with several male advocates, who spoke enthusiastically about their work.

I usually use the English word ‘advocate’. But if I had to say it in Bislama, I could say ‘midel man’. As I understand it, we are like middle people. We stay in the middle between men and women. For these issues affecting women, men don’t really understand, so we try to help out. We explain that women and men are both human beings and that they both have the same rights. One of the most important things we try our best to do all the time is to involve responsible leaders, such as church leaders, chiefs, youth leaders, provincial and area council leaders, in all our activities. These activities would include the 16 Days of Activism, Children’s Day, and any other day which we celebrate in the community. When we involve the leader in these activities, everyone feels free and comfortable to join us, and we all cooperate and support each other in making the event a successful one. (male advocate)

Male advocates also attribute changes in their personal lives to the program (Box 6.1). Together, the CAVAWs and the Male Advocates Programme have greatly increased women’s access to support and justice, particularly in rural areas where there are few other services. The male advocates who are also chiefs play a particularly important role in talking with other chiefs.

BOX 6.1: THE STORY OF A MALE ADVOCATE

Before I became a male advocate, I had violence in my home despite the fact that I am a police officer and should be upholding the law. I believe part of the reason I was violent stems from the tough police training I had received, as we were taught to be tough and strong men, and we were always under strict rules and commands, which brainwashed me into a monster. I was always violent toward my wife, and our life at home was not a happy one. After going through the male advocate training provided by the VWC, I now treat my wife with more respect than before. Being a male advocate, I am now able to put myself into the women's shoes and speak for them. Our CAVAWs around East Ambae area would refer all women victims to me for counselling and advice. If they choose, I also counsel their husbands, and it has really helped so many couples restore peace and unity in their homes. (male advocate, East Ambae CAVAW)

6.2 Wan Smol Bag

The Vanuatu theatre group, Wan Smol Bag (WSB), is an innovative program combining community theatre, print media, videos and workshops to draw attention to such issues as drug addiction, gender roles, domestic violence and sorcery. The programs are developed through formative research and are performed in Bislama throughout the country (Box 6.2).

BOX 6.2: WAN SMOL BAG

WSB was established as an amateur theatre group in Vanuatu in 1989. Since then, it has developed a reputation for delivering high-quality, locally produced film, radio and theatre productions. WSB uses drama and creative materials that draw on contemporary issues to inform and encourage community discussion on a range of issues, including HIV/AIDS, sexual health, domestic violence and citizens' rights and responsibilities.

With these activities, we are able to create an open and conducive atmosphere whereby young people interact with peers, and many of whom are themselves offenders or victims of violence, so that they can understand, accept and change their behaviour to violence. (group leader)

Responding to community discussions around these issues, WSB developed program that support youth services, including peer education, sexual and reproductive health, good governance, and community-based environmental conservation. The activities engage youth, men and women in discussions around priority development issues for the community that have shown potential for mobilising positive change around issues such as domestic violence.

WSB reaches out to youth before they leave school, providing them with valuable sexual and reproductive health information and links to services they may find difficult to access. As one group member said: *Many of us have changed our attitudes and behaviour after having been through this place. Many of us have shunned our violent behaviours after we learned to respect others.*

WSB also supports local non-government program, providing training in the use of its information, education and communication materials and techniques. Increasingly, WSB is being approached to work on various national and regional program, and its materials are used by a wide range of teachers and development agencies throughout the Pacific.

6.3 Women's economic and political empowerment

Because women's status is so low, increasing their participation in political leadership positions and economic and social status at all levels must be a priority. This means strengthening women's participation and leadership in community development and economic programs, as well as increasing their representation in national-level leadership positions, including in Parliament and in the public service.

Increasing women's economic empowerment also provides women with more options to escape from violence, access health and legal services and care for their children. Economic development programs, particularly those targeting women, should also incorporate education around violence against women and gender relations. The review team saw opportunities for integrating more education around violence and women's rights in the Vanuatu Women's Development Scheme's micro-financing program, which provides funding to women through centres that act as guarantor. Women working in close proximity (to one another, and to their families), provides a demonstration effect for men in the community:

Men do sometimes take their wives' money. But usually, men see successful examples of other women using the loan to run businesses and make more money, so they are less likely to want to spoil it. This is the benefit of having a local group, where everyone sees what's happening. (officer in the Department of Women's Affairs.)

The program also has component targeted at teaching men how to save money. Although it has no formal link to a violence-prevention objective, and at the time of the field work, funding was uncertain, the review team saw opportunities for integrating more education around violence and women's rights, and for continuing or scaling up the program

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

Despite its small size and relatively scarce resources compared to other countries, nearly 20 years of activism in Vanuatu have yielded impressive gains in raising public awareness about women's rights and violence against women, increasing women's access to justice and providing support for victims. The VWC has been recognised by the national government, as well as in international forums, for its groundbreaking work. In particular, the model of community mobilisation represented by the CAVAWs and the engagement with local chiefs and leaders through the Male Advocates Programme, are impressive achievements that can serve as models for many other countries. The multi-media work of WSB, and its skilful and professional use of popular culture and interpersonal communication, are also outstanding and should be considered best practice for the region.

7.2 Specific recommendations for Vanuatu

As with the regional report, recommendations here are presented in two parts: those requiring a more coordinated response to assigning priority and responsibilities and those that can be immediately considered and acted on by AusAID. Note, however, that *all* recommendations are relevant for *all* actors in Vanuatu working to address violence against women.

7.3 Recommendations for all actors

Support multisectoral coordination, both among local groups that work on women's issues and interagency coordination within the government. The Department of Women's Affairs would be well positioned to lead such coordination, if it were properly resourced and supported. There is also potential for the Justice Ministry to play a significant role by chairing the committee and driving multisectoral coordination. This might also provide an opportunity to incorporate activities to address violence against women into other government ministries, such as Health and Education. Support should also be prioritised for activities facilitating interagency coordination among international agencies.

Support legal reforms and training of police, magistrates and judges in the implementation of laws. Now that the Family Protection Order Bill has been passed, training of police (including senior officials and magistrates, as well as establishing mechanisms to monitor implementation, are critical. Support should also include more broad legal literacy and human rights-based training for community members. Efforts to increase access to justice must also recognise the particular needs of rural women.

Integrate attention to violence against women throughout the health system. Although survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault receive medico-legal services at the hospitals, there is no policy regarding violence against women in the health sector. Because violence against women is a significant cause of injury and ill health among women, this area should be a priority. Integrating action to address VAW violence against women into health services should be based on a thorough analysis of the health system and requires establishing policies and protocols to encourage health providers to identify, support and refer women and girls suffering violence, as well as training and follow-up to ensure that program are implemented effectively. Training for doctors and nurses should be integrated into pre-service and in-service training. Violence prevention should also be integrated into community health program, including sexuality, reproductive health and HIV prevention.

Address violence against women through primary and secondary education. Policies should be developed and implemented to prohibit sexual harassment and violence against girls in schools, whether from teachers or students. In addition, schools provide an opportunity for addressing violence and gender equity in the curriculum.

Engage youth in violence prevention activities. Integrating violence into existing youth programs should be supported, in particular opportunities to strengthen young women's leadership capacity.

Integrate violence prevention into economic and development programs for women. Efforts to integrate work on violence against women into programs dealing with the economic empowerment of women and local development, such as the Vanuatu Women's Development Scheme ANWODS program, should be supported.

Explore opportunities for increasing women's political empowerment and leadership at both the formal and informal levels, within the community, Parliament and the public service.

Facilitate dialogue between the formal justice system and traditional and community-based justice systems. Because the majority of cases of violence are dealt with by local chiefs, it is critical to involve them in efforts to address violence in a way that supports women's rights and interests. The Male Advocates Programme has succeeded in engaging male leaders, including police officers and chiefs, as allies. Further efforts to engage the Council of Chiefs in harmonising approaches to deal with violence against women should be supported as long as they are grounded in a human-rights framework and do not further entrench patriarchal power norms.

7.4 Specific recommendations for Australia

Incorporate gender perspective and violence against women into ongoing bilateral aid, in keeping with AusAID's enhanced priority on gender equality, particularly in law and justice programs. Support should be made available to train technical advisors and counterparts in advocating for gender equality and addressing violence against women. All planned program designs should include a gender analysis of the relevant sector and the implications of the planned assistance on violence against women. The needs of rural and vulnerable women need to be captured, and the access issues faced by rural women should be considered in all service delivery and law and justice programs.

Continue support of the VWC. There is no doubt that the VWC plays a critical role in galvanising public opinion and action around violence against women in Vanuatu. This is not to say that supporting efforts of other organisations in addressing violence is not important, but supporting the VWC should be the cornerstone of this strategy. Strengthening and expanding on the work of the CAVAWs, as well as the Male Advocates Programme, should also be priorities. The role of the FWCC in mentoring the VWC has been key for their success, and should also be supported in some capacity.

Continue support for entertainment education activities. WSB carries out groundbreaking work in using communication for social change techniques to involve young people and communities in reflecting and mobilising around social issues, including domestic violence. Depending on the capacity and interest of WSB, support could be given for scaling up this type of work throughout the region, by training women's organisations in social communication methods, and perhaps for mentoring other organisations in the region.

Support for shared learning and exchanges with other organisations in the region.

There is a great need for capacity building of government agencies and women's groups in violence against women, and exchange visits with other countries in the region could be of great value. In addition to continued mentoring from the FWCC, opportunities to exchange experiences with other countries, such as East Timor and PNG, could be beneficial, particularly in the areas of multisectoral coordination, and work with men and youth. AusAID should also work with other donors to harmonise efforts to support NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), with a view to reducing their reporting burden.

Support research dissemination. The results from the study on violence against women will provide an excellent opportunity to draw attention to the issue, and full advantage should be taken of this opportunity. Support should be given for public awareness activities around the results, including disseminating them through formal and informal channels, community-level activities and outreach activities with such stakeholders as churches and the Council of Chiefs.

ANNEX 1: ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS FOR VANUATU

Chief Joseph Dick, Male Advocate, Vanuatu Women's Centre
Morris Kaloran, Director, Department of Correctional Services
Merilyn Tahi, Coordinator, Vanuatu Women's Centre
Hilda Taleo, Director, Department of Women's Affairs
Kali Vatoko, National Coordinator, Pacific Children's Program
Delphine Vuti, Senior Lieutenant, Vanuatu Police Force

ANNEX 2: ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED⁶

Organisation

Department of Women's Affairs

Ministry for Justice and Social Welfare

Vanuatu Police force

Port Vila (focus group involving 11 officers)

Port Vila Family Protection Unit

Tanna (interviews with officers)

Isangel (interviews and focus group involving 13 police officers)

Department of Public Prosecutions

Port Vila Courthouse (interviews with magistrates)

Office of the Public Solicitor

Office of the Ombudsman

Port Vila Central Hospital

Vanuatu Women' Centre

interviews with Executive staff

focus groups with 20 staff and volunteers

interviews with 7 male advocates

National Council of Women

Vanuatu Association for NGOs

Vanuatu Family Health Association

Wan Smol Bag Managers

Wan Smol Bag (focus group involving 12 youth)

Sanma Counselling Centre (interviews with staff)

University of South Pacific Legal Centre

Christian Broadcasting Network

Beach Comber Resort

Tafea Women's Centre

Tafea Counselling Centre

Committees Against Violence Against Women

Interviews and focus groups with CAVAW members from: West Vanualava; Gaua;

South Santo; Big Bay; Pentecost; East Ambae; Huritahi; Gaiovo; Lonahli; Emae;

Lamen Island; Ambrym; Midmaug

Malfatumaui Council of Chiefs

Pango area (separate men's and women's focus groups)

Saratamata area, Ambae (focus groups)

Centreville Christian Fellowship youth (focus group)

AusAID Staff

including gender specialists and legal sector advisors

New Zealand Agency for International Development

⁶ To protect confidentiality, individuals have not been named.